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My name is Scott [Rodgers] and I'm just thrilled to be here with you again at The MET.

Jesus made an epic statement that throughout history has altered the course of people's lives. He says in *John, chapter 10, verse 10*, in the Bible, He says this, "The thief" speaking of our spiritual enemy, Satan himself—he says:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; {but I, speaking of Himself, Jesus} I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10 (NIV)

That verse just resonates within me so much. On one hand, it excites me to death to see that Jesus came, and He says: You know what? I've not come to give you a mundane life. I've not called you mediocrity. I've not called you to just kind of get through this life so that you can get into the Sweet By-and-By [euphemism for Heaven], but I've called you to experience life to the full. But on the other hand it frustrates me. Because you see there where he says that the thief comes to steal and to kill and destroy everything that matters to the heart of God and what God wants for our lives. He's come to give us life to the full, but there's resistance along the way.

We're going to wrap up this short two-week series called *Resolutions*, where last week we talked about losing your religion—losing that man-made religion—that keeps us from a real relationship with Christ. And today we're going to find our freedom to pursue this life that Jesus is calling us to, when He says: Hey, I've called you to fullness of life.

In my life, and I see it in Scripture as well, there are a number of very well-defined roadblocks to experiencing God's best in our lives. And one that I've had in my life that I think—because we're all normal and we're all the same—this is a big one for everybody. This is a big roadblock, a big hindrance to getting past the point where we can experience what's better and what's best from God in our lives. And here's the big one that we're going to tackle head-on today. So buckle up your seat belt and get ready, because we're going to talk about unforgiveness and that's—

UNFORGIVENESS TOWARD OTHERS

Unforgiveness usually exists because an offense has taken place. So I'm going to try to define that word *offense* for just a moment.

Now, having grown up in Michigan, offense is not what the Detroit Lions have been searching for since World War II, okay? Up north we pronounce that **aw**-fens. But offense is, according to *Dictionary.com*, defined as this: the act of causing anger, resentment, displeasure or affront. I like to say that an offense happens when someone hurts you or violates a trust. An offense is there, unforgiveness creeps in, and it becomes a huge roadblock to experiencing God's best in our life.

Now, you've made it. Raise your hand, if you're breathing. Who didn't raise their hands? Wow! You made it through the holidays. I don't know about you, but let's see if we live in (kind of) the same world, because the holidays tend to be a hot-spot for offense to happen. I mean, maybe you

have a friend like me who the day after Halloween they start playing Christmas music, and it drives you crazy. I mean I can sing (you know) a Christmas song once or twice, but I'm talking November 1 or October 31, they turn it on and they just play it all season long. Drives me nuts! And somehow an offense can (kind of) creep in and take place.

Or maybe you're going to the mall shopping for gifts, and you're driving around the parking lot and, of course, the mall is just packed. It's full of cars. You cannot find a place to park. So you hover around the parking lot—you and 100 other people, right?—like vultures, waiting for your prey to take its last breath, so you can swoop in and get your meal. And you're going around the parking lot, and there you see it—off in the distance...there it is!—the empty parking spot.

So, men, as we do as God has ordained us, we press the accelerator just enough to keep some level of adult maturity, but we speed through the parking lot, looking both ways, making sure nobody runs out between cars, and we get up there. We beat everybody to that parking spot. We get ready to turn in, and there it is: a Yugo. Tucked up there, you can't see it from a distance, and you go: Oh, man! And you're offended at the driver of the Yugo. Of course, anybody who drives...nah, I better not say that, maybe you drive a Yugo. But (you know) an offense takes place.

Or maybe you're in the mall and you're checking out and you're standing in line for half an hour, just to get through (and)

- You've missed lunch
- You're hungry
- You've got a headache
- You're frustrated
- You've been out all day (and)
- You just want to get out of there (and)

You're almost ready to check out and the person in front of you—who's checking out—decides to pay with a hand-written check. Now, you know, when someone pays with a hand-written check, everything goes into slow motion, right? Uh, Ma'am, that will be \$42.17—or Sir (I've got to be careful). [Pantomiming the agonizingly slow process of a customer paying with hand-written check, first finding the checkbook, then finding a pen that works then asking:] How much was that? And you're just standing in line and you're like [thinking]: Oh, lady, I want to kill you! Or, Sir, I want to kill you! An offense has taken place.

The holidays, they're just a hot-spot for taking offense. And if that doesn't get you—if you're immune to what the rest of us are susceptible to—how about home? That's where the heart is. I mean, we have three kids—12, 11 and 8—and sometimes you can't even get through breakfast without an offense taking place.

