

Acts (Part 10) – Like a Wildfire

Matt Chandler – April 27, 2014

[Video]

In Jerusalem, AD 30, Jesus died on the cross, resurrected on the third day, and then ascended into heaven. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, giving them power, purpose, and a plan. Out of joy, the church was born. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter gave his first sermon, and 3,000 hearts were transformed. Hearing, receiving, and repenting, the young church walked in unity and garnered praise. Out of joy, the gospel creates community.

Peter and John then continued to spread the gospel through preaching and miracles, and the church grew by 5,000. In AD 31, Stephen gave a powerful sermon, and the enraged crowd stoned him, making him the first Christian martyr. Around AD 34, on the road to Damascus, the Lord transformed the heart of Saul, a man who persecuted countless Christians, and Saul became Paul. After this conversion, the gospel continued to spread through the ministries of Paul and Peter. God gave Peter a vision and used him to first reach the Gentiles.

In AD 44, King Herod Agrippa the First executed the apostle James and had Peter arrested, but an angel rescued Peter, leading him out of the prison. As the believers were scattered because of persecution, the center of operations for Christianity then turned from Jerusalem to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey.

In AD 49, an argument arose over whether it was necessary for Gentiles to follow Jewish traditions and customs, particularly circumcision, but the Jerusalem Council sent a letter to the Gentiles affirming that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. Meanwhile, in their missionary journeys, Paul and Barnabas disagreed over John Mark traveling with them, and they separated. Barnabas and John Mark then sailed to Cyprus, while Timothy joined Paul, as they spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor and Greece.

We must keep reminding ourselves of the gospel so that we are careful not to drift toward false gospels. A church consumed with itself will move away from the truth and move toward irrelevance. Salvation comes only through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, not traditions, not customs, not good works. This is the message that must move forward, because the mission doesn't stop. Out of joy, the church multiplies.

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Good morning. It's definitely good to be here at the Denton Campus. If you have your Bibles, we're going to be in Acts, chapter 19, or at least that's where we will start. I knew I was going to be preaching in Denton this weekend, so I didn't shave at all this week and bought this green polo. This is as "beardy" as I get. I apologize. Without the beard, I thought the green polo would at least help me contextualize to be accepted as one of you.

In my 20-something years of being a Christian, I've worked at three churches. I've been a member of four. Of those four churches I have been either a member of or been on staff of, two of those churches have been vibrant and alive and people have come to know Christ and been discipled and cities have been engaged, and then two of those churches were not. They were struggling for life. They were trying to figure out how to stay alive.

They were very much what I call "navel-gazing." They were churches far more built around morality than they were mission. They were far more those types of congregations that thought sin was something you might catch if you weren't careful, so their philosophy of ministry was much more around erecting walls and guarding purity rather than engaging missionally and maybe things being a bit more chaotic and grimy.

My preference, which should not shock you if you have any history with us at all, is to engage and to do the hard work of proclaiming the gospel and preaching the gospel to those in and around the city, knowing that when people get saved and come into the church, the church gets a little messy. I have three children. The house is rarely clean for long.

We might knock it out, but it just takes one of them to come... Like my oldest melts, literally. You can see her clothes. She just melts, and then there's her whole outfit. I don't even know where she went. I get that cleaned up, and then she melted again. I'm like, "How did she change clothes twice?" The house is always a bit chaotic, because we're training and helping mature three children.

Well, the church, as it engages people and people come into the covenant community of faith, as they believe upon the name of Jesus Christ, they create a type of griminess that makes some people nervous. There are people who believe there should be this type of properness that exists in all of the church that if it's not there reflects poorly on the community or on the church in the community.

Now I *will* say that all of us should be moving more and more toward holiness and more and more away from worldliness, but what I know about infants is that they're infants. If a church is missionally engaging, they'll always be a bit of a mess. We must learn to walk in the tension of understanding the mess while pushing forward toward maturity.

