

M O N D A Y

“Lord God . . . we thank You for this opportunity we have, this . . . this time You’ve given us to just gather together and praise Your name, and spend time with each other in a way that honors You, Lord. To *connect* with each other. To have *fun* with each other. And to do it all while, just, giving all the glory to You, Lord, and sharing with each other the gift that is Your love. The same love You showed us when You died on that cross for all of our sins, and more than anything, God, we thank You for that. In Jesus’s name we pray—”

*Amen.*

“—amen.”

With the collective word, the chapel congregation raised their heads.

“Alright, everybody,” Calvin Sanders drawled, stepping back onstage. “Now we’re gonna go to family time for a bit, find your camp counselors so they can lead you to where your space is gonna be, and then—guys—then they’ll give you the schedule for morning sports so you can head there right after you’re done. So, find counselors, family time, then sports—alright.”

He stepped away from the microphone. Sam stood, turned around, looked through the crowded pews, found Thatcher’s tall head adorned with a yellow baseball cap, standing above the rest and waving two tan arms at him.

“Alright alright alright,” Thatcher ruffed as the group gathered around. “Looks like we’re all just about here—Timothy, where you at?”

“I’m here, behind Molly,” he replied, voice small and rhotic.

“Perfect—now! I’m going to take you all to a magical place. Are you ready?”

A vague concurrence.

“Are you ready for the magical place?”

Another.

“Shane, are you ready?”

“Heaven yes, I am,” Shane replied, rubbing an eyelid and lifting his bangs.

“Good, because it’s time for—” Thatcher threw two long arms in the direction of the chapel exit. “—that tree over there outside the chapel! How magical, okay, let’s go now.”

Shane snickered, still rubbing his face. “I am not ready for Thatcher’s magic today.”

Sam proceeded alongside the seven other family members. They followed out the double doors of the worship room and into the vestibule, glass doors on either side of them, then through the set on their right out of the chapel. Young, orange sunlight rained down. Sam squinted against it, went under the shade of a tree with the rest of them, a bench bordering its trunk. Thatcher sat on the ground.

“Alright, how we feelin’, family three?”

“Eh . . .”

“Good.”

“I’m ready for rest time.”

“There’s that morning spirit, I knew you had it in you. Especially you, Shane, I can see that—” Chuckles. “That spark of life.”

“Oh yeah, dude . . . I always feel most alive first thing in the morning.”

“It’s like, eleven, you boob.”

“And Molly’s a regular mathematician, look at that.”

Laughter. “Shut up.”

“You shut up.”

“Man, you too are just . . . vicious . . . So, anyhow, Calvin talked about quite a bit this morning, right? He quoted the Gospel of John, and that first chapter where it talks about John coming into Jerusalem to spread the word of God, saying ‘I’m just coming here to spread the good news. Y’know, I’m no Messiah, I just came to help out.’ So just to start out, let’s do a little bit of an icebreaker question type of thing, just so we can get to know each other as a camp family, get ourselves a little more acquainted. We’re gonna go around, around the circle here, and I want you to say your name, which church you came from, and then tell me this: why are you here? Y’know, John has a pretty clear reason for going

where he was going, so I just wanna know, what's your reasoning for coming here on this trip to Camp Havenside? And it doesn't, doesn't have to be as huge as John's or anything, doesn't have to be a big, long, intense thing, just whatever it is you feel. We can go around—Timothy, you start, yeah.”

Timothy sat up straighter, lifted his slightly form. “Um . . . my name's Timothy, I'm from uh, from Pure Heart Church of Christ. And my reason for coming here . . . um, I came because . . . I mean, I love going on, uh, camp trips with the church. Yeah. Yeah, I go every year, that's why I always come. I love it here. So. That's my, my main reasoning.”

“Alright. Yeah, even though this particular camp is a new one for all of us, y'know, like Calvin was saying last night. But I think we . . . we all feel the same. Yeah. Okay, Molly?”

Her laughter seeped through her teeth, splayed out in a reasonless smile, something between nervousness and bravado. “Hi . . . I'm Molly, Molly Hurst, and I . . . I came from, uh—”

“Yep, she forgot the name of the church already.”

Laughter from all directions, and in her words: “Shut *up*, Shane!”

“Do you need to phone a friend?”

“Stop it!” Her giggles subsided, died, then formed words. “I came from Pure Heart Church of Christ—see?” More laughter. “And I, I um . . . Um, I think I just like being able to, uh . . . connect with people and have fun and . . . and praise God, but, like, still have fun, y'know? Like, I just love getting to spend this time with my friends, and we just . . . when we all get together like this, and we're focusing on God and stuff, I just feel like there's no better way to feel good . . . than by doing that, y'know?”

