

## THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

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Series: Good God

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Jesus, Cross, Resurrection, Atonement, Easter

Mark 16:1-8, Isaiah 53:5

I was seven or eight years old when my brother tried to commit suicide. The details are a little fuzzy, we don't really talk about it within our family, and because of my age, there was a lot of information I wasn't privy to. But what I could gather from conversations was that my brother was addicted to alcohol and drugs, had some relational issues, and had decided to end his life.

Now, I should back up and say that I hardly knew my brother at the time. Technically, he's my half brother - the firstborn of my mom's first marriage - though I don't think of him that way. For most of my childhood, he lived 650 miles (over 1000 km) away from us, with his dad. I would see him maybe once a year and virtually all I knew of him was that he once worked at Disney World, and that one time when we visited, he got us into a waterpark for free, because he was a lifeguard.

I remember my mom getting a phone call, being visibly upset, and getting in a car to drive to Florida, where my brother was in the hospital. I also remember the day she arrived back at our house with my brother in tow. My mom, if I remember the story correctly, told my brother that she would only sign him out of the psychiatric ward if he would allow her to take him back to our house in Tennessee, away from the friends and influences that had brought him to this place of wanting to end it all.

He agreed, and she brought him. I don't know how long he lived in our house, but I remember the remarkable events that took place. Looking back, I know that my brother quit drugs and alcohol cold turkey, which is an incredible feat. As a kid, though, all I knew is that he smoked like a chimney, which was a big no-no in our household. I always wondered why my mom let him smoke. I now know that those cigarettes were probably the only thing that was holding him together in those first several months.

But I remember seeing the life come back into my brother's eyes. I remember playing basketball in our driveway and talking, really, for the first time. I remember a few guys from our church inviting him to help out with some construction work, and asking him to help them with their cars. I remember when they invited him to be on a bowling team with them - unchurchy stuff - just "guy stuff."

I also remember when my brother decided to devote his life to Jesus. I remember his baptism. And then, within about 18 months of his attempted suicide, he enrolled in a Christian college and eventually went on to become a youth pastor.

Now, there were a lot of factors in my brother's transformation, but none stands out to me as much as that moment when my mom signed him out of the hospital. She traveled all day to reach him, presented him with an ultimatum, and determined to do whatever she could do to not only save his life, but to restore him to the life he was created to live. It was the extreme love of a mother who was willing to go to any length to save her child.

This morning, as we continue our series on a Good God, and as we look at the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, what I see is God, the loving parent, looking at his children and saying, "I'll do anything to save them." And in the process, he would become the answer to every question - The Ultimate Solution.

Let's pray that God would open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

### **Prayer**

When I was 11 years old, I had a teacher named Mrs. Robinette, whose job it was to teach us about sentence structure, word types, and literary devices. And honestly, I don't remember much of what she taught us. I *do*, however, remember learning about metaphor and simile.

A metaphor, we were taught, was a way of comparing two things without using "like" or "as." A simile, in contrast, was a way of comparing two things *using* "like" or "as". Being an 11 year old boy, I remember thinking of it this way: "Jason looks like a monkey," is a simile. "Steve is a jackass," is a metaphor. Hey, I was 11, and it was a useful distinction.

Many years later, I learned that the use of simile and metaphor are actually really common in the bible. Jesus used them all the time in his teaching. He would say things like, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed." That's a simile. But he would also say things like, "I am the vine, you are the branches." That's a metaphor.

Simile and metaphor are very effective in helping us to understand new concepts, but they have limits. When Jesus says, "I am the vine," he doesn't mean that he's a plant that grows out of the ground and that in a few months, grapes will sprout from his hands. Every simile or metaphor has it's limits. And when we try to stretch beyond those limits, we can get in trouble, especially when it comes to something as important as our thoughts on God.