In the book of Acts, what has happened now is the church has left Jerusalem, and now it's spreading throughout the ancient world. I said three weeks ago before the message that instead of just walking through every city and saying, "What happened here now happened here. So let's change the name of the city and watch the same exact thing happen: the Word of God is preached, people believe, a church is planted, elders are raised, and Paul moves on..."

Instead of doing that with every little town in the book of Acts, what I said we would do three weeks ago was start to dial in now on some more micro-level things rather than macro-level things. So 3,000 saved here, 5,000 saved here, numbers added at their gatherings, day in and day out, God blessing the church and it growing. Instead of just looking at that over and over again, because that has been established through the first eight weeks of the series, I wanted us to look at other things.

What I want to look at today is where there is a gospel flame, a gospel fire, where the idea and the reality of Christ ransoming and rescuing from every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth is present, there are things that covenant communities of faith, gatherings of Christians, can do that add to that flame and make that flame hotter, and there are things we can do as a covenant community, not just as individuals, but as a group, that throw water on that flame and douse the heat that comes off of being legitimate gospel people.

I want to look at what I'll call four logs that we can either throw on that fire, or if we *don't* throw them on the fire, then the opposite is true, and that douses the fire of gospel ministry. No secrets; all of my cards on the table. I'm partly doing this because we vote next week and I want to encourage you that way. So no secrets. I'm not even wearing sleeves. Let's do some work.

To catch you up on where we are in the narrative, Paul has left Athens where we last saw him, and he is now in Ephesus. He has landed in Ephesus, and he has found some disciples, and for the last two years, he has reasoned in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. So much so that the Bible tells us all of Asia had heard the gospel. They didn't all receive it, but they had all heard the gospel.

From there, you get this really strange but awesome story. What happened is the seven sons of Sceva, who are... Catch this. This is their job. I don't know if they went to school, but here's their job. They're itinerant Jewish exorcists. That's their job. They travel around Jewish synagogues to try to find demon-possessed people to cast out the demons. I don't know what that pays, I don't know what kind of degree you have to have, but this is what they do.

They see that Paul walks in an unusual amount of authority. He doesn't have to do all the stuff they do. I don't know if you've seen some of the demon movies. He's not throwing water while a head spins and pea soup is shot out. You know, "The blood of Christ compel you..." None of that. Paul just casts them out and they go. There's not an argument, not a fight, no girl climbing a wall. Just gone. "There she goes."

They see this, and they're like, "Man, we have to work so much harder at this." So these dudes, the seven sons of Sceva, go and find a demon-possessed man, and here's what they say. You can read this later if you want. It's in chapter 19. They say to this demon-possessed man, "In the name of Jesus, Paul's God, we command you to come out." The demon speaks through the man and says, "We know Jesus, we've heard of Paul, but who are you?" Which I have to believe was a moment of sheer terror.

You're like, "Yeah, that one. Yeah, that one. Oh gosh." I would just think a bit of panic would erupt into the heart when the demon goes, "But what's your name? Because I haven't heard of you." Then the Bible says the man leapt on the seven sons of Sceva and whipped them. We know he whipped them because...you can read this...they leave the fight, according to the Bible, bloody and naked.

I've said for years there's always a debate around who won a fight or who lost a fight. General rule: If when the fight started you were wearing pants and when it was over you were no longer wearing pants, you lost. There's no defense that, "Oh no, he had him for a second." No, no, no. You left without your drawers, man. You got drove, all right?

No man just relents his drawers. Somebody has to take those things from you. So they get worked. From there, the Bible says the city is filled with fear and awe, a reverence, because of the power of God. Then from there we're going to pick it up in verse 18. This is after fear fell upon them all and they extolled the name of the Lord.

"Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily."

If we just read this, it seems like it's just a one-off little statement of historic fact. You have the seven sons of Sceva who are beaten bloody and naked. Fear and awe fall on the church at Ephesus, so believers in Christ come forward... *Believers*. That's huge. If you write in your Bible, I would circle that *believers* came forward, divulging their practices, confessing their sins, and others came forward and brought their books of witchcraft and burned them. I'm not a big fan of book burning, but it's kind of important to know.