“Yeah, for sure. The—”

“Like, what better time is there, y'know?”

“—Bible tells us th—yeah, totally. I totally agree; the Bible tells us, in so many ways, really, that we should not see following God as something that is . . . like a chore, like something that's unpleasant. Yeah. Yeah, for sure, okay, Shane?”

Shane shifted from side to side in a cross-legged stance, looked down, his smile just barely visible beneath his brunette locks. “Hey guys, I'm Shane . . . I uh, I'm also from Pure Heart Church of Christ, represent.”

Laughter from all, a smirk from Shane.

“And, uh . . . I came for . . . for the wicked tan.”

More laughter, predominantly from Molly. “You would say that.”

“You’re tan enough, boy.”

“Not yet, man, nah . . . nah, um . . . . . yeah, I think the reason I came, um . . . it just feels good to know that you’re . . . . . alright. Like being here with everyone, it’s . . . it’s like hey, even if I mess it up sometimes, even if I . . . I make mistakes that God still sees me as a sort of okay guy. And I haven’t screwed up *absolutely* everything. I don’t know, haven’t been struck by lightning just yet.”

Laughter. “Don’t speak so soon.”

“Yeah, I guess I shouldn’t, should I . . .”

Thatcher was smiling, nodding. “Ah boy. But yeah, in all seriousness, that’s valid. Sometimes we get this idea of God that He’s a big angry man looking to punish us, and we should feel afraid and ashamed of ourselves, but that’s, that’s the whole point of Christ, is to not be ashamed any longer. It just takes that . . . that acceptance of His grace. Yeah. Judith?”

Judith didn’t speak for a few moments. “I’m Judith Gray. Came from Pure Heart.”

“Man, we *own* this family!” Shane’s voice rose back up, bringing laughter from all but Judith.

“Pure Heart Church of Christ. And uhm . . . I’m here to strengthen my faith. To pray to God, and . . . listen for His reply. To study His word. So that I may know Him better.”

The circle was of silence, nods.

“Well hey, can’t go wrong with that, right?” Thatcher nodded. “Yeah. Sam?”

“.....”

“.....”

“..... uhm . . .”

“.....”

“..... Sorry, what was the question again?”

“Well, your name, to start off.”

There was laughter. There were questions. There was an absence of words, an absence Sam had to fill.

“Your name, your church, then your . . . your reason for coming here, coming to camp?”

“Right, of course . . . I’m Sam. Came from Pure Heart Church of Christ, as, as well. And I, um . . . I came here to, u-uhm . . . I want to, n-need to, really, um . . . well, I haven’t been . . . I’ve never been, um . . . haven’t yet been . . . . .  
..”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”



“Serve!”

A thud, then the ball whirled into the air, scattering droplets from one corner of the pool to the other. It was family against family, teams divided on either side of a net, swimming with their shirts still on. Sam looked down at his, floating around him, turned almost gelatinous under the water like an extra layer of skin, retracting tightly about his body when he leapt. The ball bounced back and forth.

Sam was near the back corner. His hands remained slightly raised while his eyes, squinting in the sun, struggled to follow the ball, until it splashed loudly a few players to Sam’s right.

“*Ohh!*” Calvin whooped from the other side. “That’s out, son.”

A teammate floated slowly to the back of Sam’s side of the pool. The ball was tossed back over the barrier, into Calvin’s hand.

“Alright, who wants to serve?” Calvin asked. “I’m getting tired of it.”

“I’ll do it,” she said.

“Alright!” He transferred it. “First-come, first-server.”

She caught the ball, then held it up high in her left hand. The cloth of her dark shirt, lifted out of the water, clung tightly to her shoulder and forearm. She brought one fist to the ball from beneath, sending it soaring across the sun.

The ball continued endlessly. Sam kept his hands slightly raised. Hers were relaxed, submerged, subdued eyes wandering from ball to barrier to nothing at all, hovering over the waters, detached. Sam watched her, watched her watch the water. His toes tapped the pool floor. It was the same water to have seen immersions of other kinds, other people achieving other unions. It was the same water they shared, but she was over there. She was behind the net.

A splash beside him; another teammate missed the swing and sank into the water.

“Yerrr out! Our ball.”

She was behind the net and he wanted to speak to her. Wanted to say something that would make her look away from the water and look at him within in the water, and if she saw him there in the water would she see what he was?

