

# Treasure in Earthen Vessels

by Gayle Erwin

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*The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of God's mercy and the importance of exposing our true selves to Him for spiritual growth.*

**Duration:** 44:39

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:3, Matthew 6:33, John 1:5, 2 Corinthians 3:17 - 4:1, 2 Corinthians 4:6

**Topics:** "Christ In You"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the contrast between the flesh and the mercy of God. He highlights the importance of knowing oneself and exposing it to God in order to receive His mercy and forgiveness. The preacher also warns against the deceptive mindset that we can achieve success and salvation through our own efforts, emphasizing that only the mercy of God can truly save us. He shares examples of false teachings and methods used by some individuals to manipulate and deceive people, emphasizing the need to preach Christ Jesus as the true source of salvation.

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## Transcript

I have several pairs of red ones. I have some that'll put red ones to shame, even. But I didn't wear them tonight, because I knew you would be here and the place would be dignified.

Well, it's good to see you again. I am not, well, thank you. You probably noticed that I was too short, fat and bald to be Chuck Missler, but it's the best you've got tonight.

Since I'm only filling in for Chuck twice and not right back-to-back, I've not attempted to develop any theme. This is sort of like stew. Once a potato, now a piece of meat, maybe a carrot.

Go with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. There are some remarkable things that Paul is saying right in this area at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 4. Maybe you've seen them before, maybe you haven't, but let's have some fun with it. Actually, what I want us to do is to back up two verses and go to 2 Corinthians 3, verse 17, which tells us, now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Now, this is an amazing statement.

There's some reason why he's telling us this. There's something to be free from here that he wants us to know about. And he says, when the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is liberty.

Ah, I could back up much further and develop this more quickly, but I don't really have enough time tonight. I need about 30 years, but so be it. So verse 18 gives us a clue.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed. Now, just notice now that that's a passive statement. It's happening to us.

We're not doing it, but I'll go on. Into the same image, in other words, the image of the Lord, from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. Now, let me back up and tell you that something you know, and I'm not trying to insult your intelligence, but we all know that this flesh hates to be exposed.

The hardest thing in the world to do is tell the truth about ourselves. You see it in politics all the time. Nobody ever says, I did it and I'm sorry.

Nobody ever does that. This flesh hates to be exposed. And the thing is, when we don't give it the exposure it needs, it's painful.

We walk in the terror that somebody is going to snitch on us. And it's terror. In fact, just a little side thought here, but it explains it fairly well.

What was the first thing Adam and Eve did after they sinned in the garden? Covered up, didn't they? They started the hiding process. Now, this is a fascinating thing to me. You see, I have a fig tree in my yard, and I like figs.

But when I pick figs, I have to put on a long-sleeved shirt, because fig leaves really make you itch. Adam and Eve sowed fig leaves. Can you see them? Whoa, whoa, you know.

They're walking along in pain, because that's what happens when we attempt to cover ourselves up. We just don't know how. We just don't know how.

And when we try, we walk in the constant terror that somebody is going to tell. Well, this is where liberty comes in. See, there is freedom in the knowledge that where the Lord is, the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

And we all with unveiled faces. See, in Christ the veil is taken away. All that separates us from Him, all that keeps us from being exposed to Him, it's gone.

And what happens? Now, the world is afraid that once we really tell God what we're like, God's going to say, Aha! I knew it! And am I going to get you now! But that's not what happens, see. What happens is when we rip the veil aside and in Christ we're exposed to God, He shines His glory down on us. You see, we reflect, we behold as in a mirror the glory of God.

Now, I've got to tell you this. A little small commercial will be built into this, by the way, so forgive me. There's an incredible new book called Yahweh Style written by a dear friend of mine who also wrote the Jesus Style, a guy by the name of Gale Irwin.

And in Yahweh Style, I developed the theme on God's revelation of His name and His glory which He defines really as being the same thing in Exodus 34. And I just want you to know what this glory is that He shines down on us. Listen to this.