But the bible is full of these things, and they sometimes lead us astray - especially metaphor. Simile is easily recognizable. When Jesus says something like, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves," it's clear that he's not calling his followers literal sheep. It's obviously a figurative statement. But metaphor is sometimes harder to recognize.

One of the most frequently used metaphors in the bible is "God the Father." Now, you might not think that's a metaphor. "God *is* the Father," you say. But he's not. At least not by any normal definition of "father." I can say that God is my father, but he didn't impregnate my mother, nor did he take any kind of legal custody of me. I don't trace my ancestors through his bloodline. He didn't physically raise me. In fact, he is not even a *he*.

While there are a lot of masculine words used by biblical authors to describe God, just as you would expect in their ancient male-dominant culture, there are also some feminine images used, especially motherly ones. We read of God as a woman in labor and as a mother nurturing her children. Again, metaphors.

So, while it's common to use words like "he," and "him," and "father," we could just as easily use words like "she," and "her," and "mother." Because none of those words are actually accurate representations of who God is. They're just metaphors.

"God the Father" is a metaphor. It's a way of helping us understand one particular aspect of God's nature using the imagery of a good father - something most people can relate to at some level, even if our own father wasn't that great.

So, what I want to look at today are some metaphors that have been used to describe what happened when Jesus died on the cross and then came back to life. But, first, very quickly, let me just summarize what happened in the last week of Jesus' life.

Last week, we looked at the story of Jesus coming into Jerusalem. He rode in on this donkey and everybody was excited because they thought he was going to be this revolutionary leader who would raise up an army to overthrow the Romans. But that didn't happen.

Instead, what happened was that Jesus came into town on this donkey, spent some time teaching people and making religious leaders mad. Then he held a staff meeting.

I mean, he was celebrating the Passover with his disciples, but essentially, it was a time for him to teach them some things and give them some instructions. So, they had a meal together, he did some weird things like washing their feet and calling one of them Satan and saying another one would betray him.

Then, he went to an olive grove to pray. He seemed to know what was coming, because he was grief-stricken. Then, in that garden, Jesus was arrested and drug off to face trial in the

court of the High Priest - for crimes against the Temple. There, he was beaten and mocked. Eventually, he would be brought in front of all the rulers of the land - first the High Priest, the head of the temple, then Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect (or governor), then Herod the ruler of Galilee. Any of these three guys could have issued a pardon, but they didn't. The High Priest wanted to get rid of Jesus, and the other two guys, Pilate and Herod, were more interested in placating the Jewish leaders and the crowds than they were in doing what was right.

Ultimately, it was Pilate who ended up ordering Jesus' crucifixion - somewhat unwillingly.

And there's a lot that happened surrounding that event, but rather than getting into that today, I want to hone in on just one important facet. So, for now, just say that Jesus hung on the cross until he died. Then his body was taken down and put in a tomb.

From there, we pick up the story in the book of Mark. The book of Mark is the briefest of all the the gospels - the recordings of Jesus' life - and though it's the second book in what we call the New Testament of the bible, modern scholars agree that it was actually the first gospel to be written. As such, it doesn't contain a whole lot of interpretive text about what Jesus meant or what great lessons were to be learned. It simply tells the story.

So, we'll pick up the story in Mark, chapter 16, verse 1:

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*

*But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

*"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"*

*Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

*Mark 16:1-8*

The other gospel writers add more detail, but you get the gist. Jesus wasn't there! He died and was laid in a tomb, but when these women went to treat his body, which was a common

practice, they didn't find him there. The large stone that covered the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away, and Jesus was gone.

There was some thought that maybe his body had been stolen. Jesus' followers thought the Roman officials had moved it. The Roman officials and Jewish leaders thought Jesus' followers had moved it. In reality, the person who did the moving was Jesus himself, and he later appeared in the flesh to his followers to prove that point.

We'll talk about some of those post-resurrection sightings in the next couple of weeks, but for now, let's just say that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. And that's what we celebrate today.