Now we know more about the church of Ephesus than any other church named in the Bible. We know that because we see their birth here in the book of Acts. We have the letter to the church at Ephesus in our New Testament book Ephesians, and then Timothy was an elder in Ephesus, so you have 1 and 2 Timothy, and John was an elder in Ephesus, so you have 1, 2, and 3 John. Jesus addresses the church at Ephesus once again in Revelation, chapter 2, and here's what verses 4-5 say:

"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." Here's what Jesus just said. This is red letter. This is Jesus saying to the church at Ephesus, "If you don't repent and get back to what you were doing at first, I'm going to remove your lampstand."

Translation: "My presence, my power, my work...I'm going to pull it from you if you don't get back to doing what you did at first." This sounds anti-gospel, doesn't it? It sounds anti-gospel in that Jesus is saying, "Hey, you'd better do something if you want my presence." But we don't earn the presence of God with behavioral modification, so what's he speaking to?

Well, the only thing we see in the Bible that the church of Ephesus does in the beginning is repentance and confession. They're just grimy. I love this church. Can you imagine the church gathering and the people of God, believers, coming forward and divulging and confessing their practices? Not new Christians; believers. Then nonbelievers saw this, and they started becoming believers and brought their books of witchcraft.

So you have this environment where there is authentic and honest and legitimate community, a gospel community that understands the gospel has set us free to not pretend we're more than we are ever, so that we are a people marked by ongoing, perpetual, never-stopping confession and repentance. In fact, so marked are we by confession and repentance that 1 John, chapter 1... I'm trying to use books around the church at Ephesus. Once again, John would have been an elder there. First John 1:7-9 says:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness."

Do you hear it? A log on the fire of the gospel toward gospel-centered multiplication is a community that doesn't pretend they're more than they are. They're authentic, and they're honest. Confession should mark your life. It should mark my life. It's not something we do once and then move on from. We should always be confessing.

If your story is similar to mine... Maybe it isn't. Maybe you were born in church, they spanked your bottom, your first word was "Jesus," and you have no real wicked background to speak of other than stuff like "Smoked a cigarette I stole from my dad once." That's a great testimony. I'm praying my kids have that testimony, sans the smoking thing, because we don't have any cigarettes in the house...unless they're my wife's.

In the end, confession usually starts out with, "Man, I'm really struggling here in a bad way." That gives way, and here I am, 20-something years into my journey, and confession still should be marking my life and should be marking our lives as believers, because we understand Christ died on the cross, outing us as in desperate need of him, and we should never drift toward trying to look stronger than we are.

This week Josh Patterson, who's a dear friend of mine in my Home Group, asked me how I was doing, and I said, "I'm tired." He said, "How's that playing out?" I said, "Well, I'm not being a very good dad, and I'm not being a very good husband. I feel entitled and I feel short." I didn't talk about black tar heroin, and I didn't want to murder anyone. I just went, "I'm tired." He knew to press me on that. "Okay, well, how is that working itself out?"

"Here's how it's working out. I'm short. I feel entitled. I feel like things should be done for me, and I'm not being a good dad." So he pressed on that. "Well, how's that working?" "Well, the way it's working right now is I just want the kids to go to bed. I don't feel like, and I haven't done a good job of, sitting down, praying, reading the Bible with them, encouraging their hearts, and then going to bed. I just want them to get in bed."

He said, "So what are you doing?" I said, "I'm telling them to go to their beds. Then they'll ask... Because we have had a long-standing habit of Daddy coming in and sitting down and reading the Bible story, praying together, talking about how God has worked in our family's life, and that over the last month has been this: 'Not tonight. You're fine. Go to bed.'" I'm not ever going to pretend to be more than I am for you or for anyone else, because that would give the Devil a foothold in my life that I simply cannot afford for him to have.

There is no freedom ever for those who refuse to be honest. *Ever*. There's no victory over sin where there is no willingness to be honest. I am pleading with you in here for the sake of your own joy, for the sake of the gospel, and for the sake of those who might come to know and trust in our Lord to not pretend to be more than you are. What awes the world is not our hypocrisy-laden self-righteousness; it is our weakness that turns to the strength of Christ and makes much of Jesus.