It's being merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth, issuing mercy or extending mercy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, forgiving transgression, forgiving sin. Not bad, huh? So when we expose ourselves to Him rather than His wrath, ah, we have His mercy shining down on us. Now, the world doesn't understand that, no.

They don't understand that. Only we who know the Lord understand that. It's just too awesome.

They can't believe it. Oh, you mean God would actually forgive? And the good news is He'll do more than forgive. See, what happens is He changes us.

We are transformed into His image. Not bad. Now, I told you that this was passive.

That means He's doing it to us. We're not doing it on our own. Some time ago, I was part of a group of pastors who met in the L.A. basin, all kinds of different denominations.

Once when we met, after we had said our hellos, one of the men, a dear pastor whom I deeply loved, began to weep. He said, fellows, you've got to help me. He says, I've had a problem in my life for 10 years, and it's still here.

I thought I'd said the right things, done the right things, but it's still here. And he says, is there any hope for me? Even as he talked, we nodded our identification with him. And when we finished, when he finished, for some reason or other, they all turned and looked at me.

Erwin? Yeah? How do you deal with something like this? I said, well, I'll tell you, fellows. I have discovered that I'm powerless to change myself. I try, and I can't.

It's like the problems I have are wild dogs kept in a cage back there. And if I decide I'm going to tackle this one, just that decision is like throwing stakes to him to make him strong for the fight. It's as if when I say, I'm going to deal with my weight, the whole world turns into food.

I said, the only hope I have found is this knowledge, that I just keep the veil pulled. And he shines his grace, his mercy down on me, his glory, his compassion, his forgiveness, and I find myself being changed. He's doing it, all I'm doing is saying, here I am, God, help.

And he says, I knew you needed it. And so he changes me into his image. You can't beat that deal, that's one of our little secrets, you see.

We can't say, I have done this by my great willpower, and if you were as tough as I was, you too could do it. That is a lie, you know. And we really know it, because we, who are followers of the Lord, know he did it.

We just sort of showed up and said, here I am, and we exposed ourselves, we confessed our sins, we pulled whatever veil there was, and exposed this flesh, and he changes us. Now, I love this too. See, what's happening here is we're seeing the difference between what my flesh will do and what God will do.

My flesh will hide, and hide painfully. But God, on exposure, forgives, and forgives bountifully. We just can't even contain it all, but I love this.

It says, and we're being transformed from glory to glory. Now what that means is that he is shining more of his glory down on us than he did before, day by day. Now, I'm going to have to make a confession to you.

There was a time, before I became such a nice guy like I am now, that I was pretty arrogant, you know. I felt that by the time I was 30, I'd pretty well have life conquered. I would be holy, knowledgeable, tall.

Oh, what an awakening for me. See, now that I'm 53, I found out that the older you get, the better you know yourself. And the more you know yourself, the more you want mercy! And God says, I knew you'd need it, Erwin, so I have arranged for you to go from glory to glory to glory.

I've arranged for you to get greater gobs of my mercy, because I knew you were going to need it. The more you knew yourself, the more you were going to need it. Who was it? Some famous somebody said, know thyself, but he said the rest of it wrong.

He should have said, know thyself and be terrorized. But God has arranged for that. The more I know my flesh, the worse things get.

I hate to examine my flesh. I hate to dig in through my innards. It's the sewer in there, and it's no fun.

And God says, the more you know yourself, the more you better expose it to me. And let me shine my glory down on you, so you can reflect that, my mercy, my forgiveness. So here we're seeing a good contrast between our flesh, what it produces, and what God produces.

Such a contrast. But Paul doesn't finish there. He goes on and says this again in several different ways within just a very few verses here.

Chapter 4, verse 1 says, Therefore, and you've heard Chuck say many times, if you see the word therefore in the Bible, find out what it's there for. And here, you've heard that. Come on.

So here we find him building on this theme and saying, since this is the way God operates, now we can draw some further conclusions about life and ministry. And he says, therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, or in other words, since this ministry has come to us as an act of mercy, it is by God's mercy that we have received this ministry, we don't lose heart, and we don't get discouraged, and we don't get downcast, you see. Because we got it by mercy.

