

Pressing Matters

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Date: 12 October 2025

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- [0 : 0 0] Mark chapter 3, have you ever just felt overwhelmed?! We all deal with stressful circumstances that seem bigger than anyone could ever imagine.
- And I believe Hebrews chapter 4 verse 15 is reassuring when it talks about our Lord Jesus. For it says, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
- Today we look at Mark chapter 3. I don't believe Jesus is overwhelmed here, I'll be honest with you. But he had a lot going on.
- He was under a lot of pressure. He had disciples that he were about to call his apostles that were under a lot of pressure.
- However, Jesus, I believe, gives us great guidance in this passage about those times that are overwhelming.
- [1 : 3 2] This scripture, this passage is considered a transitional passage by most theologians. That it's showing a transition between the time of Jesus, when he left Capernaum, he traveled throughout Judea, preaching.
- And as people came, healing. It was a great movement of God. As Christ spoke the gospel. As people's lives were changed.
- The crowds grew. And it was amazing. And after this passage, what we'll look at next week is when he calls the apostles to fully, full-time engage with him.
- To follow him. So that he can begin, as A.B. Bruce calls it, the training of the twelve. And what you'll see after that point is every time Jesus has an interaction with folks, it's a teaching time for those disciples.
- He was teaching them how to share. He was empowering them with gifts of miracles. And as well, he was preparing them to establish the church that we see in the book of Acts.
- [2 : 4 8] The church that we're benefactors to today. So it is a transitional time. But it's a few verses that share the background or the atmosphere and how it changes in this timeline of the ministry of Christ.
- But I believe it's also much more than that. More than a transition. It also shows us how Jesus shows us how to make transitions.
- He tells us how to deal with the overwhelming. He tells us how to handle life when it seems like it's pressing in on us.
- And he does that not through teaching it, but through showing it. I want you to see this. It's in Mark chapter 3, beginning in verse 7. And it says this.
- When you look at a map and see where people are transitioning to Jesus, it is quite amazing.
- [4 : 4 0] Scripture says they come from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and from beyond the Jordan and from the Tyre and from Sidon.

And they're coming from all over Israel to see Jesus. From the southern deserts that approach Egypt to the northern coast. From the heart of the country to the east bank of the Jordan.

And the heart of the country to the east bank of the Jordan. It is a wide area. Those that traveled from the south traveled as much as 100 miles by foot to get to Jesus. The only part of this surrounding area that's not mentioned is Samaria.

Now there's another area on the other side of the Jordan called the Decapolis. That was 10 Roman-based cities in that area. But we already know from previous passages that Jesus has ministered in that area.

But Samaria is different. Mark, throughout the gospel of Mark, never mentions Samaria. There was a lot of tension with Samaria and the rest of the surrounding region.

[5 : 57] And it comes back to what happened years before this. When the Assyrians besieged Samaria in 722 BC, they deported many of the Israelites, scattering them.

Then they moved other people into Samaria with the remaining Samaritans. So you had people all over the world, known world, coming into that area.

And when they came in with those Samaritans, they were, not only did they come, but they brought all their gods with them, all their false beliefs with them.

And then they get in there with Samaritans and they marry. And Solomon teaches us that when you marry people that have other faiths and other religions, that it can pollute you in your walk with God.

And that's exactly what happened to him because he had a thousand women from all over the world, as Solomon did. And he got intoxicated with all of that and got off track.

[7 : 03] And he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes to say, I messed up. I missed it. And so what happened here in Samaria was this intermarriage and this compromise of faith among believers, there was a lack of racial purity, which was a big deal among these folk.

And Samaritans were called half-breed dogs. You didn't go to Samaria. It was tense for generations afterwards, including the time in which Christ walked in those days.

All of these places are listed, but not Samaria. And that's probably why. John records that later that Jesus made a point to go through Samaria. John 4 says Jesus had to go through Samaria.

You don't have to go through Samaria. You make your way around it. That's like saying that you have to go down a New York City dark alley at midnight. You don't have to. You can go around a block. You didn't have to go through Samaria, but Jesus, it says, had to go through Samaria.

