



## Intentions

### Week 3: "The Intentional Heart"

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Today, we are going to talk about "The Intentional Heart" and I think of all the weeks, this is the issue that there is no escaping. Everybody deals with this to some extent, and that is obvious throughout the gospels because every

single time Jesus addresses a question he always takes it back to the intent.

A little United States history for you...

In 1893, North Carolina was the only one of the original 13 states in the Union who did not have a state motto. A big deal? It didn't seem like it, because they had gone 104 years without one... but in 1893, they decided...

We need this.

We need something that defines who we are.

What makes us different?

Something that tells people why North Carolina is a good place to visit. A good place to live... to call home.

So they chose the latin phrase "*esse quam videri*"

The reason state mottos were in latin, was because in Latin you could say much more in fewer words than you can in English, what this phrase means is **"to be, rather than to appear to be."**

From the moment that I read that I found it all a bit funny. So much of our society and government is built on secrets... yet they established from the beginning that their government would be based on honesty. We should check in on how they are doing with that!

They derived it from an essay by Cicero, and the sentence that they took the phrase from reads in English like this: "[N]ot nearly so many people want actually to be possessed of virtue as want to appear to be possessed of it"

Which sounds an awful lot, to me, like our underlying theme verse for this series: (Proverbs 20:6)

"Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love... but a faithful man, who can find?"

So these ideas... though they obviously come from the word of God... seem so natural that it would make sense for an entire state in the union to make it their motto. Because people crave honesty. They crave it because it is so rare. And maybe if people would hear a little bit of honesty... they would be willing to be a little bit more honest.

But it's the question of all questions these days...

Who is consistent in their character in the good times and bad? In private and in public? in sickness and in health? Who does the right thing when nobody ever has any way of finding out about it?

Who cares more about possessing virtue... than about looking like they possess virtue.

Brennan Manning in his book "the ragamuffin gospel" said these words, and I quoted this in the first week of the series... But he says:

**"The temptation of the age is to look good without being good"**

Some times it's easier to put in the work to appear to be, than it is to just level heartedly "be"

Many proclaim they are good. Many say what they've done or work to look like they've done.

Matthew Henry, in his commentary on the whole bible says it this way about Proverbs 20:6... **"it is hard to find those that really are kind and liberal, that have done and will do more than either they speak of or care to hear spoken of"**

But we love when people say good things about us don't we?

And that is a good thing... Proverbs 22:1 says "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" people should be saying good things about you because you should be doing good things...

But the problem lies in when we find ourselves doing things out of an addictive desire to be approved by others. We don't do things to win approval or to be spoken of in a certain way. And if I were to be completely honest, there have been times in my life that I definitely only did the "right" thing because I knew how it would make me look. Because it is the "pastoral" thing to do or the "Christian" thing to do, but no where in my heart was I connected to it. And that's the issue we are trying to crush with this series... Because when you forget why you are doing what you are doing, before long, you will stop doing it entirely.

Why are we generous?

Is it for us? Or for them?

Is it for God?

Is it so we can be saved from ourselves?

Or because we think it pleases God? Or it pleases others? Or We will be rewarded?

Lets look to the word of God as we open our bibles to Matthew 6:1-2:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, **sound no trumpet** before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, **they have received their reward.**”

*Lord, you know the intentions of our heart. You know our motives, and why we do the things we do even if everyone else never sees that part of us. You know exactly who we are, and why we do what we do. And today Lord, I pray that these words will stir the hearts of Courage Church, that they would realize that their motives matter. Their intentions matter. Why they do what they do, matters. And Lord I pray right now that Holy Spirit you will both encourage and convict people in this place, and that you will use my words as a vessel. Take control of my thoughts and my words Lord, that only the things you would have me to say I would say, and everything else would fall to the ground before it ever comes out of my mouth. We love you and thank you. Amen.*

The Intentional Heart.

Intent.

Motivation.

Jesus is saying something so profound in this set of scriptures. He starts by saying “Beware...” The King James Version puts it this way... “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men” Take heed of... on other words... be careful!!! you are in great danger of this! This is a big deal.