We remember Jesus' death and celebrate his resurrection. But why? Why is Jesus' death so significant? What happened there? And what about his resurrection? I mean, that's cool, but why is it so important? Why is it that, through all the conflict and disagreement that has happened in the church over the last 2000 years, one of the few things that everybody seems to agree on is that the death and resurrection of Jesus are central, core components of the Christian faith?

Well, it turns out that that's a tough question to answer. While almost all followers of Jesus agree that his death and resurrection are important, there is no real consensus on *why* they're important. And part of the problem in answering that question is that it has become quite obvious over the course of time that we are simply limited in our ability to comprehend what happened on the cross.

The best we can do is to come up with some compelling metaphors to try to explain those events. Some of the metaphors commonly used are directly from the bible. Others are more modern in nature, but tap into biblical themes. But remember what I said before about metaphor: Every metaphor has its limits. And what I think you'll see today is that these metaphors used to explain Jesus' death and resurrection all have their uses, but also their limitations. In fact, stretching some of them too far can lead us into really dangerous territory.

So, let's take a look at some of the major metaphors people have used to understand Jesus' death and resurrection. Among people who study God in depth - theologians and biblical scholars - these are called *Atonement Theories*. The word *atonement* simply means "reconciliation." Atonement reconciles our relationship with God. It restores us to him. So, here are some of the major atonement theories:

One theory, which has some roots in the early church, but was really developed in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century by a guy named Anselm of Canterbury, is called *Substitutionary Atonement Theory*.

The whole idea is that Jesus died as a *substitute* for human beings and as a satisfaction of the sin-debt that humans owe to God. And this, in different forms, is the most popular atonement theory today. If you grew up in church, this is probably what you were taught.

The bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We know that God is perfect and holy. We also know that God is just. Substitutionary Atonement Theory tells us that because of these facts, God can't stand to be in our presence. We are filthy to him. We dishonor his holiness.

And because he is, at his core, a just God, something has to be done in order for us to be with him. Anselm's writing suggests that Jesus was a substitute - a stand-in for us. And so, when we approach God, we kind of get to wear a Jesus mask so that God can stand to look at us.

And part of the reason that this theory is so prevalent in the modern church is that it was adopted by a guy name Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was a philosopher who lived during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and he heavily influenced not only the church, but also much of western philosophy and culture. You can hardly open a modern book on ethics, natural law, metaphysics, or even political theory without bumping into Thomas Aquinas.

So, since Aquinas embraced Anselm's idea of substitutionary atonement, he naturally passed on these ideas to the throngs of students who studied his works in subsequent decades and centuries. Students including the fathers of the Great Reformation of the church, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

And these guys, Luther and Calvin, came along in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and, Calvin in particular, grabbed ahold of Anselm's idea of substitutionary atonement and expanded it even further. According to Calvin, it was not enough for Jesus to simply serve as a substitute for you and me. He actually needed to "undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his judgement."

In other words, it wasn't about a perfect Jesus standing before God so God could look at us. It was about a perfect Jesus being punished in the way that we *should* be punished. According to Calvin, somebody had to pay the price. There was a penalty to be paid for our sin, and Jesus was the one who paid it.

And because of the penalty aspect of Calvin's theory, it has come to be known as the *Penal Substitution Theory of Atonement*. Jesus had to be penalized for our sins.

And at the core of substitution theory - both Anselm's and Calvin's versions - is that human sin is an offense to God, and that God is somehow governed by a sense of justice that simply won't allow him to overlook even a single sin. He must, then, find a way of satisfying

his just nature. And the way he found was by having Jesus become a blood sacrifice as a substitute for you and me.

These days, you hear Calvin's theory of penal substitution used almost as a given - as an indisputable fact. Some people will point to the prophecy of Isaiah 53 as proof that this is what Jesus' death meant.

Isaiah 53:5 says:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.*  
Isaiah 53:5

Surely that means that God punished Jesus on our behalf. Well...not so fast. It certainly seems to say that he was punished, but not necessarily by God.

