

# The Power of A Reluctant Witness

by Carter Conlon

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**Scripture:** Jonah 1:1, Jonah 3:1, Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Acts 1:8, Romans 1:16, Psalm 51:12

**Topics:** "Reluctance in Faith", "God's Transformative Power"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Today I want to speak to you on a topic that's called the power of a reluctant witness. Are you a reluctant witness for Christ? There's incredible power in your reluctance. You'll see this.

Everybody's nervously not even laughing today. They're just like, God help me to understand this. The book of Jonah, please, Old Testament.

Book of Jonah, if you can find that in your Bible and we'll start. Father, I just thank you so much today for your presence, your power, your word, your people. Lord, this is indeed a perilous hour in this world and you have established a church.

You've set about a testimony. You placed something within our hands that can make a difference in our voices, in our hearts. So God, I'm asking for the authority of heaven to speak this message and the touch of God in each of our hearts to be able to hear it.

Help us, Lord God, to reach our full potential in what you've called us to be at this time. And Lord, we thank you for it with everything in us, in Jesus' name. Jonah chapter one, beginning at verse one.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it. For their wickedness has come up before me. But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish

from the presence of the Lord.

He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Now this is a story of a man who ran from the call of God.

Now the call that was on his life was really simple, just as it is for you and I today. Go to a certain people and tell them that they are drawing near to the judgment of God. Just open your mouth.

Warn them about their situation. Tell them that there is a penalty to pay. The wages of sin is death.

Rebellion leads to an eternity without God and a destruction here on this side of eternity quite frequently, quite often. Go to them. Tell them.

Warn them. Now he wouldn't go. He was a prophet of God.

He was a man who knew the voice of God. He was a man to whom God could speak, just like perhaps you and I today, men and women gathered here today. And maybe your heart is open enough that God can actually give you very, very clear direction for your life.

And it couldn't have been any more clear. Told them, go in this direction. Speak to this people in this particular city.

Tell them that they are drawing near to the day of their own judgment. But instead of going to what seemed to be a really simple instruction of God, he got up and bought a ticket to go in the opposite direction. I'm not going.

I'm not doing this. Now we ask ourselves the question, why wouldn't he go? And it was really quite simple. Nineveh was the capital city of a nation or an empire called Assyria.

And he just didn't like the Assyrians. The Assyrians had a history of violence and intolerance. They would conquer other nations and they would assimilate them.

You remember it was Assyria that eventually assimilated the Northern Kingdom of Israel and drew them off from the promised land and more or less dispersed them throughout their present empire and then brought other people in to intermix with them to make sure that they had virtually eradicated their testimony. Their motto was, of the Assyrians was, our way or the highway. There were no negotiations.

You either bend to our way or you become one of us or we punish you. There was no allowance for individual identities. There was no tolerance of opposing viewpoints.

Assyria meant assimilation. To the Assyrians there was just no other way. And godlessness was their foundation.

They stood against everything that Jonah and his people stood for. And God says, go to them and tell them the hour of their judgment has come. And so in Jonah's mind, I suppose he was thinking something like this.

If they're under judgment, isn't that a good thing? So why tell them? If it's all going down in 40 days, if the fire of God is going to come down, if they're all going to die and go into an eternal hell, then let's just let it

happen. Why would we want to even take a chance that what I have to say to them could change it? And Jonah knew something about God. In chapter four, verse two, he prayed to the Lord and said, ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish, for I knew that you're a gracious and a merciful God.

You're slow to anger, abundant and loving kindness, and one who relents or changes his mind from doing harm. I knew this about you, God. And so just on the off chance that you would change your mind, I'm not going.

You know, we laugh at Jonah and we say, oh, what a foolish thing to do. But is this possible to somebody in your life? You know, that God's prompting you to speak to, and you'd rather not. You'd rather have that person judged.

You'd rather see them go into hardship. You really don't want them restored to God. You would rather have them come to harm.

