



It's Not Me It's You
Part 1 – When Jesus Walked Away
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Today we start a brand-new series called *It's Not Me It's You*. We are going to be talking about walking away from toxic people, walking away from the distractions of toxic people, but, as you do this series, you have to also look in the mirror. I've been doing that this week to make sure as I look at these toxic traits to just ask, "Lord, do a work in my life. Is there anything in me that is causing me to be toxic in relationships or toxic toward others?" We're actually going to do this for three weeks. The last part of this series the title of the message is called *Maybe it is Me*. We're going to look at Matthew 7 in that text.

Today, we're talking about *When Jesus walked Away*. When Jesus walked away for greater ministry effectiveness and to fulfill the mission that his Father sent him to accomplish. And that is dying for you and dying for me. Dying for your sins and dying for my sins.

This week, I was looking at signs of toxic people. I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 4. We're actually going to start there as we look at some signs of toxic people, toxicity, or signs of reliable people, which we want to be reliable people. I kept going back to all of the parents that would be on campus today. If you are a parent, would you raise your hand? It's going to be all throughout the room.

Young people, please hear me on this. The reason your mom and dad constantly ask you the question growing up – "Where are you going?" They know and they knew that where you go could determine where you end up in life. Because the follow up question to that... Look at all the grandparents even going, "Yes, I want the young people to really tune into this." What is the follow up question to where are you going? It's, "Who are you going to be with?" "I want to know who you're going to be hanging around because the people you hang around determine what you accomplish and where you end up." Your company, your friends... What you accomplish and where you end up.

In high school, I hung out with a group of like 15 to 20 guys. It was just a group of athletes. I have no idea why I was in this group, but that's where I found myself. I was just the one who brought the joy and the love and the fun and the laughter of the group, not the competition, but...

Do you know what weekends were like with this group? We were at a friend's house, my friend Kevin, and we played ping pong. Ping pong and pizza. We were crazy people; that was about all that we did. Then we all went to college. I remember coming home my freshman year for Christmas break and we all met up. It didn't even dawn on me.

We all spread out around the country to go to college. When we came back, we were sitting there one night. I thought it was going to be as usual. I'm 19 years old and my friend Kelly says, "Hey Ted, give me a ride to the gas station." Does anybody know where this story is headed? I had no idea where we were headed other than the gas station in our small town.

We go to the gas station. I didn't need anything. I didn't need gas, so I'm sitting there and it's Christmastime. My friend walks out not with two cases of beer, but the manager of the store with a dolly full of beer. I'm 19, going to a Christian college, driving my dad's late 80s Caprice Classic in a town of about 3,000 people. We know people is what I'm trying to tell you. We know people and they know us. They know the car of Ron Cunningham who goes to Valley Baptist Church – independent, fundamental, premillennial, King James Version only Baptist church. Why were seven cases of beer being loaded into the back of this car. I'll just add that my dad was a deacon at Valley Baptist Church – independent, fundamental, premillennial, King James Version only. Some of you have heard this story because I shared for the very first time from this pulpit on a Sunday morning. It was the first time dad, on the seventh row, ever heard the story. Oh, don't judge me. I was young, I was in ministry, I was trying to figure it out. But I felt like *I'm 40 years old; I can come clean now.*

Young people, I've got to tell you something. My heart is burdened for your generation because we didn't have cameras on us when we were in high school and college. Every now and then, a high school friend will take a picture of a photo and we all get on there and say, "This is not allowed!! You're not allowed to put pictures of what we did in high school!"

I just remember I was frozen driving down Highway 30. I was just speechless. But I'm sitting there going, *I need new friends. We're going to have to cut ties. This isn't going to work for me.* I often think back on that night. What would have happened if had I gotten pulled over? Some of you are like, "I'll tell you what would have happened. It's a bit like those people that left the Garth Brooks concert getting pulled over on 65." I was telling some people last week, complaining about the three hour wait in the parking lot at the Garth Brooks concert. There were a lot of people that needed to stay in that parking lot for three hours and sober up before they left that parking lot. You know what I'm talking about.

