TIME OF GRACE

Time of Grace Ministry
When Faith Gets Messy
Gensis 9:18-29, Romans 4:7
November 29, 2026

Pastor Mike Novotny

If I showed you a picture, could you tell me what these two very famous men have in common? The theologian Martin Luther and the great civil rights activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. If you work for the Department of the Obvious, you would say, Pastor Mike, they have the same name. Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr. Did any of you know that Martin Luther King, Jr. was actually born as Mike King, Jr.? And his father discovered the teachings of Martin Luther and was so moved, the father changed his own name to Martin Luther King, Sr. And then renamed his own son Martin Luther King, Jr.

Or maybe you know, if you know a bit about history or theology, that these two men had an incredible impact not just on the lives of their family and friends but on culture, on history. Martin Luther was the Catholic monk and priest who rediscovered the true message of Christianity, that we're saved, we get to heaven, not by these good things we do but by the great thing that Jesus did for us at the cross. He discovered the goodness of the gospel. We're saved by grace and through faith and not by our own efforts and everything in the church changed. And for Dr. King, you know the story. God powerfully used him to open America's eyes to see that God created people and loved people no matter the color of their skin.

But there's a third thing these two men have in common and it's a thing that I wish wasn't true. These two men, before the end of their lives, both had shockingly embarrassing and shameful parts to their story. Like the thing that Martin Luther said about his Jewish neighbors. When Martin Luther rediscovered the gospel, he assumed that all the Jewish people he knew were about to become Christians. The only reason they weren't Christians is because we didn't really understand Christianity. But once he told them that we're saved as a gift, that God's own son came down to do everything, he assumed that they would convert and when they didn't, Luther became bitter and angry and, in fact, vengeful.

Some of you have heard the worst things that Luther officially said, not in like a bad moment at the end of a hard day, but officially said in his writings, he said this, quote, "I advise Christians to set fire to Jewish synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn. I advise that Jewish houses be destroyed and that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews." Can you imagine if your pastors would say that today? "Hey, find your Jewish and

Buddhist and Muslim neighbors, set fire to their homes, assault them on the streets." Martin Luther was the guy who said, "I stand on the word of God and nothing else. My conscience is bound by this book." But in this case, it was absolutely not. It was bound by his own sinfulness and humanity. I love Martin Luther but what he did was shameful and evil and unbelievably sinful.

And then, there's Dr. King. Did any of you know that at the very time when Dr. King was preaching his "I Have a Dream" speech, he was sleeping with a woman who was not his wife? And did you know that it was not his first affair? And did you know that it would not be his last? And did you know that his inner circle of friends, like his best friend who was a pastor, knew all about it, but refused to tell the world about it because he thought the mission was more important than the immorality of the man?

I mean, the unedited versions of our stories are sometimes very uncomfortable, aren't they? There's the saying that says you should never meet your heroes because from a distance, the people that you think are so great, you find out sometimes they're not even good. You see someone online, you admire someone from a distance, and then the closer you get to them, you find out that these humans can be very, very human. And not just in, well, nobody's perfect kind of ways, but in really heartbreaking, disappointing ways. Has this ever happened to you where someone you looked up to, someone you trusted and someone you thought was so good turned out to not be?

This can actually happen with our parents. You know, maybe as a little boy, your dad was your hero and he could do nothing wrong. And then, you got old enough to understand like relationships and people and you realize, "Oh man, my father's completely incapable of having a vulnerable, emotional conversation. My mother never admits -- she always needs the last word. She can never own her part in the story." These people that we love and respect so much, we come to see with open eyes just how flawed they are.

Or maybe it's happened to you with a church or a pastor. Just this morning, I was looking in the comment section of one of the sermons we recently posted to YouTube. It was about being honest with other people, confess your sins to your pastor, and one of the women commented, "I tried that once and I will never do it again." She came in candid confession to her pastor instead of being met with grace and with good advice and with wisdom, it was thrown back in her face and that one bad experience kind of scarred her for the foreseeable future. Does this happen to you? That you're skeptical of organized religion, you carry enough church hurt, that you're, you know, you thought that you could trust these people. You thought that Christians would be a lot like Jesus Christ and when they're not, it's hard to know how to process the reality that you see.