You know, that's in every heart. Say, well, if they're under judgment, let them be judged. Why should I go and run the risk? I will not speak to these people.

That's really what Jonah said. I'm not going. I'm not speaking to them.

I'm not running the risk that you're going to be merciful to them. I'm not doing it. I'm going in the opposite direction.

And it's the type of a person that just is prompted by God to do something and just says no and remains silent. I'm not going there. I'm not speaking to this person.

I'm not telling them. I'm not talking to them. I'm not going to this group.

You know, the Bible says, Jesus himself said in the last days, because iniquity or lawlessness will so abound, the love of many will grow cold. And I believe that love is a similar thing to what Jonah was experiencing, that there'll be such a lawlessness, such a vileness in people, such an incivility. Liars will abound.

Violence will be propagated similar to the Assyrians. There'll be people that rise up and say, our way or the highway, there's no negotiating with you. Your way is inferior to our way.

So you've got to bend your knee to our viewpoint. And if you don't, there's going to be trouble in your life. And so it's a similar situation to this, that Jonah was facing at this particular time.

In Jonah chapter one, again, beginning at verse three, to get his attention, God sent a storm. And I want to ask the question, is there anybody in a storm today? Yeah, I see. I didn't mean for you to raise your hands, but anybody here in a storm and you can't figure out why? Like it's just, what's happening to me? It's like all hell is broken out all around me.

I'm in a storm in my mind. I'm in a storm in my heart. I'm in a storm in my home.

I'm in a storm at work. I'm in a storm when I'm on the subway, when I walk down the street. God, what is going on in my life? It says, Jonah arose to flee to Tarsus.

Now he's going the opposite way to what God is calling him to do. And he's actually fleeing from the presence of the Lord. If this is what you're going to say to me, I don't want to hear your voice anymore.

Talk to somebody else. I'm not interested. I'm not going there.

I'm not doing that. And so he goes to Joppa, finds a ship going in the opposite direction, pays the price, and he flees from the presence of the Lord. The next verse, it says, but the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship was about to be broken up.

In other words, the journey he was on was about to come to an abrupt end because he wasn't going in the direction of God. God is merciful. When you and I are not going in the right direction, when our thoughts are not his thoughts, when our ways are not his ways, when we can come to church and we sing, I'll say, yes, Lord, yes, to your will and to your way.

But when we leave and God speaks, we say, no, Lord, no, not that, anything but that, not going there, not doing that. I'm not going to listen. And if you're going to continue speaking this thing to me, I'm just not going to listen to you.

I'm going to clap louder. I'm going to sing louder in church, but I'm not going to listen to your voice because I'm not doing that, not going there, not speaking to those people. It's not going to happen.

And so God sends a storm. He sends a storm you can't get out of. He sends a storm, maybe it's worse than any storm you've ever been in, in your life.

He sends a storm that's so inwardly powerful, you end up streaming at God himself. This is what happened to Jonah. And fear around him began to grow.

And it says in verse five says, the mariners were afraid and every man cried out to his God and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. Now his fear is growing all around him.

This type of society that he's now traveling with, fear is growing. He chooses to go down into the quietest areas it is that he could find. And he chooses to sleep and not pray.

And the reason he chose to sleep is that he knew if he prayed, God would remind him of what he's supposed to be doing. That's why a lot of people don't pray. They don't want to pray.

They can't pray. Oh, you don't mind taking the grocery list out of your back pocket. You know, I pray for my aunt, I pray for my uncle, I pray for this, I pray for Frank and John and Joan and Jim and Sally and whoever.

And you pray, but you don't really pray. Real prayer is Lord, what would you have me to do? God speak to my heart. What do you want me to do? What do you want me to say? Where do you want me to go? Real prayer is Lord, not my will, but thine.

And a lot of people are willing to pray, but not that kind of prayer. And in the midst of a crisis where people are in danger now of losing their lives, the prophet of God is asleep. He won't pray because God, I've found out over the years, something that if you're young, you're going to learn, God does not forget.

