

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Culture Collision: I Don't Need God**  
John 15:5-8  
February 11, 2018

***Pastor Michael Novotny***

Welcome to Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny. "I don't need God." That's what my boss said. I was working with a passionate Christian man who was always trying to talk to our boss about Jesus; always trying to invite him to his church until one day, our fed up and frustrated boss said, "I don't need God." He told us of his life, that it was good. His family was solid, he was successful, he was rich, he was accomplishing his goals. Everything was going well without God so he concluded, "I don't need God."

Do you know anyone who feels the same way? Their family's just fine without Jesus and that life is just fine without church? And things are going great being an atheist, an agnostic, or not religious at all. Well, this week, Pastor Mark Jeske is going to remind us of the necessity of Jesus. Jesus said that apart from him we could do nothing that mattered anything to God. But with him, we could produce abundant fruit; fruit of faith and fruit of love.

So whether you're struggling with needing God or you know and care about someone who doesn't have an active relationship with Jesus, listen in and listen carefully. We're going to be reminded why Jesus is so important for each of our lives.

***Pastor Mark Jeske***

Mr. McVeigh, he took a poem that he really liked, a poem by the British poet William Ernest Henley – and ironically, it was written the very same year as our anniversary Sunday; the poem called, "Invictus," which is the Latin word for unconquerable. And Henley wrote this poem: "Out of the night that covers me, black is the pit from pole to pole. I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul." Get it? Invictus? Unconquerable?

"In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeoning of chance, my head is bloody but unbowed." In other words, he's saying, "That's all you got? Bring it on. What have you got? Like, I can take it. You're not scaring me."

"Beyond this place of wrath and tears, looms but the horror of the shade. And yet the menace of the years, finds me and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate," strait in the sense of narrow or tight, "how charged with punishments the scroll," meaning the scroll of judgment. "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my," you know how the poem ends, "soul." It was a great, blasphemous shout from this agnostic or atheist back in 1875 and Timothy McVeigh said that and would not utter another peep; those were his last words.

You guys remember Jesse Ventura? No? Jesse “the Body” Ventura? Does that help you? Oh, now we’ve got some World Wide Wrestling Federation people here I can see. Jesse the Body was a bodybuilder and a wrestler who decided to go into politics and what state actually made the decision to elect him governor? I’ll give you one guess. Minnesota elected Jesse the Body. Here is some of his religious philosophy: “Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers. It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people’s business.” Is that how you want to look in your world? Is that how you look in your world? Wow. What a crabby attitude, Jesse! Hope you live long enough to change your mind.

Anybody heard of Angelina Jolie? Yes? Any People magazine or ET watchers? Here’s Angelina: “There doesn’t need to be a god for me. There’s something in people that’s spiritual, that’s god-like.” So she said, “I get all of the worship I need right inside my own heart. I am,” and she was just repeating Henley; I am the master of my fate. I’m the captain of my own soul. I’ll decide my own value system. I don’t need any god.” Beat it.

Her husband, or perhaps I should say ex-husband – she filed for divorce in September – those six poor children are in for a terrible ride, I’m afraid. Brad, the other half of Brangelina, offered this for your consideration: “When I got untethered from the comfort of religion, it wasn’t a loss of faith for me; it was a discovery of self. I had faith that I’m capable enough to handle any situation. There’s peace and understanding that I have only one life here and now and I’m responsible.”

Well, brave words. He also thinks he’s the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. But all three of those people are miserable. And I want to talk to you – how do you get your head wrapped around the collision? Because you cannot assume that what most of us share as a worldview, of understanding the answers to the three great riddles – where did we come from, what the heck are we doing here, is there any meaning to my life at all or am I just a pure accident with no meaning whatsoever? And if I disappear, one or two people will cry and then I will disappear and be gone forever? And where am I going? What happens next? Am I, indeed, accountable to someone else? If so, to whom and on what basis?

The people who don’t have the benefit that you and I have struggle with those questions and so they make up other answers. And I want to invite you not to get shocked when you hear stuff – like these three quotes – when you hear that coming out of people. Don’t despise them; they don’t know. They have no idea what they’re talking about. This is like a really important computer calculation; like if you’re going to be running interest rates projected out to 10 years or you’re going to be doing algorithms to predict people’s mortality rates. You need a computer program to handle this high-level calculation. But can you imagine trying to do that if you don’t have a CPU – a central processing unit? You have no data storage and you have no software. You can’t! You could have a nice looking box but without those key pieces, you cannot solve the problem. In fact, without the software, you don’t even know the categories of the problem or how to go about solving it.