You see, the trouble with this metaphor (and remember, it *is* metaphor) is that when we stretch it beyond its useful limits, it becomes what some have called "cosmic child abuse." It's the story of a teacher whose class is unruly, so he decides to abuse and ultimately murder his innocent son instead of punishing the class.

Or, even if you don't see it as *God* doing the punishing, at the very least, he stands back and watches as Jesus is punished. And this view of God has caused many people to say, "I don't want to serve a God like that. I don't want to have anything to do with a God who requires that his own son be murdered to satisfy his bloodlust."

Moreover, when you stop to consider the other things we know about God, it simply doesn't add up. Why would an all-knowing God create a system where the only possible end game was that his sense of justice would bind him to a course of action that would require the torture and murder of his son? As long as he was creating, why not create the system in another way?

So, while this metaphor is popular, and while it certainly highlights *some* of what happened on the cross, it, like all metaphors, eventually goes off the rails. It points us to some kind of substitutionary aspect of Jesus' death, but then it begins to break down.

So, what are some alternative views of Jesus' death - other metaphors? There are a few.



Peter Abelard was a medieval French philosopher, poet, and eventual monk who came up with a decidedly different view of atonement. Abelard was a romantic, and his theory was all about the love of God. We call this *The Magnet Theory*. He saw every act of Jesus as an act of love and that Jesus' death was ultimately a loving act that drew people to him like a magnet.

According to Abelard, through the grace of Jesus, we are joined to God in what he calls an "indissoluble bond of affection." His understanding of Jesus' life and death was that a loving God took on human nature and even bore death in order to more fully bind himself to us - to understand our lives and for us to understand him. Ultimately, Abelard saw the crucifixion as an act of love and a means of drawing people to Jesus.

Jesus himself said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." According to Abelard, Jesus' death was meant as a wakeup call for us - to recognize God's unfathomable and infinite love for us, and to compel us to love God and others with renewed passion.

Now, there are some difficulties with this magnet metaphor as well. For one, it doesn't really suggest that Jesus' death actually accomplished anything in and of itself. The accomplishment is only in our response to that death. So, in order for this metaphor to hold, we have to ignore much of the New Testament writings about sin and death being conquered and defeated, and about our sins being washed away by Jesus.

This theory also doesn't require the divinity of Jesus. Since his death was simply a great object lesson, Jesus could have been any other man - a revolutionary martyr, but not necessarily divine.

So, while the Magnet theory does a good job of highlighting the loving nature of Jesus' self-sacrifice, again, it falls short.

What else have we got?

Probably the strangest atonement theory, especially to my ears, is *The Divinity Theory*. This is a theory that developed in the Eastern Orthodox church, based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> century writings of a guy named Athanasius of Alexandria. And the chief takeaway from Athanasius is this quote: "For he was made man so that we might become God."

That's a pretty novel idea! Divinity Theory holds that humans were created as divine beings to be in communion with God, but sin has robbed us of our divine nature - that there is something of God in all of us, but sin separates us from that. And the Orthodox teaching tells us that through Jesus, God entered into the fray, reunited the divine and the human aspects of us, and overcame death - the thing that separates us from God.



We now have the opportunity, then, to reconnect with the divine in us - to become gods...or at least like God.

The problem, though, with that metaphor, beyond the fact that me becoming a god is a little weird, is that it's pretty weak as it relates to sin. Where Paul, the apostle and biblical author, writes extensively of Jesus' death saving us from our sin, Divinity Theory is only concerned with Jesus overcoming death itself.

On top of this, Divinity Theory is highly tied to the Orthodox belief that the church is the keeper of forgiveness. Bishop Kallistos Ware, a contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologian says plainly that he believes, "the appointed means of salvation is always in and through the community of the Church." In other words, if you don't go to church, you can't be saved.