The threat here is, "You keep making this about you, and I'm going to yank your lampstand. You want to build a kingdom unto yourself? I'm not in that business. Get back to what you did at first." Which is what? Confession, repentance, ongoing, "I'm in need." Since we are to be a confessing people, our testimony should look like this.

Let me say this to you so we can be really clear. I don't know your backgrounds, where you're from. At this point, we are not a people who have overcome; we are overcoming. Are you tracking? After I became a believer, I was in a church where all testimonies were miraculous. Do you know what I'm

talking about? "I've been a drunk for 15 years. I got saved. I haven't wanted to drink again." They would be like, "Oh my gosh." They'd want him to sign their Bibles.

Listen, I love that story. That's a miraculous testimony and, therefore, by definition is not normative. For most of us, isn't our story that we've grown from one degree of glory to the next, that we've grown a little bit at a time, and that sanctification for us is even now, if we're honest, a fight today? I'm trusting in the Lord, but today, even now, I'm battling thoughts, lusts, desires that I know are not of God. I know what the Word says and I'm in community and I'm confessing those, but I'm still fighting. It's not over yet.

When I finally heard somebody had that story, I was like, "Well, praise God. I feel like maybe I'm a Christian now." For years I thought I wasn't. It didn't seem like anybody needed to continuously confess and repent. Everybody was Jordan. It was a church full of Jordans. I'm like the little white guy who shoots a three every now and then and doesn't even get on the court.

The church flourishes missionally when we stop playing. I'll tell you what breaks my heart today. I've said this for years. Some of you are too strong right now. You aren't tired enough yet. Brothers, sisters, history is not on your side. Your sin *will* find you out, and if the Lord loves you, he'll expose you for the fraud you are.

I know so much youth up here... I wish sometimes you could dip your face down in Flower Mound and see what happens when you're 45 and that porn addiction finally catches you while you're married with children; for some of you to come dip your face down and see what happens when, with you fronting all the time about where you actually are, you finally get outed in that. There's so much devastation.

I'm pleading with those of you who are younger to stop, for your own good and your own eternal safety. The world is drawn to authenticity, not hypocritical self-righteousness. You're not there. Do you know how I know you're not there? Because you're alive. May we be a community marked by this. Not just Denton, but The Village Church. May we be authentic.

The second thing, and I think one that's more difficult than even that one, even though I've found that one is extremely difficult... Let's look in Acts, chapter 20, starting in verse 18. This is to the elders at the church at Ephesus. Paul went on to Miletus, and then they came and met him there.

"And when they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Listen to verse 25. It's heartbreaking. **"And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again."** Think about this. Let's make sure we have this in the right context. The gospel came to Ephesus through the preaching and teaching of Paul for years, day in and day out. Paul is the face of leadership. We know from the text he has raised up other elders. He is the primary teacher. He's the primary leader.

The dude walks in supernatural power. It's in Ephesus that his handkerchief and apron are healing people. He doesn't even have to be there. They just grabbed the dude's hanky, threw it on a sick man, and he was all of a sudden well. This is what they know, and what he just said to them... What we'll see here in a little bit are tears and snot and mourning and heartbreak. He says, "The Holy Spirit has told me this: that chains and affliction await and I will never see your face again."

"Never see your face again" surely has to mean here in an earthly sense. It wasn't Paul's theology to never, ever see their faces again, but on earth, you and me, this relationship we have... We do church once or twice a week; three times tops. The gathering is just once. In Ephesus, what the Bible makes clear is they met day after day. Not once a week. They met constantly. They shared. They had all things in common. They were in awe. They repented and confessed of their sins.

That's the environment. In that environment, Paul is saying, "The Holy Spirit says I'm headed to Jerusalem. Affliction waits for me there, and I will never see your faces again." The second log, if you will, on the fire of a gospel-centered church serious about multiplication, with the first one being authenticity and honest community, is the willingness to say goodbye.