Would she see what he hadn't done? Would she see the water he was not within? Would she pull him out of the pool together with her, or would she leave him there floating and awkward in the floating layer of his shirt?

A splash—another of Sam's teammates entered the water.

"Boom. Get wrecked, as the kids say. Ours."

The ball transferred back to her. She lifted and launched it, then hefted herself up onto concrete, slipping from the waters as an artifact from sand. She walked to the far end of the pool area, lifted a water bottle from the ground, drank. A lock of hair came unstrung and dangled momentarily over her face. A skin of gray cloth tightened, wet but lifted out of the water. It clung to her body, tight. A quake felt mute magnitude, queasy.

Her eyes flicked upwards at his.

"Look alive!"

The ball collided with Sam's head, knocking his glasses off and splashing water into his eyes.

"Whoaaa, man down!"

"I'm alright," Sam said, waving one hand vaguely behind him while the other retrieved his glasses. "I'm good."

"He fell serving his people," a teammate said. "As a soldier does."

Sam lifted himself onto the concrete and sat beside Shane, who had been struck out from Sam's team near the start of the game.

"Man," Calvin said. "Let Grace serve again, she's making all these guys fall over!"

The game continued.

"She was certainly your downfall," Shane said after a while.

Sam turned to Shane. "What?"

"Grace." He nodded toward her. "Something tells me you were . . ." A grin gripped him. ". . . having a little trouble focusing out there."

Sam smiled with something like pain. He looked down. "Guess so."

"When you gonna get up the nerve to make a move?"

"I don't know."

"I'm telling you, she'd go for you, dude. Once she gets to know you. But you—"  
—He slapped Sam's back wetly. "—gotta give her that opportunity."

"I don't think she even knows who I am."

“Oh, she at least knows your name, we’re not that big a youth group. Hell, she knows Judith, I think, and Judith knows everyone. Maybe try to get her to hang out with us or something. Have you, like . . . ever spoken to her?”

“Not really.”

Shane sighed, turning away. “Well, that’s step number one. Words are the beginning.”

“I know.”

Sam’s feet dangled in the water, motion obscuring everything.

“Serve!”



The cabin was quiet. Rustling snores and vague inhalations stirred among the bunks. Sunlight came faint through the few windows in the brick walls. Sam sat on a top bunk, able to see the whole cabin, double-bunked beds stretching out with campers taking advantage of the allotted hour for rest. Sam was not resting. He sat, legs fixedly crossed, hands folded meditatively, the pale tome lying in front of him on the wrinkled sheets.

He closed his eyes. Guidance toward the right. Wisdom to find the hidden. Strength to apply. A submission, open arms, inviting greater control.

He lifted the book and tilted it onto its spine. Eyes still closed, he moved his thumbs in random directions, settling eventually on a page. His eyes flitted open, and with them, the book.

*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

He inhaled.



NO temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.  
*none; absolute*

No TEMPTATION has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.  
*temptation, no—but else?*

No temptation HAS overtaken you except what is common to mankind.  
*but will—Revelation again, a tie between; proof to the*

No temptation has OVERTAKEN you except what is common to mankind.  
*but still lives within; Nike shorts and fertile*

No temptation has overtaken YOU except what is common to mankind.  
*who else? aha, caught*

No temptation has overtaken you EXCEPT what is common to mankind.  
*you and your human vanity, you and still overtaken, then; a catch*

No temptation has overtaken you except WHAT is common to mankind.  
*nothing there perhaps opposed whom?*

No temptation has overtaken you except what IS common to mankind.  
*specific person—She  
what more is coming there is nothing there*

No temptation has overtaken you except what is COMMON to mankind.  
*again, still overtaken—but by?*

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common TO mankind.  
*what more is coming nothing there either*

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to MANKIND.  
*what other kind—human,  
angel, opposite of*

Sam straightened his glasses, and exhaled.

Mankind meant many things. Common, commonly thought, for the temptation to come readily, to appear in full display. And when it didn't? What of the snake that wears no skin, the poison that is in the veins already, with no origin except his own heart? And it would find him, inevitably, blinded and stumbling in some untellable direction, the light of his closed eyes so similar to Heaven that he would have never turned around, at end overtaken—what then? Who was to answer for that?