He doesn't forget. You can ignore him for 20 years and go back to him in prayer and he'll say, now, where were we? What were we just talking about? Remember a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. So you can ignore him for 20 years.

And for him, it's like a half of a second. The conversation is still going on. You see, ultimately the captain came to him in verse six and says, and said to him, what do you mean sleeper? Arise and call on your God.

And perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish. It was the cry of the perishing that finally woke this man up. And I believe that in our generation, it's the cry of the perishing that is going to wake up the church of Jesus Christ at this moment in history, because many of God's people are asleep.

Many of God's gatherings don't pray. Prayer is not even a burden. It's not even a thought.

At best in many places, it's only a program and it's not a heart cry, but all around him, people now were afraid they were in danger of dying. Have you noticed in America today that we have cities now that are declared states of emergency because of opiate addiction. Grandmothers and grandfathers are now taking painkillers, not that they have pain in their body.

They've got pain in their mind. They've got pain in their soul. Young people folks, are you getting tired of the school shootings? Are we getting tired of seeing young people going in with this cry of anger in their heart, thinking that however twisted it is, that somehow they're going to get some measure of satisfaction at taking somebody else's life in their school system.

Two more school shootings just this week. We've got young people crying out in our streets everywhere, looking for hope, looking for victory, looking for deliverance, looking for a future, looking for a reason to live. Homes are falling apart.

Marriages are being torn to the seams. Iniquity is abounding. That which is evil is being called good.

And that which is called good is being pushed to the sidelines of our society. And suddenly there's a cry comes among the people, people who are traveling with Jonah in this journey that's going in the opposite way of where God is. We live in a society that's been traveling that way for quite some time.

And many of God's people have been traveling with them, sound asleep on the same ship. But suddenly everything is starting to fall apart around us. Incivility is beginning to dominate our public discussion.

We seem to be at a loss to navigate our way forward and our future. Divisions are becoming more pronounced. Divisions that we thought at one time, at least we're on the way to becoming healed are now becoming more pronounced every day.

And suddenly there was a cry in that society. And I can hear it in my heart. It's a silent cry.

You have to be sensitive to the spirit to begin to realize that the people are crying out for you and I to call out to God. What are you doing sleeping? Call out to your God and perhaps your God will consider us that we may not perish. Why are you silent when we're dying? Why are you silent when our ship is falling apart and we're about to perish in the sea and we are afraid and we don't know what to do.

Arise and call out to your God. And then they came to Jonah and they said, tell us for whose causes this trouble upon us and what is your occupation? Where do you come from? What's your country? What kind

of people do you belong to? In other words, what are you supposed to be doing? You're sleeping. We know that you're on the journey with us, but what is it that you are called to do? This is the first moment where you see honesty coming into the the heart of this man, Jonah.

And he tells them that he's, he's fleeing from the presence of the Lord. God called me to go to people who you'd least expect would ever be interested in spiritual things and tell them that their judgment is coming and tell them that this is a grievous moment for them, a perilous moment for them. And they said to him, why have you done this? And because you've done this and you've remained silent, we are in the midst of the storm.

When according to your word, it's in the power of your hand to make a difference. It's in the power of the church of Jesus Christ to make a difference. It's in our hand folks, as the church, we can make a difference.

We have access to the throne of God. We have promises from the word of God that we can speak to mountains and command them to be cast into the sea. Incredible promises that whatever we ask for, believing we shall receive it.

We're told that we can tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the evil one, and nothing shall by any means hurt us. We are given these promises. We are told these things.

Then the people of that moment on that journey start calling out to the one man that they knew in their midst that can make a difference and say, why have you done this? It's because you've been fleeing from the presence of God and the purpose of God, that this storm is now upon us. And they had to have some recognition that it was in the power of his hand to stop it. And they said, what shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us? For the sea was, it was getting worse every moment.

It was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you.

