

## **Lean in to the Messy: Final Challenge and Celebration**

### **April 3, 2016**

Have you ever been ... messy ... and someone leaned in? I have. Julie and I have always been rather private when one of us is sick. But I remember when she was diagnosed with a tumor years ago - we didn't know whether it was cancer. She was in surgery, I was sitting in the waiting room, alone, scared to death. And Dick Damron came walking into the waiting room to sit with me. I don't know how he found out, but I really needed him at that moment. That meant so much to me.

Julie and I both remember being poor enough that our cupboards would go literally bare. Any kind of eating out was a treat. Our daughter Alatheia would get so excited when it was payday, because she got to go to McDonalds. Once we splurged on an IHop. We ordered simply, and we asked for the total before the waitress submitted the order so we could count our money to make sure we had enough to cover the bill. An old couple was watching us, apparently. They didn't know us. They finished their meal and they left. When the waitress brought us the bill she was crying. That old couple had paid our bill. That was 40 years ago, that didn't happen much back then. 40 years later, Julie and I both still remember that moment vividly.

Have you ever been messy, and someone leaned in?

- Maybe your wife or your husband died, and someone was there for you.
- Maybe you went through a divorce, and someone stepped up to give you the strength you needed.
- Maybe you got sick, and someone visited you in the hospital, or took food to your family ... and it meant so much to you. You weren't alone.
- Maybe you were fired, and you were so embarrassed. And someone had the courage to stand by your side, and they had your back. Maybe you got slammed by a bill you just didn't expect. And someone gave you just enough help to get through it.
- Maybe your kids were struggling, and someone gave you some encouragement and some wise counsel.

Have you ever been in a mess, and someone leaned in. I'll bet you have your stories. I'll bet you remember the messes vividly, and the people who leaned in vividly... Have you ever been on the other side? Have you ever been the one to lean in, and it felt so good. You knew "This was right. It cost me something, but it was worth it. In fact, I think maybe God used me." Sometimes when we lean in we sense that it's God loving them through us. Ever felt that? It's pretty cool. Leaning in to the messy is life changing, guys! And it can be such a powerful draw to Jesus.

I've got several great books on my shelves that track the history of Christians leaning in. One of them says, (Chadwick) "The practical application of charity (leaning in to the messes) was probably the most potent (the most powerful) single cause of Christian success." That's how the church exploded into the world: we kept leaning in! We're the ones who took care of the poor, even though most of us were poor too. We're the ones who took care of the widows and the orphans - the marginal. We're the ones who made visits to the prisons. We're the ones who cared for the sick during the plagues. We ran in when the others were running away. Our courage and our love blew their minds! And people came to Jesus! In fact, if you study history you'll discover that no other religion, no other philosophy, teaching, nation, or movement has changed the world for the better more than Christianity. Because we Jesus followers don't lean away, we lean in.

Did you know that, throughout history, wherever Christians have gone in this world the value of human life has been elevated? There is a respect for life because of us. In so many places they used to practice "infanticide." The deformed, the frail, girls, the unwanted ... their throats would be cut, or they would be left out to die, or they would be drowned. We leaned in. We are the ones who would take the unwanted children into our homes. And the laws against infanticide are our legacy.

And abortion: We Christians have fought abortion for 2000 years because we value the sanctity of life. Even those who attack Christians today have been influenced by our fight for the sanctity of life.

And did you know that it is Christians who have elevated sexual morality in our world? Christianity was born into a world in which almost nothing was considered immoral. Women were just property to be used as men wanted. Homosexuality was rampant - especially men with young boys. Extra-marital sex, prostitution, bestiality, group sex - there were simply no

rules. It was Christians who pointed to a different way, Christians who stood for the dignity of marriage, and the sanctity of the marriage bed.

A lot of feminists today don't like Christians. Well they need to compare our world with places where our influence is not yet felt. Christians have always elevated the status of women. If you don't think so, study how they treat women in places where our influence hasn't been felt yet.

And did you know that the history of charity and compassion is a Christian history? Jesus said, "When I was hungry, you fed me; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink; when I needed clothes, you clothed me; when I was sick, you looked after me; and when I was in prison, you visited me." And we Christians took him seriously. In the ancient world pagans would give, but usually only if they could expect something in return. Not Christians. We Christians would give expecting nothing back, we Christians would give irrespective of someone's race, or creed, or social status. It is our bent to lean in.

