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[Introductory video: Christmas bells music chimes at a brisk pace to accompany the bold messages which flash on changing backgrounds of bright green and red in time to the beat of the music:]

**Christmas is coming**

(the focus pans down a long row of stenciled pictures of a Christmas trees)

**deck the halls**

**peace on earth...and all that...good stuff**

(stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

**Christmas is:**

(one by one each word is succeeded by the next to complete the phrase)

**family, love, home, joy, wonderful**

(wonderful remains and these words stack up on top of it one at a time):

**cookies, fruitcake, sweaters, crowded malls, this year's iPod, 10 office parties,  
tacky ornaments, long return lines, credit cards, gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts...**

(gifts is added uncountable times with increasing speed)

**Let's be honest...more stuff**

(the word *stuff* is multiplied above and below the word in the sentence)

**doesn't make us happy**

(again, stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

**This Christmas could be different...and not just for you**

**GIVE MORE**

[As the video fades and the lights come back up, we hear a familiar portion of the Christmas song sung by Michael Bublé, playing: *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. Jones Road Campus Pastor, Scott Rodgers, smiles and sways to the music. He's sitting on the stage in front of a group of large, wrapped Christmas gifts. There's one small gift and a ceramic mug on the tall, round-top table next to him as he begins:]

What would Christmas be without the music? I mean it wouldn't be anything. It just wouldn't be Christmas without the music.

I want to welcome you if you're joining us online here at The MET this morning and here at our *Jones Road Campus*. My name is Scott.

I just think: *What would Christmas be without the classics that we all love?* Like: What's the one that makes you feel real warm and fuzzy inside? It's like: ...roasting on an open fire...chestnuts... Oh, there it is [as a portion of Nat "King" Cole singing *The Christmas Song* plays:]

*Chestnuts roasting on an open fire. {Hold somebody's hand.} Jack Frost  
nipping at your nose. Yule-tide carols being sung...*

Don't you feel it? Isn't it beautiful? I mean: What would Christmas be without the music? Like the—let me see; one other one—(Ah...umm) *Winter Wonderland*. I know we don't have that much [snow] here [as a portion of Bing Crosby singing *Winter Wonderland* plays:]

*Sleigh bells ring, are you listening? In the lane snow is glistening. A beautiful sight, {Come on. You know you want to do this...} demonstrates swaying back and forth] we're happy tonight, walking in a winter wonderland. {It's really awkward to do it when everybody's watching you.} Gone away is the bluebird, here to stay is a new bird. He sings a love song, {How many guys can sing like that?—sure} as we go along, walking in a winter wonderland.*

Growing up in Michigan it was always the anticipation of the snow. *When's the snow coming?* Often it started in early August, but sometimes it would wait until later—November, December. But then when it would start to come down, it was like this song. I forget the name of it, but here it is. [A portion of *It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas* plays:]

*It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas (—there it is—) ev'rywhere you go; take a look in the five-and-ten, glistening once again with candy canes and silver lanes aglow. [Music stops abruptly:]*

Bam! (You know) living here with all the Christmas lights out with no snow, it was really weird. It was like: *What's going on here? That's not right. They're supposed to go together.* But I think about: *What would Christmas be without the music?* And may be this last one: the time for many of you is to visit family and (maybe) someone comes home. You know this song. [Michael Bubl  singing *I'll Be Home for Christmas*:]

*I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me. Please have snow (—love it—) and mistletoe and presents by the tree.*

What would Christmas be without the music? It makes me think about: *If things were missing from Christmas, what would make Christmas not Christmas anymore?* And I think: *Not only what would it be without the music?—but I think: What would Christmas be without the presents?*

Honestly! Come on! I know we're in church and we're supposed to be really (you know) churchy at times. But we all love the presents. I mean Christmas—it's all about the presents. In fact, I have an agenda today. It's that in the next 25 minutes I want to convince you to give more presents for Christmas, because we all love them.

I mean think back when you had that great, great, great present for Christmas. Remember your favorite one of all time? I do. It was way back when I was—do the math now—I was seven years old. The year was 1976. [Pantomimes keying the numbers into a calculator] I think Jimmy Carter was the president.