Before I became pastor of The Village Church, I started a nonprofit organization with the best friends I had at that time. We started it. We traveled around together. We lived in the same apartment complex until we could afford to build houses. Then we all three built houses on the same street. I'm probably 24 or 25 at the time, so close to where a lot of you are.

So if you can imagine having a group of friends you do life well and deeply with and building houses next to each other. You're working together. You've started your own company together. Things are going well. You're making money. Not a ton of money, but enough to actually build a little house, an 1,100-square-foot house that probably wasn't safe. It probably wouldn't have passed code, but we made it work. Then all of a sudden the Lord started going, "Hey, this way, Chandler. *This way.*"

"Why would I go that way?"

"Because I have bigger things in store for you in regard to me. Do you want to know me more fully? I'm *this way.*"

I'll never forget the night I sat down at my little dining room table in that little dinky house my sweet bride and I lived in. We hadn't unpacked the boxes. I sat across from Shane and Shane and a guy named Keith and just said, "I'm out, man. I feel like the Lord is leading me in this direction." They were not pleased at that time that I was out.

In fact, I was even gently rebuked. "How in the world would leaving this thing we're doing to go to this church of 160 that's in debt that you don't even theologically or philosophically line up with... How is that in any case wisdom?" We put our house up for sale and moved in with my little sister. My beautiful bride was seven months pregnant. That's how I know she's...

I mean, I always knew she was a godly, godly woman. That was that moment I was like, "Dang, I have done well for myself." You don't move your seven-month pregnant wife with her first kid in to live with your little sister if she isn't godly. We took this job, and to this day, I see them once or twice a year tops. It was a goodbye, and it hurt, and it was right and good. Why? Because Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and these things will be added unto you."

I don't have any roots. My daddy was military. I literally don't know any of my cousins. I met my grandparents maybe two or three times my entire life before they died. I always wanted roots. I just

hadn't had them. When the Lord called me here... My family believes earnestly the Lord has allowed us to put down roots and establish his work in this place, and I'm looking forward to my life being wrung out in this place.

To get here, where God has done all of these marvelous things, took me stepping out of a salary that had finally established itself so I could buy a house for my family, walk away from the best friends I had at the time, walk away from the opportunity to drive something and lead something like I wanted to, into a place that was theologically and philosophically very different than I was.

There were no guarantees. In fact, the last pastor before me didn't quite make it. I even had guys who were in my world, kind of mentors of mine, going, "You're next, Chandler. They're going to kill you there." So how am I going to take care of my daughter? How am I supposed to take care of my bride? How long am I going to live with my little sister and her husband? These are all questions, and the only thing I was convinced of is the Lord said, "This way to more of me."

We took the step, and God has blessed. Could it have gone poorly? Absolutely it could have. If it had gone poorly, would that have given me more of Jesus? That was the promise all along: more of him. Could he have drawn me nearer to him and given me more joy in him by allowing this thing to not blow up like it has, but to blow up like it hasn't? Sure. And it would have been worth it. Now I'm grateful we blew up *this* way versus blew up *this* way, but regardless, what I was guaranteed of was him.

With that said, last time I was here, I rolled out from our elders a proposal we'll vote on next week that, in some sense, will have us saying goodbye to one another in the formal sense. Not in the relational sense, in that I have no plan of ever not being close with Beau Hughes. It'll be something I fight for. I think he'll fight for it himself. We go way back. Yet even this would be yet another gospel goodbye for me.

My parents are covenant members at this campus. My sister and her husband are covenant members of this campus. My parents have informed me they plan on staying if the vote goes through. I'm not offended by that. I encouraged them to do that. Their community is here. They should be where their community is. Nobody jumps out of a life raft in the middle of the ocean to hope they find another one. It's foolishness. So once again, I feel (and I'm speaking for our elders), compelled by the Holy Spirit of God, that this direction is the right and good direction the Lord is taking us.

With that said, here's what I want to ask, and don't turn me off until I'm done asking. I'm going to ask that next weekend, if you are a covenant member, you vote yes. If your conscience will not allow you to vote yes, then you have two options. I would prefer you operate in this linear fashion: that you consider coming on back down to Flower Mound, or if you can't do that, then vote no.