And you know what happened when he went through Samaria. He met a woman at the well. He changed her life, and she went and told others. And when he met that woman at the well, he broke racial barriers.

[8 : 15] He broke gender barriers. Every barrier with the gospel, as we should. However, in this passage, Samaritans are not mentioned here. So all of these people are coming.

They're rushing to the point of possibly crushing him, as it says in verse 9. That word crushing there is the same word they use for the wine press when they throw the grapes into the bin and walk on those grapes, squeezing out those juice.

Hopefully they wash their feet before they did that. If not, there's a little extra twang in that juice. But they crush those grapes. And that's the word there that he speaks of when he says that they were crushing him, lest they crush him.

So what do you do when everything starts pressing in on you? It says in verse 10 that people were pressing. They came from all over, and the pressures were pressing.

We looked last week at the Pharisees and the Herodians who plotted against Christ. The expectations of the people were pressing. People had their wants of what he was supposed to be and what he was supposed to do.

[9 : 28] And he had a mission that he was to follow for our salvation. And all of this is pressing in on Christ. And I believe when we see how he deals with it, how he deals with pressing matters, that we can better know how we can deal with it.

Because he's our example. He's the one that not only empowers us, but he's the one that also gives us our example. So what do you do when you face pressing matters? Let's learn from the master.

The first thing, when life presses in, withdraw. When things get tight, Jesus has a plan.

And he had a plan of action then. He said, have me a boat ready at all times. Now, I've spoke of this before. I'll be quick. But that boat could have been used for amplification process, for amplification on that water.

Because if people start crowding in and they can't hear, he can get out in that boat. I've been on the Sea of Galilee. I've been in a boat that was supposed to be like those boats that they were in, much larger than the one that he asked for, which is more like a dinghy.

[10 : 44] But the reality is, I've been on those boats and I've seen other tourists on other boats and I've heard their conversations across the water as they've heard our conversations across the water. Because if you spend much time on the water, you know it's amplification.

But it appears that here, and it was used for that by Christ more times than one in Scripture. But it appears here that it was there instead for evacuation purposes. He needed a plan of escape because they were crushing.

We need a plan of escape. Even a pattern of escape.

And I want you to listen to me this morning. I want you to hear me out. Because I don't want you to misunderstand this. Take it out of context or get half of it. I don't mean run away.

I don't mean we leave our family. That's of the devil. Okay? I don't mean that at all. I don't mean that you leave your job.

[11 : 51] Unless that's what God's telling you to do. And I would encourage you to try to secure another one before you leave that one. Just personal advice, not from Scripture. But I encourage you to do that.

I don't mean leave your church. And I sure don't mean neglecting meeting together, as the Hebrew writer said, as some are in the habit of doing. I don't mean that either.

No. I mean we better make some time to be set apart. We need a time of quiet with the Lord.

And we need it often. And we need it daily. Mark chapter 1 verse 35 that we looked at a few weeks ago says, And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place.

And there he prayed. It was the Lord's pattern to get up early and pray. Now listen, I'm a morning person. And I like doing it that way as well.

[12 : 55] I'm kind of like my, I had a veterinarian. He didn't treat me. He tripped my dog. But in Mississippi. And he was primarily a cow doctor.

That's what he did. He took care of people's cattle for the most part. But he opened his office from 6 to 8 a.m. in the morning. And that was it. If you had a pet and wanted to see him, you bring it from 6 to 8.

And you know what he said? He said, because that's the only people I like are people that get up between 6 and 8. That's the only people he dealt with. I'm a morning person. And so all the morning people in the crowd look at Mark 1 verse 35 and say, Yeah, that's exactly how you're supposed to do it.

You're supposed to get up in the dark and spend time with the Lord as Jesus did. However, at 10 p.m., the night owls are just starting. And all those folks that got up with the Lord in the dark and with the chickens, about 10 o'clock are folding up their spiritual wings and getting mighty cranky and getting ungodly.

It's a good thing they did get up in the morning with the Lord. I realize everybody works on a different schedule. At night, Dawn looks at me and says, Why are you going to bed this early?