We talked two weeks ago about how Jesus didn't come to abolish the law, but to sustain by properly interpreting the law. He is saying, “I don't have a problem with the law but lets make sure we understand what it is saying” and then he gives us the spirit of the law... our intentions. our motives. what drives what we do. We talked about how iniquity begins our mind. Last week we talked about why we pretend. Why we want people to think we are one way when really we are another way... and why Jesus is so much better than that. Well lets look at what Jesus is doing in Matthew chapter 6. He says:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

Beware. Watch out for this! You are in great danger of this... Don't practice righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.

If you haven't figured it out yet, there is a theme to this series. We are trying to make it as clear and in your face as possible because that is what Jesus did. The theme is intent. The point is NOT that you shouldn't do works of righteousness. YOU BETTER BE DOING THEM!... but you should know why you do them. And its not because you want the approval of others.

Jesus is saying, when you do good... I want it to be a reflection of what is in your heart. Not because there is pressure to do it or because you want to fit in by doing it... I want your outward actions to be a reflection of your inward motivations... Because I want to have a hold of your heart.

Look through the gospels... through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Look at the words of Jesus. He never ever says that something is right or wrong in and of itself. No. that is not the Jesus way. He always goes back to this:

What is driving you?

What is the reason you are doing this or doing that?

You've heard it said one way... BUT I SAY its even deeper than that.

Are you fasting to be seen by others? So others will pity you?

He looks at **motivations**.

Lets look at the story of the Rich Young Ruler. (Matt. 19:16-22, Luke 18:18-30)

This man comes up to Jesus and says "teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" and Jesus looks at the man and asks him a question in response... He asks him:

"Why do you ask me about what is good?"

What is Jesus doing here? He is not asking the Rich Man what he meant by saying "what good" - He was actually asking him, why do you think that a good deed will get you eternal life?

A lot of people have an issue with the law... And this man and people like him are the reason. But There is nothing wrong with the law, and that is the problem.

There is nothing wrong with it! Really, the law in and of itself is perfect. And we aren't perfect so we can't live up to it... And that is why Jesus died... For us imperfect people. He died so we can be saved through HIM because nobody will ever be saved by the law. Nobody can live up to that. But this rich ruler wanted to be saved through himself. Through his works. He wanted to do *something*.

So Jesus does this... He says "There is only who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."

So right then, it begins to seem like this is about rules. And this young man probably gets excited because he feels like maybe this is attainable... So he digs a little deeper... The rich young man asks Jesus, "well which commands?" I imagine Jesus just maybe getting a little sad here. Frustrated that the man just isn't getting it. So Jesus basically decides, fine... if you want to make it about rules, lets make it about rules. Jesus gives him a list...

dont murder  
dont commit adultery  
dont steal  
dont lie  
honor your father and your mother  
love your neighbor as yourself.

and the man says "All of these things I have kept from my youth. **What do I still lack?**"

Notice this. This man did everything right, and yet he still knew, deep down, in his heart, that he lacked something. He knew something was missing.

We normally read this knowing that he had great riches, and we think, "what he was missing is he didn't give away everything that he had... he hung on to possessions." But i think there is more to this than that.

You see, he was looking for validation. He was looking for Jesus to look at him and say, “you followed the rules... BRAVO... now you have eternal life.” but with as many rules as Jesus listed in this moment, the spirit of the law was at work in such a deeper place in this mans heart. Jesus had an expectation of his followers that they would do those things... and that they would serve people and meet needs and help each other out. In Matthew 6 he says WHEN you give to the needy. WHEN you fast. WHEN you pray. These are things he assumed they were doing. It was a part of this culture, these were things that were already happening... and Jesus was saying WHEN these things happen, lets make sure it is for the right reasons. What the man was missing was intent. Because if he had the right intent, then giving everything he had to the poor would not have been an issue. And had he naturally developed the habit of giving and created a lifestyle of generosity, he would not have been convicted like he was by the way he was living. He was no doubt already generous but probably not to the point that he felt it. The rich man knew where the problem was. He knew where he wasn't acting like Jesus, it was in the area of his life that he was not willing to let go of. The rich man kept pushing Jesus on this.

Jesus called the Rich man out on *his own convictions*. Jesus said, “fine. Your heart is not right because it is wrapped up in your money. The money is your bottom line. If you want eternal life, you have to get your heart wrapped around me, not around money. I have to be your bottom line. But as long as that money is there, I never will be. Because that's who YOU are. Not because of who I am or what I require of you.”

Let it go.