Surely you knew when we rolled this out... I mean, we felt strong enough in rolling this out that I wanted you to vote yes to this and wanted to see if the Lord was in this *by* rolling it out. Well, now after five or six Town Halls and all of the conversations we've had, we're all the more emboldened that the Lord is in this.

I'm asking you, for the sake of unity, vote yes or consider coming down to FloMo. It's the 'burbs. It's not as cool as Denton. I understand that. We do have two non-chain restaurants now, so that's pretty huge. You can giggle, but before that it was like, "You want to go to Chili's or Applebee's or Friday's?" Like, "Isn't that all the same restaurant? It's just the same thing."

If your conscience won't allow you to do either, vote no, but then, because of what we already know, you're going to have to come back and decide again on the first two. A people consumed by the gospel on mission with the gospel know how to say goodbye and know that sometimes saying goodbye bears far more fruit than not laying down our personal preferences. The third log on the fire is found... Let's pick it up where we left off. Let's start in verse 26.

"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." Remember, he's talking to the elders. **"...to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock..."**

The third point in gospel-rich, gospel-centered, on-fire, flaming mission for God that must be in place is not just authentic, honest community, not just the willingness to lay down personal preference for the glory of God, but also an unmoving, unwavering commitment to God as he has revealed himself in his Word. Here's why that becomes important. People don't think about it this way, but it becomes imperative that we think about it this way.

God is going to disagree with you often, and God is always right. You can giggle, but every

generation throws its cultural ammo at the Word of God, wanting the Word of God to give, as though God is not transcendent and outside of time, like he was not aware of how enlightened we would be in '14, and if he knew how smart and far along we were in '14 he would never have written those things he wrote about sexuality, he would have never written those things he wrote about a man and a woman...

What happens is our culture starts to launch all its arsenal at the Word of God. "Surely he didn't mean..." "Well, if he would have known..." I'm telling you, without a ferocious commitment to the Word of God and being willing to be marginalized because of what it says, there *will* be no transformation in souls. There *will* be no entering into the mess to rescue, because our drift is to say there's no mess.

"Move along. There's no mess. There's no sin that needs to be cleaned up. There's no soul that's busted up that needs to be rescued. See, what God meant when he said that was a sin is not that it was a sin, but that it wouldn't be wise. When he was talking about that sin in particular, he wasn't talking about that sin like it worked then. I know he says, 'Don't be gluttonous,' but he just didn't know. There were no such things as buffets. Now that there are buffets, surely God would relent."

You can giggle, but this is the type of argumentation that literally is happening right now to justify what the church, through the Word of God, has condemned as sinful forever. Missional church is rooted in the Word of God. It's not moving. If you don't think this is true, this is an easy study for those of you who have access to this thing called the Internet. Look at the mainline denominations. What happened to them? They vanished.

The downtown metro areas of every major metropolitan city in America have massive empty mainline denominational churches. Why? Because in order to reach people with the gospel, they said, "Well, people get offended by this, so let's just not talk about that. When we offend people, they won't listen to the good news of Jesus forgiving them for their sins.

Well, it's their sin that offends them. Okay, let's just make it about the gospel of the kingdom. Let's just make it about being good and doing good things and having a good heart. Let's not talk about sin or repentance at all. Let's just talk about taking care of widows and the poor. Let's talk about injustice and oppression, but let's not talk about the other stuff."

There are all sorts of ridiculous holes in that. First, wouldn't injustice then be sinful? Now you haven't eradicated sin; you've just tried to redefine it. On whose terms? Yours. We've already talked about this. You would make a really crummy god. God should disagree with you. Alpha and Omega has always been, will always be. You two are arguing. Who's your money on? The safe bet, brother or sister, is not you.

Don't you confuse you? Sometimes you're restless in your soul. You don't know where it's coming from. You're angry, but you don't quite know what happened there. *You* confuse you, and yet all of a sudden you're exalting yourself as god? We had dinner on Thursday night with some friends, and those friends brought this couple who aren't believers. This couple in particular always brings unbelievers, because I think they don't quite know how to share the gospel.