I just remember that night. I wasn't mean about it. I wasn't like "I can't believe it!" We got back to my friend's house. I didn't touch the beer, but I'm just going... I had to drive home. I get home and Dad's like, "How's it going?" I go, "Great, I'm going to my room." I've confessed my sins before my Father in heaven and before my earthly father.

But I often have to wonder what would have happened. The reason I start there with this series is because that's why your parents ask you so many questions. It's why they obsess over it. And it's why that one friend that you have and you're close to, your mom and dad are always suspicious. "Are his parents going to be home? That's going to be an extra layer of protection."

1 Corinthians 15: 33 says this. **33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character.** The company you keep, the friends you keep. A couple of weeks back, I went into our student ministry on Wednesday night. They were in a series on friendship and Jared was leading our students through that.

He had other teachers step up as well. The content was rich, but I loved listening to our students, including my son, talking about the depth of that content and just really processing through who will my companions be? What company will I keep? Because bad company corrupts good character, it corrupts good morals, the scripture says.

We know this from Proverbs 13: 20 - ***Walk with the wise and become wise...*** Who you hang around. Iron sharpens iron. The people you spend time with will determine a lot about the quality of your life. ...***for a companion of fools*** drives beer in his Deacon dad's Caprice Classic back to Kevin's house. We're almost 50, so there is a little level of forgiveness to all of this. ...***suffers harm.***

So, here's what we're going to do just to kind of get in the mood of signs, toxic or reliable signs. I love road signs. Every time I have to go back and kind of refresh on the road sign test. It's funny that when my kids were getting their driver's license years ago, I asked them if they had studied for the test before we went up to do it. They would ask me what certain signs meant. I had moments, after driving for 30 years, where I didn't know and would have to Google it.

Here's what I'm going to do... The only people not allowed to participate in this quick little activity are I don't want any of our sheriffs, deputies, police officers, or highway patrol men and women; none of you can answer these questions because this is for our ordinary citizens. Yell out what this sign means.
[shows various street signs]

But here are the signs (skull and cross bones) we're looking for in this series, the signs of toxicity. But also the signs in my own life. In Ecclesiastes 4, we get this beautiful explanation of companionship and what a good companion does for you and the relationship. You've heard this passage in Ecclesiastes 4: 8 -12 at weddings. Parents will often share this with their young people on this is what it means to not be in the company of the unwise or a companion of fools. We kind of see a compare/contrast, but he's going to share clearly what it means to be a reliable person, a reliable companion. We get four signs. We are going to look at them briefly before we look at when Jesus walked away.

Verse 9 gives us our first sign. ***9 Two are better than one...*** This is in a lot of Christian book stores and on a lot of Christian mugs. ...***because they have a good return for their labor...*** Here's the first sign. **Toxic people distract us from our work.** Does anybody in here have someone at work that is a constant distraction? They're the office gossip. They are the one that slows down meetings. They may be the one you want to give that ribbon to that says, "Hey, I survived another meeting that could have been handled in an email." They are just a distraction, and they are coming around while you are trying to do your work and they are not making you productive.

A reliable person or a reliable companion makes you more productive. That's why when a husband and wife are together, on mission together... You can take two completely different temperaments... I always love that people think that this is the biggest issue in marriage. "We're just two different temperaments." You can bring people from the same temperament, opposite temperaments together. If they have a common mission, two are better than one because there is a good return on that.

Here's the next one we get: **10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.**

I've always loved this illustration from Beth Moore in *Get Out of the Pit*. Some of you may have read that book. Beth talks about... and I love her fire when she shares this. She says, "When you're in the pit, whether that's just gossiping, struggling with addiction, you just have toxicity in your life, you get to a point where you make a decision and your like, "No, more. I'm done with this! I'm not living this way anymore!" You personally make the decision to get out of the pit. Isn't it something all the people that start grabbing your heals and start pulling you back down. It's because there's that moment where they're like, "Who do you think you are? You think you're better than me? You think you should...? No, I'm miserable down here and I want you to stay down here and be miserable with me." That's a toxic person. They want you to join them in their misery.

