

# DEATH BY RELIGION

From the series *Why Jesus Hates Religion*

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**Reverend:** Pull out your outlines. We're beginning this series *Why Does Jesus Hate Religion* and I know right away you say that, aren't you a religious guy? And isn't this a religious place? And so what is religion, as we start? Religion is our attempt to bridge the gap between God and us. It is our way of trying to understand the infinite. It's our way to try to know what is unknowable. Religion is trying to understand how to get from this life to the next life. Religion is a system of beliefs, practices, rules, where we're trying to connect with God. That's the definition of religion. And we can all agree that in religion there's some really good things. There's some beautiful things in religion. There's this sense of reverence and awe. There's architecture that's a part of our religious tradition where there are these powerful, spiritual places that you go into and it creates a great sense of awe. There is a sense of truth to live by, there's people to live with, sense of community. Lots of good things in religion so the question would be, why would Jesus hate that? And then there's a lot of weird things in religion, right? We can all agree with you're not so sure there's weird things in religion? Because the way we do things are right but the way other people do things are weird. But if you grew up in a church and your church people wore 3 piece suits and they came dressed and there was a sense of awe and music was kind of more quiet and there was a sense of reverence, you'd come into this and think, I don't think this is right. This is weird. What do you think? God can't hear? Does it need to be – so there's that. So you might think it's weird. What was that about everybody extending a hand? That's kind of a weird thing to do at kids, isn't it? Because we do it, it's not weird. But other people if you came in you'd go, that's weird. I'll tell you what's weird to me and this might be offensive to some of you but you know every once in a while when somebody says they see Mary's face on a tortilla and then they build a shrine to the tortilla or Jesus' face on a tree? To me that's weird because how do you know it looks like Mary? There's no description for what Mary looked like in the Bible. There's no physical description for Jesus. That's just weird. And religion has weird. People dress weird. But is that why Jesus hates religion because it's just got some weirdness to it? The way we do things is a little weird? Or does he hate it because some things are just painful about religion. I mean we can admit that religion all has sort of a – it leads to kind of a legalistic mindset, right? If you do certain things then God loves you and here's the list and if you don't do those things then God doesn't love you so much and the problem with that, right away, is that nobody lives up to that rule. So what do we all do?

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We pretend. Okay, I can't do it but I'll pretend that I'm doing it and I'll look good. And even worse, then we'll judge others for not pretending as well as we do. So I tell the truth. I always tell the truth. You liar. You don't tell the truth. Or I'm better than you. So right away there's the hypocrisy that we're pretending and then that judgmental attitude and intolerance. Is that why Jesus hates religion? Does Jesus hate religion? We're going to go through a series and we're going to look at this because some people, they go that's right. That's why I hate religion. That whole



deal. I'm tired of it. I don't like the hypocrisy, the intolerance, so they just walk away. I understand that.

And they say, I'm just going to find my own way. We'll talk more about that in future weeks but really they're just becoming their own religion or their own way. And then other people are saying, you know what, it might be weird or there might be some painful things to it but I don't have anything else. And I'm looking for religion to bridge that gap. I've got to bridge the gap between me and God. I've got to find some supernatural help and religion's helping me find that supernatural help I need in my life. Or to answer the questions in life. Meaning for life. I might not have the best thing but it's all I've got and so we don't let go of it.

So does Jesus really hate that? Through this series we're going to look at that and you get to decide. Does Jesus really hate religion? And more importantly, do you really love religion? And where do you love religion? How much do you love religion? So we're going to look at that so if you've got your Bibles turn to Matthew 1. We're going to take a big broad sweep of Matthew and how he presents Jesus and in that, what you're going to see is you're going to Jesus. Especially in this kind of a punch in the face to religion because religion is about us bridging the gap. That's fundamentally what religion's about. It's about us bridging the gap between us and God. And right away Matthew and Jesus just punches that message in the face. It's very abrupt.

Look at what it says in Matthew 1:20. It says, As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. This is Joseph, son of David. Now this passage, obviously, very familiar, right? It's Christmas. The angel said, Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit and she will have a son and you are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. You want to underline that in your Bible or in your outlines.