For I know that this great storm or tempest is because of me. This is the first indication that the prophet Jonah is now reconsidering his ways. And he's now willing to live for the benefit of others.

He's willing to be given so that their storm might cease. He's willing to actually give his life that their storm might cease. But there's also something else very curious in here.

Why doesn't he just say, I'll climb over the side and jump into the sea? No, he says to them, you have to pick me up and throw me in. It's a first recognition that he needs help. I know what I'm supposed to do, but I need help to do it.

I can't find within myself the power. He would have known he could climb over the side of the ship and jump in. It would have the same result.

But I think it's a recognition. I want to be given, I want to do the will of God, but I need you to help me. We're going to be talking about that this afternoon.

Why do you need the church? Why is it important that we gather to encourage one another? Not to give up, but to persevere in faith, to live for God, to speak where God calls us to speak. None of us can do this alone. We need help to do this, and we need the help that God gives through the church.

Then ultimately we need the help that only God himself is able to give us in our situation. They throw him into the sea. In other words, Jonah's saying, throw me into the center of your storm.

I am the solution to your problem. That is true of the church of Jesus Christ. Throw us, throw our voices, our prayers, the words that God will give us, the testimony of who Christ is.

Throw us into the midst of the storm of this present moment we're living in, because we are the light of the world. Jesus said that. We are the salt of this earth.

We are the ones that produce healing and taste for the things of God and the preservation of that which is true and pure and holy. In chapter two, Jonah goes through a very deep night of the soul where all of his motives are examined. I cried out, he says in verse two, to the Lord because of my affliction, and he answered me.

Out of the belly of hell, I cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and all the floods surrounded me, and your billows and your waves passed over me. Then I said, I've been cast out of your sight, yet I will look again towards your holy temple.

We can get there to the point of thinking, I missed my moment. God, you called me, but I missed it. I ran from it.

And he says, the water surrounded me, the deep closed around me, weeds wrapped around my head, the regret of what I had not done or allowed to be done around me. The regret of my slumber wanted to swallow me. I went down to the moorings of the mountains, the earth with its bars closed behind me forever, yet you brought up my life from the pit, oh Lord, my God.

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer went up to you, into your holy temple. I thank God that we are invited to the throne of grace, not when we have it all together, not when we've been highly successful in everything we do, but it's in our time of need and in our own weakness that we are invited. As sons and daughters, whether we look like we've been down to the bottom of the ocean, we got weeds wrapped all around our head, we filled with regret for what we have or have not done, yet no matter how we may have failed in our commission, we are invited to the throne of grace to find help now in our time of need.

He says, those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy, but I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

And hear what it means in verse nine, he comes after all of his trials and all of his difficulties, all the searching of his soul, all the dealings of God, he comes to one conclusion that you and I must come to in our generation. Salvation belongs to God. In other words, Lord, you will save whoever you choose to save.

It is not my business. It's not my choice. It is yours.

You are a merciful God in places that we don't expect there to be mercy in places where we would rather see judgment to a people that have caused us pain and have given the opportunity will revive again and cause us even deeper pain in the future. Yet, but God, if you choose to show yourself mercy at this time, you are God. We are not.

Our thoughts are not your thoughts. Our ways are not your ways. You are the one who went to a cross and said, father, forgive them.

They don't know what they do. Salvation belongs to you. This, this was the moment that Jonah was brought back to his original calling.

This was the moment. God, if you have chosen to be merciful to this generation, then it's your choice. It's not that he fully loved his commission.

It's not that he was fully engaged with it. Not that he was overly enamored with the Assyrians. You'll see that when he gets up and he goes into the city of Nineveh, which was the capital city of Assyria, a city, three days, it took three days to walk through it.

There was 120,000 people in that city. You'll find that there was no grace or mercy in his message. He just got up and almost robotically obeyed God.

He was a reluctant witness 40 days. And you're all done. 40 days.

You're going to burn 40 days. I don't know how God's going to do it, but he's going to destroy the whole lot of you. 40 days for the harm that you've caused 40 days for the misery you've inflicted on people's as you've conquered them all over the world, 40 days and your godlessness will come to an end 40 days.