[14 : 12] And in the a.m. I look at her and say, Why aren't you getting up now? I mean, I don't say it. I think it. And you're not going to tell her. And I'm sure she wasn't listening. Folks are different.

We're different. And how it works, how you work that out between you and the Lord is up to you and the Lord. But I want to make some suggestions to you. One is spend time with God daily.

You need the spiritual nourishment of withdrawing to be with the Lord. We live in a wicked world, an evil world, a pressure-filled world, a tempting world.

And you need time with the Lord daily. I hope and pray that every time you come here, that you get a blessing from every song that's sang, that you're uplifted through the prayers, that you're challenged and encouraged through the Word of God.

I know Brian works hard to make that happen on his part. I try my best to do everything I can to prepare for this time. Because I do believe it don't look like a desk anymore. But it is a sacred desk.

[15 : 21] It is the opportunity for us to go before God. And I take that seriously. But I got news for you. This ain't enough. You got to have time with God.

You need to spend time with God daily. Secondly, spend time with God first. And I realize that it's easy for one that gets up early to say that.

However, it only makes sense to spend time with God first. I mean, in Ephesians chapter 6, it explains our spiritual preparation as if it was a body of armor that we put on, a spiritual armor that we put on.

When do you put the armor on for battle? When you're done? Or before you go into battle? I spent 25 years every Friday in the fall speaking to football teams and telling guys, taking some battle from the Old Testament and saying, you need to go out there and kill somebody in the name of Jesus.

I had the opportunity to do that for high schools, for colleges on Saturday. It's a blessing to have that kind of opportunity.

[16 : 40] And I always enjoyed it. But we did that before the game. You're licking wounds and celebrating afterwards. But you do that before the game.

If you need directions to go somewhere, I would advise you get them before you go. And I don't like anybody telling me where to go.

I don't. Okay? So my GPS is silent. And I pray that the people in my car are silent as well. But that's another matter. But my GPS is silent.

I don't need them barking at me about where to turn. But because of that, sometimes I'll miss a turn. I won't look up and see that. So I'll miss that turn. And we'll go another way around to do that.

It would have been best if I knew I was making that turn before I got to the turn. Listen, friend. There's going to be turns in your day today that you don't know that's coming.

[17 : 39] And you need preparation for that before it comes. It only makes sense to start your day with the Lord. Get your direction daily first.

And then schedule seasons of withdrawal. You need to pull away. whether it is for a day or for an hour, you need to just sit before the Lord.

I'm thankful that this past week through benefactors and sponsors that work with Billy Graham's Training Center and through your church's, this church's generosity to give us the time to do that.

Dawn and I was able to go to the Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove this past week. Sat under Erwin Lutzer for three days. Erwin Lutzer, legendary pastor of Moody Church for over 30 years.

Pastor emeritus there. He's written a ton of books and just sat at his feet and listened to a good godly man share the wisdom. Spend time together in God's beautiful nature and just, just to decompress and just to take it in and just to be fed.

[19 : 03] I'm telling you, you need to schedule seasons of withdrawal. Now, sometimes I may do that on a walk. I had a health crisis earlier this year and it's caused me to have to build back my strength and when I was in cardiac rehab, they had me go down the hallway and walk for six minutes at a brisk pace to measure how far I walked and they said, what's your goal at the end of this time together?

And I said to do a 10 mile hike in the mountains and they said, well, we're hoping to get 100 feet more out of you and I said, well, we're about nine and a half miles different between me and you.

The reality is to walk down a trail by the river in the mountains is therapy for me. It does me a world of good and it don't take the place of my time with God but I'll tell you, it is a time with God.

For me, when I see the beauty of creation and see what God's made, it reminds me of how great our God is. It's reassuring to me to see that and so it's been my prayer and I'd encourage you praying with me that I'd have the opportunity to be able to do that.

Again, I think I could but we'll see because you need and it's different for different folks. Sometimes, you may need a rod and reel in your hand.

[20 : 43] You might need a tree stand. You might need a ride down the road. Quiet moments of reflection with the Lord. Now, again, I told you, you need to listen closely this morning.