I wanted this particular present so bad. I'm begging my mom and dad: *I want it. I want it. I want it. If you get me this, I'll never want anything ever again for the rest of my life! (Right?) Please get me this one present.* At our home—I don't want to mess this up for you (depending upon what you believe)—but at our home the presents wouldn't come out until Christmas Eve. I don't know if it was Mom and Dad or if it was Santa, but they would come out late on Christmas Eve

and we wouldn't see anything until early on Christmas morning. When our parents were still sleeping, my sister and I would sneak out of our bedrooms and we would (kind of) go out and peek around the corner to look to see what was under the tree. Did anybody ever do that? Do you still do that?

I'm peeking around the corner to look under the tree, and there it is in all of its glory. It's an engineering work of art. It was standing beside the tree (not—it wouldn't fit under the tree) but there it was...my *Huffy Thunder Star BMX bike!* [Screens display a picture of his childhood bike.] Isn't she a thing of beauty? Look at the seat on that baby! That is the hot rod of all 20-inch BMX bikes.

When I saw that I was in utopia. It was heaven on earth. God had come. It was the present beyond all presents. C'mon! We all love presents. I'm going to convince you that Christmas is all about giving more presents.

In fact, I even have scripture to back it up. So if you're really fast, we're going to do a Bible drill. If you're not as fast as most of us, you can look at the references on the screen. Here they are—

*Matthew, chapter 1*—we're going to fly through this—*verse 23*:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means [pause for congregational fill-in: "God with us"].)

*Matthew 1:23 (NIV, 2011 edition)*

*John, chapter 1, verse 9*:

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

*John 1:9 (NIV, 2011 edition)*

Fast-forward—*John, chapter 1, verse 14*:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

*John 1:14 (NIV, 2011 edition)*

*Philippians, chapter 2, verse 6* and on—speaking of Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he

humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should [pause for congregational fill-in: bow], in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is [pause for congregational fill-in: Lord], to the glory of God the Father.

*Philippians 2:6-11 (NIV, 2011 edition)*

I'm here to convince you that Christmas is all about the presence (*p-r-e-s-e-n-c-e*). It's all about THE PRESENCE.

## **CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT THE PRESENCE**

In fact, *John, chapter 1, verse 14*—in a different translation (in *The Message* version)—says it this way (it says that):

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

*John 1:14 (The Message)*

I like that. “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” Now, what a theological term for that is called the *Incarnation*, where God in His divinity—(literally) on His own choosing—becomes human. In some mysterious way

- Retains His divine nature (but)
- Takes on the nature of a human being (and)
- Chooses to walk among His creation.

I can't even get my mind around that concept.

Another word for this—often referred to in *Philippians, chapter 2*—is called the *kenosis* [the Greek transliteration for *emptiness*], when God empties Himself of His divine rights and privileges and clothes Himself with humanity and putting borders around how He can conduct Himself as a human being.

So here it is—Christmas morning...

- Jesus is born, God in the flesh
- He moves into the neighborhood

Why did He do that? He didn't just move into the neighborhood so that He could create some religion that some people would (like) rally around. But He came to fix a problem—a deep problem—and that is this: Ever since Adam and Eve turned their back[s] on God, sin entered their nature[s]. Adam and Eve reproduced with sin in their nature[s]. So every child that was born since the beginning of time (after those two people) were born with the nature of sin.

That's why you and I have a natural propensity to (kind of) go away from God. We have the natural propensity to live a lifestyle that's contrary to what God says is healthy and right according to the way that He created it.

We also have that craving on the inside of us to know God and to worship God. So the conflict is within us. So God says: *Do you know what? The only price that can be paid for your sin, because justice must be served, is the sacrifice of a sinless human being.* That's why God came. [Some] call it the *immaculate conception*. The virgin Mary was [overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and Jesus was] conceived. [So Jesus carried both natures: human and divine, but He never sinned.]