I happen to be a lifer; many of you are lifers, also. I have no actual memory of being an unbeliever. I did not come to faith as an adult when I had awareness of my surroundings but some of you did. I don't want to embarrass anybody so I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I invite you to share your stories with people of how it is that you came to faith. And it's important – especially I'm putting this on my fellow lifers – it is important that we not look down on people who don't have what we have. They never got the software and even if they had the software, they don't have a hard drive to put it in. And even if they had the data, if you don't have a central processing unit, you can't process the data. They don't have the tools. And it's important for you and me to get our heads wrapped around straight of the life or death issues here but without being judgmental, without being arrogant or condescending. Or another way – or one way that you've seen, is that when Christians really feel threatened, they go on the attack. So some group will march around a gay bar holding up signs that say, "God hates gays," but they use the f-word. That doesn't help anything!

Or somebody who is trying to advocate for the worth of human life inside the womb; that a baby just before birth is still a baby and a person, too. But advocating for that idea by bombing an abortion clinic is a terrible idea. That – because the people who are running that clinic don't have your software; they don't know what you're talking about or where you're coming from. Just as bad is the reverse where instead of going on the attack, you hide and don't let anybody know what you think and believe so that nobody gives you any guff; so nobody thinks you're dumb or some weird cult member or a Jesus holy roller or something like that or better than thou or snoot in the air kind of person. And so, just hide it; just keep your faith so compressed and quiet nobody will know and that way nobody will mess with you and you just stay out of the way and hide. You think, "Well Jesus, this world is going to hell and I got what I need. I'm hanging on. I've got my ticket. So I'm just basically going to go in my bomb shelter. There's like a nuclear devastation all around me. I'm just going to hide and take me now, Jesus." I'm putting it out to you – that's not the right solution, either.

But I am going to put before you today in a culture collision is neither to run away nor to attack but to engage; to make friends by listening and loving unconditionally. And letting people utter things that you may know to be nonsense but you're not going to pounce on everything and tell them what idiots they are. You're going to listen and realize that until people are connected to God in faith and have had their mind opened up to realize that the word of God, the Bible, is the software they've been looking for to make sense of their existence, they're not going to be able to make God-pleasing decisions. Don't expect it. Don't assume it. And don't be surprised.

And here's another little thing I'm kind of pulling my "so what's" from the end here cause it's sort of – this is a moment to probably mention it. A big thing to me is when I look at how big the army of atheists and agnostics is and the spirituals but not religious and the people who hate organized religion, it's so oppressively many; I stagger under the mental weight of it. Don't you, too? Doesn't it just feel like we're being squeezed out and squashed? Like they're everywhere. And so, my tendency is to kind of shut down and only hang out with y'all because you're more fun and that's not right, either.

The point is to engage but here's my strategy and suggestion to you: One at a time. Don't try to save the world. Just connect with one person and every man, woman, and kid in the building this morning, you know one person. You may be related to this one person. You may have this person right in your house who doesn't have the CPU, doesn't have the hard drive, and doesn't have the software and cannot process the word of God. All they hear when you talk about the Christian life is rules and some Christians think their job is to try to use government power to try and clean up the behaviors in our country. That's not our mission. Our mission is to be proclaimers of God's unconditional love through Jesus Christ and let him do the installation of the tools they need so that God's words and ways will make sense to them and they will choose to do them. You cannot force, shame, or bully people into Christian behaviors. They have to choose them or they're worthless. And Christians sometimes get impatient because we want the government to fix people. We've got to let it go and form a relationship with one person. Listen first, love and serve somebody, and earn the right to be heard. And after you have established your cred as a listener, you can then be expected to put out the great value proposition of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

And here's the power you've got going for you – it's not like God is sending you out like salespeople with a broken sales model or salespeople with a sales product that just doesn't work or you've got some clunky, obsolete product that nobody wants anymore. This is totally not true; you've got the best product in the world to share with somebody else. It doesn't benefit you if somebody else comes to faith. It's not like you get more money or you don't get a commission – like God doesn't give you \$1,000 every time you connect with somebody – this is not a sales commission kind of thing. You're simply sharing spiritual food – you who once were a beggar – you're sharing food with somebody who's a beggar, too. We're just sharing food before the final bell goes off.

