

## “Anything's Possible”

John Ortberg

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I want to welcome everybody, people joining us from all of our campuses, online. I want to start this message with a question. If there was a request you knew God was going to answer, God was going to do what you asked him to do, what would your request to God be? Maybe it would be, "God, would you put my marriage back together?" Maybe you have a relationship with a child, and it's gone way wrong. You'd just say, "God, heal that relationship."

Maybe it's about physical health. Maybe you'd really love to find good work to do, and you can't seem to be able to do that. Maybe you feel like you're in the grip of anxiety or depression. Maybe you'd like to have a really good friendship, or there's a habit you just can't break. The question today is...*Do you believe God is able to do this?* Do you talk to God regularly about what you most want to have happen in your life?

There's a character in the New Testament, and he is a dad. What was killing him was that his son was being tormented both physically and spiritually. He was his dad, and he couldn't do anything. Jesus' other disciples couldn't do anything, so he finally ran up to Jesus and said to Jesus, *"But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

That *if* sticks out like a sore thumb. *""If you can""? said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who believes.'"* What would your life be like if you actually believed the power of God was available to you? What would your life be like if the power of God was flowing into your life on a daily, regular basis? Because we all need power.

Years ago, our family was on vacation, and we were at a lake. My wife decided she was going to teach our kids and me how to water ski. Nancy grew up water skiing, but none of us had. We spent the day on the lake with the boat. It went okay. By the end of the day, I thought, "I'd like to try to get up and ski on one ski, because Nancy can do it, so it can't be that hard."

I was in the water, and I just couldn't do it. I finally figured it must be a problem with the boat. "If the boat just had more power... I think the boat is just sluggish right now, and it's not able to get my bulk up out of the water." That night, I'm not a real mechanical guy, but we were looking at the boat. On the dashboard, there was a button that was just labeled "power tilt." I thought, "That's an interesting phrase. Power tilt."

I said to Nancy, "Let's try it again tomorrow, only before you take off, hit that. Push the power tilt button, and let's see what happens." The next day, I'm in the water on one ski. I yell to Nancy, "Hit it." She pushes the power tilt button, and the boat (I'm watching) goes like *this* to like *this*. It just takes off like a shot out of a cannon. It was going like a racecar.

All of a sudden, I have all the power I need and more power than I can handle. The boat is flying across the lake, and I'm skimming on the waves on one ski. It scares me to death, so I start waving for Nancy to slow down. Unfortunately, we had not worked out the hand signal thing, so the kids say, "Mom, he wants to go faster!" She is like going full throttle. I'm flying like a kite behind the boat holding on to the rope.

If I had had any brains, I would have let go of the rope, but that never occurred to me. Finally, we hit a big wave, and I landed on my face. For the next six months, when I smiled, only half of my face would go up. The other half would not. For a few glorious moments, I had power. I knew what it felt like. I discovered the secret behind the power tilt.

I was thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if there was a power tilt in your soul?" Wouldn't it be great if you could just say, "God, I know. I need power to have this conversation. I need power to speak truth to this person, or I'm going to mess it up or stumble around. I need power to be a good dad. I need power to change this. I need power to quit smoking. I need power to stay on this diet. I need power to be a better person in my marriage. I need power to show up at work and bring the best I can. I need power to endure when I'm going through this. I need power to resist this temptation"?

How do I get power from God? We're in a series. We've been thinking together about what kind of church Jesus came to start. It's this amazing community, so much more than a religious community. When Jesus came, he turned it into a community where everybody was welcome. It had been mostly just Israel, but now with Jesus, God's intent that every human being find out they matter to God and live with God began to be realized.

We looked at how in human terms, we just divide the world up into *us* versus *them*. We like *us*, and we're suspicious of *them*. God never does that, because God made everybody. God loves everybody. Jesus died for the whole human race. God does not look on the planet and say, "*Us* and *them*." He just sees everybody as *us*. Everybody he wants to be *us*.

As a church, this is a place where everybody is welcome, no matter your background, color, ethnicity, creed, whatever. This is a place where in our ministry when we greet each other, when we walk around with people, we want our lives to be "everybody is welcome" lives.

Then we looked at how this is a community where we're really honest about the truth that nobody is perfect. Churches get kind of goofed up about that. Sometimes because people try to follow God, they start thinking, "Well, I'm better than other people who aren't even really trying." Jesus tells stories about how really religious people would sometimes end up being worse off than people who were just scandalous.