- Dad, he looked at me!
- Who drank all the milk?
- Get out of my bedroom before I decapitate you!
- Who left the toilet seat down?

You know, this goes on and an offense can take place. If you're alive—you have a pulse and you're breathing—offense happens. Unforgiveness gets in the inside of every single one of us.

And so what do we do with this thing? What do we do with this unforgiveness toward others when the offense happens? Because this is a big issue—it's a roadblock—it keeps us from experiencing the best of what God has for us to offer.

In fact, Jesus knew all about this. He even said regarding Himself in *Luke, chapter 7* (check this out)—He says:

...blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."
Luke 7:23 (NKJV)

Imagine having that as one of your statements when you walk in; you're at a party: Hey! Good to see you. Blessed are you if I don't offend you. (I mean, you know) like: What? "[B]lessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Let's deal with that. Let's hit it head on. Let's look at this thing.

Jesus is teaching and He says in *Mark, chapter 11, verse 25*: "...when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone..." Gosh, don't you love it when He's so comprehensive? It's like you just can't squirm your way out of this one.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone,
{comma} forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive
you your sins.

Mark 11:25 (NIV)

In *Matthew, chapter 6, verses 14 and 15*, He says it in a bit different way:

¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly
Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their
sins, your Father will not forgive {you} your sins.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)

Ouch! That's some pretty thick stuff right there.

When I was a senior in high school, I was in sociology class. I was one of those students who celebrated at graduation, just because I graduated—not because of what the future held. And I'm sitting in sociology class my senior year in the back of the room on the left-hand side facing the teacher. I remember it vividly, sitting in my chair. And Mr. Perry, my sociology teacher, says: Mr. Rodgers! (He says it that loud in front of the whole class.) Mr. Rodgers! I'm like: All right, here we go again, is it detention or what's it going to be? Do you realize that you are the only senior in this class? [I'm like]: Yeah.

Then he goes on to say: And, Mr. Rodgers, do you know that you are the only student that's flunking this class? And I sat—oh, I slouched a little bit—and (just you know) insecurity [or] embarrassment just kind of blows on me like a cool breeze. And I didn't realize at that point, but I took an offense to what he said. And what happened for Mr. Perry is that a good man, who

probably—I know—that wasn't his intent, went home that day; he probably never thought about it again for the rest of his life. And here I stand, years later, talking about it.

That's why you're different than the 8:15 [a.m.] crowd; because they don't laugh at my pain, but you do. Oh, [where] do I go now? But an offense took place.

When I was pastoring a church in Phoenix, I'm driving through a suburban area going home one early afternoon and—beautiful day, as it is 364-and-a-half days a year there—and I'm driving down the road. It was a cooler time of the year, so I had the windows down. I'm driving down a 25-mile-an-hour [or] 30-mile-an-hour street. I'm not paying attention—okay, I'll admit that. And all of a sudden, in my left ear, some guy is just cussing up a storm right at me: Hey, you, blah, blah, blah, blah!

I'm like: What? I look over and here's this guy and—it's (you know) two lanes one way; two lanes the other—he's driving beside me and he's just yelling at me, because I was really, just wasn't paying attention. But I'm thinking: Well, hold on here, dude. You can't—no!—this isn't right. So, I didn't swear at him, but I began to passionately express male affection back to this guy.

And so here we are: two grown men driving down the road (you know) just bonding together very loudly. We're going back and forth and I'm offended at this guy. I mean, he's just going up in my [face]. I probably offended him. He goes off in his direction. I go off in mine. Right then two things come to my mind. And you think: Oh, well, you're a pastor, so I'll bet the first thing that came to your mind was repentance. No, no, I'm sorry—the first thing was: Man, I'm glad my wife wasn't with me. And then the second thought was: I hope he never comes to our church, because that'd be awkward. [If] he walks in the door: Hey! I know that guy from somewhere.

But an offense—I mean, if you're alive and you're breathing, we all have the opportunity to take an offense almost every day. And when we do, unforgiveness—

- It just finds harbor within us (and)
- It stays there (and)
- It stews there

And I think and look at verses like when Jesus said:

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Mark 11:25 (NIV)

And maybe you don't do this; but I do; because I'm honest. I look at verses like that and I think: Seriously? Jesus, are You really serious when You say that? I mean, okay, I can forgive the waiter when he brings a diet coke and I ordered a regular—I can do that. And maybe I can even forgive when they overcharge me on my cell bill. With a whole bunch of frustration I can get to a place: Okay, I'll forgive them, because they have me under a two-year contract, so I'd better get over it, right? Maybe for that stuff—okay, Jesus—this applies. But what about the real world stuff that you and I live in?