*Missing word . . . a missing word . . .*

*Mankind was prone; soil with separated rib concocted devilishly, considerable but common contradiction of the human species, a sleeping snake as that in the Garden, a pre-arranged danger posed to paralyze at a moment's glance, then move to render oneself overtaken, with no*

*Camp Havenside*

*further interference than the innate unfolding of predestined disaster—perhaps that was what; a fuse lit at creation until the flame is upon us, upon him—Book of Revelation.*

*An easy excuse; a tantrum against his own responsibility, temptation unto self-indulgence. An escape, except at the expense of no one. Blood ran down the stair steps of creation, fall after Fall. Someone needed to sit at the base throne and take the pent-up punishment that has descended generation after generation. Someone had to—who?*

“You . . .”

Sam exhaled, then inhaled, and straightened his glasses again.

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can BEAR.  
*know my limits – even I*

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you CAN bear.  
*rather cannot? what beyond impossible*

He will not let you be tempted beyond what YOU can bear.  
*who else – ah, Him*

He will not let you be tempted beyond WHAT you can bear.  
*but He and I as one, we* *again, refer whom* *me* *Ea* *Nt* *Fo* *R* *y* *O* *u*

He will not let you be tempted BEYOND what you can bear.  
*wet tight gray, a branch for picking* *won't be long before you* **STOP IT**

He will not let you be TEMPTED beyond what you can bear.  
*come back – focus* *what worse torment possible* *what More is coming*  
*I know your secrets*

He will not let you BE tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*nothing there, damn* *no, don't say*

He will not let YOU be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*the glistening shine of her hair* *Satan* *that's you, isn't* *cast the devil from my thoughts* *Satan*

He will not LET you be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*rather force happening? test, perhaps*

He will NOT let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*absolute again* *such thing?* *yes, devil*

He WILL not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*absolute again* *again* *again* *again*

HE will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
*then who will* *who*

*who*

*who will*

Water would do it. It would muddle the sounds of his thoughts until he couldn't hear them anymore, as through an ocean. It would wake up the sins sleeping inside of him, the ones he couldn't see although he knew they were there.

It would wash them from his heart. Water would.

Sam looked at the ceiling, looked at it as if to see through it. Time was just a shortening tether. And maybe it was that simple. He closed his eyes and pressed

his fingertips into the lids. He saw the simmering lake of coals. He opened, then closed his eyes again and saw the water. An immersion all the same.

*But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

Water would do it.

The door across from him opened, letting in Shane and Timothy, voices loud, their faces glistening in sweat.

“—ver stop being that way. That is what she is, and I don’t know how else to say it,” Shane said, head shaking.

“I don’t think of her that way,” Timothy said lightly.

“Well of course you don’t, you’re on her good side.” Shane pulled off a darkened tank top. “Get on her bad side, and you’ll see what I’m saying.”

“Who?” Sam asked.

“Judith,” Shane said rancorously. “Who else.”

“She was a little salty with Shane during Frisbee just now.”

“Yeah, that’s one way to put it.” Shane hopped onto his bed in the upper bunk next to Sam’s; Timothy sat on the bunk beneath it. “Her dad just so happens to run the church, gets up on stage once a week, and suddenly she’s the fuckin’ Virgin Mary.”

“Language,” Timothy mumbled.

“What happened, exactly?” Sam asked.

Shane sighed. “We’re playing Frisbee in a circle, right? And it’s me and Molly next to each other, and like seven other people, Judith being one of them. All of a sudden me and Molly accidentally catch the Frisbee at the same time, holding it between us, and so she starts slappin’ and I start pullin’, just playing, joking, laughing, whatever. Then Judith comes between us, takes it, and says—loudly and in front of everyone—‘keep it up like this, and you’ll be starting a family in no time.’ And *no*, it did not sound like a joke. Normally I’d think it was, and normally I wouldn’t get annoyed about it if I didn’t know Judith, and if I didn’t know she was trying to like, embarrass me or punish me or some shit.”

“Language,” Timothy said, slightly louder. “I mean, you don’t *know* she was meaning it like that or whatever, like, you can’t be sure.”

“You know she was, Timothy,” Shane replied downward. “That’s just what she does. Anytime anybody does something *slightly* off-color, she’s gotta get all judge-y and gang up against them. It’s just what she does. You know what I mean, Sam.”

Sam didn't reply. He peered down to Timothy, petite and pale beneath a broad and bare-skinned Shane.

"I'm telling you, dude, one of these days, she's gonna slip up, *she's* gonna be the one to feel ashamed," Shane said, lying face-up. "And when she does, so help me God, this whole camp is gonna know about it."



The door opened.