Ah, good contrast for my flesh. Now, my flesh would say, you know why God has chosen me to be a preacher? It was because of my higher spiritual standing. That's what my flesh would say.

That's what my flesh says. But my flesh lies. I'm amazed at this flesh.

You realize we're all made out of flesh. And this flesh, terrible things are happening to it. You recognize that even this morning when you got up.

The first thing you did, terrible decision. You went straight to the mirror. And you looked and you probably said, I have met the enemy.

And you immediately set about correcting this flesh. See, this is evidence of what the flesh is up to. It is going downhill.

Believe me, it is. So the ministry, and every one of you are in ministry. I hope you understand that.

God does not say, well now I have some who are in ministry and some who aren't. No, no, no, no, no. Every one of you are in ministry.

You're part of the body of Christ if you're a follower of his. Therefore you have a ministry. But why did you get it? How did you get it? Was it because you were so tall? Was it because you were so intelligent? Oh, no, no, no, no.

Was it because you were so rich? Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Was it because of your beautiful personality? Your great looks? No, none of the above. I've got some bad news for you and then some good news.

The bad news is that Jesus tells us in the gospel of Luke, the things that are esteemed of men, or the things men really like, are an abomination in his sight. Now chew on that for a while. That will rather stagger you a bit.

Our flesh has nothing about it that would cause God to want to say, Oh, I like that. So instead, by his mercy, his mercy, he looks at us and he says, Oh, boy. You guys need help.

Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a ministry. Why? Because you just need help so bad.

Your flesh is so terrible. I want to bless you. And since it's by his mercy, we've received this ministry.

We never need to get discouraged, because it was all God's problem anyway. He knew who he was giving it to. In this way, that means that things never go bad, see? They never go bad.

It's just all part of the process of moving out in our lives, the things that God has given to us. And if difficulties arise, well, praise the Lord, man. I got it by mercy anyway.

No need for me to get discouraged. I have come to the conclusion that if only one person ever shows up to hear me, that's one more person than I deserve. It's by his mercy that we've received this ministry.

Now, if you don't think that's true, you're going to do something. If you think that you got your ministry because, well, you prayed so long even, or you gave so much, or your skin was the right color, or this or that. If you think it has anything at all to do with your fleshly status, then you're in for some rather damaging things in the kingdom of God.

Now, let me put it this way. We've got two ways to look at our flesh. One is that it is absolutely worthless.

It is doomed. It stinks. The other way is to think, well, now, Erwin, it's not that bad.

I mean, well, with the education I have and the kind of work that I have done and the way I've applied myself, I come at least fairly close to deserving something. So, now, these are the two kinds of views. If you think your flesh is worthless and God gives you something, you're delirious with joy.

You think, all right, man, Christmas every day. But if you think, well, I probably deserved it, sort of, then you're going to have to work real hard to keep deserving it, see? And this side over here becomes a real attempt to stay up to date. And this one over here just goes, wow, thank you, Lord.

How can I do this? How can I handle this? And it's total dependence on Him. Whereas this one says, I've got to keep up the deserving, see? Now, over here, what happens? You panic a lot. I mean, one wrong step and you think, I've got to balance that out.

And we work ourselves to death. The legalist lives over here, really. The legalist feels that God blesses him because he keeps so many rules or achieves so much or is so careful to avoid so many things.

But it doesn't work that way. You can never be good enough. You know that.

I'm trying not to insult your intelligence tonight. And since we know we've received this by mercy, he says, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. We have recently, to our sorrow, been made aware, I think we knew it, but it's usually the national media that gets there first.

We've been made aware of major failings on the TV market of religion, you know. And it all tended to have to do with money. There were other things involved too.

But when one begins to feel, and I knew one of the individuals in one of the recent exposures, and I think he's a good guy, but I can remember when he made a turn. It was like an overnight decision that we've got to rescue something. We've got to quickly see if we can't save something.