What is Jesus coming? His name is Jesus because he's going to save us from our sins. All right? All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through the prophet. Look, the virgin will conceive a child, she will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God is with us. See how this punches religion in the face?

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Right away because it says, it's not about us bridging a gap between God. It's not about us finding our way to God. Matthew starts right away and it says, it's about God coming to us. You're not good. I'm not good. We can't be good, he's saying. And so Jesus comes to save us from our sins. And Jesus is God. He's not a prophet, he's not a guru, He's not a spiritual leader. Jesus shows up and He's God. And He's God in the flesh. It's God with us. God coming to us not us going to God. It's God coming to us. And He's like us. He's embraced humanity to be with us. To rescue us and save us and that's what the Bible calls good news. The gospel. And it is good news because it's God bridging the gap. It's not us bridging the gap. It's not us finding a way.

The Bible always is telling the story of God coming to us. We're always getting ourself in a mess and God is coming to our rescue. It starts in the garden in Genesis, through the Old Testament, God keeps coming. He keeps coming to save us and then Jesus comes in the flesh. And religion is not good news. And that's why Jesus hates it. It's not good news because it's about us trying to find our way to God. And religion makes us read the Bible in a wrong way. When you start with the religious mindset and you read the Bible, you fundamentally go to the Bible and believe it is a book of stories, like Aesop's Fables, that tells you how to live. So that's the whole purpose. It's a bunch of stories. Good moral stories telling us how to live but that's not right.



Because if that was true, the Bible would be primarily about you, teaching you how to live. But that's not the purpose of the Bible. It does that but that's not the primary purpose of the Bible. The primary purpose of the Bible is to tell God's story. It is one book, consisting of a bunch of books, it is one story about how God is telling us about who He is and how He comes to our rescue. How He reveals Himself. The Bible is primarily not a book about what you should do. Then it'd be about you. The Bible is not primarily about you. It's about God. And it's not what you should do, it's what God has done.

And this is important. Why is it so important? Because if you don't get this and you look at the Bible through religious eyes, you're going to miss the big point of the Bible. You're going to miss God all together. You're going to start becoming moral and moralistic and you're going to miss God. Religion makes us read the Bible the wrong way and so we miss God completely. And the whole point. Why does God show up in the person of Jesus? Because we can't save ourselves. We can't be good. And so God comes from Heaven in the person of Jesus to do what we can't do. It bridges the gap.

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Then if you flip over a couple pages in Matthew 4:12. Look at what it says there. When Jesus had heard that John had been arrested, He left Judea and returned to Galilee. Now, if you've got a Bible, circle Galilee. Why is it so important that Jesus goes to Galilee? Because this is an important thing because what is Jesus saying? Where should Jesus have gone if He was a religious person? Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a holy city, it was a city of God. It was where all the good religious people were. But Jesus didn't go to Jerusalem, He goes to Galilee. Why? First, because Galilee was a hugely populated area. There was only a couple hundred thousand people in Jerusalem. There was 3 million people up in the Galilee area in a whole bunch of villages. It was the major trade route. Everything going from Africa and Egypt up north or going south had to go through Israel or anything going from east to west or west to east had to go through Israel. So this was a great trade route. It was where 3 million people lived and these people were courageous, great business people but they were also people that the people in Jerusalem, the religious people, looked down upon. And what's interesting about that, and Jesus is making a point, who doesn't He go to? He doesn't go to the religious people because religious people don't need Jesus.

He goes to people who aren't religious that the religious people are saying, you can't make it. You're not good enough. And Jesus says, that's right and I'm here for you because you'll listen to my message. And so Jesus comes to those people and it says, He returned to Galilee then He went first to Nazareth, then He left there and He moved to Capernaum beside the Sea of Galilee and He said, and this fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. From then on Jesus began to preach repent from your sins and turn to God for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.