And so the rich man went away sad. Because he was very wealthy. and as much as he wanted validation for what he had done, he left with conviction for what he was unwilling to do.

The rich man was looking for a reward. Yes, it was an eternal reward. But he was seeking a reward.

**Even heaven can be a distraction from who you are supposed to be, now.** If your motivation lies in the afterlife, you are not living, *now*. You are not Alive.

For the last several years, Dawn and I have had the honor of the incredibly interesting job in New York City of "creative pastors." We have had the opportunity to pastor a group of creatives, as well as help lead the church the Dream Center planted in New York City... And part of our job is first impressions. Most likely, if you were to look up our church, you will see Dawn and i's finger print before anyone else's... If you attend the service, you will first be greeted by the A-frame signs when you first get off of the subway directing you to the church and then a flag banner in front of where we meet and then more signs leading you into the auditorium. All of which were created in our department.

If you look us up online before you attend, you will find our website which we created and oversaw, and you will probably watch one or more of the several videos on the site that show what we are all about as a church. You can get a great feel for who we are, what we believe, and the type of work we do at the dream center just by watching a couple of these videos.

You can watch story after story after story of the people that we have helped. Of the communities we have helped...

And what you creative people in here already understand... But a little secret for everyone else, is that those videos are all edited. They are all crafted together over hours of labor from extensive interviews of real people who we really do help in very real ways...

Yet when we tell the final story, we still tell it the way that we think it will most appeal to the people who will watch it.

Truthfully,

We hit a point when we became convicted about this. Because there really are amazing things happening... Yet we are creating the stories we want to tell out of them. Because if you interview someone for long enough, they will say something that you can use.



And I started to wonder... I got this kind of messed up thought.. this is me, not a reflection of our church... they were doing great things.

But i had this weird thought... “are we helping people so we can make these videos?”

“So I can have a job?”

“So I can feed *my* kids?”

Is there anything in my world that is actually not about me?

Or are we genuine? are we helping people because people need help. Because it is what God commands us to do, and it brings us joy to follow his word?

Psalm 112:1 “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!”

You delight in them! Its your delight to follow this. Its not a chore. Its not a task. you are not a slave to some awful slavedriver who wants to limit your potential by locking you into a box...

You delight in his commands because they are a joy to you! You read the word of God and you say, yes! This is good. There is something different about this. It is right. It is pure. It is Holy... its good!!!

Moving on through Matthew 6:

when you give to the needy, **sound no trumpet** before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, **they have received their reward.**

There we see it again. WHEN. When you give. God is a generous God. We talked last week about how the Devil works in lies... thats how he works... its always where it starts... It starts in a lie.

Where with God, it always starts with giving. His world revolves around what is good and he gives that to us. He gave his only son. He gave us his best creativity when he created the earth, and the stars, and the heavens, and the trees and plants, and us. He gave Adam and Eve the garden, and he gave them free will. He gave us our hearts, and our minds, and our friends, and our families. Everything God does, its a form of generosity, so as his reflection, naturally we should be giving. and in that day, that was understood. People gave. You helped people.

It's who God is. He is generous. Imagine people's shock when they heard Jesus telling them that in the final judgment he will say to those on his LEFT (Matthew 25:31-46) Depart from me... because I was hungry and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. You didn't welcome me as a stranger... you didn't visit me when I was sick and in prison... and when those on his left will say "When the heck did that happen?" and Jesus says "whatever you didn't do for the least of these, you didn't do to me." We find Jesus in serving. In meeting needs. In visiting people. In giving food to people who are hungry.

Before that, he said to the people on his right... whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.

Thats how we find God. We meet needs. He meets us.

If you are having trouble finding God and yet your life is like a bump on a log... Maybe if you get your intent right, and starting living love... you will find Jesus setting up a bedroom in your heart.

When you give! The jews in that day, they practiced giving. They had scheduled times to give. They tried to be generous. But why were they generous?

This line right here, sound the trumpet... shows the heart of why they were being generous. The phrase "sound the trumpet" most likely is not talking about a literal trumpet... but rather is a figure of speech used in that day...