Or maybe the person that you thought would be better and wasn't is the person you saw the last time you brushed your teeth. And maybe you were going to change. Maybe you were going to leave the addiction behind. Maybe you weren't going to go back to old habits and maybe you were going to listen to your counselor and put her wisdom into practice. And then real life happened and you got stressed, and you snapped or you relapsed or you said something that shocks even you and the unedited version of you, what you've said and done, is so deeply disappointing not just to God but to yourself. What do you do in those moments, whether it's with your parents or your pastors or yourself as a person, when we fall short of the kind of people that we want to be?

And that's a big question because there's a lot of reactions that you could have in those moments and most of them are so unhealthy and so destructive for your life and your soul. But today, I want to teach you a different path because one of the amazing and shocking things about the Bible is that it gives us the unedited versions of people's stories. That it doesn't minimize the flaws of the people who you think are the good guys and good girls of the scriptures. Today, God is going to get us back, like to avoid the extremes, and back to this healthy, middle, realistic road that is so good for our soul.

If you're taking notes, here's the big problem I want to wrestle with today is that we need someone better. We're disappointed when people do bad things. Our hearts ache and long for someone better. So, if we're not going to just cover it up and we're not going to just cancel one another, if we're not just going to quit on these things that God loves, what do we do? Well, we're going to find the answer today in the story of Noah. If you don't know, the ending of Noah's story has a shocking ending that will make you question every nursery you've seen that has Noah in it. If you thought it was the story of a bearded zoologist whose giraffes were always smiling for the pictures, the Bible is about to open your eyes today. It actually teaches us something so much more human and realistic and necessary. I'm so glad you're here and that you're watching at home because God is going to teach us so much at the very end of the story of Noah.

The whole story goes from chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Genesis and we're going to look at just the last half of Genesis 9, which begins like this. "The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth." So, if you don't know the story, the earth was so wicked, so vile, so godless, that God himself sent this global flood as like the reset button and he wanted to restart humanity with just eight people, Noah and his wife, their three sons, and their three wives. And this was a really good idea because in the beginning of the story, we hear this about Noah. He was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he, Noah, walked faithfully with God. There's no more bad

influence to influence the kids. There's no more sinful world. It's been wiped out. Instead, we just have this God-fearing, walking faithfully with God family led by the patriarch, Noah. It's going to be a good restart, right?

Next verse. "Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent." Meet the first ever drunk in the Bible, the good guy, Noah. You know, if you had read from the very start to this page of the Bible, you would have met some finger-pointing, others-blaming rebels named Adam and Eve. You'd have met a covetous, jealous, insecure, angry, violent, murderous brother named Cain. You'd have met Lamech who was arrogant, violent, aggressive, polygamist. But this, Noah, is the first time in the whole Bible that we hear about someone being drunk. And when it says that Noah's drunk, it's not saying that he was a little bit tipsy and started to slur his words. It wasn't like he was listening to a Shaboozy song and just got a little bit dreary-eyed at the bar. He was hammered drunk, like groomsmen face down in the middle of the dance floor in a pool of his own you-know-what kind of drunk. Noah, he was not just drunk, it says, "He became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent."

Actually, I had a chance to read the original Hebrew of these verses. Do you know that our English Bibles really minimize just how shameful this was for Noah? Sorry for this, parents. The Hebrew word for genitals, I think, is used more in the story of Noah than in any other story. When it says he lay uncovered or he "was naked," the Hebrew word for genitals is used again and again, and again and again to say how embarrassing, and wrong and brutal, and shameful this was. And then it gets worse. "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked," literally saw his father's genitals, "and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders. Then they walked in backwards and covered their father's genitals." His naked body. "Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked."

Ham, the son of Noah, shames his father. In a culture where saving face and protecting someone's reputation meant everything, this was the most brutal thing for this boy to do. He could have waited until his father was sober and talked to him quietly. He could have dealt in an appropriate way with the sin but this guy, who's supposed to be from a good family, does the exact opposite. It's the equivalent of seeing someone in the most embarrassing situation and pulling out your phone and live streaming for the world to see. He spread his father's sin to literally almost every human being that was left on the earth. Thankfully, the other two brothers act in great honor and love. They walk in backwards; they go to great lengths to turn their faces away and to cover up their father's sin with a garment.