This idea doesn't seem to hold water. Jesus, when he was hanging on the cross, told one of the thieves hanging beside him that he would gain entry into paradise. That guy never went to church, but Jesus forgave his sins then and there.

So, this metaphor does some good stuff. It reminds us, for example, that we are created in the image of God - that there is, in fact, something of the divine in us. But again, when you start to stretch it out, it just goes a bit too far and begins to break down.

Then there's the *Mirror Theory*. This is an idea that's been suggested by contemporary philosopher and anthropologist René Girard. Girard's approach is unique in that it began as a study of ancient myth. He first approached Jesus' story as one in a long line of cultural myths involving sacrificial death.

The thing that caused Girard to embrace Christianity was the marked difference between Jesus' story and all the other traditional sacrificial myths. Girard's theory is that when we view Jesus on the cross, we are looking into an anthropological mirror of the natural outcome of our current way of life - our culture, our conflict, our violence, our sin. Girard sees sin as a virus, sacrifice as a treatment, and Jesus as the cure.

In Jesus, rather than violent people being overcome by more violence, violence itself was overcome by willful sacrifice. Girard says that through his actions, Jesus put a mirror up to the violence that is continually perpetuated by humanity, and showed us just how absurd it all really is.

And while I agree with that statement, I think this mirror metaphor doesn't really go far enough. Where others might be stretched until they break, this one seems to not be quite stretchy enough. Again, the mirror theory is weak when it comes to things like sin and God.

Because of its anthropological approach, this metaphor focuses primarily on a human response to human errors in thinking. In some ways, God doesn't need to be involved, Jesus could be just about anyone, and sin is not really addressed. It highlights the inability of violence to solve our problems, but stops far short, I think, of tapping into the depth of what Jesus' act really meant.

Finally, there's the *Victory Theory*. This is the theory that was actually prominent for about the first 1000 years after Jesus' death. It is the one most prominent in the biblical New Testament writings. The Victory Theory sees Jesus' death as the turning point in an epic spiritual battle.

Originally, this theory was conceived as what is called *Ransom Captive Theory*, and it goes like this:

Humanity, in the form of Adam and Eve, made a deal with the devil. In exchange for the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan demands our life. We are held captive by him. But God offered Jesus as a ransom for the captive human race.

This is what we read in the book of Mark, chapter 10, verse 45, where Jesus says of himself:

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

*Mark 10:45*

This is, at least in part, how Jesus understood his vocation, so we would do good to take a look at it.

The great takeaway from this idea is that Jesus' *resurrection* is central. It's important. It's not just the cherry on top of a sacrificial sundae. Jesus goes as a ransom for us, and he's killed, but *ultimately*, he doesn't stay dead - he rises victoriously.

This idea is captured in C.S. Lewis' classic, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan, the messianic lion, offers himself as a sacrifice to save a boy, but then ultimately is resurrected as the victor.

And though this was the prominent theory for 1000 years after Jesus' death, people like C.S. Lewis would have probably never heard of it if not for a Swedish bishop named Gustaf Aulén. In 1930, Aulén wrote a book called *Christus Victor*, or "Christ the Victor."

In it, Aulén argued that Jesus' death and resurrection did not pay some necessary price to God, but instead, the death and resurrection of Jesus served to defeat Satan, sin, and

death. Rather than a sacrifice to satisfy God's bloodlust, it was an act of divine love, with Jesus and God the Father working in tandem to defeat the powers of evil.

And while this theory of atonement seems mostly right, it does get a little troubling when we extend this metaphor to its logical conclusion. Because what comes to light is a battle between good and evil, where God is on one side and Satan is on the other. That would require Satan to be God's equal, or at least somewhere close to God's equal.

But what we read in the bible is not that at all. Satan, instead is one of God's created beings - a fallen angel, ultimately subject to God.

The Victory Theory introduces the incredible unseen spiritual battle that rages on, and focuses on Jesus' epic defeat of sin and death, but, like all the other metaphors, it eventually breaks down.