Jesus is saying two things when he shows up. First, repent, which means to turn around. What are you supposed to turn around from? Your religion and your sin, thinking that you can find a way to God. Don't go there thinking that you can bridge the gap. You've got to come around and come to me because the Kingdom of God is here and what is the Kingdom of God? If you don't know the right answer in church you always go with Jesus, right? What is the Kingdom of God? It is His message and the purpose. He's saying the Kingdom of God is here. I'm the Kingdom of God, is what He's saying. How do you enter the Kingdom of God?

**Congregation:** Jesus.

**Reverend:** That's a good answer, Jesus, but not right. How do you enter the Kingdom of God? You turn around. You stop trying to make yourself righteous. You turn around and you come to?

**Congregation:** Jesus.

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**Reverend:** Good. We're getting there. So we come to Jesus. He says come to me. Jesus hates religion because He's saying it's no way to God. And then look at what he says. You can't work yourself, you can't make yourself righteous. Jesus is the one who makes you righteous. In Matthew 8 it says large crowds – if you've got a Bible turn there because you want to mark it. Can't just let you read it. I'm going to have to take this off the screens, right? Large crowds follow Jesus as he came down the mountainside.

Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before Him. "Lord", the man said, "if you're willing you can heal me and make me clean." Jesus reached out, touched him, and said, "I am willing. Be healed." And instantly the leprosy disappeared. Then Jesus said to him, "Go to the priest. Let him examine you. Take along the offering required by the law of Moses by those who have been leprosy and this will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed." Here again, Jesus is in the face of the religious people.

Here He's traveling through Galilee, He's talking about, I'm the Kingdom, you've got to come to me, it's not about religion and so now this guy with leprosy comes up to him and leprosy is a disease that alienated you from community. You couldn't live in community with other people. You had to live by yourself. It was living death. Leprosy is the disease in the Bible that pictures our spiritual condition. Living death. Separated from everyone and everything. So Jesus heals this person. Jesus has the power of healing. And where does he send the guy? He sends him to the religious leaders and what's the purpose of it?

There's a couple but primarily Jesus is saying, what your religion can't do, heal people, I can. It's kind of in their face, isn't it? And He's saying, look. What you can't do I can. I can heal disease. I can heal sin. And the next story is even more in their face. Look at Matthew 9. All right? Just getting a picture. And this is how Matthew presents Jesus. Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. Some people brought him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Be encouraged, my child. Your sins are forgiven." What do you think that statement's going to do to the religious people? That's going to get them hot and bothered.

But some of the teachers of the religious law said to themselves, that's blasphemy. Does he think he's God? And the obvious answer is?

**Congregation:** Yes.

**Reverend:** Yeah. People who say Jesus didn't claim to be God simply haven't read this. All right? Because he says, does he think he's God? Jesus knew what they were thinking and He says, "Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven or stand up and walk?" Which is easier to say? Come on, take a side. Which is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven because you can't see if that happens, but if you say stand up and walk there's got to be some power there. So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins. Who alone can forgive sin?

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**Congregation:** God.

**Reverend:** God. He said, so I'm going to show to you I'm God, then he turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up. Pick up your mat. Go home." And the man jumped up and he went home. Yeah! So Jesus is saying, I can do what religion can't do. I can?



**Congregation:** Heal.

**Reverend:** And? Forgive sins. All right? Why did people kill Jesus? Because he talked about love? People don't kill Mr. Rogers. If Jesus would've come and said, God is a God of love, they would've said, that's right. We believe in that God. God delivered us out of the slavery of Egypt. He gave us the Torah, yes, God is the God of love. That would not have made them kill Jesus. If Jesus would've said, there is salvation from sin. They would've said, that's right. That's why we have the temple and the sacrificial system and the priest. We believe there's forgiveness of sins. We celebrate Yom Kippur, the Passover, we believe that. We've got our way of doing that. They wouldn't have killed Him if He just said that.