Now, one of the reasons that I think he felt he had to save it was because his name was so strong on it. It's funny what happens when we put our name on it. And so he tries to save it, and then suddenly the thing became money.

How can I get more money? How can I get more money? And all kinds of different methods began to arise, you see. And I could tell, I could tell that a change had happened, that he had panicked, and he had lost sight of the fact that it got the whole thing by God's mercy, and if it was going down, maybe God wanted it to. Maybe it was okay.

I can remember my teenage years were during, I call them the tent revival years, when several of the world's largest tents were floating around the U.S. And there were two or three of them that made that turn. They panicked, it seemed, at a certain point, and began to use methods that were shameful and deceitful. I remember one guy who bought a trainload of chewing gum, and he blessed it.

And for an offering, you could get a stick of this gum, and if you chewed it, it would do marvelous things for both your body and your spirit. Now we laugh at that, and we think, great day, who would buy that? A lot of people did. As far as I know, he sold every stick.

But this is a panic sort of thing. When you lose sight of the fact that what you've got is by God's mercy, you'll start doing panicked things. It may be big scale, or it may be small scale, but a panic in this kind of thing is evidence that we don't believe that it was by His mercy that we've got what we've got.

We panic because we think, I earned this, I've worked hard for this, it belongs to me, and I'm going to have to maintain it. And we panic, and we're a mess. And we're a sad sight for people to say, that's a Christian over there, worried to death.

Well, he gets down to verse 3, and he says the whole thing over again. He says, But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the God of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. How would you describe the blinding God of this age? What would be the overwhelming spirit right now? I think it is that we can do it.

We can do it. Here we are in California. California produces some interesting things, doesn't it? Including whatever kind of guru you want.

Who will, for several thousand dollars, help you discover the God that is in you. Help you become the master of your own fate. Now, do you see what's happening here? Here we go right back to the flesh.

The flesh. It's dying, folks. Look in your mirror again.

It's on its way down. I know. Just recently, I was watching, I don't know what you call it, a bodybuilding show.

You know, Mr. America kind of thing. I don't know what they called it. But I happened to come across it, and it was really interesting.

These guys didn't walk out on the stage. They kind of slunk out, you know. It's like underneath their skin, rats and mice were running up and down, and they went through their paces, you know.

And I was going, wow. I've never seen anything like that before, you know. And I was watching it.

It's just awesome. And then I realized something. There wasn't a single person on that program my age.

I have news for those guys. Gravity is an awesome force. It will win, I know.

You should have seen me when I was six feet four, and had hair. Gravity has won. And folks, the God of this age blinds people into thinking that their flesh is going to make it.

But it isn't. I've got news for you. The only thing that's going to make it is the mercy of God.

And so Paul ends up saying, For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. Now, see, here is another flesh versus mercy sort of thing. If I were to preach myself, oh, I hope you would stone me.

I don't have much to offer to you. Not much at all. Except flesh.

Good old flesh. About three years ago, I was in a town called Bhubaneswar in India, in the Orissa state, which is the poorest of their states. And when I'm in a foreign country like that, I like to get up early in the morning and walk around, take long walks, and watch the town wake up.

You get a good idea of what it's like in times like that. And as I was rounding a corner, it was a dirt road, so I could sort of circle a major portion of the city. I turned the corner, and there, partway onto the road, with its head in the ditch and its body up on the road, was a dead cow.

It had been there for at least a day. It was distended, you know, rotten. I walked up.

I don't know why I walked over to that cow. I had no need to see a dead cow. I've seen dead cows before.

But I walked over to that dead cow, and there it was, just working alive with that exposed rotten flesh, and maggots just working their way through this rotten, stinking... Oh, it was terrible! I turned my stomach. I went over to the other side of the road. Got to wait so I could get some fresh breaths of air.

And as I walked away, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, Gail, that's the way your flesh looks to me. I thought, really? Is it that bad? Yes, it's that bad, Gail. Suddenly I understood His love commended to us in that while we were yet maggots, Christ died for us.

And if I preach myself, I want you to paraphrase it to, the maggot can help you. And Paul knew he was just a maggot. And so he says, I'm not about to preach myself.