And God is going to judge you. And I think there's somewhat of a measure of satisfaction in this man's heart, because there's not an ounce of mercy in his message. As he's walking through Nineveh, he's simply pronouncing their judgment, but he has no idea what's going on behind him.

It's amazing when you look at it, he doesn't see it. It's all happening behind him. He's just walking straight through.

Welcome to Nineveh. And he's just looking forward to thank you for having come to Nineveh. He's looking forward to just getting through these three days of almost a miserable assignment as he might see it.

And of course, the rest of the book proves that he wasn't overly enamored with his commission, but behind him, it's amazing what's going on. The people of Nineveh believe God. We assume, I think from the story and rightly, I think it's rightly that God has already been speaking to people's hearts.

God is able to speak to people before we do. And when he calls us to speak to them, we are simply confirming what he's already been speaking. Who would have thought that God would be speaking to these people? Realistically, if you studied their history, they were violent.

They were vile. They took societies they conquered on forced marches. They put rings in their noses and in their lips and they chained them together and thousands would die on these forced marches.

And if you didn't bow to the gods of Assyria, you were slain without mercy, even tortured to instill fear in the other people that were with you on the journey. And yet, even to these people, God is speaking. Talk about mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy.

The whole foundation of the kingdom of God is forgiveness. Do you understand that? Mercy triumphs over judgment. Yes, there's a day coming when there will be a judgment on the whole world, but until that day, mercy still triumphs.

God's heart is not always mine or yours. God's ways are not always mine or yours. God's words are not always mine or yours.

God can be speaking and he just wants us to confirm what he's already saying. Even in our reluctance, the power of God can be made known. Years ago, when I was a police officer, I was out on assignment one day and I had a partner with me and it was a rainy day and I was in a real bad mood.

Anybody here ever been in a real bad mood? I know you're all saved and sanctified and you're running around going, praise God, all day. Well, I had a bad day. I was in a bad mood.

I didn't even want to talk to this guy. I didn't want to talk about anything with this guy. I just wanted to sit there and stew in my own misery.

The windshield wipers are going, the rain is falling on the windshield. It's just a lousy day. I don't feel good.

Out of nowhere, this guy says, so what is it you believe anyway? I don't want to talk to him. I don't want to talk to him. I don't want to share what I believe.

To be honest, there's no burden in my soul for him at that moment. Something could have happened that day and we could have been both in eternity, be going one way and him the other, and I wasn't even thinking about it. So with no passion, no real conviction in my heart, not really wanting to speak, in about three sentences, I just shared Jesus, the cross, and forgiveness.

I just wanted to get it out. There was no passion. You have to understand.

I wasn't even looking at him. I was just looking straight out and I just said it. As I finished, he slaps the dash of the car and says, I want that.

He said, I've been looking for that all my life. You see, so God's been speaking to this man's heart and brings him through to salvation through a reluctant witness. It's amazing.

There's power in our speech, even when we're reluctant. Sometimes we think to win somebody to God, we've got to be like Billy Graham. We have to have that moment in the lunchroom where the Holy Ghost comes on and said, you've tried this and you've tried that, and it's not worked.

We have to have this. Then we have to just almost like you can hear the harps playing as we speak. Then we give the invitation.

People fall on their knees. I've had moments like that where I've shared with somebody, I felt the Holy Spirit come on me and just the words were flowing like a river. The conviction of God was there and have the person look at me after 15 minutes of just pouring out of a mini sermon as it is and have the person look at me and say, well, that's okay for you, but I'm not interested.

Yet you're in a moment where you're reluctant and fine. We might find ourselves reluctant to speak in this generation. We might find ourselves sick of the conversation, the division.