A lot of us came to the front of this church as a way of saying, "We want to be a place where you never have to pretend, you never have to look like you have it all together. We're just a group of messed up people who are asking, 'God, would you help us? Because we desperately need you.'" Now this week, this is a place where everybody is welcome, nobody is perfect, and anything is possible. That's true particularly for people who most need power. It's an interesting thing. God's power tends to come not to people who think of themselves as powerful but to people who acknowledge their powerlessness.

I want to go all the way back to the beginning of the people of God, a man named Abram. Abram and his wife Sarai are 75 and 65 years old. I suppose their big request for God would be around having children. They knew the pain of infertility. In the ancient world, there was a great stigma socially. There was a lot

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of economic pain around that. Then one day God comes to Abram and says, "I'm going to begin a new community on earth, and I'm going to start it with you and your wife Sarai. You're going to have a child, and that's going to be the new beginning."

Year after year goes by, and there's no kid. They finally decide since it's not going to happen with them that Sarai gives Abram her maidservant as kind of a back-up wife. He has a child by that second wife, kind of a provisional child. That's not God's plan, so God comes back to Abram again. This is where we pick up the story.

***"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty.'"*** Now this is quite deliberate in the text. The Lord appears to him, but he doesn't say, "I am the Lord." Names are a big deal in this story, as you're going to see. He reveals a special name to Abram. It's not just *God*. The word *El* in ancient Canaanite languages was the generic word for *God*. It wasn't just *God*.

"I am El Shaddai. I am God Almighty. I am the one who is able to bend creation to my will and make it serve the purposes of grace. I am the thunderer. I am the overcomer. I am the great and powerful God. All things are possible in your life now, Abram, when you have me here."

He doesn't say, "I'll do whatever it is you want me to do." He says, ***"Walk before me faithfully and be blameless."*** In other words, "What I'm asking of you now is that you enter into an interactive relationship with me, that you seek to obey me in all things. I know you're not going to be perfect, but you make that your ultimate goal. You let go of your agenda for your life, and you now enter into life together with me."

***"Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."*** "I'm able to do this." ***"Abram fell facedown..."*** That's an expression with his body of the commitment of his heart. "All right, God, I will do it. I will let go of my life, and I'll follow you. I'll surrender to you. I will depend on your power in my life."

Still no kid. God appears to Abram again, and once more, Abram falls down (an expression of humility). ***"God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.'"*** Not just the dad of one child. The father of many nations. ***"No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful."*** This is going back to the beginning of the Bible. God said to Adam and Eve, ***"Be fruitful and multiply."***

The earth has been a mess, and every birth has led to more problems. God is saying, "I'm going to begin again. I have not given up on my dream. Abram, you old man, I'm going to make you very fruitful." ***"I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."*** To show this, he gives Abram a new name, a new character: Abraham, father of many.

In the ancient world, they loved words. They were fascinated by wordplay. In Hebrew, *Abraham* is actually a word where if you change the letters around it, it creates a different word. It's an anagram. We have those in English. Here is an actual anagram in English. This is particularly pertinent to us. Britney Spears is an anagram for Presbyterians. I'm not making that up. Somebody with too much time on their hands actually figured that out.

What does that mean? I have no idea at all, but anyway in ancient Hebrew... "Abraham, you're going to be the father of many nations. It's going to happen. I'm God. All things are possible." But still no child. So

God comes again and says once more, "I made you a new person, Abraham. You have a new life. You walk faithfully with me. You be blameless. I'm going to do what you cannot do."

Abraham's wife, Sarai, has been given a new name: Sarah (princess). She'll be the mother of great peoples. She is in the tent, and she hears God saying (now she and Abraham are 99 and 89), "You're going to have a child."

*"So Sarah laughed..."* That word *laughed* is going to come back into this story. *"...laughed to herself..."* "Yeah, sure, God." *"...as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old...'"* In the old days, wives used to call husbands their lords. It's good those days are gone. *"...will I now have this pleasure?' Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD?' [...] Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'"*

Of course she laughed! "What are you going to do? He is 100 years old. I am 90 years old. I'm going to have a baby?" All you can do is treat it like a joke. "They're going to move a crib into the geriatric ward? I'm going to give birth, and Medicare is going to pick up the tab? I'm going to go to the store and buy Pampers and Depends in the same cart? I'm going to get strained vegetables because nobody in the family is going to have a single tooth? Really? What is this?" What are you going to do besides laugh at this story?