Did any of you know that on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the great artist, Michelangelo, painted Noah naked? I'll show you a zoomed-out picture. Some of you

recognize right in the middle of the picture when Adam and God's fingers touch the famous painting of the creation, but not far from that is a picture of Noah not building an ark in faithfulness but passed out naked, being covered up by his own family members in the midst of his sin. Isn't that interesting that when this master created the masterpiece, he didn't cover up the worst part of Noah's story? Isn't it interesting that when the Bible, who considers Noah a righteous man, tells his story, it doesn't filter out the most shameful parts of the story? He's there. All of him is there.

"When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan!'" Remember, Canaan is the son of Ham who embarrassed his father. "'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.' Noah also said, 'Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth's territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.'" Come on, Noah. He awoke from his wine, his head is probably pounding, his stomach is probably churning, he's terribly hungover, and what does he do? Instead of owning his own sin, instead of confessing what a mistake he makes, he lashes out at other people. Now Ham had sinned against his father, but Ham only sinned because his father sinned first. This guy who's supposed to be so righteous is so wretched in this moment. He's literally cursing his grandson, his own family tree, while he's hungover because he drank too much wine.

And then the story ends. Verse 28, "After the flood, Noah lived 350 years. Noah lived a total of 950 years and then he died." The end. Now, you probably have a bunch of questions how a guy could live 950 years. We can talk about that another time. But isn't it crazy that there's no, like, Genesis 10 called the rehab stint of Noah? That there's no memoir and like a tour to restore his reputation? The Bible says this guy who was so good, so faithful when he built the ark, he morally faceplanted. He cursed his family tree and then he died. What an interesting Bible God has put into our hands, is it not?

So, what are we supposed to take away from this story? What did God intend to teach us when he didn't edit out this shameful part at the end of the account of the ark? Well, there's a whole bunch of things I want to teach you. Three of them are in your program. One of them I didn't put in there but I'd love for you to write down. The Bible, write this down if you would, the Bible neither covers up nor cancels. The Bible, if you'd actually read it, is so brutally honest about the most embarrassing parts of its saints' stories. If you've read much of the Bible, you know that Noah got drunk, you might know that Abraham gave in to fear and literally gave his wife away to another man. You know that David, after he dropped Goliath, lusted, looked, hooked up, impregnated a married woman, had her husband killed, and took her as his wife. You might know that Hezekiah, who was one of the rare good kings, gave in

to pride later in his life. You might know that Peter, that we name literally churches after, was not always such a saint. He denied he knew Jesus. Paul, who wrote half the New Testament, was murdering Christians. The people that are supposed to be the good guys are not always so good. The Bible does not cover up the story. It puts it there for everyone to read.

But at the same time, the Bible does not cancel such people. In fact, if you would keep reading the Old Testament into the New, you would find out that God doesn't keep his distance from Noah, despite the graphic details of his embarrassing sin. Friends, this is so important for us. I think if there is a heart that our church has for your spiritual story, is that this would be a place where you would stop covering things up, but because of the cross of Jesus, you would not be canceled. What we are trying to do, I think, is just basic Bible, is that we don't want you to hide, we don't want you to filter, we don't want you to lie, we don't want you to say you're fine when you're not, we don't want you to smile and like we don't want you to have to edit the footage of your life. We don't want you to cover it up. Because of Jesus, we're not going to cancel you. If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just. If you confess your sins, you'll find healing, as James 5 says.

When you come to this place, when you do life together with other Christians, don't cover it up. The Bible didn't cover up this part of Noah's story. You're going to have to cover up yours. And I know it's embarrassing and I know no one wants to say it. No one wants to say they get angry at their spouse this fast. No one wants to say they're wrestling with same-sex attraction and they always have. No one wants to say they relapsed and looked at porn. No one wants to say that they struggle with substances. No one wants to say they're brutally jealous or they struggle with anxiety. We don't want to say that but we have to. The Bible models for us on so many pages not to cover it up, but instead to bring it into the light so we can help each other.

Next thing I want to teach you today. I'd love for you to write this down, too. I want you to beware of the sin of Noah. Now, what do I mean by that? I don't just mean drinking. I mean that Noah's greatest failure comes immediately after his greatest success.