But a reliable person... **Toxic people hold us back, but a reliable person helps us out.** I want to be this person. I want to surround myself with people that when I'm n the pit, they are going, "Give me your hand. I'm going to help you up out of this." That's a reliable person. Who is in your life right now grabbing your heals saying, "Huh uh, you're not going there; you're going to stay here and be miserable with me."

Here's the third sign **11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.** This is speaking of comfort. **But how can one keep warm alone?** Young people, don't read more into that text. That has nothing to do with dating relationships or marriage.

Toxic people seek comfort but offer none. They want to be comforted. After the first service, it was discussed because we're going to get into heavier content here, but it was discussed – What do you do with Galatians 6. What do you do with the "**Carry each other's burdens and in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ.**" Were going to talk about walking away from toxic people so that you can fulfill what God has given you to do here upon this earth. Part of that is carrying each other's burdens. Well, let me tell you. I am here, called to carry your burdens and you are called to carry mine. You're carrying each other's burdens as brothers and sisters in Christ. But a toxic person doesn't keep reading in that text where it says that each must carry their own load. You see, a toxic person wants you to carry their burden for them, but they refuse to carry their own load. They want the comfort, they want the help, but they refuse to offer it.

Reliable people comfort when there is nothing in it for them.

12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. To me, this a quality of a companion, a reliable friend, that all of us honor the most. In this a cancel culture world in which we live, where people will start coming after you. You will watch your friends back away because they don't want to be on that radar. A reliable person says, "I'm defending my friend even though it puts me on the radar." They will defend you. **A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.** I love that final thought because you know what it's saying there is if you have one reliable friend, what a blessing that is for you. Can you imagine having two? Can you imagine being in the company and the three of you and

the strength and the comfort and the help and the productivity that can come out of three people together all rowing in the same direction and headed for the same common vision?

A toxic person does not have your back, but a reliable person has your back even when you're not around.

Back in 2020, we had our friend Gary Thomas here. We actually filmed several videos with him for our home group ministry. He wrote a book. It's a great book and I highly recommend the book called *When to Walk Away: Finding Freedom from Toxic People*. In that book, Gary goes through all the gospels, and he looks at over 41 times where Jesus either walked away from people or allowed them to walk away from him. If you take the overlap from the synoptic gospels, you get just over two dozen times that Jesus walked away or allowed people to walk away from him. Some of the words we'll look at today that I love... It's when it wasn't his time yet to go to the cross and they came after him to stone him. I love the term, "he slipped away." Scripture says he withdrew. He knew what his mission was and there were times he would just renew and get away from the crowds of people to be refreshed and rejuvenated, revived so that he could do the will of his Father. What we are going to see today is Jesus walked away and let others walk away from him.

Gary Thomas says this in his book. "*Jesus didn't let needs, pleas, attacks, or unresponsiveness...*" I think this is important for us because we live in a culture today that the church and followers of Jesus, we just feel like we have to keep talking and keep going at people until they are convinced of what we believe even when they are not responding. ... "*Jesus didn't let the unresponsiveness of others distract him from the mission given to him by his heavenly father. Sometimes to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk away from others or to let them walk away from us.*"

I want to share some of the illustrations that Gary gives in the book and some of the text. He says, "*On one occasion, after giving a difficult teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, Jesus lost a lot of enthusiastic followers.*" We say enthusiastic followers. The Bible says disciples. Not just crowds of people that were intrigued by what he had to say, but people who were following him.

Here's what the scripture says in John 6. **66 From this time...** After this difficult teaching ...**many of his disciples...** Not just people in the crowd, but disciples, ...**turned back and no longer followed him.** What Jesus does is he then turns to the 12. These are his reliable men, his closest followers. Jesus questions the disciples and their reliability. He turns to them and says.... **67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve?"** Here's what toxic people do. Here's what those with toxic traits and the method we need to take and be clear about, knowing what God has called us to do, making sure we are on the path to do it and not, as we are going to get into next week, allowing distractions to keep us from what God has called us to do.