Just like how we have our offering buckets up front, they had giving boxes in those days... they were brass receptacles that were small on top with a

slot to put your money in but were bigger on the bottom to hold the donation... it was small on top and had a brass bottom. And sometimes, people would come into the synagogues and they would slam their coins into the container so everyone there would hear and know how much money they were giving. That was called "sounding the trumpet" it was basically saying, "look at how much I am giving to the poor." Look at me! Look at me!

Well Jesus was saying not to do that. He was saying... do you know who does that? The hypocrites do that. The hypocrites give so that others will hear them. So that others will recognize, wow, they give a lot of money. Wow. They sure are generous. Wow. They sure are amazing.

And you hear Jesus use this term over and over when dealing especially with the scribes and Pharisees... Woe to you scribes and Pharisees... Hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence... Inside you are full of sin! (Matt. 23:25) we read that one a couple weeks ago... a couple verses later he says (Matt:23:27-28) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

He is describing a type of person who looks one way on the outside, but is an entirely different way at the core of who they are.

And I don't know about you, but whenever I hear the word hypocrite... I cringe. I get this mental picture of a youth leader or something, telling teenagers not to kiss each other while he is sleeping around and cheating on his wife. I get the picture of a total double life. Someone who doesn't practice what they preach. Who has this secret life of awful sin.

You know... the uncommon stuff.. The stuff that most of us don't do but some do.

Yet it's the most common complaint people have against the church. It's what everybody says.

They are hypocrites... But what about the rest of us?

Because all of those things would definitely make you a hypocrite... but its far easier to be a hypocrite than that.

The word hypocrite in the Greek is literally just an actor. The first words that come up when you search hypocrite are these words: an actor. a pretender. to recite or declaim. to play a role.

Though it is something entirely different today... In Jesus day, the word literally came from the theater.

When Jesus says don't do your good deeds in order to be seen by them... he is saying in order to act... In order to be a theater.

What is so dangerous about this is that everyone does it.

Matthew Henry says this... "Take heed of hypocrisy, for if it reign in you, it will ruin you. It is the dead fly that spoils the whole box of precious ointment."

It can be a far more subtle sin than any of us understand.

and What people don't realize is that Jesus took a term that in his day was not necessarily considered a bad term... it was just a term used to categorize a person who was on a stage. Everybody knew that the person on the stage was an actor... you were going to watch a performance so hopefully they were a good actor.

But Jesus took this term and he applied it to the Pharisees, and the scribes, and the people in his day. He was saying, when it comes to the things of God, "you guys are acting!" When you give your money, thats not the real you. Its not who you really are. You want to be keeping your money! I would rather you just kept your money if I can't have your heart in the process. You don't want to fast because you love God... you want to be eating your food... you fast so people see you. You suffer to appear suffering. You aren't doing it for me. This isn't about God this is about man. This is about

your friends. Looking good in front of your friends. Looking generous in front of your friends. And then he says this “They have their reward.”

Whats he saying? Its easy to read this from the “angry god” perspective... like, because you rebelled against me, this is what you had coming! But thats not what Jesus is saying here at all.

What he is saying is this. The Pharisees... they sound the trumpet to be seen... they want you to look. When they fast they go public. When they give to the poor they make it known and they smash those coins into that offering bucket... When they pray they say these babbling prayers that go on for hours so that people will see how religious they are. They are showing up, they are getting on the stage, and they are acting for the approval of the audience. That is their goal. So when they get the approval of their audience, they have achieved their goal. They got the reward that they actually wanted!

They received their reward.

Its not about holding out on them out of anger, its about giving them exactly what they wanted.

**But there is so much more for you than that!**

There is more.

Jesus wants followers who are free. That is why he says when you pray, go in your closet. Go behind closed doors. Make this a moment between you and God, and let God reward you in full. God who sees you in private will reward you... but you rob yourself of that reward when you build a life around getting a different reward. You tie Gods hands of ever taking you where you have the potential to go.

and honestly, its bondage. Its a prison. If you live your whole life for the approval of someone else or for the approval of an audience, then when are you going to be the real you? When are you going to be what God has called you to be? You will never even see what you are supposed to be because you are so focused on what others want you to be.. And on what

others see you being. Its life in prison. And most people who get life in prison, die in prison.

I remember sitting with Dawn in the living room of our house in the Rockaways and we were talking with the girl who was heading up the relief effort in the community after the Hurricane had left thousands of families just completely devastated... and we had been working for several weeks and by that point and you could tell something was just kind of boiling up in her and finally she just let it out.