He came—God in the flesh:

- He moved into the neighborhood as the sinless Son of God. He walked among us.
- He taught with amazing clarity. People were wowed by His teaching on...
  - Life
  - Reality
  - Truth
  - The kingdom of God
  - Eternity
  - Heaven
  - HellThey were just amazed.
- He'd walk around healing people. People that were paralyzed, He would heal, they'd get up and walk.
- He would pray for people that were sick and they'd be healed.
- He turned water into wine. (And it wasn't *Yellowtail*—\$5 from *Walmart*—I'm sure it was the good stuff.)
- He did miracle, after miracle, after miracle.

He walked among us. He was divine and yet human. But He ultimately came to die on the cross to be the sinless sacrifice for you and [me], so that we can stand before God and be forgiven and redeemed and welcomed into His family.

Christmas is all about God's *presence* coming into our world. I've said my goal was to convince you and [me] to give more presents. First, we need to know it's all about the *presence*. It's the *presence* of God in our lives:

- Redeeming us
- Changing us
- Transforming us

...into who He desires for us to be.

Now, if you're here and that Jesus that I just talked about:

- The Word became flesh
- He moved into the neighborhood
- He did what He did
- He died on the cross

How many of you would say (by raising your hands) that you are a follower of that Jesus? You're a believer. You're a Christian. (Okay, put your hands back down.) You're a follower of that Jesus.

I'm going to read a verse to you (that)—if that's who you are, this should really get you excited. Maybe even rattle your brain a little bit and cause you to wrestle with some of this stuff in your life. Here it is in *John, chapter 14, verse 12*—Jesus Himself is speaking (He says):

Very truly I tell you, {So He's not just playing around; He's getting right down to where the rubber meets the road} whoever believes in me {That's you if you just raised your hand, you're joining us online, you're right here at *Jones Road*. Whoever believes in Me will do what?—they} will do the works I have been doing, {Then He goes on and it just—I don't know what to think about this:} and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

*John 14:12 (NIV, 2011 edition)*

So how in the world do you and I even begin to (even) expect to do what He did—let alone, greater things? I still don't know the full meaning and implications of that. However, I know that if you're a follower of Christ, it's in you—it's in your nature now—to do the works of Christ in this world.

And we think about: *Well, what did He do?*

- Well, He spit in somebody's eyes and they could see again. (I've spit on someone, but they weren't blind. But maybe I'll wait until they're—it's been a while.)
- He prayed for people that were sick and they were healed.
- He brought to light eternal truth like nobody else.
- He (just) [performed] miracle, after miracle, after miracle is what He's done.
- He lived a life of compassion for people who were far from God.
- He extended nothing but grace to someone who did not know Him or know His Father.
- He extended nothing but a little harsh tone to those who claimed they knew God, but they were far from Him, [and] they depended on their own works and religion.
- He did incredible things.

So how do we even think: *How do I do the works of Christ—if I'm a believer in Christ—how do I do that?* Here's where we all begin (right here). Let me just simplify it for all of us: To do the works that He did and somehow even greater works, it all begins where He began. He "moved into the neighborhood." If you and I are going to do the works of Christ, we will also move into the neighborhood.

## **WE MOVE INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD—SOMEBODY’S NEIGHBORHOOD**

We will simply give more of our presence to our world...

- To those that we love
- To those that we know
- To those that we don’t know

...just to give more of our presence.

## **WE GIVE MORE PRESENCE**

(I’m telling you) Christmas—it’s all about the presence (the presence of God). Let it be a reminder that it’s for us to give *our* presence to the world around [us]. So how do we do that? What does that mean? *Okay, Scott, you’re (kind of) talking in a way here that (you know)—get right to it. What does that look like for me to give my presence to do the works of Christ in my world?*

Well, if you’re taking notes, write this down. Here’s just a quick thought that I’ll expand on (is this): to be present, you must leave.

## **TO BE PRESENT, WE MUST LEAVE**

Go ahead...[signaling with a sideways nod of his head toward the door]—No! That would be weird, wouldn’t it? Everybody just walked out! You’re online—they just walked out—you don’t see them. *Hey, everybody, get back!* No, they’re still here.

So to be present, we must leave. Here’s one thing (that): If we’re going to...

- Be present
- Invest our presence in our world
- Do the works of Christ

...we’re going to have to leave our comfort.