I'm not that dumb. So I preach the real answer. I preach Christ and ourselves, your slaves, for His sake.

Listen, if you're going to be rotten, if your flesh is going to die, you may as well use it for something worthwhile. He says, I'll be your bondservant for Jesus' sake. Well, let's go on here.

So he says in verse 6, the same thing in another way. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness. Now, darkness can't produce much light.

See, this is our fleshliness. Have your children ever asked you, where does the dark go when you turn on the lights? And when my kids ask me that, I'd say, go ask your mother. But John lets us know that light has shined into darkness, and the darkness couldn't comprehend it or couldn't stop it, couldn't do a thing about it, didn't understand it.

All the darkness could say when the light came was, goodbye. And God, who did what nothing else can do, took darkness and made light shine out of it. Oh, what an awesome thing.

Now he's telling you what's going on here because he says, he has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Wow. What if, what if I were to go back to that dead cow and say, now let me see what kind of cosmetic could I get to cover you up.

I need to make you look better and smell better. We need some sort of perfume that would make you presentable to life, so that people will not think you are a dead cow. That's rather preposterous, isn't it? It's getting absurd tonight.

That's exactly the way it is when we try to take this flesh and produce something light out of it. Something good. Everything we've got comes from him.

We just expose it to him and he shines his glory down on it. Therefore we realize it's by his mercy we have this ministry. Incredible.

I'm not about to get discouraged now because that's the way it is, man. He's done it all for me. And the poor people out there whose minds are veiled, guess what blinds them? The God of this age that says your flesh can do it.

Put some extra perfume on the cow and God takes what cannot be done and does it. He shines light into our hearts. In fact, it's the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

Now what was his glory? Let's go back over that again. Mercy. Grace.

Long suffering. Abounding goodness and truth. Mercy to thousands.

The forgiveness of iniquity, transgression and sin. All. We see all that we could not produce for ourselves shining on us in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now before I finish this I've got to connect something. We've got to connect something. You'll notice that our faces really weren't much.

I mean, what can we brag about being a dead maggot filled cow? But we expose our face, the veil is pulled and His glory shines down on us and it's the glory that comes to us in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What a opposite. My maggoty face gets changed into His likeness.

Now what this means is that the more I live with Him the more I become merciful and gracious. And long suffering and abounding in truth and goodness and extending mercy to thousands and forgiving of iniquity, transgression and sin. See, He's making me into that so that my face looks like His face and so that people can see His face in us.

Well, I conclude with this. Verse 7 And He's saying the same thing all over again. We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

Clay pots, folks. You've heard that so many times. We have this treasure in clay pots.

Mud balls. I mean, what's a clay pot? But a somewhat shaped hunk of mud put through a little bit of heat so that it's now rigid so it can brag. I'm a clay pot.

I'm a clay pot. I'm a hunk of mud. I'm a hunk of mud.

But it's amazing to me how much money we spend shaping our mud. Have you noticed that? I bet a bunch of you spend money shaping your mud. Putting your maggots in other places.

Ha! I have too. And every once in a while I get amazed at myself and thinking, I'm a ball of mud. Look at how much I'm spending on this mud.

This flesh. And then we say, my mud looks better than your mud. And us guys, you know, we all have in mind how we want our wife's mud to look.

I'm amazed at this. But it's flesh. It's clay pot stuff.

You may say, but I'm anointed. Alright? So you're a greasy ball of mud. So we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

Here's the contrast all over again. What God does, and the best we can do, is a mud pot. And he says, I'll use it, and I will put in it a treasure out of keeping with who you are.

And there's a reason. It says, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. Not of us.

See, the beautiful thing is when you understand your muddiness, and you don't try to hide it, then God gets the glory for what he does. He puts the treasure in it so the world, so we and everybody will know that it wasn't us. It was God.

Clay doesn't produce treasure. Clay pots are unworthy of treasure. That is the symbol of the incredible mercy of God.