Maybe your story isn't somewhat as comical as two grown men affectionately bonding, driving down the road side-by-side. But maybe, ladies, you've had a father-figure or a male-figure in your life [who] deeply wounded you and hurt you—abused you even. And I think: Forgive? I mean, Jesus does that apply—seriously?

Or maybe when you grew up you were in an environment where you were just flat-out told that you were a mistake. You were a mistake. We didn't plan on having you, and in fact, I don't expect anything to ever come out of your life. You probably will end up being nothing for the rest of your life. As much as you hated those words, you hated even more that you believed it and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Jesus, are You serious? You want me to forgive that? Forgive them?

Maybe you're like half of the world in a normal family situation where divorce has happened. And as a kid—in the confusion and really the pain and the frustration—you feel like those that you trusted the most had somehow betrayed you and now you're forced to choose between two:

- Where's my loyalty stand? (and)
- What do I do with all this? (and)
- How do I process this?

And somehow an offense has come in and unforgiveness takes place in your heart. You think: Jesus, okay, are You really talking about that there?

Or maybe it was your own divorce that was so jacked-up and full of anger and messed up that you vowed to yourself that you'd never trust someone of the opposite sex again. Forgive him? Forgive her? "...when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him." If you hold *anything* against *anyone*— Let me try this again: If you hold—yeah, man, that's a tough pill to swallow.

I remember when—this was awhile back and—man, I got sick. I don't know what it was, flu or whatever it was. I woke up in the middle of the night and—

- I'm just sweating (and)
- I've got the chills (and)
- My head's pounding like crazy

And I'm laying there and I'm thinking: I can't sleep any longer. What am I going to do with this thing? And so I figure: Okay, I've got to go find something. Do we have anything that could help me sleep?

So I open up the medicine cabinet and I see the bottle of NyQuil®. Now here's the thing: I can't stand cough syrup or that (kind of) little syrupy stuff. (I mean) just talking about it right now, my saliva glands are kicking up and my stomach's starting to churn. So you guys better be careful because it could come out. And I'm looking at the NyQuil®, I get it out—

- My head is pounding
- I'm sweating
- I'm shivering
- I can't sleep
- It's misery

So I take the NyQuil® and I think: Okay, I've got to do this. So I pour it in that little plastic-cup-thing that comes off the top. I pour it in there and I stand at the counter for about 20 minutes

staring-down this tablespoon of NyQuil®. And I'm standing there staring at the NyQuil® and I'm like: Okay (I mean) this is ridiculous. If I'd have been on *Candid Camera*—only about 10 percent of you understand what *Candid Camera* ever was, but the rest of you—if somebody had their *Flip MinoHD* [pocket-sized video camcorder] out and caught this thing, it would have been comical.

So I'm standing there looking at the NyQuil®. I pick it up and I'm literally kind of moving like this [demonstrates standing very still with the cup in his hand]g: I can do this. I can do this. I can do this. And I raise it up and I put it up to my mouth and go: No, I can't do it! I walk away; head still pounding, still sweating. And I know that if I drink the NyQuil®, I'm going to be able to sleep; the pain's going to go away. Now the sickness may not disappear, but at least I'm going to have some comfort for awhile. And I get back at it. It took me like 20 minutes and I finally slam the NyQuil® down—hold my breath, swallowing it down, and ewwww—almost threw up in the sink, go back to bed, and about 15 minutes later I'm sleeping.

I think about that NyQuil® deal and how this whole deal of forgiveness toward those who've offended us is really kind of similar. We're going to see (in just a moment) how forgiveness can really free us to pursue the life that God is calling us to. But it's just a hard cup of NyQuil® to swallow—it's just difficult to get down—because in all reality it seems like it's impossible. Well, let's do this. Let's look at what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS AND FORGIVENESS IS NOT

I've written down a few differences between the two. And here's what I've come up with:

- Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened; but forgiveness is letting go of what happens.
- Forgiveness is not being a pushover; but forgiveness is a courageous act of grace.
- Forgiveness is not something that you do for the offender; but forgiveness is something that you do for yourself.
- Forgiveness is not forgiving first and then healing. The irony is that forgiveness is forgiving first and then healing. See, we don't heal and then forgive; we forgive in order to heal.