That does not take the place of worship. That does not take the place of corporate worship on the Lord's Day. It does not take the place of personal worship daily.

So, don't tell me my daily time with God is while I'm driving down 123. Don't do that because you're full of ungodly thoughts when you're driving down Highway 123 in the morning.

Okay? I promise you. So, don't do that. It's not the same but I think you need both. It does not take the place of worship.

We dedicate ourselves to not forsake the assembly of the people of God. However, you need time to withdraw. And Jesus knew the disciples needed that. They needed time to pull away.

[21 : 44] We do as well. And you say, well, I'm so busy. Listen, you are not too busy for that. There's a book that was written years ago called Too Busy Not to Pray. The reality is if your schedule is so busy, it's too busy.

And so, you need to ask the Lord in this very hour, God, show me what I need to do different in my life to make time for you.

We are not busier than Jesus nor are we doing as important a work as he did. When life presses in, you need to withdraw. Not only that, but when life presses in, you need to minister.

I want you to notice what Jesus did. His aim was to pull away with his disciples. However, the people just kept coming. They kept coming. They were coming from all over and they were pushy.

They were so eager to be healed, they were trying to touch his garment. But when one tries to touch and the other behind him is trying to touch and the other behind him is trying to touch, it became a mob mentality, a somewhat chaotic atmosphere to the point that he told him to have that boat behind him at all times ready for evacuation.

[23 : 03] He knew he had to be able to pull away from all of that. His priority was to preach, to impact lives for eternity, not just for temporal healing, and to train his disciples.

However, I want you to notice that he always took time to minister. He still meets needs. needs. The scribes are questioning him and trying to set him up.

The people are pushing their way in. He felt the need to withdraw with his disciples, but even with that, he still ministered. He never stopped meeting needs.

You know what that tells me? That tells me that we need to be careful when we go through pressing matters. Because when we go through pressing matters, God will still put people in our path that need Jesus.

Let's be honest, it's easy to get selfish when things get pressing. But the reality is God still puts people before you that need Jesus. Many have come here today, and you need God to intervene in your life.

[24 : 06] There's a matter in your life that you need God to intervene in your life, and you come in here today with a heavy heart. Maybe it's the life of a loved one. Your heart is heavy for that person's life, or maybe it's another pressing matter in your life.

You've come in here with that. I got news for you. You're not alone in that. You're not the only one experiencing that. I've learned through long-term pastorates that, and I hope I'm able to be here a long time, but I've learned there's a pain on every pew.

I said that one time to another pastor, and he said, yeah, the key is to find out who they are. And I said, no, that's not what I meant. That's not what I meant, you bunch of darlings.

It's not what I meant at all. The reality is, until you sit beside somebody's hospital bed, until you walk through a line by some casket, you don't really get the opportunity to really get to know them.

I wish y'all knew you very well, all of you. But the reality is, doing this for an hour, don't allow that to happen, just alone.

[25 : 33] That's why I always encourage you to be a part of more than just this. But besides that, when calamity comes, you can walk through somebody and pray with somebody through that.

You build a relationship with them. You get to know them. That's where ministry really, really is. And so I want you to remember something when you come in this place every day.

Instead of coming in saying, what can I get today? No matter how many pressing matters are on your heart, I want you to try to think, what can I give today?

who is God going to place in my path? Not in your way to get out for lunch, that's not what I said, in your path.

Sometimes it's a call that comes when you don't want to get a call. Sometimes it's a visit that comes when you don't want to get a visit, you want to be left alone. Sometimes it's an interruption when we don't want to be bothered.

[26 : 45] But Jesus was not looking to minister, he was looking to withdraw. However, when people needed a word from God, when people needed a touch of healing, when people needed a loving response, he was always ready to give it.

I think about the time when the little girl was dying. They asked him to come and on his way a woman came to him that had a issue of blood.

She was dying. And he paused in what he was doing and said, who touched me? And people were all around him and the disciples were like, everybody's touching you, what are you talking about?

He changed that lady's life. When he got to the young girl who had died before he got there, they panicked, they said he was too late. He said, I ain't too late. That's my version.