And here are the two powerful things you've got going for you that every atheist, agnostic, and spiritual but not religious person cannot lift a finger to resist – one is the power and realization in everybody's heart of guilt. Everybody feels guilt. Even the people who lie and say they don't have guilt are lying because they do have guilt. Everybody has guilt. Everybody knows when your lifestyle and behaviors are out of line with God because he built a conscience – not just in you or me – but in everybody. Even in the atheist, agnostics, and spiritual but not religious people in your life, they know you're onto something and if you're making them uncomfortable, they may push back but they know you're telling the truth. So assume it even if you cannot see it or gain their verbal agreement. Assume that you have poked at an anxiety inside and nothing you can do outside of Jesus gets rid of guilt that your life is out of alignment with your Creator.

The second powerful thing you have, powerful – more powerful even than Satan, the devil himself – is the power of the Bible, the word of God. When you speak God's words simply and clearly from your heart, eye to eye, tracking with somebody, and you're saying the gospel, the unconditional gospel of the love of God through Christ Jesus, his sweet gift of the forgiveness of your sins, his sweet gift of favor and an open ear to prayer and a living relationship and the sweet gift of immortality in heaven, you are speaking something more powerful than any lie the devil can come up with. And that gospel has the power to blow down the walls of resistance and that is how conversions happen. When the unconditional love of Christ is handed from one foolish

sinner to another; not to bully someone into adopting a different lifestyle or following our clubhouse rulebook, but giving a gift.

So having said all that, let us go now to the upper room – I’m sorry to change metaphors; I wanted to talk about computers and software but Jesus had to make due in the era before there were computers – so he picked a different metaphor but it’s the same point. And if you would look at one paragraph in John 15 with me today, I would like it a lot.

If you go to John 15 – a bible would work or if you’ve got the mobile device, look that up, too – John 15 and I’d like to look at the paragraph from verse five to verse eight. Jesus is hours away from being arrested, condemned for the sins of the world, several times tormented physically, and then crucified; not because he couldn’t get away but as a deliberate gift of his sacred body on behalf of foolish sinners. And because he is human, he can represent us. And because he’s God, he’s unlimited enough to share it with everybody.

And here’s what he had to say. It wouldn’t surprise me a bit to think that the disciples of Jesus didn’t get this the first time; a lot of what he said stressed them out and confused them. But later they got it; they all got it later and you and I can get it today. Jesus used the metaphor of a central line. In this agricultural society, every one of the men in that room had seen a vineyard; maybe some of them even had worked at them or even some owned them and they knew what he was talking about. A vine, a grapevine, has a central sort of gnarly, weaving trunk or stem that goes into the ground to draw out moisture and nutrients from the soil. And then branching off from it are the branches. Jesus said, “I am a vine and you are like branches coming out from me. If someone remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do,” what? Nothing. Pretty lame response so I’m going to give you another chance to do that better because this is – this is big! Don’t be afraid to say this at the right time. “Apart from me you can do nothing.” That’s better.

This is a big deal. There’s somebody in your life that needs to know the reason his life isn’t going anywhere and is so frustrating and is so fearful. Why he’s so depressed and why he’s so anxious is because cut off from Jesus, he can do nothing. Nothing.

“If anyone doesn’t remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish; it will be given to you.” In other words, I’m going to tend your life. You’re going to pray and I’m going to hear you and I’m going to send resources your way because we have a living relationship. So I take care of your past, I pay off your old bills and your old debts. All that stuff that’s dragging you down, I will wipe out your guilty conscious and help you be at peace because you’re now as holy as me. Those who trust in Christ are washed as clean as God’s son himself. This is an insanely amazing concept and I wouldn’t dare to put it out to you if I hadn’t lifted it straight out of the Bible. I could – I would never have made this up myself because I think it lets people off the hook and it trusts you too much because, basically, he’s fronting you everything you need; trusting that you won’t despise his gift. Isn’t that risky? I wouldn’t do that. But God did.

“Apart from me, you can do nothing.” Connected to me – the corollary is you can do everything because you have resources coming into your life. So you not only have your past taken care of, your present is good because you’re living with God’s favor; the one whose hand is on the faucet of resources flowing into your life and he listens. When you present a need, when you ask, he sends resources and answers to your prayers for one reason and one reason only: Because you – you don’t know what I want, do you? Okay. You could – a correct answer would be, “Because he loves you,” and that is a totally good answer. But take it one step beyond that – he sends you even more than he was originally planning to – are you getting warm? Because you asked. You can lead God to change his mind in your favor and get this – he waits to be asked. He’s holding stuff in reserve; waiting for you to ask. Jesus said, “You have not because you ask not.” Hello? That’s his promise for now. This isn’t just by and by; this is right now.