We might find ourselves so turned off by the conversation in college or high school or in the workplace that we just would rather find a quiet place and sleep. We don't want to speak. Even though people can be very, very loud in those moments and they can be saying things they ought not to say, it is still possible that God is speaking and he's only looking for a witness of what he's already been speaking to the heart,

even if we're reluctant.

Even if I am not inclined to speak, God still is. And when we move in unison with him, mercy, sometimes on a scale bigger than we could ever imagine is unleashed. Mercy.

Jonah is walking through with his reluctant sermon. One line, death, darkness, despair, judgment, no hope. You're done.

You're finished. That's all he's doing. And he's just getting through it.

He realizes he's been a recipient of mercy, but in his mind, that just means he's recommissioned to speak his message. He doesn't much hope that the Assyrians are going to find the redemption that God was about to give them. 40 days, he says, and you're going to be overthrown.

And so he just keeps on walking. And as he passes by, behind him, the people believe God, they proclaim to fast, put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. Can you imagine? They're one way as he's passing through and behind them, they're turning to God.

He's not even aware of it because the scripture says after he went through the city, he went up on a hill and waited for the judgment of God to fall on the city. So he's absolutely unaware of what's going on. Then the word came from the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his noble saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Nobody is to eat. Nobody's even to drink water, but let men and beasts be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily to God, lest everyone, yes, and let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

This was a violent society. And through the testimony of one reluctant witness, look what God is doing is God is breaking the pattern of this nation. They're about to be spared for an entire generation, given an opportunity to have a relationship with the real and the living God.

And the king himself says, let us put away our robes. Let's put away food. Let's start crying out to God and turn from our evil way and from the violence that is in our hands.

That's really key. Then he says, who can tell if God will turn and relent and turn away from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. Then God saw their works that they turned from their evil way.

And God relented from the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them. And he did not do it. Mercy is unleashed.

You might say that the power of God was waiting for even a reluctant witness. You and I don't know who God is speaking to. He might be speaking on a much larger scale than we realize.

You see, people will put on a public face. I'm sure the king had a public face. The nobles here had a public face.

The people had a public face. But all it took is one messenger to confirm what God, I believe, was already speaking. And suddenly the whole viewpoint of a society that lives in opposition to the ways of God crumbles, just like the walls of Jericho.

The whole thing falls. And people see the error of their way. You know, you and I live in a generation when we, especially if you're watching the news, at least you think there's no chance this generation will never turn.

If you believe that, you don't know your Bible. You don't know biblical history. You don't know what God is able to do.

And you might not be aware that God is already speaking. Don't think for one second that God is not speaking to every heart, convincing people that your ways are not right, even though they're, they, they vociferously have to hold to it because they don't know anything else until somebody comes along, even reluctantly, and says, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Did you know that? Did you know there's a better way? Did you know you can have a full and abundant life? You know, there's a compassion available for our society that is God birthed and God breathed.

Can't be legislated. Can't be programmed. You see, humankind is selfless to the core, so it can never be achieved through human effort.

But by the spirit of God, by the spirit of God, we can have a new day tomorrow. You don't know whom God is speaking to. There's a reluctance, I suppose, in all of us.

Sometimes a large reluctance because of the day we're living in, and sometimes just a reluctance throughout our day to speak. I'll finish with a story that I've shared with you once before. I'll share it again.

I was in a restaurant after a service here one night, and sitting in the restaurant was a group of people whose conversation was so vile that it was inappropriate to be spoken in an inappropriate place. That's how bad it was. The owner of the restaurant was embarrassed.

He came over to me knowing I was a pastor. He said, I'm so sorry you have to listen to this. He said, would you, I'll get another table for you in the back.

As he shared that, I had a stirring. I said, no, just wait a minute. I had a pastor and a musician with me.

I got up from my table. I walked over to this table. There's four or five guys there and one girl who I think was a call girl.

I said, hey, I'm the pastor of Times Square Church just around the corner. I said, you look like a group of people could use a little bit of church time. I said, I'd like to invite you to come to church.

This was a Sunday night. I said, we have a service Tuesday night. He said, that'd be great if you'd consider coming.