Jesus is hanging out with His disciples in *Matthew, chapter 18*, beginning at *verse 21*. If you have your Bible, you can turn there if you'd like. We're going to camp out there for a few minutes. Jesus is hanging out with His disciples, and Peter walks up to Him.

Now, Peter (if you read your Bible)—he's kind of a (you know)—I like him. He's a little bit (you know) pistol at the side—he's a wrangler. He's (you know) kind of loud. He walks up to Jesus—I can just imagine; I don't know (obviously) for sure—but Peter's maybe feeling a little bit self-righteous, feeling real good about where he's at in his spiritual life. I mean, after all he's been trucking around with Jesus and seeing the miracles—

- He's one of His right-hand men
- He's feeling the position (and)
- ...some of the power (and)
- ...some of that stuff (and)
- He's feeling a little cocky (maybe and he comes up to Jesus and, you know)—

- He's been reading his Bible
- He's been going to church
- He's wearing his Christian T-shirt (and maybe)
- He even has his little fish-logo bumper sticker on the back of his Ford F-150

He's feeling really, really good. And he walks up to Jesus, in *verse 21*, and he says this:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?..."

Matthew 18:21 (NIV)

And I'm assuming he's—(you know) again—a little arrogant:

...how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?

Matthew 18:21 (NIV)

Like (you know): Yeah, that's me—up to seven times. You know, it's always dangerous whenever you ask Jesus a question, isn't it? So—

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:22 (NIV)

Or some of your Bibles may say: "seventy times seven." In *verse 23* He says: "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like..." So Jesus begins to teach Peter about forgiving others using a parable. A parable is really just a modern-day story—in that culture, a modern-day story—used to teach a spiritual truth. And so, He says:

²³ ...the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents {which, in our economy, would be literally millions of dollars} was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

Matthew 18:23-25 (NIV)

How is that for the fine print? That's like rent-to-own (you know): Hey, you can get this big-screen TV for only \$99 for 99 months and no payments for 99 days! But if you miss one payment—you, your family, your kids, your wife, your dog, and your big screen TV—they're gone, baby. I mean it's almost like it's credit card interest or something. So He goes on to say in *verse 26*:

²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Matthew 18:26-27 (NIV)

If you are taking notes, you can write this thought down:

A FORGIVING SERVANT RECEIVES FORGIVENESS FOR HIMSELF

It's pretty [basic] you know—it's 101. I want to receive this forgiveness; this is great. I see the debt that I owe and, man, I'm forgiven—receives forgiveness for himself. It goes on in *verse 28*:

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii {which, in our economy, again, was literally worth a few dollars}. He grabbed him and began to choke him. {Saying:} 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, {saying} 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

Matthew 18:28-29 (NIV)

"But" *verse 30* "he refused." Forgiven servant receives forgiveness for himself but holds onto unforgiveness toward others. It's going to catch up with us here. It's going to hit home. Moving on:

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

Matthew 18:30 (NIV)

Now, here's what I think is interesting about that—as I've thought about this in reading it a number of times: Jesus is teaching about forgiveness and forgiving—

- Those who have sinned against us
- Those who have violated a trust
- Someone who has maybe hurt you
- ...lied to you
- ...cheated to you
- ...abused you
- ...whatever it is

He says that the person who received forgiveness for themselves didn't extend that forgiveness to someone else, but locked him up in prison.

I think that many of us have done the same thing. I know that I have. I've created this prison that I am the warden of—in my heart and in my mind—and I have a cell block there. That cell block is full of the people who have offended me that I am unforgiving toward.

- Mr. Sociology teacher: put you in your cell—it wasn't that bad of a deal, but—you're getting at least 10 years for this deal; close the door.
- What you did to our family, do you know how painful that was?—life!—close the door.

If you're anything like me and you've created this prison and this cell block, you can think right now in your mind and you can see the faces of those who you've locked up—

- Those who have offended you
- ...who've hurt you
- ...who've violated you

And we lock them up.

Jesus continues to teach—*verse 31*:

³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said. 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

Matthew 18:31-33 (NIV)

You want to find a sweet spot in life? You want to get to a place where that life-to-the-full that Jesus tells us about in *John, chapter 10, verse 10*? You want to get a place where we're free to pursue that where we're free to reach out for what God has for us? It's right here: It's not only being a forgiven servant, but it's going another step forward and that's becoming a forgiving servant.