But on the last great day, he’s going to be coming back and if you are deadwood, you will be scooped up and burned in the fire. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish; it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory that you may bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

And this is why you exist right now: Having your past cleansed and sanctified. Having your present strengthened and fortified with a living relationship with the vine, who’s bringing you water and sap and juice and strength and nutrients so that your life and your body and your family are going to be blessed and to guarantee your eternity. It says, now I’m doing this, not just so you can have cool green leaves, but I want to see some fruit. You can be useful to me so don’t hide! Help some other foolish sinner grasp how wonderful and deep the love of God is. Share the name of Jesus and you can’t convert anybody but God can. And he waits for us to set the word in motion and then he’ll take it over.

So you cannot convert anybody; God doesn’t put that on you. But he does – what he does put on you is setting the word in motion. And you have one person – remember, don’t get intimidated by the vast weight of all the Jesse Ventura’s and Brad Pitt’s and Angelina’s out there who are mocking Christianity; don’t worry about all that. Just pick one and today and in the week ahead, offer to share with one person who’s floundering and struggling that there is love, forgiveness, answer to prayer, and immortality for all branches who are connected to Christ the living vine.

This is our personal mission. This is our congregation’s mission, too. If you’re in, then say as loud as you can, “Amen.”

### ***Pastor Michael Novotny***

She didn't think that she needed God. Years ago, I met this woman who had this vague connection to our church and she had so many questions and was living really so far from God's plan for her life. I'll never forget the day at the coffee shop when we met and I brought my Bible and she asked me every possible challenging question you can imagine. What do you think about homosexuality? What about creation and evolution? What about church fellowship? What about women being preachers? What do you think about this and that and this and that? And I'm sure I was sweating profusely.

And I didn't have all the answers in that moment but there's one thing that God helped me to say that I'm so glad that he did. I simply asked, "Would you be willing to read the Bible with me?" I didn't need to convince her in that moment that she needed God or that Jesus was the best way or that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life. I just knew that the Holy Spirit can do incredible things; that he can renew our hearts and transform our minds when we're connected to that book.

And so she read. And she had even more questions and she read more and there were even more questions. Well, we got through the end of the Old Testament and into the New and something incredible happened: She realized that she needed God. There was fruit, fruit of faith. Trust in Jesus. I'll never forget the day that I heard her confession. I went home almost in disbelief but I shouldn't have because God is good at his job.

Maybe you really care about someone who has so many questions and seems so far from God. Maybe it seems impossible. Maybe you've tried and you've prayed and nothing has changed but don't give up hope. The Holy Spirit can do incredible things. So whenever you can - through a text, an email, a forwarded message, through cups of coffee and an open Bible - get into this book and people just might see their sin, how much they need God, and their Savior. To see how much God was willing to provide for their needs.

Would you join me in asking God to reach more and more people through this message of his amazing grace? Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, we know that you love the whole world. We know that you came to seek and save people that are lost. We know that you healed people who had questions and doubts; those who struggle with unbelief. We knew that even your closest friends and disciples doubted after you were risen from the dead. Thank you, God, that our doubts and our lack of faith doesn't stop your love and your passion for us. And now we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit. We know people who don't know you just yet; they don't even think that they need you and it breaks our hearts to have that empty seat next to us in church, to gather together and start a meal with a prayer and know that someone's not closing their eyes and bowing their head.

Heavenly Father, it breaks our heart and we know that it breaks yours even more. So please, give us passion. Help us not to be ashamed of the gospel. Help us to trust that your word never comes back empty; it's living and active and powerful and effective. Holy Spirit, do what we can't. Give us the courage to say the words and open people's eyes to their sin and to their Savior. We pray all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

With Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny and it all starts now.



TIME OF GRACE®

# Gracenotes

guides for personal Bible study

## *Culture Collision: I Don't Need God*

**John 15:5-8:** <sup>5</sup> “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

### *Points to Ponder*

1. List some ways in which culture and Christianity collide when it comes to believing whether or not you need God.
2. What’s the best way to be heard by someone who doesn’t believe there’s a God? Should you get in an argument? What’s the best approach?
3. How is the message of Jesus different than any other “sales pitch” you might give? What makes it the best “product”?
4. Read **John 15:5**. If we aren’t connected to Jesus, what can we do? What an important message for those who are frustrated and searching for the reason for their purpose!

5. Read John 5:7,8. What do these verses say about how God intervenes in our lives and why?

As our culture leans farther from God and more toward questions like, “Do we even need a god?” it is so important for us to share the message of the gospel. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. But with God in our lives, he guides and directs us; he gives us purpose and love and mercy and forgiveness. This is the best news to share!

### *What else does God say?*

Psalm 14:1: The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

2 Peter 1:16: We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.