



Marked (Part 7) – Multiplication

Matt Chandler – September 24, 2017

[Video]

Nathan: My name is Nathan, and I live and work in Romania as a missionary. About a year and a half into our marriage, my wife and I heard a missionary preach at church, and we both felt individually like God was calling us to full-time missions. God made it clear in a number of ways, and we felt affirmed in the decision. In 2013, we were sent out from The Village's Fort Worth Campus.

The first year we moved to Romania we experienced significant losses in our family, but we felt at peace because God was with us. It has been a difficult journey but one that we wouldn't change. When you know God is in something, you want to follow him no matter the cost. It is necessary for Christians to go out, because there are so many people, not just in Romania but everywhere, who do not know the gospel, and how are they going to know unless someone is sent?

[End of video]

Good morning. How are we? Doing well? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Psalm 77. If you are a guest with us today, we're going to do something a little bit different. We are in the seventh week of preaching through the statement we created several years ago that we feel like we wrung out of the Word of God, some guiding sentences about how we wanted to be shaped and molded as a church.

That statement is simple but robust. It just says that "We exist to bring glory to God..." That's why we're here: to bring glory to God. "...by making disciples through..." Then we get into methodology. "...gospel-centered worship..." We want to be a church that worships the risen Savior, but we want that to be rooted in the gospel.

It wasn't just worship, but we also wanted to be a community. We wanted to embrace that we are a community of faith and that God has put us together for such a time as this, and that needs to be informed by and shaped by the gospel. Then we talked about service, that we are a community heaven-bent on serving one another and loving one another and working out the "one anothers" in a given context.

That leads me to Multiply. When we talk about multiplication, what we're talking about is that God takes broken sinners like you and me, redeems us, and then uses us as agents of reconciliation so that we multiply. We multiply as individuals and as an organization. So rather than exegetically walking through a text... What I mean by that if you're a guest with us or that's new terminology is what we historically do here is read the Bible and go line by line, and then I exposit the Bible.

What I want to do today is read a passage, and then I want us to spend some time doing what the passage actually says, and then from there I want to paint a vision for our future that we believe, as the elders, God has given us. So I want to celebrate the past, rejoice in where we are, and then point to what we believe God is leading us into tomorrow. If you feel like, "That sounds like it's going to take a long time," I promise you it is.

Over the last probably year and a half, one of the things I've been trying to do is in my journal spend some time writing and remembering the way God has worked in this place that's abnormal and to remember those times that we've done what by every measurable were these foolish "This doesn't make any sense. Why would we ever do this?" and then God blesses it.

What became apparent over the last year and a half as I was working in this practice is we are a people, by the grace of God, who, on repeat, have taken really crazy steps of courage and risked a lot and then have reaped the benefits of that risk, because as I'll say a little bit later in the sermon today, that space where we're uncomfortable, that space where we're not sure, that space where we're a little bit anxious and uncomfortable...

That space is actually called *faith*, and it's in that space that God meets us where we are. Almost all of the beautiful things you could point to in your life were accomplished in that space of faith. To become a Christian is a very uncomfortable thing. To radically shift your allegiance is discombobulating for a season. If you've been a Christian for a long time, you just forgot how discombobulating that was.

The Village Church has been a people who have embraced risk and walked in courage, at least as long as I've been around, but it certainly predates me getting here. So let's read this passage, and then I want us to spend some time doing what the passage says. In Psalm 77, there has been some sort of national tragedy. We're not sure what that tragedy is. The first part of the psalm is lament, a feeling like God had forgotten them, a feeling that God had not kept his promises.

Then the writer of the psalm shifts in verse 10 through the end of the psalm and establishes one of the many, what I'll call, heartbeats of the Scripture. What I mean when I say that is they're so woven throughout the Bible they become a kind of normative practice for the people of God. So let's look at this, starting in verse 10.

"Then I said, 'I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.' I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples."

When I say this is one of those heartbeats of the Scriptures, what I'm saying is that not only in *this* text but throughout the Word of God you're going to find this call for the people of God to remember the faithfulness of God in their past, to remember it and rejoice in it and to get excited, regardless of their present circumstances, of the faithfulness of God yesterday, and it roots you in the today and gives you hope for tomorrow.

This is not just in *this* psalm, but woven throughout almost every book of the Bible is this idea of "Remember, remember, remember." What does Jesus do as he heads to the cross? He institutes the Lord's Supper. To what? Help us remember. So what I want to do is just spend some time remembering and rejoicing together before I say, "Hey, this is where we feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to go."

When I was in the hiring process of The Village Church... Cards on the table. I didn't want the job. I wanted to go out West and plant a church. I spent years out there in my earlier life and thought I'd get back to the West. I didn't want to be in what *Christianity Today* called in 1998 the "center of the evangelical world." I want to be in Enemy-occupied territory. Church on every corner...that doesn't appeal to me. It certainly didn't at 28.

So, I'm going through the process of being hired here. I'm 28. I have no pastoral experience, really, no seminary degree, and yet this place was crazy enough to even have the conversation. There were three or four different occasions where I got in the car and called Lauren and said, "Well, *that's* over."

"What happened?"

"Well, they asked me about this, and I answered honestly, and it just got awkward. Let's just start looking at real estate in the Bay Area." Then they would call back and go, "Hey, let's get together again," and we'd get together, and they'd ask about *this* philosophy or *this* theology, and I would answer. I could feel as I was answering that this was not what they wanted to hear.