I ain't too late. And that little girl came back to life. But he made time. I want you to hear me. He made time for something that wasn't on the schedule.

[27 : 54] So let's not be selfish in the midst of our difficulty. It is so easy for us to shelf ourselves until everything in our life is right. I'm not ready to serve the Lord right now because I've got, I've got to get some things right.

Listen, everything in your life is never going to be right. That's why you need to depend upon the Lord. And that's not a criticism. That's for all of us folks.

There's always going to be a missing piece somewhere. And if we wait until everything's settled before we get serious about the Lord, we'll never get serious about the Lord. So serve the Lord even when matters are pressing in.

Understand, you're not in this alone. There's others. And not only that, but this. When life is pressing in, silence the demons. Silence the demons.

Notice there were unclean and demonic spirits that came near as well. And what this means is that there were people filled with demons, possessed with demons that were coming as well.

[28 : 59] Demons were speaking through those people and they immediately started acknowledging who Christ was. The demons did. even the religious leaders didn't recognize him as the Lord.

Matter of fact, they were trying to kill him. They were already plotting against him. We're only in Mark chapter 3, but they're already trying to kill him. But the demons knew who he was.

And when they saw him, they fell down before him. The sick fell into him, pushing to get to him. The demons fell down before him in panic and submission.

The demons then seem to give him praise, but he shuts them up. He silences them. They praise him, but he silences them. What in the world is going on with that?

Why would he silence them? Well, we get a couple of clues from Scripture. One of them is in Acts 16, 16 through 18, when Paul and Silas, Luke's with them because he's writing about it, and it says Paul and Silas is ministering, it says this, as we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling.

[30 : 13] She followed Paul and us crying out, these men are servants of the most high God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. That would seem like an acclamation. And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having been greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

And it came out that very hour. Scripture says that Paul got annoyed with her, not so much her, but the demons that were in her that had taken her over. Why?

Because they were speaking well of him. He got annoyed and he cast out the demon because it was hurting his witness. Because this girl was known to be able to tell fortunes.

Because she was demon possessed, and because she was demon empowered with a supernatural power that came from demons. And she had people who owned her, who were prostituting her out for fortune telling.

She was not known to walk with the Lord. People knew what her reputation was. So by giving them praise and sounding as if she aligned with them, the reality is it either weakened their ministry because they were aligned with somebody who was not of God, or either she was elevating herself.

[31 : 41] But either way, it wasn't working. Therefore, at least partially, to silence her, he cast out the prophet-making demon. And the people who owned her were not happy with that because they just lost their fortune through her.

not only that, but I want you to notice in Matthew chapter 16, verse 21 through 23, it says this. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things for the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan.

You're a hindrance to me, for you're not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Peter wasn't demon possessed. He was demon influenced.

Jesus was telling them about the cross that he was to bear, and Peter, I know he was not demon possessed because he was a follower of Christ. And when you follow Christ, you become indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit of God lives within you.

[32 : 56] And demons can't live where the Holy Spirit is. That don't happen. So the reality is, people who are demon possessed need the Lord.

That's what they need. So we're not demon possessed if we're Christians today, but we're demon influenced. Some of the things you think, some of the things you say, some of the things you do, that's demon influenced.

Christ. And what Peter said, although he was trying to protect Christ, trying to encourage Christ, trying to have his back, and all that kind of stuff, was the influence of the evil one.

Because Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem, and before what was before him. And so he looked at Peter and said, get behind me, Satan, you're a hindrance to me.

Satan was using Peter to try to throw Jesus off track from his mission of the cross. And then notice that he says, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

[33 : 57] That's exactly what the devil wants to do. That's exactly what he wants to do. He wants us to set our minds on ourselves. He wants us to set our mind on our desires.

He wants us to set our mind on our troubles. He wants us to set our mind on our worries. And when life is pressing in, that intensifies, by the way.

Satan sees the stress in our life. He sees our weaknesses. He goes after them to try to make a fool out of us in the midst of it. And when life is pressing in, we need to silence those demons.

And I'm not speaking of demon possession. I'm speaking of demonically influenced thoughts. The evil one's suggestions to us. He gets aggressive when the pressure's on.