So we always ask awkward conversation starters. It's like, "Matt, what's the difference between, say, Protestants and Catholics? By the way, these are our Catholic friends here." "Okay." So I start talking, and the wife said, "I just feel like that's so narrow. I just think the Lord would never be that narrow. I think the Bible has some things God didn't want to apply on all people but just some people. There are certainly outliers to everything. Wouldn't there be outliers to what the Word of God says?"

We had a really loving, friendly talk about if you get to pick what you want from the Word and not what you *don't* want, then you've made yourself the authority. You've made yourself god and are in no way submissive to the God of the universe. The way the Lord will lean into you, press on you, shape you, and mold you will be with his Word. Your feelings betray you. What you feel is your flesh. Isn't it? Don't we know this?

Most of the desires that creep up in my soul had better be informed by the Scriptures or I'm going to be in a lot of trouble. There is a way that seems right to man, and in the end it leads to death. Timothy, once again an elder in Ephesus, says this. This is 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**"

If you have a church background, that's kind of a kitschy little verse, right? "Let's throw that up on a coffee cup." But hear me. What just happened is Timothy said... Timothy heard from Paul that the Word of God was going to correct you. That's never pleasant. It was going to rebuke you, that God

was going to engage you by saying, "No, *this* way. Not like *that*, like *this*." That through the Word, God was going to equip you and train you, correct you, rebuke you.

This is what the Word of God does. So it shouldn't surprise you when you come across things in the Bible that make you go, "Oh, I don't really want to do that." What happens in that moment is you must decide who is the ultimate authority in your life, you or God. Please hear me. This could be a whole other sermon. Please trust thousands of years of Christian interpretation over...

If you ever buy a book that says, "New perspective," you've been duped. You might as well just get something you see on an infomercial. You know those things? It's like, "Have you ever tried to make pancakes?" It's like a guy who probably can't zip his pants. He's spilling it all over the stove. New perspective stuff, a new interpretation... These are all flags that should make you go, "Absurd." Trust 2,000 years of the church's interpretation of the Word of God.

"What about baptism and membership? There are all of these other ancillary arguments." Sure there are. But there aren't a lot of arguments over what's sin and what's not, historically. Never has the church gone, "Adultery? That's not really a sin. See, what Paul meant when he said adultery wasn't that..." No, no. Never, except in the modern error, have those types of ridiculous arguments been birthed.

We're rooted in the Word of God or we die. We shrink and disappear. Hear me. I'm praying that the lampstands of many will disappear. "That seems kind of cruel." Well no, I'm praying for repentance first, and if there is no repentance, then just put that light out. Give us the building. No? No one even heard that? Maybe I should have said that louder. Here's the last one. Acts, chapter 20. This is one I think people don't think of often. Acts 20, starting in verse 35:

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship."

The fourth piece on a church that's aflame with life, engaging a city, and seeing people come to know, serve, and love Jesus Christ... They are an authentic, honest community. They are a

community that is willing to lay their preferences down for a kingdom greater than their own personal kingdom. They are ferociously committed to the Word of God. Then here's the one that few people talk about: they are hardworking.

When Christ called you to himself, he did not call you to a life of ease. Are you tracking that? He hasn't called you into ease. Rest? Yes. Soul-leveled rest? Sure. Joy? Absolutely. Ease? Not a chance. He hasn't called you into ease. Here's what's interesting to me. I'll be 40 this June, and I remember... I don't know what grade I was in. I remember when all of a sudden the education system decided to be more interested in my self-esteem than it was whether or not I was learning anything.

It went from me failing a test to, "Oh gosh, how's he going to feel about himself when the little moron doesn't study and makes a 50? Oh, you know what? Let's just let him take it again. Oh, this time he only made a 62. You know what? Gosh, he's going to really think he's absurd. What kind of citizen is he going to make when we tell him he's foolish because he's a fool who won't study even when given a second chance. So let's give him a third chance."