### **1. LEAVE OUR COMFORT**

Here’s what he says in *Philippians, chapter 2* (another translation). Let me read part of it again (in regard to Jesus):

<sup>6</sup> Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. <sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being...{Later on it says that He} <sup>8</sup> ...died a criminal’s death on a cross.

*Philippians 2:6-8 (New Living Translation)*

I just have to think: *Okay, that was uncomfortable. Jesus left some comfort behind.* I don't even know how much and to what degree. But to live the life—

- God in the flesh
- Coming down
- Humbling Himself as a slave
- As a servant
- Ultimately dying a brutal, bloody, painful, graphically disturbing death on the cross—had to be leaving some comfort behind.

I believe that if you and I are even going to do some of the works that He did (that)—we'll never die on the cross for anyone's sin; He's the only one that could do that—we're going to have to leave behind some of our comfort.

My dad was diagnosed about five or six months ago with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He's gone through his chemotherapy; he's done with that. He actually just finished his radiation treatments a couple weeks ago. He's doing good. He's doing pretty well.

For the past few years—he's had this little thing going on since he retired—he's been intentionally getting in touch with people that he grew up with. So he's getting a hold of people that (literally) he hasn't seen for almost 50 years (some of these people). His whole goal is to share his faith in Christ and see what God will do with that. He's not some flaming evangelist. He's really a very basic person; worked a blue-collar job his whole life. He's just a good, average person like you and I. He's getting a hold of these people. What's been funny to me—on the outside looking in—is every now and then he'll call me up before he's going to meet with somebody or (maybe) after his first conversation with them.

He'll say: *Scott, I got a hold of so-and-so and we're going to meet. Here's what we did; we used to do this together. Here's what's going on in their life. What should I say to them? What should I do around that phone conversation?*

I just say: *Dad, you don't need to figure out what to say to them. Just go and be their friend, and see where they take the conversation. God will fill in the blanks for you. You'll find it very easy to insert your faith in those conversations. You don't have to figure it out along the way.*

Then he: *Oh, okay. Okay.*

Because if I were to tell him what to do—(I don't know) I don't know the person—he'd go on with this rote: *Okay. All right. How are you? Oh, good, you're married. All right, Romans Road, baby—let's hold it up. Did you know that you're one heck of a sinner?* Ugh, no. He would just love on them, and the conversation would go.

Every now and then, he'll call me and say: *Scott, guess what happened?* I knew what happened with that kind of excitement. He would (like) [whispering]: *I actually prayed with them and led them to Christ. They got saved. It's amazing.* I'm just celebrating with him.

One guy was (literally) on his death bed and came to Christ by just this average guy saying: *I'm going to step out. I'm uncomfortable, but I want to give more of my presence in this world. Jesus said that I'll do the works that He does.* He goes out and steps out of his comfort zone, and God uses him in a really big way.

I don't think God will...let me say it this way: For me rarely has God used me within my comfort zone. I don't know if that's true for you, but it's been true for me. So my question for you is:

- What do you get uneasy about when you think about what God wants to do?
- Who is it that God wants you to engage in?

And you think: *Whoa-whoa, that'd be uncomfortable. That's awkward. I don't like that.*

Here's the deal: You don't have to figure it out. Just go...

- Be human
- Be compassionate
- Be full of grace

...and see what God does to use that relationship to potentially bring someone to Christ or (maybe) just help them out. Maybe they already know Him. They just need someone to encourage them. And you stepped out—out of your comfort zone—and made yourself vulnerable and transparent and said: *I'm here for you.*

Christmas—it's all about the *presence*. God's presence in our world, in our lives. If we're going to be present, we're going to have to leave behind some of our comfort. If you're taking notes, you can write this one down too. To be present, we need to leave the country.

## 2. LEAVE THE COUNTRY

Is your passport ready?

- Metaphorically speaking leave the country for some
- (Maybe) genuinely speaking for others

But if we're going to be used by God and do the works that Christ did, we're going to have to at times intentionally walk on foreign soil in places of unfamiliarity.

Here's what He said (again) in *verse 14 of John, chapter 1*. I keep reading this. It just—I love it every time.