The guy with the most vile mouth of all sitting at the head of the table, his conversation was just vile. He said, the guy sitting in front of you is a huge sinner. He really needs prayer.

I said, okay, let's pray for him. I put my hands on his shoulders. Without any hesitation, I began to pray, Jesus, show him, show him who you are.

Show him what you did on the cross. Show him what his future can be. Give him an understanding that his sin can be forgiven and that he can have a new life in you.

The fellows that were with me said, when you began to pray, the entire restaurant dropped their utensils and bowed their head. Now the guy at the end of the table really went off on me. He just exploded.

He started cursing at me in the restaurant. Who do you think you are? I'm saying it in a nice way. He wasn't saying it in a nice way.

What gives you the right to come over here and go back to your own table and keep your mouth shut and everything else? The guy wasn't a slouch either. There were five of them. There was me, Pastor Claude Hood is still pretty good.

There was another guy. I thought, well, if this thing goes south, we at least have a shot at it. I knew the owner of the restaurant would be on my side.

He said, what gives you the right to come here and do this? I stood there and I said, because I'm a Christian, God speaks to me. He told me that there's somebody at the table who's desperate to know who God is. The guy who's cursing me out starts to cry, takes up a napkin, starts to wipe his face.

He says, it's me. It's me. He says, I'm desperate.

I've got to know. I've just got to know who God is. It's a thought that never leaves my heart.

Now, who would ever think that God is speaking to this man? Who in the natural would ever think that a guy with a vile mouth like that, who's preparing a night of immorality and boasting of it openly, is interested in the things of God. Then he pulls up a chair and he says, please pastor, sit down. Tell us about how do you find your way to God? The guy had laid hands on his shoulders.

He said, this is weird, man. I'm going back to the hotel. So he got up and he left.

But I had a chance to sit there with him. He cried so hard through our conversation. He was wetting the restaurant napkin.

He cried so hard. He was so hungry for the things of God. And I said, will you bow now? Will you bend now? Will you give your life to Christ now? He said, pastor, it turns out he was from the UK.

And he said, I want to call my wife. I want to go back to it. And I want to do this, but I don't want to do it alone.

I want her to pray with me. And he says, but I promise you, I promise you whether she chooses to go with me or not, I'm giving my life to Jesus Christ. There's great power.

If we will just speak, if the Holy spirit can move on us and lead us to people and places that we wouldn't think God is speaking, but God knows. You see, you and I have the spirit of the living God inside us. And he knows what the people in your office are thinking.

He knows what that person walking down the street towards you is thinking. He knows their thoughts. And if we can learn to walk in unison with him, if we can become a people of prayer, not gauging what we're willing to do and not willing to do what we should do, what we shouldn't do.

If we can learn to walk in the spirit, if we can go to prayer and say, God, would you help me to acknowledge your presence in my life every day? Would you guide me? Would you guard me? Would you

Speak to my heart? And if you're speaking to somebody and all I am is just a confirmation of what you're speaking, would you give me the courage? Would you help me not to walk by the sight of my eyes? Would you help me to walk by the spirit? Because Lord, even if I'm a reluctant witness, there's incredible power when I walk in unison with you. Because you are the one speaking to somebody's heart, not me. And help me just to speak what I need to, not more, not less.

Sometimes it's just meeting somebody on the street who's crying on their cell phone saying, I want you to know that God loves you. And if you'll trust him, he'll help you. And just keep going.

Just keep going. All you're doing is you're sowing seed everywhere you go. But there has to be a willingness.

There has to be. And so I want to give an altar call today for every reluctant witness. Everybody here just say, Pastor, you just nailed it.

There's certain people I'd rather die than speak to them. I'd rather sleep than pray for them. Maybe it's this whole generation, this lawlessness is beginning to abound.

You say, something's happening to me. The witness in my voice is being driven down into the bottom of the ship. And I'm hardly ever speaking to anybody about Jesus Christ.

