



You're MVP

Joe White

2015... How many of you are like "Good riddance." How many of you are like "Good-bye." Was it a good year? It's gone. The highlight of my year... Thirteen grandkids in one place at the same time. My wife did good. I thought twelve would be a nice number and now we're still having them and I have a sneaky feeling we're not done yet. I love grandkids. Are there any grandparents in here? Bless your heart. It is the best time of life. Do you know what, grandparents? It's not so much about your grandkids; it's about being friends with your grown children. It's amazing. God's love just keeps giving.

So, 2016 is the year. Like it or not, it's here, it's upon us. I think that for some of you, all you were looking for the other day was a rainbow. We thought Noah's Ark was coming back to Branson. If you do any business down at The Landing, I'm sure you were praying for a rainbow. Was anybody down there praying for a rainbow? God, let the rainbow shine.

Was anybody's house flooded? If y'all will come up afterwards, we have a gift for you, a good one. If your house was flooded for real, come up here and see me afterwards; we have a gift for you. I worried about you... a lot.

2016... For me, 2015 was the people. I am the luckiest guy in the world and have the best job in the whole wide world. In the summer, I get to be a teenage guy; I get to hang out with kids. By the way, whenever I teach at K-2 I give Jolly Ranchers to the kids. Y'all are kind of like my little teenagers today. I give Jolly Ranchers because I can and because they help you stay awake. If you have sugar in your blood, you can't sleep while I'm teaching. How many of y'all are greeny fans? Jolly Ranchers are so like a cult. People are like so addicted to their favorite flavors. What about watermelon? Those are the original. I'm a cherry guy. And you have the fake outs. You have the strawberry... You get one that you think is a cherry and it turns out to be strawberry and you're ticked off. You have the blue ice. How many blue icers out there. Travis says his is the fire one.

Anyway... In the summertime, I get to work with high school kids. We eat Jolly Ranchers. In the wintertime, I get to travel and meet people. I get to do events for men, women, students. For me, it's not the event. I love what I do, but I love meeting the people before and after events around this nation and around this world. I just love meeting the people. I have four favorites.

My first favorite was Freddie. This happened back at camp this summer. We have a couple thousand high school kids that come through our little teenage camp that we get to coach football and hang out with. We had a group from Egypt. We had seven kids from Egypt. One of the things I do at K-2 is I coach the football team. Team Egypt came to the football camp. Y'all, they do not know that the ball is

shaped like that. They don't know there is a lace on the ball. They don't know it's made out of pigskin. Basically, we became friends a year before, so they came out to hang out with Pops. So, I've got these seven Egyptian kids. It was hilarious.

We became tight and the last day of camp, Freddie comes up to me. All the kids are headed home and Freddie comes up to me at breakfast on the last day of camp and he says, "Coach, can we talk?"

I said, "Freddie, absolutely."

We sat down and he said, "Coach, I want to know Jesus, but it's so hard." Freddie was raised in the Muslim culture. Everything about the Muslim faith is works and fear. That's the whole ball of wax. That's what some of them... I have a lot of Muslim friends and we're not going to get into all this Fox News stuff... But it's just works and fear and some really unusual, not so good ideas.

I said, "Freddie, why are you afraid to become a Christian?"

He said, "Because you have to go to church, you have to read the Bible, you have to..."

I said, "Freddie, do you want to accept Allah or do you want to accept Jesus?"

He said, "I want to accept Jesus."

I said, "Why?"

The sweetest smile came upon Freddie's face and he said, "Because I love him so."

I wondered, Woodland Hills, how many Freddie's there would be this morning who either forgot or maybe your childhood pastor didn't tell you that knowing Jesus was just about "because I love him so." I wonder how many of us grew up fearing that at the end of the day, our works wouldn't be enough to please a judgmental God who keeps score on our lives, and our good deeds have to outweigh our bad deeds or we don't get to go to heaven. I wonder how long it's been, Freddie, since you came to the altar and just said, "Jesus, I love you so much and I want to know you and be your kid."

More of you may relate to another guy I hung out with this year. His name is Clark. He owns a football team – he and his dad. He calls me his second dad. We're sully connected and have been since he was a child at Kanakuk. I was standing with Clark the day that his all-pro player went down. The Chiefs were on the nine-yard line. I had been ministering to the team and to the fans. I'm standing there with my hand on Clark's shoulder, being the daddy that he doesn't have anymore. On the nine-yard line, Jamal Charles goes down and Clark's world crashes. They lost a total of five games, but that young man found out that Jesus knows a whole lot about perseverance. That man found out that when your world crashes, God comes alive.