FORGIVEN SERVANT BECOMES A FORGIVING SERVANT

Because when we can forgive others, we can experience (you know) the fruit of the Spirit—

- The love
- The joy that God gives
- The peace that no one can take away
- The patience
- The kindness
- The goodness
- The faithfulness
- The gentleness
- The meekness

All the stuff that the Spirit of God wants to do in us is sometimes—so often—just restricted because of this roadblock of unforgiveness that we have in our life.

What's interesting about this deal of unforgiveness is that most of the time, those who offend us and hurt us have moved on. Isn't that the case? They've moved on in life. They'll probably never come back and apologize, which really doesn't make a difference anyway because we're supposed to forgive regardless. But—

- We hold onto this unforgiveness
- We lock them in our cell block
- It becomes like a ball and chain on our life

They've moved on and they're not even thinking about you or [me] are they? They're fine, but we're just hobbling through life restricted because we're just holding onto [the] weight of this unforgiveness. We've got it and it's locked up—10 years go by, 20 years go by, decades can go by—and we're still: Oh yeah, you know what so-and-so did to me back then (you know)?

Here's the problem with it—we think: Okay well, why? Why does God command the impossible, because justice must be served, right? Especially when we've been hurt, justice must be served. It would be a crime to let them off. In being honest, some of us have been so offended and so hurt that forgiving seems humanly impossible. Then I think: "If you stand praying and you have anything against anyone, forgive him." What do we do with that? What do we do?

One of the reasons—and I don't understand all of this obviously, but one of the many reasons—I believe that God not only suggests, but literally commands us, to forgive those who have offended us, who've sinned against us, is: Well one, we do it to other people, right? But it's because unforgiveness is like cancer to the soul.

UNFORGIVENESS IS LIKE CANCER TO THE SOUL

It breaks down our emotional and spiritual immune system and it gets in there and it eats away and takes away the life. And unlike cancer, unforgiveness spreads to those around us. Those around us become bitter; they take on our offense. They're offended toward the people who hurt us. It just spreads and eats away at us like cancer. It's like cancer to the soul. I think that's one of the reasons why God says: You've got to forgive those who've offended you. He says in *Colossians 3:13* to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.

So here's the cool thing in this deal; is that, whenever we see God commanding us to do something that we cannot do on our own, that's when we lift up our head and you can begin to smile and say: Oh, *that's* when God comes in and enables me to do what I cannot do on my own.

Let me show you the level of forgiveness that Jesus is telling us to have. He goes on to say in *verse 34*:

³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailors to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless {now check this out—unless} you forgive your brother {where?} from your heart."

Matthew 18:34-35 (NIV)

There is a depth of forgiveness that will set us free; and that depth of forgiveness is from the heart.

FORGIVE FROM YOUR HEART

Maybe you've been told: Well, forgiveness is a decision. Well it may begin with a decision, but it certainly doesn't end there. It lingers when it's just a decision. But there's a place that I believe the Spirit of God will take us where we can forgive someone who's offended us and forgive from the heart.

I've been praying that God would do that for you today. I've been praying that that ball and chain—that the seat that you're sitting in right now—that you'll literally, supernaturally be able to stand up and walk, forgiving. Maybe today, you go into your prison—in your cell block that you've created in your heart—and right where you're at you see their face. You're standing there with the keys hanging on your belt and God's grace enables you to grab your keys and let them go.

Unforgiveness is a roadblock to experiencing God's best in our life. He wants us to forgive everything someone has done against us. What's impossible with us is what is possible with God. Today you may walk out of here free, having forgiven. For some of you maybe today begins a short-term process of getting to the place where you're able to forgive from your heart; because God's going to help you to do that. Jesus said: I've come to give you life and life to the full; but unforgiveness will keep you from it. Open the prison door, let them go, and forgive.

Let's pray, you guys:

Father, thank You so much for speaking to our hearts today. God, we embrace this pretty difficult issue here. God, I pray that by Your Spirit You would do in us what we cannot do on our own. Help us to forgive those who've offended us from the hearts.

(With your heads still bowed and your eyes closed) I want to give you an opportunity to respond to God here (in just a moment). Maybe you're sitting here and you're like pretty much everybody else in this room: you've harbored unforgiveness toward someone; maybe you've harbored unforgiveness toward yourself. Today's the day where God says to forgive those who've offended you—forgive yourself if necessary—and I believe He's going to give you the ability to do so.

You're sitting here and you're like everybody else—you're not alone—and you say: Scott, man, I want to just reach out for God and ask for Him to help me to forgive. If that's you and you want to pray with the rest of us, just lift your hand. I want to see how many of you guys are with me on this thing...hands up, going up all over the place. Some of you guys are holding your hand down because you think you're the only one. Go ahead and lift your hand if there is unforgiveness you need to ask God to help you with.