And my song seems to be relegated to when I come to church, but I can't sing the same song outside. I'm a really reluctant witness. But you remember Jonah said, you're going to have to throw me in.

Like I'm recognizing like Jonah did that I need help. I know I can't do this without the body of Christ to encourage me. And I can't do it without the spirit of God giving me the power to do it.

But God, if you will help me, I will do it. You will help me. I will open my mouth.

If ever there was a time in the history of this nation to not be quiet, it's now. People are hungry. Did you see at Christmastime when we just preached the simple gospel? I remember on that first Christmas morning service when we preached the gospel, Christmas Eve rather, people responded to receive Christ right into the lobby.

There's that resistance that has typically been part of our society to the things of God. The resistance in families, it seems to be crumbling. And I'm hearing more and more stories from people coming in and saying, it's amazing.

It seems like everybody I start talking to is open now to the things of God. Many people who were closed for forever are now starting to be open, at least willing to consider the things that I have to say. Is it possible? Is it possible that God is speaking to America again and waiting for the church to move with him? I want you really to think about that.

I'm going to say it again. Is it possible that God is speaking to America again and waiting for the church, waiting for you and I to agree with him, even if it's reluctantly, waiting for us to open our mouths and simply confirm what he's already speaking to people's hearts. If you'd like the courage to really be a witness for Christ, the courage, the courage to actually pray and say, Lord, what is your will for my life? Guide me every day.

The courage to not just sing a song, but actually live it. Yes, Lord. Yes.

To your will and to your way. If that's your heart, I know it's mine. I'm going to ask you just to, in a moment, get out of your seat and just join me here at the front of this auditorium and we'll just pray together.

That's all we can do. We just pray. Say, God, help us and help us to help one another and make us light and make us salt.

Give us a voice in our generation. Lord Jesus, we thank you today for a word that finds us where we are. And I thank you, Lord, that you have shown us, even in a reluctant witness, where, Lord, we have been so unavailable to you, that you will throw us overboard.

You will put us into the deep parts of your will, O God, and you will help us. I thank you, Lord, for your spirit of mercy that you are pouring over this nation. I thank you for places and people that don't look like they can be touched, but you've been saying you've been speaking and you are speaking because you are so merciful and you are that great.

So I thank you, Lord, that no matter how reluctant or weak we are, you are finding us today and you're stirring us and we take the next step, O God, with our hand in yours. We take the next step, Lord, not looking to our faithfulness, but looking, O God, to what is in your heart and what you will do in us and through us. So, Lord Jesus, I just pray that this word we could lay to heart, that this is an hour of mercy, that there is no one beyond your mercy, including reluctant witnesses.

And I thank you, O God, that as we rise, O God, and just take this, not lay this word down, but understand the hour we're living in and the incredible things you will do, O God. I just pray that we would say, help us, and you will. We would say, Lord, I want to open my mouth and we will.

Lord, I want to go to places that my flesh doesn't want to go, but I will, by the power of your spirit, I will do things, Lord, that have been so hard for me. But because it's an hour of mercy, there will be mercy for me. There will be mercy for who we speak to.

There will be mercy, O God. I thank you. This is a day you are truly pushing back the darkness, that you, O God, it is your hour for mercy.

You are breaking up the depths. You are pushing back the darkness. I pray, O God, I thank you that we will not miss this hour as your church.

And I thank you, Lord, that you are about to do something. And I thank you, O God, that in your great kindness, O God, you are making us willing. You said that you will make your people willing in the day of your power.

This is the day of your power. There is a willingness, even in reluctant witnesses. I thank you we'd step from this place, O God, with our eyes firmly fixed on you, because we know who we are.

But you, Lord, you're going to make a difference in us. We're going to make a difference. I thank you, O God, for this promise and this hope.

We believe it, O God. We receive this. And we thank you for the mercy, O God, to change today.

And, Lord, we will do that because you love us and you love those we will speak to. In Jesus' name we pray.

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