The Word became flesh and blood, and {—He what?—He} moved into the neighborhood.

*John 1:14 (The Message)*

I don't know if I've shared this story with you before. But my wife, Shelly, and I—when we got married—we first met actually doing ministry reaching out to kids and students in the inner city. We had done this for years. That was the passion of our lives to reach at-risk children and youth, their families, in the inner city area where we lived. That's where we met and we developed a friendship; ultimately got engaged, got married.

Here's the awesome part of it. On our honeymoon—do you want to hear our honeymoon story? (Do ya?) Honeymoon night: August 19, 1995. I remember the date, because we had a key code on our vehicle and that was the entry code. I'll never forget our honeymoon. (She's here now and she's laughing at me saying: *Yeah, but you forget the gift. Don't forget it this year.*)

August 19, 1995, we get married. We leave the wedding ceremony—getting ready to go on our honeymoon—but we forgot to have the pastor sign the certificate, the marriage license. So we have to wait and get the guy back and wait for like three or four hours to get that signed. So finally it gets signed. We head off on our honeymoon. Due to my debacle and my mistakes, we're headed across the country and on our honeymoon night we end up sleeping in a car at a rest stop in Cleveland. I'd better sit down for the rest of this. [As he sits, he picks up his ceramic mug and takes a drink:] Ah, there's cough syrup in here.

So we're sleeping in a rest stop in Cleveland, trying to salvage this whole deal. How you do, I don't know. Anyway we're headed across the country; our destination was Cape Cod. Maybe it was divine providence, maybe it was foolishness; but we never reached our destination on our honeymoon. We were in the middle of Pennsylvania and thought: *This is one long state, why don't we just call it good? Let's go back.* (There's more to it; another illustration for another time.)

So we're headed back through Amish country in Pennsylvania and back into Michigan. And I convince her to move into a house that we had just purchased but we hadn't closed on yet. I don't even know if that's legal. It's vacant and it's in the middle of the ghetto. Houses around it are abandoned, the siding's falling off, and there's drugs being sold down the street. So I convince her: *Let's just go back and let's jump right in. Let's move into the neighborhood right in the ghetto.* We did that. I think a week later we actually closed on the house, so we were legal tenants of our own property. We just had such a passion and God had put it in our hearts to invest in these kids that we had to move into the neighborhood (at that time). We had to really engage in their world.

Now, not all of us have to literally move into someone's neighborhood but we *all* have to, at times, walk on foreign soil. If God is going to use us, [we need to] go into those places that are unfamiliar and reach people that don't know Him. What soil is God asking you to walk on?

What I love about this—the *Big Give* that we've been in for a few weeks—is (you know) the *Big Give* is when we encourage The MET [members] to let's give together collectively and gather some resources together to help fund most of all of our partnerships missionally around the world for the next year. It's been fantastic so far. You guys are awesome.

But what I love to see as I'm looking at this whole *Big Give* thing is not only does the church come together and invest resources, but God is actually grabbing some people's hearts through this whole thing. It goes way beyond giving a check or a credit card number online. It's (literally) some of you over the past years—when you're giving—have said: *Whoa-whoa. Hold on. Okay, I'm going to give but what am I holding back while I give?*

Some of you have been really challenged to do some significant things. If you've been on our website at [biggive@themet.org](mailto:biggive@themet.org), you've seen some of the videos.

- The Hasselbrocks, who went on a little short-term missions thing. God got their heart and now they love going places and being used by God to help make a difference in some areas.
- Some other guys, their videos were: they were sitting here and they gave. God said: *Now, I want you to invest more of your life. I want you to move out of the neighborhood...*
  - *Leave some comfort behind*
  - *Leave the country (and)*
  - *Go across the street and walk on some foreign soil.*
- One of my friends here, his foreign country was to walk away from his corporate career and invest it in some international missions initiatives.

Everybody's story is different. But what has God put on your heart to do? Because whatever it is, to do the works of Christ we're going to have to leave some comfort behind, move into the neighborhood (whatever that means), and walk on foreign soil.