So how do we pull away and withdraw to the Lord in the midst of our struggle? And how do we continue to minister even when it feels like the world is caving in on us?

[35 : 03] And how do we silence the demonic thoughts? How do we silence the depression? How do we silence the anger? How do we silence the spite?

How do we silence the revengeful thoughts? The impure thoughts? The hopelessness?
How do we silence those things?

The Apostle Paul said in Colossians 3 verse 2, set your mind on things that are above, not on things on earth. We have to set our minds on what, not what we can see and not what we can figure out and not what we can understand.

We've got to set our minds on him, even in transition, especially when the pressure is really on. When the Golden Gate Bridge was built in the 1930s, it was a dangerous work.

The winds would howl through the bay. The currents below were fierce. The fog was so thick at times a man couldn't see his hand in front of him.

[36 : 21] And in the early months of building that bridge, 11 workers fell to their death. That made the work slow. Because if you see a guy fall beside you, you'll slow down a little bit.

And it made them afraid. It was real. And then they did something that nobody had ever done before. They hung a huge safety net underneath that bridge.

It was expensive. Some said it was foolish to do that. However, that net ended up saving 19 men's lives who fell into the net instead of into the water.

They actually formed a little club and called it the Halfway to Hell Club because they knew without that net they would have been in trouble.

And here's what's interesting. Once that net was in place, the work didn't get any easier. The wind still blew like it did before.

[37 : 29] The fog still came just as thick. The danger was still there. However, those men worked with greater confidence because they knew if they fell, they wouldn't die.

You know what? Work effort came up. The pace picked up. The bridge was a more successful project than it had been before because of that.

They had a net to help them make it through. Folks, when life is pressing, keep on.

Keep on going to Jesus. Keep on ministering to other people. Keep on silencing the demons by setting your minds on things above.

Because we have a net in the Lord Jesus. And his grace is sufficient for whatever matters that we may face.

[38 : 40] During the pressing times, during the transitions. Now let me ask you a very personal question this morning. When you look over your life and think about the decisions you've made in your life, has there ever been a time in your life when you've truly surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ?

You've asked him to come into your life. You've asked him to forgive you of your sins. You've asked him to change you. To save you. Friend, if that's never happened to you, there's no net.

There's no net. I wouldn't want to be where you are, quite honestly. If you've never given your life to Christ, if there's a question about that in your life, don't leave this place today without nailing that down.

There's no need to do that. There's no need to let that linger. Eternity hangs in the balance. If you have done that, is it a private matter that you did with the Lord by yourself or maybe just with a few or have you ever acknowledged that publicly?

Have you ever told anybody about it? Jesus, by his example and by his commission, show us that the first step of obedience after that is baptism. If you've never been baptized as a believer, I encourage you today to commit to do that.

[40 : 06] You can join this church by baptism. Maybe you're a member of this church and you realize over time this has happened just recently. You realize there's never been a time in your life for you to baptize as a believer.

Something happened to you as a child but in reality you got saved since then. You've never been baptized as a believer and you realize that. You want to be obedient to follow God. We're not going to baptize you this morning but we'll line it up in the coming days.

Commit to that today if you've never done that. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church. I'm blessed that God's doing a wonderful work in this church.

God's so good to us. He really is. And if you feel like the Lord's leading you to do that, we'll be happy to guide you in that process. We'll be happy to do that. But then for the rest of us, there's pressing matters.

Some of you came in here with a weight around your neck that's weighing you down and I encourage you to set your mind on things above. Give it over to the Lord.

[41 : 10] That'll take you following Him in obedience and whatever that means. You can do it where you'll stand in just a moment instead of singing. Get it right. You can do it at this altar as someone did in our nine o'clock worship.

I'll be happy to pray with you. I'm here. But let's just take a few moments to make sure we do everything we need to do to be obedient to God. To not let that be a pressing matter in our life that we've been disobedient when God spoke to us.

Heavenly Father, lead us right now to simply do what you'd have us to do. Nothing more and nothing less. Give us the boldness, the courage, and the faith to just follow you and set our minds on you, oh God.

In Jesus' name, amen.