*This is, yea—this is it.*

*That's the cabin?*

*Yea, Molly told me all about it.*

*It's so . . . dark . . .*

*It's so weird, like, what is this one cabin doing all  
the way out here? Like what did it used to be?*

*Hey, all I know is one thing,  
and that's that I wanna go in there.*

*Of course you do . . .*

*And just what is that supposed to mean?*

*Hehehebe . . .*

*You're just too scared to come in with me.*

*No, I—*

*Being a little miss priss over there?*

*No! I just . . .*

*Hey, you're the one still standing outside of it.*

*Well, you know what I heard?*

C. S. W.

*What's—*

*Wanna know what Shane told me?*

*What?*

*If you go inside, even just once, even just out of  
curiosity . . . then Gilly will come and get you.*

*Oh, stop it.*

*Who?*

*Gilly. It's a—*

The door shut.

*Camp Havenside*



C. S. W.

*thrssh*



Sam stood with people in front of him and behind him, the long line for canteen. They were huddled against the brick wall of a long, rectangular brick-building where, a few tens of campers down the line, counselors served canteen from a wide window, handing out candy bars, bags of chips, sodas in Styrofoam cups. The line moved slowly.

Sam looked over his shoulder. Sitting at one of the picnic tables, Shane poked Molly in the nose and she covered her face, laughing. Standing beside a tree, Thatcher looked down at Timothy, alternately nodding and speaking. In line behind Sam, next to the nurse's office adjoined to the same building, three girls yelped and jolted out of line, a wasp hovering over them, between their waving hands. Sam turned back forward, kept waiting.

A few moments later, he walked away from the window holding a Twix bar and a Powerade-Sprite mixture. He looked up at the sky; looked at its thickening blue. He looked down at his food, at the cup, and he found it all soon splashing into his face, dripping down his glasses.

Sam looked up, and saw her.

"Oh, man."

"O-oh, I . . . s-s-sorry, I d . . ."

"It's, uh . . ."

She shook her hands a little, tried to get it off of her.

"Y-yeah-h, I, um . . . I wasn't . . . I didn't, uhm . . ."

Sam's mouth opened. It stayed opened.

She had already walked past him, didn't seem to notice he was saying anything. In a few seconds, she was mid-sentence again with someone else. Sam stood still.

He turned back around, went to sit at a table.



Navy hues descended upon the camp. A Frisbee circled between six campers; Sam watched from beside a roofed pavilion, rows of metal folding chairs lined up on its concrete floor. The blue screen of the hymn projector was already on for evening worship, but displayed no words.

“Look out!” Molly cried, sending the disc far away, across the wide central field of Camp Havenside. It collided distantly with a tree between the five clustered boys’ cabins, and tumbled to the ground. Shane whipped around to face her.

“As much as I wish, I’m actually not twenty feet tall, Molly,” he said. “Wanna go and fetch that?—oh wait, you *can’t*. Looks like I’ll have to.”

“See, that’s what I was planning all along! Just to make you suffer!” she called after him. He stepped away. Molly turned and giggled to a near grimace at Sam, childish teeth pale under protruding cheeks. “I think he’s *ma-yad* at me.”

She turned and jogged in Shane’s direction; as her frame became smaller, Sam turned away, surveyed. Saw on his left the dirt road strung from behind the pavilion, up against the chapel building, then past the small playground adjoined to it. Beyond that to skirt the cluster of boys’ cabins, veering left into the trees. The sun had all but vanished, and the remnant azure of its departure spread itself across the camp like watercolor. The color of water. Sam looked up. The sky was the color of waiting water.

Sam closed his eyes. Behind him he heard the metal seats being filled one by one, clanking against the hard floor. There were so many of them. With his eyes closed, there were so many of them. It was like he heard how many there were in the world, how many except for him. But he kept his eyes closed, because to turn around and see them would be to see the multitude, to see that which made him lesser. It hung before his thoughts at all times anyway. And there was only one way to remove it, to render him human again among the campers who sat waiting for evening worship behind him; only one way to make him whole. And it was all there before him, waiting.

*What’s your purpose in coming here, coming to camp?*

Waiting water.

The sky darkened further. Frisbees and beatitudes swirled about him. A muscle twitched in paralysis.

He turned to find his seat for evening worship.

Night was falling.

The water of the pond became still, dark. There were no ripples on its surface.

The grass grew crisper, firmer. In the death of sunlight, a faint chill became manifest, and blades of grass were sharper.

The hum of locusts rose in the air. As the night became a deep black, it ceased.

The stars gleamed down from above, but in the forest they were not visible. There was always something blocking them.

And as the colors of the forest changed, the warmth of sunlight withdrew from Camp Havenside.