Father, we pray in Jesus' name that You would supernaturally enable us to forgive from the heart right now, Father God. Help us to move forward, God, to pursue Your best in our life. It may be a painful process; it may be painless. Regardless, God, we believe that You want us to forgive from

the heart so we choose to do so, God. We release them. We open the door of the prison that we've put them in and we let them go.

(With our heads still bowed and our eyes closed) maybe you're sitting here and you don't have a relationship with God. So this whole issue of forgiving those who've offended you is: What are you going to do with it now?—because you've never asked God to be a part of your life before. And if you think about it, He said—the verse I referenced in *Colossians 3:13*—forgive others as I have forgiven you (as the Lord has forgiven us). God has forgiven you and I of every single sin, of every stupid thing, of every shameful thing that we've ever done and ever will do. But the key is: receiving His forgiveness, because you and I certainly don't deserve it. We certainly will never go to Heaven based on the goodness in our hearts.

But Scripture tells us this: That Jesus, the Son of God, came to live a life that you and I could not live—that's a life without sin—so that He could die the death that you and I could not die, and that's the death that pays the penalty for the sin of every single person on the planet. Today God is stirring within you and saying, really in a sense: Give your life to Me; surrender your life to Me. I've forgiven you. I love you.

If that's your prayer and you want to surrender to God's tugging on your life and on your heart, you say: God, okay, I surrender my heart to You. Jesus, come into my life. Forgive me. Save me. Change me. Be the Lord of my life. Today is the day that you make that decision to ask Christ in your life. If that's your prayer and you say: Scott, I just want you to pray for me as I stay in my seat—seated where I'm at—pray for me. I want Christ in my life; I want to surrender my life to Him. (With your heads bowed and eyes closed) if that's you, lift your hand because I want to see who I get to pray for. Invite Christ in your life—save me and change me. I want You, Jesus, in my life. Who in here wants Christ? Sir, I see your hand right there. Praise God for you. Who else? Scott, just pray for me. I want Christ in my life. Jesus, save me and change me. I want You in my life. I want Your forgiveness. Be the Lord of my life.

Guys, maybe you're sitting here and you're a lot like me: Man, I don't want to raise my hand for anything. Well, here's what I want you to do: I want you to pray this prayer with us; because I'm going to invite every one of us to pray this prayer together. Lift your heart to Him. Give your life to Christ.

If you just lifted your hand, say this with passion, because in a moment I'm going to say “Amen” and your past is going to be gone and your future with Him can be incredible. Let's pray. Everybody say:

Father God, today I surrender my life to You. Please forgive me of my sin, my mistakes. Jesus, I believe You're the Son of God, that You died on the cross for me, that You've risen from the dead, that You're alive; so live in me. Be the Lord of my life. I surrender myself to You. In Your name I pray. Amen.

You guys better clap your hands about that (because you're the rowdy crowd and you're allowed). Come on! Awesome! Congratulations! Let me first say this to you—those of you who just asked Christ into your life—man, what a day! This is January 3, 2010. You'll never forget this date because you'll be able to look back and say that's the date I asked Christ into my life.

Man, pursue Him...pursue Him. He's created you new on the inside and pursue that friendship with Him. This church, The MET, is a great place to explore what that relationship with Christ looks like. So plug in, get involved, and someone will come along beside you and just help you on your journey in growing with Christ.

If you're some of the many who've said: God, help me to forgive—trust Him. He'll bring you through that. You'll be able to live free with forgiveness toward someone who's offended you. So congratulations on a new day dawning in your life—free of bitterness and free of unforgiveness. You guys are amazing.

Pastor Bill [Norman, *Lead Pastor of Administration and Operations*] actually asked me to pray as the ushers receive the offering. If The MET is your home church and you want to worship God through your giving, man, that's incredible. I want to say on behalf of Pastor Sal—he and I are great friends—just thank you for investing in people's lives. That's what you're doing when you give. You're saying: God, I worship You. I trust You. I believe in people and I believe in changed lives. That's just a great thing to invest in—is the person sitting next to you. So, guys, let's pray:

Father, I thank You for this opportunity to give back. Just like Jason [Hinze, visiting worship leader] said during worship how we have so much. And, God, we give back to help others. We thank You for this opportunity to do so. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Guest Speaker: Scott Rodgers

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⁷ Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you... ¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

John 10:7 and 10
(*New King James Version*)

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*