Next, I want to warn you to beware of the sin of Ham. What was the sin of Ham? He saw someone else's sin, and he didn't deal with it the right way. Here's the fact. I wish it wasn't true. This month, probably this week, maybe even this day, you will see someone sin in a very, very interesting way. Your buddy is going to drink way too much and he's going to be an idiot and there's going to be a recording of it. Someone's going to snap in an email from work or a text and you can screenshot it and you could use that to have some really fun conversations. The fact is, I hate to admit this, sin is often much more interesting than obedience. But please, please, please, beware of the sin of Ham. When you see it, I want you to handle it like Jesus

taught. There are times that we will have to tell others about someone's sin. If it's a crime, if someone is in danger, if it's a case of abuse, we would have to say something. But otherwise, Jesus wants us to keep it as private and quiet as possible for as long as possible. If I see your sin, step one is not to get advice from my friends or to tell my wife at home. It is to talk to you privately, quietly, humbly, in hopes that you'll repent of your sin and I can bring you back to the cross of Jesus.

Finally, oh, and by far most importantly, the last thing I want to tell you today is that Jesus is someone better. Man, we hear the stories of Martin Luther and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Noah and David and Peter and Paul, and it's so discouraging. We don't know who we can trust and who we can rely on. I'm so happy that I can tell you today that Jesus is so much better. You know, like that early description of Noah, Jesus was a righteous man who walked faithfully with his Father in heaven except after his mountaintop moments, Jesus never disappointed us. I mean, can you imagine after the euphoria, after the adrenaline rush of Jesus' baptism, the skies open up, the Holy Spirit comes down, the Father's like, "This is my kid that I'm so proud of. With him, I'm well pleased." But right after the mountaintop, the Spirit brings Jesus into the desert and he's tempted fiercely for 40 days and 40 nights. The devil, like a flood, tries to lead him into temptation, promises him everything, but Jesus never, never, never self-medicated with sin. Instead, he stood strong in the wilderness. He quoted the word of God, and the angels helped him through it. He was tempted, the Bible says, in every way, just as you and I are, but he never, ever sinned.

Jesus, unlike Noah, didn't have a dark side. There were no secrets that history later told about him. He was absolutely pure in everything that he did and do you know why? So that our sins could be covered. I love because Jesus died on the cross, what it says in Romans 4. It says, "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." Just like Japheth and Shem walked in in great love to cover over Noah's sin, they put a garment on their shoulders, but our Jesus put a cross on his own and he covers us with that cross so that all the things that you and I regret, all the temptations we gave into, that they would be covered, gone, not seen before the eyes of a holy God. Jesus is so much better, not just because he was a good example for you and I to follow, but because he was a perfect Savior who would make sure that God could look at you and be delighted with you as the Father was with his own son at his baptism.

You know, the fact is, your parents are going to disappoint you, but Jesus died for you. That your pastors will fall short of your expectations but Jesus will always live up to them. That your friends will let you down but Jesus never will because his love is unfailing and it's perfect. There is a God whose love for us was so deep that he sent his one and only Son that whoever would believe in him would have every sin

covered and would find eternal life forever. The story's true and the story is good. May God bless you as you ponder his word and put it into practice today. Let's pray.

God, I thank you for the messed up, messy people we see in the Bible. If you wouldn't have told this part of the story, we would maybe wonder if we belong in a place like this, if we can even follow a God like you, but because of Noah's sin and David's sin and all the other sins, we know that Christianity is a religion for sinners. And at the same time, God, we don't want to minimize sin. We want to put it to death. We want to drag it into the light even if it makes us sweat because we don't want to go back to the things that we did yesterday. We want to honor you with all that we are and all that we do today.

So, may your Spirit lead us. May your Spirit open our lips that we could say to other people what we most need to say. I thank you most of all, Jesus, that you were so self-controlled. Thirty-three years and not once did you cut a corner, not once did you take the easy road, not once did you excuse sin. You were so strong and so faithful and because of that, there's such good news for us today. Thank you for being a perfect Savior that we can rely on completely. This week, God, help us to love people well in response to this great grace that you have shown us. Help us to be holy and blameless as we walk faithfully with God. It's in your name, Jesus, that we pray all these things and all of God's people said, Amen.