You can be seated,  
 How's everybody doing tonight?  
 Lemme hear you say, God is good!

*All the time!*

And all the time?

*God is good!*

That's right. That's right, He is. Y'know, I just hope each of y'all churches are competing against one another for who can be the loudest, just saying . . . now no bad blood, but my money's on Pure Heart, that's all I'm saying. That's all.

So, like we talked about yesterday, this week's theme the theme for this trip to Camp Havenside, is 'Will.' About how having a will and knowing what that is and how it fits into our role as Christians . . . it ain't easy. And it's a lot more complicated than it would seem at first glance. Another problem, though, comes whenever we have to acknowledge that there are other wills out there than just our own. Wow. Yeah, there's other people out there and stuff, it's just, whoa, crazy. Having to factor in all those wills may seem even more difficult and even more complicated, but finding the first will that you're gonna have to deal with as a follower of Christ—it's actually pretty easy. And that's because it's literally all around you, all the time: it's the will of the world.

The will of the world is around you constantly. You ever think about that? Nowadays with the iPhones and the laptops and Snapchat and other things that are gonna make me sound real old, you're exposed to this stuff all the time. Which means it's gonna be even harder for you to distinguish yourself from that world when it's got a hundred and one ways to reach you.

But since biblical times, the will of Christians has always kinda run against the will of the world around us. It's just a natural thing. Back then, at least in Roman times, it was illegal for us to even . . . exist, like, in order to exist and still be following the law, you had to worship Caesar, you couldn't worship God, and most importantly, you couldn't follow Jesus. Those that did, most of the time, were taken from their homes, put on stakes, and burned alive to light the royal garden. Back then, that was what they did to us Christians whenever they found us.

*the wriggling, that horrific screaming*

But what about some of the more complicated situations? What about some of the questions that people had to ask then, and they still have to ask now? Now persecution may not be immediately relevant to you, true. But things still get in the way, right? There's always things trying to distract you, to prevent you from having the will that He wants you to have. That's why we, as Christians—you hear this all the time, but it's true—we as Christians need to strive to be in this world, but not of this world. And this can be a difficult thing to manage.

We see so many examples of this in the Bible, one of 'em is in Genesis, chapter thirty-nine. See, here Joseph is put in charge of the house of Potiphar. And he's got everything to himself, no one watching over him; he's the man of the house. And it's written:

*Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!'*

*But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'*

Now *that's* willpower, am I right, boys? If you've got this woman, attractive enough for a Pharaoh's official to marry, and she's telling you 'no, it's no big deal, really, just come with me, no one will have to know about anything at all!' That's pretty tempting, right? But Joseph is better than that. Joseph tells her 'No, I won't, I'm a man of God, and *that is not what men of God do,*' amen?

Now what I'm getting from this story is that, if you wanna have a will of your own—like we talked about last night—but a will of your own that matches up with His will, then we no longer have any excuses. Right? We can't blame what our will is on the wills of the people around us. We can't say, 'okay, Jesus, I like what you're saying, I really like being able to go to church and call myself a Christian, but there's this thing that everyone else is doing and that I really want to do.' It doesn't work like that. It doesn't matter if everyone else is doing it; the world can try and tell you that it's perfectly normal and natural and everybody does it—or my favorite one, that it's 'only human' for you to do it. I'm only human, right? So *what* if I kill someone; I'm only human. So *what* if I have sex before marriage; I'm only human, right? But if it goes against what God says, you

don't do it. Anybody else would've slept with Potiphar's wife, but Joseph said, 'absolutely not—<sup>Christlike, become a god</sup> God has commanded me <sup>not you</sup> not to do that, and that right there is all the reason I need to say no.' Simple as that. <sup>follow</sup> <sup>obey</sup> That's what it means to be a Christian.

If we turn to Romans chapter twelve, <sup>give me orders</sup> we read this verse, right at the beginning of the chapter—it says, <sup>Apostles, disciplines</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and water, cleaned new acceptable and perfect.* Notice the big keyword there, 'you may discern what is the will of God.' <sup>synonymous; Kant</sup> Funny how that word ends up in there, huh? See, that, brothers and sisters—guys, list'n—<sup>i'm listening.</sup> that right there is all you need to understand this verse, and to understand why we need to follow it: By not conforming to the world around us, we are following the will of God. We're not supposed to stand out just to stand out. We're supposed to stand out because otherwise, <sup>universal, whole world, church is for all.</sup> we're letting ourselves become <sup>counterculture</sup> enticed by the world and getting sucked into it, and we start becoming okay with the way the world is, and before you know it, <sup>earth wearing red dress</sup> we're no longer following God at that point. <sup>blood of the saints, Whore of Babylon, Revelation yet again</sup> And that's just a truth we've gotta realize if we're gonna follow Christ in a world that doesn't want anything to do with Him. <sup>not me</sup> <sup>never me</sup> <sup>screaming</sup>

“We talk about following God like it’s supposed to be easy, like it’s never supposed to be unpleasant or painful or anything like that, but unfortunately, that’s just not true. It’s supposed to be pretty tough, y’know, we all have our crosses to bear.