Maybe you're thinking right now: *Boy, I did that. For me that means... [fill in the blank], but it freaks me out.* It's intimidating—isn't it?—to leave comfort behind. We're creatures of... [congregational response: comfort]. We're so about our culture, our personal eco-system. To go into someone else's eco-system, it's like: *Uhhh!*

Here's the thing—maybe this being overwhelmed and intimidated—maybe you're thinking right now the same mistake that I've made so many times in the past (it just gets me recently how I've made this mistake) and that's this (that): *Okay—*

- *I'm going to muster up the courage.*
- *I'm going to leave some comfort behind.*
- *I'm going to go.*
- *I'm going to move across half of the world.*
- *I'm going to start going across the street.*
- *I'm going to move into the neighborhood (however that means).*
- *I'm going to bring Jesus to them.*

Do you get (kind of) the arrogance in that statement? *I'm going to bring Jesus to...*

Here's the deal: Relax. You don't have to bring Jesus to them (or whoever that person is) because He's already there. When we engage in relationships with others to do the works of Christ, we don't have to bring Jesus anywhere. He's already there. All we need to do is try to see what He's already doing and get in on it.

Conversations with people that we care about are so much easier when we don't feel like we have to teach them something. We just listen to their story and say: *Man! Have you ever thought about that might be God knocking on your door?*—and just share your faith. He's already at work. Let's just figure out what He's at work doing and get in on that.

Christmas—it's all about what? It's all about the *presence*. The *presence* of God coming to earth to redeem us—

- Purchase us back
- Pay the price for our sin

—so that we can stand before Him as forgiven children of God.

Then He says: *Go out and do the works that I've done and greater works than this*. I think it all begins doing what He did: moving into the neighborhood; giving of our presence. It really will require and challenge us to:

- Leave some comfort behind (and then maybe)
- Even leave the country (and)
- Walk on foreign soil in some unique way
- Trusting Him every step of the way that...
  - He's already there.
  - He's already at work.

*God, use me in this situation for Your glory.*

Let's bow our heads and let's pray.

Father, we celebrate the fact that today, as we enter into Christmas here in a few days, Lord, that it's really the monumental, historical event when You became human. To me that's insane, but it was necessary. Lord, I thank You that followers of Christ is not just a religion. It is: God became a human being to ultimately go to the cross to buy us back. We thank You for that today. Father, I pray You'd speak to our hearts in this moment.

With our heads bowed and our eyes still closed in a posture of prayer, maybe you're sitting here and God has...

1. Turned on the light bulb about what Christmas is all about for you. It's about His presence in our world.
2. Then (maybe) He's tugging at you saying: *I want you to give your presence (give more presence) in people's lives. Step out of your comfort zone. Walk on some foreign soil.*

If that's you and you say: *God's just kind of stirring something in me right now, even if I'm not sure what it is; but He's really speaking to me right now*. Just lift your hand up. Just lift it up with confidence saying: *You know that's... Yeah, He's stirring something in me*. Let me pray for all you guys that did that.

Lord, I pray for those that lifted their hands. Their hearts are stirred.

Father, I pray that, God, that You would give us the courage...

- To step out of our comfort zone
- To walk on foreign soil (and, Lord)
- To lean in on You
- To not depend on our own intellect or knowledge, God
- But to really be led by the Spirit in those very real-life scenarios.

So, God, we're going to step out beyond our comfort. We're going to walk on some foreign soil. We're going to be people of grace and mercy and compassion to those in our world. God, we pray that You use us in a big, big way.

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, I want to ask you this question. You're sitting here and you've heard me talk about the God...

- Who stepped out of eternity into our world (and)
- He became a man for the purpose of ultimately going to the cross to die (the death on the cross) to pay or purchase the price for your sin and my sin.

We were born with a nature of sin in us. That's why there's never anything that we can do to earn our acceptance in God's eyes. God truly and only accepts us as a child of God when we embrace who Jesus Christ is and what He's done for us.

I want you to open up your eyes and just look up here as I read this. This will not be on the screen. But I want you to allow scripture to speak to you right now, especially if you're here and you've never made a decision to ask Christ into your life.