If He would've said to them, the Kingdom of God is coming, they wouldn't have been really mad about that. They're going, yeah, we've read Daniel 2 and 7, we're all about somebody coming and destroying the power of Rome. But Jesus didn't say that. Jesus said to them, God is a God of love and I am God and I've come to bridge the gap that you couldn't. He's saying, I am the Kingdom of God. I am the King and I bring the Kingdom and I am the only way that you can have forgiveness of sins. You can't be good and there's no system of making you good. It isn't that all religions lead to God. No religion leads to God. There's only one way you can get to God and it's through me. Your religion is useless.

And there's only two responses to that by religious people. The first is what they did. To kill Jesus. Or the second, which they did not do, is to then say, it's true. You can forgive sins. You can heal me, You can make me right, You are the king, You bring the Kingdom of God, and the only response then is to give your whole life to Him. That's why they killed Jesus. He claimed to be God. He came claiming that he bridged the gap and as a result, they killed him.

And then if that isn't clear enough look at John Chapter 2. If you've got a Bible it's four books ahead. Matthew, Mark, Luke, then John. Have a great journey in your Bible because there's a couple of phrases that I really want you to mark in your Bibles because your Bible is such a gift and you want to make it a great tool for you. Listen to all those people turning pages, see students? All right. John 2. It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration so Jesus went to Jerusalem. Remember? He goes to Jerusalem a couple of times but his ministry is up in Galilee.

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In the temple area He saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices. He also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money and this was a really sordid way for them to even make more money. Jesus made a whip from some rope and chased them out of the temple. He drove the sheep and the cattle, scattered the money changers, coins all over the floor, and turned over their tables. Would you love to have seen this? This is one thing that I hope in Heaven they've got like you get to see things that Jesus did.

Then going over to the people who sold the doves, He told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace." Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the scriptures, passions for God's house will consume me. But the Jewish leaders demanded, what are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it. You've got the power to take control of the temple, what's your proof. "All right," Jesus said. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up?" What? It has taken 46 years to build the temple. You can't rebuild it in three days but when Jesus said this temple, He meant His own body.

Now, what's happening here is Jesus comes to the temple area and they've got all of these obstacles and these barriers, and He sees the temple and so He's looking at it because the temple was a big religious thing, right? And the whole sacrificial system, that's just a big religious thing, right? And the priesthood, that's just a big religious thing, right? And The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, that's all a big religious thing, right? Because in the Old Testament God was all about religion but then He changed His mind because He said, that's not helping people. And so in the New Testament He's all about something else.

And right now you're feeling uncomfortable because you're going, that can't be right. And you're right because it isn't right. Because the Old Testament isn't all about religion. The temple is not religious. The priesthood wasn't designed to be a religious thing. The Old Testament sacrificial system wasn't religious. The problem was people turned it into religious stuff and they made it empty ritual. So Jesus is angry at them because the temple, the tabernacle in the Old Testament, the temple was the place of God's presence. God coming to this Earth but what did they do? They made the temple a place where there were all of these barriers. If you were a gentile, meaning not an Israelite person, you couldn't even get real close to the temple. There was a court for just the gentiles.

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But if you would convert and become a Jew you could get a little bit closer and women, you've got to love this because this is what religion always does, and they said if you're a woman you're second class. And all the women went – right. And so you can only get so close but men, because we're obviously better, can get a little bit closer and then if you're a priest you could even get closer and then all of these barriers and they had made all of this religion and empty stuff, it was hierarchical and it was barriers that God never wanted because they turned the temple into a religious thing.

God wasn't religious in the Old Testament and turned nonreligious. What was the purpose of all the stuff in the Old Testament? It was the trailer to the movie. The Old Testament was just showing you these beautiful trailers. Passover trailer, you know, you can pass over death. Yom Kippur, there is forgiveness. Temple, God is coming to your rescue. The priest, all the sacrificial system, there's a way to cover your sin. All of these things. The trailer and who's the movie?

**Congregation:** Jesus.

**Reverend:** That's right. So when Jesus shows up, do you need the trailers anymore? No, because you've got the movie. Yeah! So that's the purpose of it. So Jesus says the most startling statement to these people. My body is the?