There are some other minority theories of atonement, but most of them sort of land in these categories. So what are we to make of all this? What's the right answer? We know Jesus' death and resurrection are important. We may even believe they are central to our faith. But why? What was accomplished on the cross, and what was the purpose of Jesus' resurrection?

This is where I think all these atonement theories - all these metaphors - can actually help us, but only if we're committed to not being married to only one of them. The fact is, we don't have to choose, because these aren't eternal truths we're talking about here. They're metaphors. And just like the bible calls Jesus the lion and the lamb, Jesus' death has the ability to be, in some ways, all of the above.

And I think a combination of all these metaphors gets us the closest to the full meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. There are some things we'll never understand - this is the greatest of all mysteries - but there's a lot that we *can* understand when we combine these ideas. So, let me attempt to put a big fat bow on this thing - not by coming up with a metaphor to end all metaphors, but by jumbling these things together to come up with a working, albeit somewhat messy picture.

If I borrow from all of these metaphors - from all of these atonement theories - what I get is something like this:

When Jesus came to earth, he came as a representative - an emissary - of God. But he also came *as* God. Recognizing that the father/son metaphor is just that, a metaphor, I realize that in reality, God and Jesus are one and they are equal. As such, God came to earth *as* Jesus and substituted himself for us - taking on himself the consequences of our sin - the results of our violent, self-serving systems.

In doing so, he exhibited a kind of voluntary, sacrificial, divine love that far exceeds anything we've ever seen before. And that love is incredibly attractive. We are drawn to God because of his willingness to do whatever it takes to see us freed from our prison - to live the life we were created to live.

Because he created us, and he put something in us that is divine - that is *of him*. When he looks on us, he sees all the potential that he built into us and all of humanity. By uniting humanity and divinity in Jesus, he defeated the idea that the two can never mix. Jesus was a living breathing communion between God and man - an example for what *could* be, and a foretelling projection of God's ultimate desire for all of humanity.

But in our current broken world, Jesus' death holds a mirror up to that brokenness. In recognizing that people just like us called for Jesus' death - that people just like us beat him and hung him on a cross - we see how fragile our state is. We are forced to acknowledge how quickly we can take on the mob mentality and become monsters.

But the joy of it all is that God is a loving father, a passionate mother, and a spiritual titan. He will do whatever it takes to not only save us from the consequences of our actions, but to break through the barriers that divide us from him, to take on whatever punishment humanity can throw at him, to be killed, then to rise again victorious over sin, death, and ultimate evil.

Why? For us! Because he *loves* us. His death was the ultimate sacrifice. His resurrection, the ultimate solution.

My mom wasn't much older than I am now when my brother tried to commit suicide. And even though he was a bit of a scoundrel, even though he was a castoff, even though he was incredibly sick, she intervened in the only way that would work.

She inserted herself into the equation. She refused to let him suffer the full consequences of his actions. She willingly took on the punishment that comes with helping an addict through recovery. And she did it because she knew he was made for something more.

She did it because she loved him. And she did it because she was loved.

My mom may not be able to articulate a unified atonement theory, but in her heart, she gets it. When you love like God loves, you do whatever it takes to show that love.

So, what will your response be this Easter Sunday? Will you leave here unchanged - unmoved by God's incredibly complex, unfathomably passionate love. Or will you leave somehow different?

If you've never thought much about Jesus or if you've never made a clear decision to follow him, I want to invite you to do that right now. And I'm not going to stand up here and say, "If you died today, would you go to heaven or hell?" That's not what it's about. It's about an all-powerful God who allowed himself to be beaten and killed because he loves you enough to save you from yourself. Do you love him back? Will you at least try to love him back?

We're going to close today with a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

### **1. Singing**

We're going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

### **2. Prayer**

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

### **3. Communion**

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly dies for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

### **4. Giving**

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to

do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

### **Closing Prayer**