Then comes this question, and this is a great question for the Old Testament, for anybody who wants to follow God. It's the big one for you or me, and it is, *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* Now you have to think about that one, because if the answer is *yes*, if anything is too hard for God, then no matter how well I'm making things go in my life through my power or luck, the only result is despair if anything is too hard for God.

But if the answer is *no*, if it is true there is nothing in life or death that is too hard for the Lord, then no matter how badly things may be going on in my life right now, then the ultimate result is hope. *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* The answer in the Bible is, no, nothing is. Less than a year later, this amazing thing happens. Sarah wakes up one morning, and she is feeling kind of queasy, kind of nauseous. She has a strange craving for mashed potatoes, lima beans, and Rocky Road ice cream. Her yoga pants don't fit her anymore.

Then this little child comes, and God has the coolest idea. He says, "Let's name the kid *laughter*." Isaac is the name, and Isaac is an anagram for laughter. *"Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this...'"* I love this. *"...and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?'"* "At this age, I thought I would be in a nursing home, not nursing in a home." I thought that was hilarious. I'm the only one who did. Nobody laughed at that all weekend long.

This is the question. *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* Now you need to think about do you believe anything is or is not? What I want to tell you in the next couple of moments in this message is kind of a survey of stories in the Bible because the biblical writers were gripped in their minds and their imaginations by this truth that nothing is too hard for God. There's story after story after story in the Bible of a God with whom anything is possible.

To begin with, let's just look at some of the ways in which God's power prevails. He has the power to make everything from nothing. "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" If he did not do that, you have to ask, "How did anything get here?"

Sometimes people in our day have the idea that science has demonstrated that there is no need for the idea of God or that God's apparent power has diminished, but science has never answered and cannot answer the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing? Because surely it would be much more to be expected if there's nothing, if there's no God, that there would never be anything, and yet here we are."

I believe science doesn't *diminish* God's greatness; it *reveals* God's greatness. I mean, as we now understand the universe, 14 billion years ago, there was something that's called the singularity, because we don't know what else to call it. It's smaller than the head of a pin. For some reason, it exploded, and it has been expanding for 14 billion years. It's still expanding for reasons we do not understand, for which we talk about dark matter. How could that happen? What kind of a God could do something like that?

The Bible says God flung stars into space. Just by the power of his saying, it became so. He thought up every species from centipedes to sperm whales to tadpoles to elephants and reigns over them with effortless ease. Jesus says he cares about them so much that when a single sparrow falls out of a nest, God knows. God watches over, and God cares about it. That's our God. He has the power to make everything from nothing.

Then beyond that, he has the power to stop the unstoppable. A man named Daniel gets thrown in a lions' den. It is no problem for God to stop the mouths of those lions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (you can check all this stuff out later on in the Bible) get thrown into a fiery furnace. It is no problem for God to stop the fire from burning them.

When his children (Israel) have to cross the Dead Sea, he can stop the flow of the water and make walls out of water. In Jericho, he can make walls that were standing come down. He can stop a storm with a word. He can stop a giant with a slingshot. He can stop the sun in the sky. He does that one time when Israel needs more time. He can stop the unstoppable.

He has the power to guide the misguided. He guides the children of Israel, his people, with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. There's a little boy named Samuel who is confused. God is able to guide him with a word in the middle of the night. He is able to guide Moses with thunder on Mount Sinai.

He is able to guide anybody who needs wisdom or guidance into what it is God wants them to do. He takes a man named Paul and guides him into Macedonia, and the gospel goes to Europe. He takes a man named Philip and leads him to an Ethiopian government official, and the gospel begins to spread to Africa.

God has the power to redirect the mistaken. A man named Jonah is mistaken. He runs away from God. God can suspend the flow of nature. He sends a storm to stop him. Jonah gets thrown into the ocean. God sends a whale to swallow him up. Then way before GPS, the original GPS... What do you call a GPS? Global Positioning System. He sends the whale to Nineveh, and Jonah does what God wants him to do.

He is able to give Esther courage. He is able to give Joseph humility. He is able to give Moses eloquence. He is able to give Solomon wisdom. He is able to give Samson amazing strength. He is able to give David

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repentance after sin. God has the power to humble the mighty. Pharaoh is all puffed up because he is the strongest man in the world. God sends the 10 plagues, one after another, and Pharaoh ends up allowing God's people to go free.