**Congregation:** Temple.

**Reverend:** Temple. Why do we need the temple? Because Jesus says, that's me. That's what I am. So now I bring God to you and you can kill me but I will raise from the third day and I will conquer death, destroy sin, I provide a way for you to have a relationship with God and that's why in Matthew 20 – and I'm getting excited now – it says, then Jesus shouted again and it released His spirit – I guess I'm the only one excited – and He said at that moment the curtain of the sanctuary of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom and the earth shook and rocks split because the temple was the place of God's presence and when Jesus died on the cross the one barrier was this curtain because if we would walk into God with our sin it would destroy us but now Jesus has provided a way and so the curtain is torn and that's why Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life and the only way you can have a relationship with God is through?"

**Congregation:** Me.

**Reverend:** That's right. The movie's here. You don't need the trailer anymore. Woo hoo! So why does Jesus hate religion? Because religion promises things it can never deliver. It promises a way to God. But it isn't a way to God. No religion is a way to God. Jesus alone is the way to God. The Old Testament, all these beautiful pictures, Yom Kippur was just yesterday, beautiful picture of God covering sin, the trailer for the movie of Jesus, what He did. And Jesus is saying, the reason I hate religion is because it promises you supernatural help and it promises you supernatural power and it promises you things that will sustain you in the most difficult moments of life and the reason I hate it is because you will depend on it and then life will crash in on you and you will have nothing.

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And religion, while everything in religion isn't wrong, religion, the most dangerous part about religion is some religion contains so much truth that it really does blind you from what is the truth, which is Jesus. And Jesus is saying, I'm here to love you. To extend God's grace to you. To rescue you. To save you. You are not good, you could never be good, and you can never bridge the gap. It's why I showed up. It's why I had to die on the cross. The Bible, it's all about me, Jesus would say. It's not about you. And it's not about you being moral and good and changing. He goes, I'll take care of that on the other side because you can't be moral and good without my power and without my strength.

Jesus hates religion because it brings death. It destroys. But, you know, as Americans we love religion. We really do. Because look at what religion says. You need to get at it, you need to do your best, and if you work hard God will honor it. In fact, if you work really hard God will owe you and He has to do what you ask Him to do. After all, you're talented, incredible, and smart because you live in Orange County. You don't have to live in Wisconsin so you're better than most people in America to begin with and so you know what? We like that sense because dadgummit, I am good and if God needs to give me a little help, but I can mostly handle it on my own.

Maybe I can illustrate it this way. This might surprise you but every once in a while in my marriage with Laurie, I can be insensitive, unkind, unthoughtful. I can sneer, I can be grumpy, and worse. And when I am, things sort of break apart and then the next day when I come to my sanity I have one of two choices. I can try to earn my way back, a very religious approach to a relationship, or I can go a relation away. What the religious approach looks like is this. I'm lame, bad, weak, so I bring flowers and I give Laurie flowers. I write a card. If I've been really bad I'll try poetry. And then I'll be whimsical and clever and I pay lots of attention and I start affirming every little – have I told you how beautiful you are? Insightful and how bright you are and oh, my gosh, I never thought of that. You're absolutely wonderful and I keep doing it.

Now I'll do that for a period of time and if Laurie doesn't let me out of the doghouse what I'll do is I'll say, hey. A little something for the effort here. Have you not noticed that I've been good and I bought the flowers and I did these things and if she doesn't come around I go – and I like this part – you owe me, honey, because I've been good. And I've been doing what you wanted and I've been charming and affirming and you should give me some things and after all – I'm in control. See? Because even though I've been bad I get control again because it's like, you've got to do these things on my terms in my relationship so I start to push that and I try to make that happen and love disappears and it never works. Because it's religion.

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Or the other approach is I've had the lame day and I can go and say, you know what? I love Laurie and she loves me and love is a gift and it can never be earned. And so she promised to love me and I promised to love her so I will choose to live in love. And I'm apologetic for what I've done and I might buy flowers and I might write a card and even write poetry and I'll affirm her and I'll still be whimsical and clever but if she doesn't respond, that's okay. Because love is a gift. And I'm giving her my gift of love because I love her and I'm making good on my promise and I'm just going to love her and continue to love her because she doesn't owe me and I can't demand her and I'm not in control which is a frightening thing for us in Orange County.