I had a visit this weekend from my daughter, Courtney. I started thinking about the day that my world crashed with my little girl. I had to fly to Seattle. I had Leukemia. I had it at camp, but I couldn't tell

anybody because I had to go see my little girl. I remember, the day after camp, jumping on the plane and taking the longest plane flight of my life to tell a little girl that her daddy wasn't going to make it or probably wasn't going to make it. I remember those awful days of countless fears.

And then came prostate cancer and then came the liver disease and then one day everything got so hard and so discouraging and so difficult. I haven't talked about this publically, but I literally went into a two-year period of depression. Maybe you've been there when you can't get out of bed. If you do, you just cry. When the world comes apart...

God started bringing little Bible verses to my mind and then they became Bible verses to my soul. One of the verses that Clark knows and that you know and that I know is where God says to Paul, "My grace is enough." You find out at that deep dark valley... If you're in it, if that dark gray cloud is over your head... It may be your marriage or it may be your finances or maybe just the pressures of life or maybe, teenagers, it's just the challenges of growing up. The cloud sometimes is so thick up there that you think it's never going to move. God says, "My grace is enough."

You're going to learn that, and Paul gets it, and I began to get it in those days. Paul cries out "Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my afflictions so that the power of Christ might live in me." That's the day after the storm... and it's coming. I'm going to tell you, if you're in the valley with me, the cloud moves. It's not permanent; it moves. And you'll be able to say, "Most gladly, therefore, in 2016, I will boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ might live in me."

Paul took us down the road in 2 Corinthians 4. And God took me down the road. Paul was able to say, after being beaten, stoned, flogged, scourged, imprisoned, and in the deep... He was able to call them momentary light afflictions and he was able to say **8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.** Nothing can take you out because he says **10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.** If you are weak today, you've never been stronger. You just don't know it yet, but it's coming. The best days of your life are ahead of you. The best days of your life are coming.

I was in Chicago just before Christmas. I was speaking at a school for high school kids – my favorite place to be. I was going to rent a car, but a buddy of mine, Johnny Musso, called and said, "Let me take you around tomorrow and let's just hang out."

I said, "I'd love that, Johnny, I'll cancel the rental car."

He said, "I'll get you a limo." I told him he'd have to set it up because I didn't know a whole lot about limos. He said, "I'll have you one waiting."

So, John gets one limo out of how many hundred or thousand or so are in Chicago. I walk out of the airport and there's a limo waiting. It wasn't a long one; it was just one of the normal short ones... mercy. And Amine steps out. He's a 55-year-old Pakistani person with a beautiful smile. I shook his hand.

I said, "What's your name?"

He said, "Amine."

I said, "Dude, you have a great smile. Where did you get that smile?"

He said, "I don't know."

I said, "It was probably your momma wasn't it?"

He said, "Probably was."

We started chatting away. I'm sitting in the back seat and I'm wanting to chill a little bit, but God presses into my chest. Y'all, I felt the presses of God in my chest and in my heart, he's saying, "You go love that man." I lean forward and I put one arm around the empty seat in front of me and I put the other hand on Amine's shoulder, like I did Clark, and took the daddy role.

I said, "Amine, can I ask you a question? Will you teach me from the Koran? What's going to happen to your soul when you die, Amine?"

He paused and he said, "I don't know. I've never thought about that."

Men and women, he'd been driving that limo for 32 years in the United States of America and I wondered how many Christians had gotten in that limo and had never asked that question.

I said, "Amine, can I share with you from the New Testament what scripture says about your soul when you die?"

He said, "I'd love that."

Y'all, for the next half hour, I unpacked the New Testament to him. We sat there under a little streetlight in West Chicago in front of my son Cooper's house where I was going to stay.

He looked at me and said, "Are you angel?"

I said, "Talk to my wife; I'm certainly not an angel. Amine, I'm just a man."

He said, "Joe, don't stop talking. I've got chills going all up and down my body. My heart is beating so fast."

We sit there until about 11:45 at night, unpacking scripture. Amine gives his heart to Christ. Then I tip him and he said, "Please don't tip me. You've given me so much more." Then we step out of that limo and there, in the misty rain in West Chicago, Illinois, he said, "Will you hug me?"

I said, "Amine, I would love to."

If you could have seen the sight under that streetlight in suburban Chicago of two grown men... I'm holding that man like his father should have held him a long, long time ago... He wouldn't let me go.