Toxic people attempt to keep you from your mission and the people that God has brought into your life to minister to.

I talked to Bailey in the first service. She was sitting right down there, and she was an easy target. Bailey is a young mom. I think about the young parents in our church. I don't know if I need to remind a

parent of this. Children are a lot of work. Children suck the life right out of you. Children will drain you. They take a lot. I think there are some parents in here that forget God has given you these little children to raise and to point toward him. That takes a lot of work and right now, you're allowing toxic people to distract you from your mission. And some of you tonight the holiest thing you are going to do at 8:00 pm is change a diaper. You're then going to give a bath.

Then you need to turn off the phone and all the people and their opinions and all their highlight reels and you need to go to bed. Do you know what? It's because those children are going to wake up early. They start sucking the life out of you early. And you've been allowing people... Listen, we all are limited in relational capacity, physical capacity, emotional capacity. You can't give yourself to everybody. Right now, you know what you are called to do. You have been distracted and drained by toxic people and you know it. And every day, you allow yourself to go through it. It's time for you to say this is where I'm at now and what God has called me to now and I'm going to give it everything."

Do you know what walking away from toxic people means too? Gary uses the term verbally walking away. Some of us need to verbally walk away. What does Proverbs say? ***Even a fool is considered wise when they restrain their words.*** I always like to skim past that because I like using words. My mouth has gotten me in trouble my whole life. You can ask my parents. I got kicked out of junior high classes, elementary classes. From a very early age, my parents prayed, "God, redeem this kid's mouth." I'm 48 years old still praying, "God, redeem my mouth." Because I want to go after people and I, like you, have an answer for everything. With the level of stupidity in our world today, there are more answers needed and God has called me to answer everyone on that. He's called you to get online, right? No. Listen. walk away.

These are great examples. I really encourage you to get the book. This is Jesus' pattern. Not just one, but many walked away. Not just casual only. Jesus also demonstrates the need to verbally walk away sometimes when dealing with a toxic person like Herod. Instead of arguing with Herod and trying to justify himself, which is what we all want to do when attacked or accused, Jesus remained silent.

We read in Luke 23:9 ***9 He (Herod) plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.*** He also verbally walked away from Pilot and the religious leaders. We read in Matthew 27: 12 – 14, ***12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"***

For us, followers of Jesus, this is called discipline. We have a reply button, we have a comment button. I encourage you to use it all the time. It will bring joy to your life, and it will fill you up. No, it will distract you and it will drain you. You don't have to give an answer to everything you see that is wrong, everything you see that is untrue. Listen, I'm preaching to the choir. It is hard to walk past ignorance, isn't it? You see it all the time. You're going to do it today when you leave here driving. You're going to be in our parking lot going, "This isn't how I would do it at all. I tell you what I'd do..." And the first one that complains today about our parking lot, you're parking at fruit farm next week. We're going to shuttle you from 86 and we're going to see how you like it. Who is from Oregon? That's a joke you don't get, but we can explain it after the service.

We don't have to give an answers and we don't have to make a reply for everything. ***14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.***

I don't know who shared this years ago, but I follow it, but I don't always follow it – I'm an idiot. I should follow this more. I'm trying to practice it. "You don't have to show up to every fight you're invited to." You don't have to. Do you know why? I'll say it again. You don't have the capacity. I want to remind you that Jesus walked away and you're not Jesus. You don't have the relational, physical, emotional capacity, and you can't answer every single person, and you can't give a reply to everything.

What we're talking about today is ministry effectiveness. You want to be an effective parent. I want to be an effective spouse. There are times when I'm emotionally drained from answering people and Amy is trying to talk to me about something around the house. Whenever Amy is talking to me from across the table and she starts look around me back and forth... She's like, "I'm just looking to see what else is going on in there." That's because she knows I'm here but I ain't here. "You're not in this moment right now." I'm distracted.