There's another guy, the most powerful man of his day: Nebuchadnezzar. He is looking out over his kingdom, as we do over our little kingdoms. He says, *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built...?"* God causes him to lose his sanity. Did you ever think about this? Your sanity is a gift from God. You're not in charge of your brain. You did not think up your brain, and it is not under your control.

For seven years, Nebuchadnezzar lives like a wild animal. He eats the grass. He says about his own life, *"...his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."* Then God restores his sanity, and he says, *"And those who walk in pride [God] is able to humble."* God has the power to do this. A preacher named Charles Spurgeon put it like this: "Every Christian man has a choice between being humble and being humbled."

With God, anything is possible. God has the power to speak through any means. God can speak to Moses through a burning bush. God can speak to another king through handwriting on the wall. If you've ever heard that phrase ("That's the handwriting on the wall"), that's from the Bible. God did that. God spoke when the Holy Spirit came through young men and young women who saw visions and old men and old women who dreamed dreams. He spoke through the Bible and more people. The Bible has been translated into five times more languages than any other book in the world.

One of the funniest stories in the Bible about how God can speak through anything and anybody is a prophet named Balaam. God wants the prophet to go someplace. Balaam doesn't want to do what God calls him to do, so God sends an angel of the Lord to stop Balaam. Balaam won't stop, doesn't see the angel, so Balaam's donkey does. God reveals himself to Balaam's donkey. Balaam starts beating his own donkey because it won't do what Balaam wants him to do. God is troubled that his prophet is abusing this animal, so here's what the story says.

*"Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam..."* I just love the logic of the donkey. *"Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" 'No,' he said.*" He is out-logicing Balaam. Now if God can talk through Balaam's donkey, through whom can God not talk? Of all God's demonstrations of power, when we see it clearest and greatest is when this man Jesus comes to earth, born in a manger, lives as a carpenter and a rabbi, and now the world sees power.

He has the power to forgive sin and give people a fresh start. He has the power to heal. He'll touch a blind person, and they can see. He lets the deaf to hear and the lame to walk and the mute to talk. He is able to take a few loaves and fish and feed a multitude of people. He has the power to turn water into wine. He has the power to walk on water. He has the power to eliminate unfruitful trees without using an ax. He has the power to inspire people to follow him.

He has power to go to the side of a grave and say, *"Lazarus, come forth,"* and a dead man comes back to life. He has the power himself to go into the grave and three days later come out. No one had ever seen power like this man Jesus. Before he left the earth, he gathered his followers together, just this ragtag... They had no money. They had no connections. He says to them, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."* Forty days later, the Holy Spirit came and, man, did they receive power.

Rich people got the power in the church to become generous. They actually helped the poor people. The Bible says there were no needy people in that community. Ethnic barriers that had bedeviled the human race for centuries came down because they got the power to transcend them. Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free lived together in love. Men and women began to treasure each other like brothers and sisters. Sick people got healed, and the least of these God honored. Orphans and widows God cared for. The gospel got preached, and hardened sinners repented. The world got changed, and it's never recovered.

***"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"*** No! Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus would teach about this. He would say to people who were beaten down by life and just convinced they were headed for despair, ***"...with God all things..."*** Not *some* things. Not *most* things. ***"...all things are possible."*** A man named Paul who was just eaten up by pride, envy, anger, resentment, and persecuting people got turned around by Jesus, faced horrible things, and did it with great joy because he said, ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."***

Then he gave this great prayer to the church at Ephesus when they were facing enormous problems. He wants them to see how big God is, so he says... This is a prayer worth just memorizing. ***"Now to him [God] who is able..."*** Able to do what? Able to do what we ask. Able to do *more* than what we ask. Able to do more than all we ask. Able to do more than all we ask or imagine. ***"...able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..."***

***"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"*** No! With God, anything is possible. If we were not a Presbyterian church, somebody would say, "Amen!" or, "Way to go, God!" or something like that. Now here's the deal. Here's the deal. Yeah, you know. God is worthy of our best thoughts and our best imaginings. You know, when Paul says, ***"...able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..."*** it's worth sometimes just trying to imagine how great God's power is.

I can't imagine the universe. It staggers me. The universe is this tiny little pebble in the hand of God. So many of us go through life, and we think there is this great big universe and a much smaller God. No, no, no, no, no. It's the vision of life, but now will you make your life an adventure in living in the power of God? This is the power tilt button. This is the key part of this message.