I wonder how long it's been since you have fallen in the arms of Daddy Jesus the way you explained in the worship song and chills have come up your spine because the hug with Jesus was so good. I wonder how long it's been since your heart... I wonder if your religion has gotten stoic, if this is just a place to come for one more Sunday to hear one more sermon. The Daddy of daddies, the Father of fathers hadn't put his hand on your shoulder and reminded you that you're his child and he adopted you, that you're completely his.

And then there was my favorite. It was this fall. We were in Texas, doing a university event. A couple thousand kids showed up to the basketball arena. At the end of the program, the kids come up to the cross. Probably about 80% of the kids came up there to fall in love with Jesus. Two beautiful African American girls walked up. One is named Diane and one is named Destiny. They begin to unpack their story. The only time I talk so much is here. I usually listen better than I talk. I listened to them for a long time. Many, many tears were shed in all three sets of eyes in that little huddle.

Little Destiny told me what it was like to be sexually abused as a seven year old and then she told me what it was like to be sex trafficked when she was a teenager and passed around from man to man and all the horrible dreams and memories. The little girl was looking through a stained window, and all she could see was hurt and fear and shame and unnecessary, undeserved guilt that goes along with abuse. I watched and in the windows of Destiny's eyes, through the beautiful alligator tears laced on her mascaraed eyelashes, I watched this window open up. As I shared with Destiny what I've shared in this church before from 2 Corinthians 5: 17 where God says, ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!***

I watched Destiny... I watched the little caterpillar, as I've shared with you before. I watched her crawl up to that cross in caterpillar skin and I watched her build a Christ-like cocoon around literally a coffin around that old Destiny. And I watched the little caterpillar die. There was one arm on Destiny and one arm on Diane with all the other students around us there in that Colosseum. I watched the little caterpillar deteriorate. I literally watched the DNA going down to dust. But inside that caterpillar, there was a dream. Inside every caterpillar that dies in the cocoon, there is a dream. It's a dream to become a butterfly. And I watched the little butterfly emerge inside this beautiful girls heart, mind, and body. I watched the butterfly break through that little chrysalis, that little coffin, and I watched the girl's wings begin to move as her faith came alive. This went on for probably 30 to 45 minutes there, just the three of us with all the students just around.

I watched the butterfly and I said, as little Destiny began to walk away, "Destiny, what are you?"

She said, "I'm a butterfly."

The reason God's grace is important, Freddie, and the reason God's perseverance is important, Clark, and the reason God's trust is important, Amine, and the reason God's redemption is important, Destiny, is because, Moms, you wear one of those hats, maybe all four. Dads, you wear one of those hats; maybe you can relate to somebody else who wears or has worn all four. Somebody needs you in 2016 to be their MVP.

As a parent, your child, in his eyes, you're MVP. He may not know how to tell you that, but I'll tell you, you are. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, students, men in the workplace, women in the workplace, there is somebody next to you that you're MVP. And the reason those things from God, those gifts from God are so important... as Kevin Durant so well told his mom a couple of years ago when he received the NBA MVP... You are this person to somebody this year.

[Video plays] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnGXV4Xd41c>

Kevin Durant: And last, my mom. I don't think you know what you did. You had my brother when you were 18 years old. Three years later, I came out. The odds were stacked against us. Single parent with two boys by the time you were 21 years old. Everybody told us we weren't supposed to be here. We moved from apartment to apartment by ourselves. One of the best memories I had is when we moved into our first apartment. No bed, no furniture and we just all sat in the living room and just hugged each other because we thought we made it.

When something good happens to you, I don't know about your guys, but I tend to look back to what brought me here. And you'd wake me up in the middle of the night in the summertime, making me run up the hill, making me do push-ups, screaming at me from the sideline at my games at 8 or 9 years old. We weren't supposed to be here. You made us believe. You kept us off the street, put clothes on our backs, food on the table. When you didn't eat, you made sure we ate. You went to sleep hungry. You sacrificed for us. You're the real MVP.

Joe White: Single moms, you're MVP. I can imagine how it doesn't feel like that, but you're MVP. One of the reasons I love to do the women's conferences I do is because they need an older guy, a grandpa to look them in the eyes and say, "Moms, you're MVP."

Dads, you're MVP and I know a lot of days it doesn't feel like it. Some days it just feels lame, but you're MVP. You're MVP when you're mentoring their spiritual growth. That's the M of being MVP. When you're tucking your kids in bed at night and you take time to read the Bible to them... When you take time just to memorize a Bible verse... When you take time, grandparents... When you take time, uncles and aunts... When you take time, friends, just to say to your friend at school "Can we pray together? What would you like me to pray about?"