I can hardly believe it. I look at the apostles whom Jesus chose, and I may have said this to you last time because I say it a lot. I'm so overwhelmed by it.

I went into the scripture and just studied them without thinking, apostle, you know, super guy, and just studied them. You know what I came to the conclusion? These men were world-class turkeys. These guys

didn't have a clue.

From the beginning to the end, they were more of a problem to Jesus than they were a help. He's busy healing people and restoring people and preaching the kingdom and they're over there, yeah, yeah, yeah, about who's the greatest in the kingdom. Right down to the end, they never understood.

Often in places where it seems so clear to me that what Jesus was teaching, they didn't have a clue. They go, huh? What do you mean by that? And when Jesus was trying to build their faith after he had fed 5,000 and he said to them, don't you remember the bread? They thought, oh, he's mad because we forgot bread. These guys were losers, folks.

You may as well understand that. I think we'll be able to spot them when we get to heaven. They'll be the ones going, this is great.

Where are we? This is great, man. One of them betrayed him. You know that.

Another one denied him. You know that. They all abandoned him.

You know that. They tried to incinerate the customers at one point. They wanted to destroy a village.

Shall we call fire down from heaven and destroy them like Elijah did? I think if I'd have been Jesus, I'd have said, go ahead, can I watch this? They rebuked mothers who were bringing children to Jesus. Now, that's a great apostolic activity. To them more than anybody else, Jesus said, oh, ye of little faith.

These are the apostles he's talking to. Now, what really impresses me is that before he chose them, he prayed all night. Now, folks, he either blew the prayer or else that's what he prayed for.

Father, don't let me appoint the ones that the world would have chosen. Don't let me appoint the ones that the major corporations of this world would go for. But let me choose the ones that when you and I use them, everyone will know it was God.

You see, that's the nature of it, folks. I want you to understand that whatever you do for your flesh, your flesh, is going to be temporary. You may call it a permanent if you want to.

But it's a temporary, I promise you. You can shape up for a while and that's okay. I'm not opposed to that.

Have fun. But time's going to win. Gravity's going to win because this is flesh.

Is there any hope? None except, Here I am, God. I need your help. He goes, Well, you sure do.

Tell you what, I'm going to put a treasure in you. I'm going to shine my glory down on you and change you into my likeness. I'm going to let you see the face of Jesus and all the glory of God.

So you can understand that this is me doing it, not you. That way, you can relax. You don't have to ever get discouraged.

You can go, Ah, thank you, Father. It's all your mercy, whatever. Even the bad, whatever I thought was bad, is better than I should have gotten except for your mercy.

Your mercy. So, as we leave tonight, count your age spots. I have one right there.

Well, not just one, but I mean, I've noticed this one. It's heartbreaking. What can I do for this? Is there something that will cover this up? Isn't there anything that can rescue this flesh? Isn't there a fountain of youth somewhere? I would accept not even a fountain of youth, just a fountain of status quo, I mean.

But no, there is none, except in Him who said, I will keep you young. I'll present you to myself spotless, without spot or wrinkle, which means none of the old age spots or wrinkles of old age, eternally youthful in me. That is His mercy.

So, which would you rather have tonight? That's a pretty good choice, isn't it? You want to try it with your flesh? I mean your flesh. Or shall we go with His mercy and shout for joy at this incredible thing He has given to us, a treasure. Oh, awesome.

Thank you so much, Lord. You're so good to us. I hardly know how to say thank you.

I don't have the words, Father, but I'm so grateful. And Lord, I think I can speak in behalf of all of us here that we receive Your mercy. We expose ourselves to You.

We're glad to receive from You. We ask You to give us wisdom and understanding and knowledge of You so that we won't depend on these things that are going to die, that we'll only lean on You. We'll seek first Your kingdom and let You supply the rest.

So, put a sense of rest in our spirits tonight. A sigh of relief that says, Alright, Lord, it's Your job here. I give myself to You and I expose my flesh to You.

Please change me into Your likeness. And Lord, that will satisfy us. We'll be happy.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, God bless you.

I guess you're supposed to go home now.

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