And that always works towards, you know, that brings wholesome. And maybe that'll illustrate for you why Jesus hates religion because for lots of us we want to be in control of our relationship with God and we want to control intimacy and it's like, hey God. It's fine but I'm going to be in control in how close You come to me because it's all about me going to You. It's not You coming in and invading my life. And we don't like the idea that maybe God's in control and God's coming to us and loving us and pursuing us. That's what the Bible says. We like the idea of no, no, I'm pursuing You and the relationship is on my terms.

And personally I like the idea of God owing me. I'm a doer. I like doing. And I have the list. I got all the list, I know, I'm trained in the list. And so I do the things that God's supposed to do and if God doesn't come through and answer my prayers, that's so not okay. And I tell him about that. Because it's like, hey. Did you not see all the things that I've done over here? And the sad part is I lose Jesus in that story. And I don't read the Bible right and I don't understand really who Jesus is and what relationship is and it destroys it. And others of you, maybe you work hard and you perform and you're just shocked that there's real evil in the world and evil crashes in on your life and you're going, wait a second, God. How can anything bad happen in my life? Because I did all the things right and if I do everything right, you owe me.

And it's that religion that you love that Jesus hates. Because it will break your heart, it will break your spirit, and others of us we are so self-righteous and right because we follow the rules and it gives the ability to look down on others and say, that's good and you're growing but I'm just a little bit better than you are. And you know, some day when you've walked with Jesus like I have and spent two hours of prayer everyday and do all these things then you'll be religious like me but until then, you're not as good. And you love the idea of comparing and competing because you love religion and it's destroying your heart and Jesus hates it in you because it's going to break your heart and it's going to break my heart.

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And in this series, we're going to see that Jesus really does hate religion because it hurts you and it only brings death and it makes promises that it can never fulfill and what I think you're going to see, because I see it in my own life, the truth is, I love religion. Because it makes me feel in control. It makes me feel like God has to deal with me on my terms. And the sadness is, my religion is hurting me. And Jesus is sad for that because what Jesus really wants for all of us is to live in the freedom of love. He wants you to wake up everyday with the sense that Jesus is there and He says, I'm with you and we're going to do today together.

And you know what? You're going to fail. There's not surprise there. I already know what's going to happen but I want you to know that forgiveness is available and I want to give you the courage



that you can be honest and authentic with me. You don't have to play games with me. I already know all this and I've taken care of it. And you can go and move together in freedom and authenticity and in the wonder of my love and every day be amazed that it wasn't you who found me but I found you. And I loved you. And you didn't do anything to earn my love. The paralytic, all he did was show up, broken, and Jesus healed him because he had faith that Jesus could do it. And that's my story. That's your story. Jesus comes to us and says, I love you and I will heal you and I will forgive you. It's all about what God's done and when we learn to live in that place we live as loved children of God. We live the story in the Bible. Not as religious people but as loved children of God. That's what we're going to learn in the next few weeks. Will you stand together with me in prayer?

Father, we as people confess that we love our religion too much and when we do we miss you, Jesus. We miss your love, the wonder of your grace, the kindness of your heart, and we become busy, diligent, little religious people thinking that you're so impressed with all that we do and it tires us out and it breaks our heart. Oh, Lord, over these next weeks will you break us down and help us to let go of these lies so that we live and love with you, Jesus. Please help us. We pray in Jesus' name.

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We have a couple more minutes. Would you do me a favor? The reason that we planned the service this way isn't so you can run and get to your car and you'll just bust up other people's worship. But this is an opportunity to take and to hear what God has to say to you. Can you in your heart now just say, God, speak. I need to hear. I love my religion. Maybe you don't even think you love religion. Would you let God speak to you right now and say to you the things that he needs to say as we worship together?

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