I think a lot of people get this wrong. A lot of people think, "Well, if God is able to do all stuff, then where I should start is just tell him what I really want him to do." I don't think that's the power tilt button. I think the place where human interaction with God begins is just like it was with Abraham. ***"Walk before me faithfully..."***

Let go of, surrender, your own agenda, your own need to manage outcomes. Wake up in the morning, and ask God, "God, would you use me today? Could I make this day an adventure in being guided with you? I don't have to worry about the outcomes. I'm not in control of anything anymore. I'm not calling the shots. It doesn't have to look like anything. God, could you just use me?"

In your programs, in your bulletins, there's a little card. You can rip it off if you want to turn right there, because I'm going to kind of invite all of us to go on the "use me" prayer adventure starting today. You can just tear this off of your program. If you want to, take it home. Put it in your Bible. Put it on your nightstand. I want to tell you my favorite "use me" prayer story. I tell this about every five years because it's so foundational.

There was a guy who lives in Washington, DC. He is almost 90 now. Some of you know him. His name is Doug Coe. He works with a lot of people in government, statecraft, behind the prayer breakfast movement. One time he met a man named Bob. Bob wasn't in government, wasn't connected, wasn't important particularly, but Bob met Jesus. He heard about how God loves to answer prayer and that with God, anything is possible. "Ask him whatever you will."

Bob said to Doug, "Is that really true?" Doug said, "Well, you know, again, it's not a blank check. You have to surrender, but, yeah, God loves to answer prayer."

"I have to start praying for something."

"All right. What do you want to pray for?"

"I think I'll pray for Africa."

"Well, that's kind of big. Why don't you narrow it down?"

"All right. I'll pray for the country of Uganda."

"Have you been to Uganda?"

"No."

"Do you know people there?"

"No. I just want to pray for it."

"I'll make you a deal. You pray every day for the next 45 days that God will use you, use your prayers, do something extraordinary in Uganda. If you pray that prayer and in 45 days nothing happens, I will pay you \$500. But if God does do something, if God does answer your prayer, you pay me \$500. If you don't pray every day, the bet is off."

It's kind of an unusual approach to prayer, but Doug is kind of an unusual guy. Bob starts praying every day for 45 days. Nothing happens for a month. On the thirty-second day, Bob is at a banquet. There's a woman at the table, and she explains she helps run the largest orphanage in the country of Uganda. Bob, who has just been sitting like a bump up to this point, roars to life and starts pounding her with questions about what she does.

To catch her breath, she says to him, "You're really interested in what I do. You've obviously been to Uganda."

"No."

"Well, you obviously know people in Uganda."

"No."

"Well then why are you so interested?"

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"Well, this guy is kind of paying me \$500 to pray."

"Would you like to come visit me?"

"Yeah."

Bob gets on a plane, flies over to Uganda, and sees this orphanage. He is just appalled by the suffering and the poverty. He comes back to the United States. Again, he has been praying, "God, use me. God, do something." He just starts to write to these big multinational pharmaceutical companies and is saying, "Hey, every year you guys throw away millions of dollars of unsold medical supplies. There are kids dying over in this place. You ought to send some of those supplies over there."

Some of them do! This orphanage ends up getting more than a million dollars worth of medical supplies because of Bob. The woman who runs it calls him up and tells him what happened and said, "Our children are so grateful. They want to throw a party, and they want you to be the guest of honor. Would you come back?" Bob says, "Sure." Bob gets on a plane, flies back to Uganda. They have this big party. Because it's the largest facility of its kind, the president of Uganda wants to meet with Bob, and he gives him a little tour of the capital.

Again, Doug Coe told me this story. At one point, they're going past what looked like a stockyard, only inside the pens there's not cattle. There are people. Bob asked the president, "What are those people doing there?" The president says, "Well, those are my political enemies. That's where I keep them." Bob says, "Oh, you shouldn't do that. You ought to let them out." He doesn't think any more about it. He comes back to the US. Several months later, he gets a phone call from the State Department.

"Is this Bob?"

"Yeah."

"Bob, have you been to Uganda lately?"

"Yeah."

"Did you talk to the president about political prisoners?"

"Yeah."

"What did you say?"

"I told him he should let them out."

The undersecretary for African Affairs went on to tell him that the US government had been working to get these prisoners released for a long time to no avail, and they just got word they had been released. They were told by the government it was partly because of Bob.

Some time later, he gets a phone call from the president. The president has to select a new cabinet, and he wants Bob to come over and kind of give him wisdom. So Bob who knows nothing (he is not connected)

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goes over there. The president ends up coming to the US, meeting with Doug Coe, and giving his life to Jesus.