That was a shift that occurred. What it has produced is a type of entitled laziness among my generation and below that always has somebody else to blame and has some sort of allergic reaction to the reality of hard work. If we have been called by God to push back what is dark in the world, do not think that's coming easily.

That will not come through some burst of adrenaline, through one gathering of a prayer meeting, through one attempt at pressing into the darkness. We must be willing to have our lives wrung out to push back what is dark in the world. I think the predominate example as I've studied and read over the years is William Wilberforce.

William Wilberforce was a member of the British Parliament who worked tirelessly for 20 years to make the slave trade illegal. In 1807 (I believe the month was February), the British Parliament, after 20 years of Wilberforce day in and day out spending his own money, putting forth bills that got shot down, working back channels, tirelessly trying to shut down what he saw biblically as a horrific injustice against mankind and the *imago Dei*...

He saw the British Parliament vote overwhelmingly to cease the slave trade. After the vote, according to history, Parliament stood up and began to applaud, and they turned to face Wilberforce's chair. Wilberforce was sobbing with his face in his hands. Then he got up from there,

and for 26 more years he labored, now that the slave trade was illegal, to make slavery itself in England illegal, and three days before he died, Parliament voted to emancipate the slaves of England.

Forty-six years of mind-numbing, back-breaking, sleep-depraving labor. I think that concept is so foreign. Even now, I don't think many people are going, "That sounds awesome." That brother died knowing he had poured himself out for the glory of God and the good of others, and that's a good death.

Churches that are serious about multiplication are open and honest. They work toward authenticity. I know there's secret sin in here. I'm not an idiot. I know there are some of you fooling around. I know some of you are getting high. I know there are all sorts of secret sin in this place. We're moving toward it. You need to get over yourself and confess before you destroy your life.

But right now, let's just be a community that's moving toward this. Maybe this is your morning to finally out yourself. God already knows. They are a community marked by "I'm going to lay down my preference." So I'm asking you, Denton covenant members, vote yes next week, make plans to transition to Flower Mound, or if your conscience won't allow you to do either of those, then go ahead and circle "no."

Be willing to lay down what's comfortable and known to risk what is unknown for the hope that maybe God will do something bigger and beyond what we can imagine. Churches that are serious about gospel-centered multiplication are unswervingly locked into the rails of the Word of God, and they work hard. They go to bed hopeful and exhausted. That's a good way to go to bed. I think that's why David said the righteous sleep well.

Four churches: two vibrant, full of life, messy, a bit grimy, and always rejoicing and two that stared at their navel, wished they could become more morally pure, and were terrified of anyone who saw the world differently than they did. One of those doesn't exist at all anymore, and one of those I think only has a couple years left if the Lord doesn't do something mighty. May the Lord do these things, encourage these things, and cultivate these things in our midst. Let's pray.

Father, Jesus tells us that where our treasure is our heart is there also, so I pray, Father, that our treasure would be you and, therefore, our hearts, our energy, our efforts, our desires, our longing

would be locked up in knowing you, making you known, having our lives spent for what is eternal and not what's transient and that you would encourage us in these things.

For my brothers and sisters in this room who, Father, keep sin and struggle hidden, just between you and them they think, I pray for a deep and weighty conviction to lay on their hearts. I pray for freedom against the type of self-righteous hypocrisy they're walking in. I pray that glad confession might be made.

Father, I know the idea of the transition is personal and painful for many. I'd even include myself in that. I do believe and pray that you would help us to believe, Father, that lining our steps up with what appears to be where you're leading us... If the godliest men, the men you have put as a covering over this place, and their wives all passionately believe this is where you're leading us, that you would grant us the courage to trust you and then trust them who you've put as a proxy over this church.

God, grow our confidence in your Word, as I see weekly the temperature of our culture escalating against what you say is right and good and beautiful. I pray, Father, that you would grow our confidence in the Word, that we'd be unwavering. I pray, Father, for our work ethic, that we might be marked by those who aren't afraid to get our hands dirty, aren't afraid to work long hours, aren't afraid to engage injustice and oppression, aren't afraid to get in the mix to push back what is dark and wrong in the world. Help us. It's for your beautiful name, amen.