She said "I don't want to help people just so we can say we help people."

I don't want that.

And as she was talking I was thinking to myself, "yeah... I don't think that anybody wants that..." it seemed a bit obvious to me. Pauls words kept resonating with me when he said in Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Of course thats why we help people... we are christians :)

But the next time I went for a walk around our destroyed little town, I recalled those words, and I saw something a bit different. I saw church groups and mission trips, hipsters and the Red Cross, news trucks and journalists, just like there had been for several weeks... and I realized, these people are all needed, but in a few weeks, they will be gone. We probably will be too. And suddenly I realized much more clearly just what she was saying.

Its not about the news cameras, the newspaper articles, the blogs, the promotions. A lot of people learned our names during that disaster... and who cares? Honestly, we didn't. The hype fades. You will get the applause, and it will go away. Its fleeting. Its here today, and gone tomorrow.

But Ministry is about caring. And if someone feels genuinely cared for it will leave an imprint on their heart. It will stay there.

Whether you *yourself* are able to stay in their life for a day, a month, a year, or a lifetime... its not about cameras. Its not about trumpets. Its not even always about helping people or about fixing people. What it is about is caring *about* people.. its about caring *for* people, and caring doesn't always end with something being fixed.

But it always ends with something, to some degree, being healed.

Sometimes its as simple as coming alongside someone and saying "me too."

"I don't have the slightest idea what can make this better, but I love you. Jesus loves you. If there is anything I can do to make your day easier... please let me know what that is."

and we fix what we can. But we can't fix everything. I do this with my wife all the time... She explains a situation to me and right away I want to try and fix it... I even interrupt her mid sentence sometimes with my remedy for the problem she is communicating. It almost never helps. I always find myself in a much better place when I just listen. When I just care.

We can care, every single time.

It should be our natural reaction. To care. To give our selves.. To help when we can. It should be so engrained in us that we don't even think about it. Thats what Jeremiah says...

Jeremiah 31:33 says that God will write his laws on their hearts.

He will do something in them, in which suddenly, they just default to the love of God. They just bounce back to that. its written on their hearts. And when that happens, when the law of God is written on your hearts thats when God says "Then... I will be their God. And they shall be my people." Then! "I will forgive their iniquity.. I will forgive them of what they let their eyes hook too and multiplied.... I will remember their sin no more!"

When my word is written on their hearts...

When they NATURALLY do the right thing. When it becomes who they are.  
Godliness.  
Holiness.

That's where we are trying to get. That's the type of community we want this church to be. One that naturally reacts the Jesus way. But we don't get there overnight. There is a process to learning... anything new. It's like learning to read or playing a guitar... The more you do it, the more natural it becomes. The more you practice it, eventually, you will just get it. I was trying to teach Chris and Elaine's son Foster how to play a couple of chords on the guitar a few days ago... and the whole time I am naturally just playing my guitar and I am watching as someone who had not really played much struggled to do the things that now came naturally to me... And I couldn't help but go back in my mind years and years to that moment when I first got my guitar in the 7th grade, and had no idea what I was doing. Or how I was ever going to make music out of this thing.

But I played it every single day. Sometimes all day. I built callouses on my fingers. I learned one song... I read the chords off the sheet and I played that song over and over and over again, until I knew it by heart... And I played it over and over again now by memory, now naturally. Finally I learned another song, and I played that song over and over and over again. And before long, I was messing with chord arrangements, and writing my own little songs, and now when I pick up a guitar, even if I hadn't played in weeks or even months... it's just natural. I know how to play the guitar. Sometimes I even naturally strum the chords to that first song I ever learned.

Jesus wants that for us. He wants us to pick up the guitar and know exactly what to play. He wants us to see a need and to naturally do the right thing.

He wants us to develop a life of prayer... a habit of prayer. A life of giving. A habit of giving. A life of serving. Of generosity. But it takes doing it. It takes living in it constantly... doing it over and over again. You are going to get one chance this Saturday for Saturday serve... When we are partnering with a great church for Bless Fest. We are just going to go down to Patton Park, and love people... Bless families... Put some tangible hands and feet



to this gospel. We would absolutely love it if you would join us, and just sort of work out this process:

Love. Serve. Repeat.