And it’s not easy to make that kind of commitment. In Matthew chapter six, the Bible tells us that nobody can serve two different masters. *Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other*, verse twenty-four. And I think that’s true, especially true when it comes to this question of . . . like, who’s it gonna be? Is it gonna be God, God’s will? Or is it gonna be the world’s will? And it sounds so simple that way, but I think what Calvin more or less laid out tonight is that it is *not*, it’s not simple at all. There’s plenty of things that hold us back, right? Plenty of things. What are some of those things for you guys?”

“ . . . ”

“Like, what’s . . . what’s gonna try and keep me for itself, and not let me be with Him?”

“ . . . ”

“I think one of the Devil’s biggest weapons is a low self-esteem, right? I mean, one of his three titles is Accuser, and he’ll actually—something I’ve found with my time in youth ministry is that, with a lot of teenagers, I think he uses their own shame, their own insecurity and guilt, and he uses those negative emotions to paralyze those people even more. Make them feel even less worthy of a life with God, and it makes



baptism that much harder for them because they feel like they  
don't deserve it. Yeah. So—"

"What's the solution?"

"—Judith, y—sorry, what? What'd you say, Sam?"

"What's the solution? If somebody's own personal shame and guilt makes them want to be baptized even less . . . I mean, what would you say to someone like that?"

" . . . I suppose I'd say that the only real answer to a lack of self-love is God. He loves you better than you can, so much better than you can. In that case, I mean, it's like, of course you feel bad about yourself, of course you feel unworthy. If you haven't had your shame cleansed by His blood, then you're gonna feel bad about yourself, it's only natural. Nobody can really have self-love—one that is authentic, at least—if they don't have His love first. So, the only real solution is to join with Him in a life together. His love is what you really need, it's what everybody really needs."

" . . . "

" . . . "

" . . . "

"Does that answer your question?"



*As I went down in the river to pray  
Studying about that good old way  
And who shall wear the robe and crown  
Good Lord, show me the way!*

*O sinners, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
Come on sinners, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray*

*As I went down in the river to pray  
Studying about that good old way  
And who shall wear the starry crown  
Good Lord, show me the way!*

“Alright, everyone, before we go to bed . . . everyone go to the pool.”

The words were a summons, an ecstatic end to the devotional but an extension of the hymn’s volume. Arms previously joined in multiple concentric circles disbanded all at once, turned to a murmuring haste towards the pool. Sam inhaled. The stars twinkled mutedly.

“So, as a lot of y’all seemed to have figured out,” Calvin began, standing at the heart of the pool with one hand on the thin blond boy’s shoulder, “Joshua here has decided that he wants to give his will to the One most worthy of possessing it, and dedicate the rest of his life to serving Jesus Christ. Joshua, look around you.”

The golden head turned.

“Right now, in this very instant, you’re looking at the family you’ll keep for the rest of your life. Not just these people here, not even just the Church, but one day, the Heavenly Kingdom of God. All you need to do is answer me a few questions.”

Joshua straightened, shook the hair from his eyes.

“Joshua Green, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?”

“Yes.”

Resolute yet gentle.

“And do you believe that He died for your sins, so that you might be forgiven for your sins and spend a life with Him for the rest of eternity?”

“Yes.”

Relieved like the exhalation of a mended wound.

“Then, Joshua Green, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins.”

*grlgrlgrlgrlgrl . . .*

“ . . . ah!”

There were cheers, and bodies after bodies threw themselves into the water. It looked brighter than in daylight, as if electrified by the same spirit for which it baptized.

Sam remained where he sat, feet wavering in the water. When it was still, it looked like a block of ice, a glacier in which his feet were already trapped. He couldn’t leave it. He couldn’t lift himself out of it. But how was the rest of him going to get inside of it. Would it at all.