It was Christians who took orphans into their homes and built orphanages. It was Christians who took care of the aged and built homes for the aged. It was Christians who built the first homes for the blind, and homes for the insane. Did you know it was Christians who started the United Way?

And what about hospitals, and health care? They have been built on the backs of Christians. Jesus leaned in to the sick. So we do too. Through the centuries we built tens of thousands of hospitals. We're still doing it. Capital City helped build a clinic in Haiti. I don't know how many people in this world only receive medical care because of the compassion of Christians. We just keep leaning in.

And education. The Bible says that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." (Proverbs 1.7) Well, irrespective of what you may have been taught, Christians have not been obstructionists to education, we've been its champions. Did you know that Christians seem to have been the first to educate men and women side by side? Did you know that Christians seem to have been the first to offer an education to any person, irrespective of their race or social standing? It was Christians who pushed for compulsory education for all children. It was Christians who pioneered education for the deaf and developed sign language. It was Christians who pioneered education for the blind and developed Braille. We just keep leaning in.

It goes on and on. It's always been that way. We lean in when others lean away. We run in when others run away. And it is not an accident ... We started out this series back in September by looking at some powerful words that come straight from the heart of God. Jesus was hanging with some tax collectors and sinners - some of the messy, and it was scandalizing some of the religious people (people like us).

Well here's what Jesus tells these guys. Here's what Jesus tells us. He says, (Matthew 9.12 on screen) "Healthy people don't need a doctor -- sick people do (messy people do)." You guys don't need me; they do! We get that; we can accept that. We actually kind of like that ... about Jesus.

But what Jesus says next gets personal. (Matthew 9.13 on screen) He says, "Now, go and learn the meaning of this Scripture." Now he's talking to people like us - religious people, who claim we believe the Word of God. He says, "You need to go ponder what the Bible really means. You think you know God's heart, you think you are living a God-honoring life, but you're missing the point!" He says, "I want you to reflect on what God means when he says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." "Mercy, not sacrifice."

Well here's the deal, guys: sacrifice is about getting clean, and staying clean; mercy is about getting dirty. Sacrifice is about separating myself from anything that might make me impure, it's about leaning away from whatever is impure; mercy is about leaning in. Sacrifice is about me, and how things affect me; mercy is about you, and how things affect you. Sacrifice is about making things better for me; mercy is about making things better for you.

And there are two huge words we overlook. God doesn't say, "I desire mercy and sacrifice." That's what I would have expected God to say. He says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." In reality God requires both. But if they clash - and they will, God says, "Mercy wins." You see, God is revealing his heart, his priorities. Sacrifice is important: our holiness, our purity is important to God. But our mercy, our grace, our compassion is ... more important, to God. When it comes to a choice between staying clean, and getting your hands dirty for God, when those options clash - and they will - God says, "You choose mercy, you choose grace, you lean in."

And then there is that second huge little word. God says, "I desire ..." "I desire, I want, I take pleasure in mercy, not sacrifice." And that matters to

us ... Jesus followers: what God desires, what his priorities are. Because when we call Jesus "Lord," we're telling him, "Your desires are more important than my desires. Your will for me is more important than my will for me."

So you see, guys, this is a big deal. This leaning in to the messy is a big deal to God, and it's a big deal to us. But we don't lean in just because he tells us to. We lean in because it brings a richness, a purpose, a satisfaction, a joy to our lives. It feels good to make a difference. It feels extraordinary to be used by God. And it transforms our faith from an obligation and a drudgery, to a privilege and a joy.

In fact, we think leaning in is so important that we have made it one of the core purposes of our church. Capital City exists to introduce people to Jesus, and to grow them up into Christ-Driven 24/7 Jesus followers. That's who we are, that's what we do. And we believe there are three indispensable pieces to growing people up into Christ-Driven 24/7 Jesus followers. We worship, we serve, and we grow. We worship, we serve, and we grow. And we think they belong in that order. Worship is about giving God the honor he deserves, serving is about others - it's about leaning in. And growing is about me. God first, others second, me third - we think that's what a mature Jesus follower looks like, that's what a Christ-Driven 24/7 Jesus follower does. Jesus, others, you.