Toxic people can be needy. I love how Gary puts it. "Whether they use force, guilt, direct attack, or unreasonable neediness... Do you have any unreasonably needy people in your life? That's the Galatians person who want you to carry their load, but they refuse to carry their own. They want you to pick up the other side of what they are dealing with and as soon as you pick it up to help them, – it's carry each other's burdens. As soon as you start to carry that burden with them, as soon as you pick it up, they drop their end. And you'll hear this in the church and some of you in your home group maybe or if you are in women's Bible study, maybe around the table, you know, you've heard it from people. It's not in the words, it's in the tone. "You're the only one who can help me. And you have to help me right now. My life is falling apart and this is..." Listen, there are moments I drop everything for a person when I think this is so out of the ordinary for them. But then we have other people where it's like that's their mode 24/7.

I had a mentor years ago in Dr. Gary Smalley. As the first elder of our church, he said, "Listen, you don't drop everything at 8:00 pm to go when the couple calls and says, "We're in crisis; we need you right now!" You tell them, "It has taken you years to get to this point in your marriage. Another twelve hours is not going to kill you. I'll meet with you in the morning."

Now if there are any safety issues or dangers, you know our clear stance as a church around here. We do not permit an abusive spouse... We remove an abusive spouse in a relationship. I'm not talking about that right now. I'm talking about that person who is like, "I'm in crisis and I need you." Listen, this is so important for us to understand. Do not allow the crisis of another person to create a crisis in you. You are called by God... As a member of this church, we consider you a minister of the gospel. Every member is a minister. Controlling someone or letting yourself be controlled is always wrong.

Gary goes on to say, "As far allowing himself to be mistreated, though Jesus came to die the death of a martyr, he didn't allow constant, persistent abuse to continue throughout his life. He let himself be tortured and crucified, but there were many occasions before that when he slipped away from those who wanted to hurt him.

If you've been a follower of Jesus for a long time, this can be really tricky for us. That's why these messages and this series can be difficult because we're like, *When did Jesus just stay and minister to the crowds and the lines of people and when did he slip away*. Jesus knew when this question coming at me right now is just to trap me, this question coming at me right now is just to hurt me... He knew when the situation was destructive. That's what toxic people do. They bring destruction to the relationship.

I'll give you three examples that Gary points out in his book. "*At this they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*"

In John 10 we read again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. ***Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where john had been baptizing in the early days. And there he stayed, and many people came to him.*** His time had not yet come.

In Matthew 12, we read a third example. ***But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Aware of this...*** this is what we're trying to do in this series – just create an awareness in us to know what toxicity looks like in the lives of others and in our own lives and not allow it to take us away from ministry. ***...Jesus withdrew from that place.*** The bottom line – Jesus knew his mission and did not let people distract him from it. What was his mission? John 6 says it this way, "***For I have come down from heaven, Jesus said, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.***" Every word he spoke was from his Father. Everything he did was given to him by his Father and he was about his Father's will.

You and I have got to stop bending to everyone else's will. That's what a toxic person wants you to do. They have an agenda, they have a motive, and they want you to conform to what they are doing. You and I need to be about our Father's business.

In Luke 19: 10, we read, ***The son of man came to seek and to save the lost.*** Do you know why he was willing to walk away or have people walk away from him? It's because he came to die for your sins and mine, and nothing was going to keep him from that.

If you are not a believer in Christ Jesus, I pray today would be the day that you know. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our lord. I pray that if you've never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day of your salvation.

Father, we are grateful for Jesus dying on the cross for us and leading up to that, all that he did to minister and to care for people, to heal, to teach, and to lead the reliable men gathered around him that walked with him. We want to be reliable followers of Jesus. With the mission you have given this church to go and make disciples of all nations. We want to inspire families and individuals to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. May that always be true of this church. Teach us as we look in the mirror in weeks to come. Help us to root out toxicity in our hearts and life, that the Holy Spirit would call us by name in areas where we are not being reliable companions, reliable friends, or where we're taking people away from the mission that you have given them. We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.