*you might be forgiven for your sins and spend a* Life was a terminal state. Life was a single unending interval of struggle, caged by his eternal sleep. But life, true life, was in that pool waiting for him and yet still he sat, unmoving, unsatisfied, unable—somehow worse than unwilling—to even take a dip at all. He looked at his palms, clenching, unclenching. Of dust made, to dust return. He stared at his unpierced palms; to see through them would be all. It would be all he needed. All he needed in order to do what Joshua had just done.

He felt a crack in his sandpaper throat. A single dip, a backwards lean guided by an arm, one plunge like a thunderbolt into a pool already static with the radiance of a promise. He watched the campers dive into the water and cover Joshua with arms, with love, with water and to Sam he looked like an offering already burnt. A space lay hollow in the center of Sam’s body, a palpable lack as if he were missing an organ. What was the rest of him doing, then, other than a hackneyed, frantic attempt to conceal the invisible, to hide that which was not there at all, continuing breath, repeating his pulse, as if death were not the sole purpose of the game. A death to the world. A death to the self. Whether into the waiting water or into the dirt. One plunge was all—one single baptism would relieve him, as a deer pants for streams of water.

“What is that?”

Molly stood behind him. She pointed to a dark object floating around the other bend of the L-shaped pool, opposite from the baptism. Turning, Sam saw

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it was a fallen branch floating dead atop the surface, as quickly as Shane barked in a savage voice into Molly's ear:

*"It's Gilly!"*

She erupted into shrieks both of terror and of ecstasy, turning to thrash at him as he thrashed at her, their infinite exchanges of touch. The lifeless branch floated like a drowning man.

“Alright, lights out.”

The switch audibly flipped, and darkness took the cabin.

*Camp Havenside*

*sft . . .*

$\underline{sfff}bt, sst \dots$

$sft, sft \dots$

*Camp Havenside*

“Mmmm . . .”



*“Mmn . . . nmnb . . .”*

*“Mmmtri . . . mm, tree . . .”*

“ . . . . . *nnnnnnnnnnh* trees, the . . . the trees . . . ”

“Oh gosh, this again . . .”

*sft* . . .

“... *mnh* trees . . . trees . . . t-t-t-t-*tree*—”

“Stop it . . .”

. . . . . *shrift* . . .

*Camp Havenside*

*rrrrllllllbbb . . . bbbbbbhub . . .*

*sft . . .*

*rrrrllllllbbb . . . bbbbbbhub . . .*

“The t-trees are walking . . .”

“Caleb, will you please shut it . . .”

*rrrrlllllbbb . . . bbbbbbub . . .*

“The trees . . . walking . . .”

*rrrrlllllbbb . . . bbbbbbub . . .*

“Walking, the trees are . . . walking . . .”

“Ugh . . .”

*Camp Havenside*

“The trees . . . are walking . . .”

*rrrrllllllbbb . . . bbbbbbhub . . .*

“Walking . . .”

*rrrrllllllbbb . . . bbbbbbhub . . .*

“Walking, they’re . . . walking . . .”

*sssfFffz.*

*rrrrllllbb . . . . .*

*ssnnrrrrkkkkkkbb . . .*

“The trees . . . the trees are walking . . . . .”

*rrrrllllbb . . . . .*

*ssssnn . . . ssnnrrrrkkkkbb . . .*

*Camp Havenside*

*rrrrllllbb . . . . .*



*eeuuuggggghhhhaagghh . . . . .*

Sam opened his eyes. He was already standing up.

His eyes were on the trunk of a tree that looked black all over. It was not dead, but it did not look like it was alive. He did not know when he started seeing it but felt he had been looking at it for a long time.

He looked up, moving for the first time that he could remember. The leaves of the tree were still there, but a pale gray. Behind it and all around it were other trees of the same black trunk and the same pallid leaves, and it occurred to him then that there was no color anywhere around him. He looked down at himself, and he was gray too. He was also naked, but there didn't seem to be anyone in the forest other than him. Except for christ.

Sam saw christ on his left, crouching against the trunk of a tree, holding onto it for balance. Sam attempted to cover his body with his arms, but christ did not seem to notice. He was looking directly into Sam's eyes.

christ was scared. His face was haggard, pale, and though he was beautiful in a sense he also looked dead. His stare was so hard it felt like he was trying to tell Sam something, like he was remembering something he had forgotten, or had tried to forget.

Sam wanted to ask christ why he was scared. He wanted to ask him where everyone was, because he felt that they were somewhere. But christ's eyes were watering slightly at the base of the lids, shaking in their sockets, and Sam felt he no longer wanted to ask those questions because the answer was something bad.

But after Sam had been looking at christ for long enough, he realized something. christ was not looking at Sam. He was looking behind Sam.