That's just one guy. "God, use me." It was such an amazing story. Doug was telling me more recently there were 13 business people, and Doug told them that same story and said, "I'll make the same deal with you. You pray 45 days, 'God, use me.' If God doesn't clearly answer that prayer, I'll give you \$500. If he does, you give me \$500."

They pray. Within the 45 days, 12 of the 13 write Bob, send him a check for \$500, because God has answered. A couple of weeks after that, the thirteenth guy sends a check for \$500. He says, "God didn't answer the particular prayer I was praying, but my life has changed so much because of this I'm sending you \$500." Doug Coe has like a prayer pyramid scheme going.

Here's the thing, guys. We're the church, for crying out loud. We're the place where anything is possible. We're the place where dead people have gotten raised and people have gotten healed. We get to watch when a guy who is from a part of the world where by culture, geography, religion, he has no business coming to Jesus, and he does. He gets baptized, and we get to watch this.

We get to watch a family this last week for me where their marriage was so shipwrecked, there's no way it's going to get put back together. God is involved with it, and now years later down the road compared to that, they have been put together. We get to watch that stuff.

We get to watch a family where they have a special needs child, and they're exhausted. They feel so isolated. Then a larger church family remembers Jesus says, "Whatever you do for those the world regards as the least of these, you do for me." We get to be a part! We get to see that every week. People who are weighed down by guilt get to experience forgiveness. People who would otherwise be walking all alone get to be part of the family.

The thing is God isn't done. God doesn't want for a single child to be left behind. God doesn't want for a single school to be under resourced. God doesn't want for a single neighborhood to be unsafe. God doesn't want for a single marriage to shipwreck and go down. God doesn't want for a single addict not to be liberated. God doesn't want for a single sinner not to be forgiven and set free. God doesn't want a single hell-bound person not to be turned around and headed for heaven.

We get to be a part of that. Here's the challenge for everybody who will do it, because these days as a church, we're just praying, "God, use us," not because there is anything special about our church or any of us at it, not because we're going to build anything that's about us but because God came a long time ago to a man named Abraham and said, "I will bless you so you can be a blessing."

There's no other reason to live but to be a blessing for people for the sake of this great God with whom all things are possible if we surrender. We're just asking, "God, where can we plant that next campus? There are going to be people there, and they don't know you. We can be a part of that. God, what's the school we could partner with? God, where is there a village that needs water?" It all happens just one person at a time, just you and you and you and you and me.

Here's the deal. For anybody who wants to, you take this card. I have been doing this now since before the first of the year. Every morning I wake up and pray this prayer, "God, use me. God, guide me through this day. God, inspire my thoughts, decisions, and intuitions. God, lead my thinking and divorce it from all

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self-seeking, from anything that would be dishonest or self-will. I'm resigning from all that. I'm not in charge of outcomes."

It doesn't have to look any way. Just, "God, use me." Okay, so I'm asking this weekend, this is for our church. We're a place where everybody is welcome. We're the place where nobody is perfect, but this is the place, because of the Holy Spirit, where anything is possible. Here's the challenge. You take this card home with you. You put it on your nightstand, in your Bible, on a counter someplace where you'll see it. Every day, you pray when you wake up, "God, use me."

If you pray this prayer every day for the next 45 days and God clearly does not answer that prayer, Charley Scandlyn will pay you \$500. It's a generous community. No, actually that's not going to happen. If God is at work, I'd love to hear your story, because I believe in a God where anything is possible and where the God who created all things is in the plan and the business of redeeming all things. I get to be a part of that, and so do you, and so do we. That's just the best. It's just the best! Let's pray. Would you bow your heads? I want to begin that prayer right now and invite you to make it your own if you're ready.

God, use me. God, I surrender now my agenda. I acknowledge and surrender my self-will, my resentment when things don't go my way, my self-pity. I don't want to live, God, to fulfill my appetites. I don't want to live just to fulfill obligations. I want to walk with you. I'd like to wake up tomorrow morning and just be full of anticipation at what the day might hold as I try to serve you going through it.

God, I acknowledge to you right now I am a mess on my own. I will give in to resentment, self-pity, grandiosity, self-seeking all the time on my own, but I'm asking now, God, use me. Fill me up with your Spirit. Help me to look at people differently. Help me to see what it is you see. Help everybody to be welcome into my life. Just help me serve, God, all through the day. Use me. Use us. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.