And when we do life that way ... we will taste joy. Here's the deal, guys, worship can be so rich, if it's about him, and not about me. And growth is so important: studying the word, learning more about God. But if you are not serving somewhere, somehow, you are not following the example of Jesus, or the commands of Jesus. And you are not living out what God made you to do. And you will not discover the joy that comes from being used by God.

So this hasn't been a 7 month excursion into the trivial. This is been serious attempt to define who we are here at Capital City, and what we are about. This has been a serious attempt to drill this theme of service right into the core of our hearts. One guy put it like this: we want to be full service Christians in a self-service world. I like that.

Guys, sometimes you are going to lean in because God is going to bring messy people into your world. It's not something you plan for, it's not something you expect, God just brings someone messy into your life. He does that a lot. And that's cool! And he wants you to have the courage to

step up. If you do, he'll use you ... and it is an incredible thing to be used by God! But sometimes we need to look for ways to lean in, over and over and over again. We need to look for ways to bring God's grace and God's truth to the messy.

You had to have noticed all the booths we have set up in our lobbies. They represent places where people from our church family are leaning in right now, places where you can get involved.

- There are booths representing our mission work in Haiti: The Haiti Needy Children's Foundation, and the Haitian Christian Mission, and Sydney and Markey Kessa, down in Jacmel.
- We are sending teams to Honduras with Sparrow Missions, another place you can get your hands dirty for God. And I believe Paul Redmond is preparing to do some short term work with a fabulous Mission group called Teach to Transform. They send teams in to work with pastors and churches around the world teaching them basic medical, and farming, and mechanical, and discipleship skills. It's a great way to lean in!
- There is a booth where you will find Michael and Diana Flory. Diana is our Counselor here at Capital City. Michael and Diana are trying to raise support right now to work with a mission society that is leaning in to the immigrants who are flooding into Germany.
- There are tables representing some of the service agencies where our families lean in right here in Frankfort. Cheri Scott, and Kathy Haydon, and so many others lean in at the Avenues for Women - our crisis pregnancy center. There is a table for the Women's Shelter, which some of our ladies helped get started. There is a table for the Access Soup Kitchen, which some of our guys helped get started.
- There are tables for the Senior Activities Center, and the King's Center - places where you can lean in.
- Marie Allen was telling me last week that Franklin County is desperate for foster homes. So many kids are being pulled from their homes due to the heroine epidemic. Maybe God is nudging you to be a foster parent.
- And both Marie and Betty Lawson match messy kids to mentors over at Western Hills. Maybe you can mentor a messy kid. You can change a life for an eternity, guys!

I'm asking you, when the service is over, wander around the foyer for a few minutes. See whether God is nudging you towards one of these places to serve. If not, he has something else for you.

And while you are out there, look up. Look at the messy towels hanging from the ceiling. A few months ago we challenged you to look for ways to lean in to the messy, and to bring back one of these towels to represent what God was able to do through you. We had some people kick back a bit against these towels. They kind of thought we were celebrating us. They thought the towels were kind of like bragging towels. Guys, if that's what came across, I am so sorry! That was not their purpose.

Here's what Jesus said. He said, "You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify (who?) your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5.14-16) He says, Let them see your good deeds (don't hide them; let them see your good deeds, why?) so they will praise Him. Let them see you lean in, so they will praise him! This isn't about drawing attention to us, this is about drawing attention to him. We serve, so that he is honored. These towels represent God working through us. These towels represent Jesus followers trying to bring honor to him...Guys, thank you, for leaning in! ... ..

Did you know that last Sunday - Easter Sunday - was the biggest worship service ever here at Capital City? Did you know 1423 people came to Capital City just to hear me preach? That's humor. Did you know that 1423 people came to Capital City last week just to hear Steve Smith and our worship team? That's even worse humor. Do you think 1423 people were here because of our staff? No! They came because you guys have been taking Jesus outside these walls. They came because you guys have been leaning in!

Guys, you are the heart of Capital City Christian Church. You are the ones who make what happens here rich and pleasing to our God. And you did so well. But I hope we're just getting started. He deserves that! - And they need it! So ... here's what we are going to sing ...

Start a fire in our soul, God  
Fan the flame and make it grow  
So there's no doubt, no denying  
Let it burn so brightly  
That everyone around can see  
That it's You, that it's You we need