That verse that He "moved into the neighborhood" (*verse 14 in John 1*), let me back it up. It says this (that):

<sup>10</sup> He came into the very world that he created, but the world didn't recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God {to all them who believed in Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God} <sup>13</sup> They are reborn—not with a physical birth...but a birth that comes from God.

*John 1:10-13 (New Living Translation)*

Today you're sitting here and you don't know Him. If that's you, today you have the opportunity:

- To accept Him and become a child of God. (or)
- You can simply walk out and maybe that's a form of rejecting Him. That's not my business; that's between you and God.

But I want to ask you all again to just bow your heads, close your eyes in a posture of prayer. Let this be a private moment and think:

- Do you need to accept Him today?
- Do you know Who He is?
- Do you know Christ as your Savior?

If you don't, I am really excited to say: This is probably the best place at the best time to make a decision...

- To give your life to Him

- To receive Him

...so that He can give you the right to become a child of God.

You're sitting here, you don't know Him and you know it. But you want to know Him beginning today. You say: *Scott, I want Christ in my life. I want to go into Christmas knowing that it was His presence that this is all about. I want to go into Christmas as a child of God this year for the very first time in my life. Scott, will you pray for me? Will you include me in this prayer to ask Christ into my life?*

If that's you and you want me to include you in that prayer, just lift your hand real high and say: *I want to know Him. I want to go into Christmas as a child of God.* Come on, be bold if that's you. Today you want to make the decision to ask Christ into your life. Just shoot your hand up really quick and allow me to pray with you.

You guys are chicken; this many of you in here who don't know Him. Come on, pray this prayer. Ask Christ into your life. Yeah, I see your hand up there. Good for you. Praise God. Who else? *I want to know Him. I want to be a child of God.* Yeah, I see your hand right over here. Good for you. Awesome! Who else? I'm picking on you that you're a chicken, but I'm not. I'm challenging you. Come on. Don't walk away from Him!

Say: *Jesus, I want You into my life. Be my Savior. I want You. Scott, include me in this prayer that you're going to pray.* If that's you, just lift your hand up. Come on; shoot it up. Be bold. *I want Christ in my life.* Yeah, right up there. Congratulations! Good for you. (Good for you.) Who else before I pray? *Scott, include me in this prayer. I want Christ. Man, He came to give His presence.* All right, let's all pray. Let's pray this together as a family. Say:

Father God, today I'm giving You my life. I give You my heart. I surrender to You. Please forgive me for my sin. Jesus, be the Lord of my life. Be my Savior. I thank You that You died for me; that You've risen again. Fill me with Your Spirit. Make me a child of God. Thank You for accepting me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Come on, my 9:30-rowdy crowd, put your hands together. Let's celebrate for those guys. Congratulations! Let me say this: If you've just made that decision, you asked Christ into your life... (By the way, the top section, you ought to give yourself a hand, because you way outdid these guys [down front]. All you guys that raised your hand up top, so good for you. Man! That was awesome!)

If that was you and you made that decision, allow us to give you a gift. It's a copy of God's Word—it's a Bible—and a couple other resources. Before we dismiss in a couple of minutes, I want you to go out to the *Next Steps* area and grab one of those *Next Steps* packets with a Bible in there. I want to help you out and get you going in the right step. Okay?

I want to ask our ushers to come forward this morning. As they do, I want you to stay in your seats, because you're going to want to check this video out. This video is one of our mission partners in Nairobi, Kenya. They're called *K-Krew*. These guys are amazing. A lot of what

you're going to hear them talk about is the investment that we, The MET, have made into their ministry over the past year [that] has exponentially increased their results. It's just some phenomenal, phenomenal stuff going on.

I've had the opportunity to go there, be with those guys, [and] do their deal. I tell you what: I'm humbled because they're maniacs for Christ and it's just amazing! They're a movement in young people in Kenya. So let's pray and check this out.

Father, thank You for our time to give. Lord, for those of us giving to the *Big Give* I just pray You'd keep moving in our hearts to invest in these mission partnerships. And, Lord, as we give our tithes and offerings, we thank You for this opportunity.

If you're giving to the *Big Give*, just make sure you designate that on your envelope. All right, check out this video.