Why? Because “A generous man devises a generous plan and by generosity he shall stand” (Isaiah 32:8)

Love. Serve. Repeat.

Because “Whoever is generous to the poor LENDS to the Lord.. and HE will repay him for his deed. (Proverbs 19:17)

Love. Serve. Repeat.

“Bare one another burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Love. Serve. Repeat. Love. Serve. Repeat.

And before long it is just you. Its who you are.

Earlier we read Psalm 112:1, which says “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!” Who greatly delights in doing good. Well if you skip ahead three verses, verse 4-9 says something incredible about the people who develop these types of habits. Look at what it says: (Psalm 112:4-9)

“Light dawns in the darkness for the upright;  
he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.

5 It is well with the man who deals generously and lends;  
who conducts his affairs with justice.

6 For the righteous will never be moved;  
he will be remembered forever.

7 He is not afraid of bad news;  
his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.

8 His heart is steady; he will not be afraid,  
until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.

9 He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;

his righteousness endures forever;  
his horn is exalted in honor.”

We read an awful lot about people sounding their own horns today... But look at the horn that is exalted in honor. God exalts the humble. We talked an awful lot about light last week (1 John 1:5-10)... Well, light dawns in the darkness for people who default to to grace, mercy, and righteousness... It breaks through... Light wins. It conquers darkness, every single time. As soon as you flip the switch, light wins... good wins... For those who live in it. Who it's just who they are. It's only natural.

The righteous... the steady heart. the firm heart. the heart that trusts in the Lord. who distributes freely. who give to the poor. Who just is, and doesn't worry about whether or not a camera is rolling or a scribe is documenting it. Who pulls over to help the person they have never met after the long work day knowing there is nothing in it for them.

I'll end with this story.

A little over a year ago, our church did this campaign called "fifty-five." In New York City, there are 55,000 homeless people... 55,000 people who spent Christmas without a home... 18,000 of them are children....many are living in the shelter system, and others are on the streets. You will over time likely hear many stories about this weekend from me... It left a life long imprint on my heart.

Well for 55 hours, a week before Christmas, our team spent 55 hours on the streets to represent those 55,000... We slept on the streets the first night, and in a shelter the second night.

We went to three different shelters during that time, and two of them were family shelters and we threw huge Christmas parties for the kids who were there.

Of course, Dawn and I's first job was to document it all. We filmed the whole thing, and made a 30 minute documentary that we had to edit in one week to play at our Christmas service.

And as we were filming as these kids met Santa Claus and opened presents and decorated cookies... And as we were interviewing these single teenage homeless mothers about their stories, I was never more proud of our church. I was never more proud to do what we do... And it was never easier.

Because we had found a story that told itself.

This wasn't going to take any doctoring. It wasn't going to take a bunch of editing.

All it was going to take was piecing it together and pressing play.

Because when you are face to face with a child who isn't going to get a Christmas...

All you want to do is give him a Christmas.

That... Is... Enough.

That story is worth telling...

And the stories that are worth telling, tell themselves.

There's no need for a mask... There's no need for an act or a show.

There's just people that are made in the image of almighty God, who deserve our best, and so we give it to them.

The intentional heart lives every story just like that one. It treats every person just like that child. They entertain strangers, naturally. Because its the Jesus way. Its the way of the cross. The bible says that Jesus is our example of love (1 John 3:16)... him laying down his life for us is our greatest example of love, and we ought to lay our lives down for our brothers.

We ought to be willing to drop everything for our brothers. In fact, its more than a willingness. We ought to DEFAULT to dropping everything for our brother... when there is a need. Thats the Jesus way.

I am sure you guys are already sick of hearing our New York stories... but its all we've known for the last few years. The majority our married life so far has been spent there.. but I know that there are many stories like that here already... Many Courage stories that have deeply impacted the city of Detroit... Things you did when nobody was looking... And then suddenly the mayor calls on you when he needs something. Because God Exults the humble (Matt 23:12)... But he does it in his time. In his way. We were built to be affirmed.. God knows that, and he handles that... but we can't live imprisoned by it.

That being said, we need to be intentional about the way that we live. About the way that we serve our city. About the way that we serve Jesus. We need to be intentional about developing a heart that naturally defaults to the things of God. It has to become us. Who we are. Not just what we do. But who we are.

We have to cultivate the intentional heart.