You're MVP when you wake up in the morning and you cook the pancakes just for an excuse to open up Proverbs and have a little Bible verse before the kids go off to school. You're MVP because you put bookends on their day. The television is on, people are going to movies and parties, but you, as a parent, are MVP to somebody. You're putting them to bed with Jesus and you're waking them up with Jesus. You're MVP.

You're MVP when you give them vision. I got it from my daddy. I watched the way my daddy loved my momma. My daddy adored my mom and I could not wait to get married to be able to adore somebody like he adored my mom. Ladies, my mom adored my dad. She was so much about her man until the day that man died. She gave him her heart. She gave him her love. She gave him her encouragement. She was his biggest fan his whole life. We couldn't wait to find somebody like that.

You're MVP when you show them what passion for Jesus is like. Someday, men, I look at your boy and he's 16 years old, and I say, "Tell me about your daddy."

He says, "My daddy is the purest man I know."

Grandpas, I talk to your grandkids and they say, "My granddad has more passion to follow Christ than any man I've ever met. He loves God's word and he loves Jesus with all of his heart."

Someday, when you die, and your kids look back... We teach our kids how to live, but we teach them how to die as well. We teach them how to do well. We teach them how to suffer well. Someday they talk about you and we say "Talk about your grandma, talk about your granddad," and they say, "That man fought a good fight. That grandma of mine ran the course and that grandma of mine, she kept the faith." You give them passion for Jesus like no one else in their whole world.

I'll tell you a story I've never told in public. It's somewhat difficult to explain, but I was driving down the road. I had been discipling this fellow. You don't have to just be MVP to your children. I got to put this together. By the way, these are always free. It's just a simple book to sit down with somebody for 24 weeks and be their pa or be their Ruth and just mentor to them. Every Sunday night, I get to do this with 13 or 14 high school boys on the telephone. MVP is not just your own children; it's people you run into.

I was going through this discipleship book with a man who had just gotten out of prison. We're driving down the road and I called a friend, a grown guy who was suffering with depression. I was just encouraging him along as we traveled down the road. I saw a hitchhiker. Now I don't recommend picking up hitchhikers. I have a friend who got slit from side to side of his throat picking up a hitchhiker. But rarely and occasionally and locally, I'll pick somebody up. There was an older person on the side of the road. It was raining. This person was not tall and was humped over. He had an old hat on and an old raincoat on.

I was talking on the telephone with this man as I mentored him along. I pulled over to give this man a ride. I opened the door and the person walked up. I looked in this person's face and it was an older lady. I know way better than to have a single woman in my car. A lot of her teeth were missing and the ones that were there were rotted and her face was very wrinkled. I asked her to sit in my car. I was on the telephone and I just continued to visit, just for protection there on that issue. I asked her where she wanted to go and she said Forsyth. I thought *Oh my goodness, that is 25 minutes away from here; what I have I gotten myself into?*

I continued to counsel this gentleman on the phone and she picked up the discipleship book. It was sitting between us. She began to read through it. She must have been 75 or 80 years old. She looked at me and said, "You need to talk about the Holy Spirit." I told her to keep reading because it's in there. As she continued to read, I continued to counsel this man.

Then we get to Forsyth. She opens the door to get out to go back to her homeless place. Y'all, as she stepped out of my car, she turned to me and I think I saw the face of an angel. Now, y'all may think I may be crazy and I may be, I don't know. That's just the way I felt. I felt like I was looking into the face of a beautiful angel. She didn't have many teeth and those that were there were rotted. The face was very wrinkled and older.

She said to me "Tell that man you're talking to it's going to be okay."

I said, "Bob, I think an angel just got in my car to tell you it's going to be okay."

There are Freddie's and there are Clarks and there are Amines and there are Destinies. And, Woodland Hills, there are angels all around you. What's 2016 going to be? It's going to be the best year of your life. I don't care what kind of disease you have. I don't care what the financial world is doing. It doesn't matter because you're MVP and this year, as you trust his grace, as you trust his mercy, as chills come up your arms when you sing "How great is thy faithfulness," and you believe in your heart "How great is your faithfulness, oh God my Father," and as you fly like butterflies, never going back to those caterpillar days again that brought you to Christ, you're MVP.

As we close with this hymn, which is my favorite – just stay seated for a minute and talk to God and besiege his grace. I dare you to trust him to the point where there are chills coming up your arms. I dare you let him just hold you out there in the mist of West Chicago like the dad that maybe never held you like that before. Then, when you're ready to stand up and sing "How great is your faithfulness, oh my father," then go ahead and stand and finish the song.