*[Uganda Missions: K-Krew [Kubamba-Krew], Nairobi, Kenya. The video begins with a one-two count to reverberating steady beat of dance music while switching scenes showing all the ministry activity: Gospel Sunday [stage sign is shown], men dancing in unison on stage, music mixer boards, talk show hosts, and a DJ with a turntable, worshipping congregants with upraised hands. The video continues with two K-Krew leaders giving their testimonies:]*

*[DJ Moz:]* My names are Moses Kimathi Mathenge, and in K-Krew and in the world of music that I'm involved in, they call me DJ Moz.

*[Njugush:]* And my name is John Njuguna, otherwise known as Njugush, and we lead K-Krew.

*[DJ Moz:]* Yes, sir. K-Krew is a youth ministry that seeks to evangelize the young people (you know) through urban gospel music and biblically based convictions. We live to evangelize, and music is our tool of influence. The Gospel Music industry right now in Kenya is the number one form of entertainment. Can you believe that? You know, people are being drawn to Christ in ways that are not conventional, but the message has not been compromised.

The reason why K-Krew targets the young people is, first of all in the continent of Africa. You know, forget even about Kenya. But just speaking about Africa in general, 73 percent of the population is below the age of 30. So we're working with a huge demographic of young people (you know) who are below the age of 30. We realize that if we're going to have an impact—Kingdom impact—we need to reach out to this massive population.

We have three arms of outreach that we use to influence the young people. That's media, events, and what now we call GLOW-squared [GLOW<sup>2</sup>]. That's our high school campus and upper primary ministry.

So in January we started a tour to the high schools. And from the first day, there is no school that we have gone to and students have not given their lives to Christ. Between January and the end of July, which is the first 2 terms of the year, we had about 2500-and-something students who had given their lives to Christ.

In this third term, starting from September, we decided to do something different. And Marion, who heads our high school missions, decided to take us to western Kenya. So the team left and they did missions in western Kenya. And in 3 weeks of doing missions, 8381 students have given their lives to Christ in 3 weeks! So it brings our total to being at least 10,800-and-something! You know that cannot be done in our own strength.

[*Njugush:*] I mean it was just one of those things that leaves you speechless, and you know only God can do this. So for us it was a good thing—an eye-opener—saying (I mean) there is a hunger, because no one goes out to the interior of Kenya. But we need to get out there. There are kids out there who need to hear the Gospel. And not only just hear the Gospel, but hear the Gospel from someone who can present the Gospel in a language that they can understand and relate to.

[*DJ Moz:*] I mean for us we're extremely blown away. We've done this mission, this high school thing, for 11 years. But never, ever have we had 10,000 people getting saved even before the year ends.

[*Video shows a large crowd of the youth dancing to the music.*]

[*DJ Moz:*] I think right now we're in that place where we're dreaming and we're saying, "You know what, God? We can do so much more." Right now our limitations are just we need to multiply ourselves. We have one set of sound system. We have one van. Already you can see the impact that this one sound system and this one van is having. What if we had five? What if we had 20? I mean my faith is in such a place where I'm thinking, you know some of the conflicts we've been experiencing in the African countries, maybe they would stop. Because the Gospel of Christ is being evangelized, and the Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of love.

Right now our limitation is resources (you know). But the other thing that we've come to experience (you know) God's favor is amazing, man. We've been riding on His favor, because we know that His favor can open doors that money can't buy.

[*Njugush:*] We never had an idea that God was going to use us to impact this generation this way, and we're glad. And I think every step of the way we've seen His guidance and more so He's been sending people our way. For the next level He sends people our way to achieve what He has for us to achieve. It's just been a Jesus journey, I think, and we're excited. If God has done this much for us, we can't wait to see what He's about to do for us. Not only through us for Kenya but for Africa.

[*Video ends with closing credit:*] K-Krew™ representing Christ Jesus to the fullest

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<sup>19</sup> ...I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that!  
I became an obedient believer on the spot. <sup>20</sup> I  
started preaching this life-change—this radical turn  
to God and everything it meant in everyday life—right  
there...and from there to the whole world.

*Acts 26:19b-20 (The Message)*

**Legend:**

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*