Three different times, I got in my car and got on my cell phone, which didn't look like this, and called Lauren and just said, "Well, that's it. Let's just keep working with a nonprofit and then keep studying and trying to build a team to head out West." Finally, it just became apparent to them and to me that God was up to something here.

I was sitting with the deacon body at the Village Grill, and they had butcher paper on the table. Gilbert Montez asked, "What's your vision for the church?" So I grabbed a crayon. If you remember this, if you ever ate there, there was butcher paper and crayons. I took out a crayon and drew a circle and wrote "HVFBC" (Highland Village First Baptist Church). If you didn't know, that's who we are. If you're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm Baptist," welcome. You're fine. We have crazy uncles, but everybody does.

So I drew "HVFBC." I knew I wanted to change the name to something like "The Village," but you don't say that in your first meeting with the deacons. You kind of hold that back until maybe you get a little bit more credibility and political capital. I just drew "HVFBC," and then I drew all of these lines out and I drew other circles, and I said, "What would it be like if the heartbeat of this church was not just *inside* the walls of this church but *outside* the walls of this church?"

We would be a community of faith that was serious about taking the resources, talents, and force of God's Spirit in this place and pushing it out, and we planted churches and established missions and worked globally, not hoarding our resources, trying to do things simply, not over the top, excellent but not top of the line, like, church 'good enough,' and got serious about seeing people come to know Jesus Christ in profound ways all over the world."

Then that group of deacons and I began to dream about what we could be. What would it be like if The Village Church could be a place where it was okay to not be okay? My entire experience in church was that everybody had a smile and everybody was doing awesome. It wasn't until I actually got in ministry that I realized that was such a façade and everybody was broken and had a lot of doubts and was bitter and their marriage was falling apart, but on Sunday it was like, "How are you, brother?" "Praise his name. We're great. Love this gal."

What would it be like if we could say, "Hey, we live in a Genesis 3 world. It's broken, and even the people of God can hurt, can mourn, can experience loss, and can wrestle with doubt"? What would it be like to create a community of faith where it was okay to not be okay but not want to stay there? What would it be like to say, "We're going to follow you, Jesus, no matter how crazy the ask is"?

What would it be like to live with openhanded gladness, saying, "We're going to give away a lot of what is given. We're going to be serious about praying for other churches, about wanting to see the kingdom of God..." What would it be like to be a church that understood that our church is not the apex of the kingdom but we're a part of a greater kingdom and they will not be singing songs about us in glory? What would that be like?

We gave ourselves over to orienting around some of those things. There were massive philosophical, theological, and practice shifts that first couple of years. In fact, everything that has led historically to a First Baptist Church becoming a First *and* a Second Baptist Church was done in those early days. We shifted how we did music. We shifted how we dressed. We shifted even our model of...

We were a Sunday school-based church, but we grew by 1,000 people year one. There were 168 people my first Sunday. By the end of that first year, there were 1,000 people. We had two Sunday school rooms that held about 20. You're going to have to shift your model. So we moved to Home Groups. Then Dell Steele... I will praise Jesus for Dell Steele the rest of my life.

Dell Steele and a group of men laid on their faces in those old terrible portables that probably should be condemned over at the HV Campus. Have you ever been in one of those? If you haven't, don't ever go back. That's where we used to put your kids, by the way. We were trying to figure it out in the early days. He and a group of men would lay on their faces on Thursday morning and just cry out and ask God to move, ask God to do something significant.

I'm telling you, if the Spirit of God has done anything beautiful in your life at The Village Church, it was on the prayers of those brothers before any of us got here, that God would do something profound in *this* place with *this* people for the glory of Jesus' name in *this* part of the world. Dell, in the middle of all of that change... Change is hard on people. It is really hard on people, and it was hard.

Think about it. You're a church of 168, never been larger than 350 or 400 your entire life, and all of a sudden, in less than a year, you're a member of a church of 1,000. You don't know anybody anymore. You know everybody who was here when all of the new people came, but it just doesn't feel like you know everybody. So there's a radical shift in mindset in a church that's 300 people and a church that's 1,000 people and growing quickly.

There were all sorts of risks in those days, risk to let me lead. At 28 I had a bit of an edge. In fact, if you don't know why our pre-2006 sermons don't live on the web, it's because of who I was at 28 and the fact that, like fools, we were doing six services a weekend, two on Saturday night (biggest regret of my 20 years of ministry), two on Sunday morning, and two on Sunday night.

This is going to be hard for you. Right now, my filter is washing out a thousand things every moment that I know shouldn't be said. After five services and eight Americanos, that filter is done. Literally, we had to go, "Pull them. Pull them all from the web." In '06 we kind of stabilized. But God was just doing these incredible things. We did six services every weekend. We turned away from all six.

In fact, just to show you how prevalent this problem has been and just to remind you this isn't normal... How many of you have ever been turned away from a service or childcare at The Village Church? Okay, look around. That's not normal. Church services don't sell out. Are you serious? I can't tell you how discombobulating that is to people when they come in. "What do you mean I can't come in?"

"Yeah, there are no seats."

"What?"

"Yeah, there's no place for you to sit here."

"That can't be. This is church. I've read about you guys. You're dying. Young people are just leaving in droves, so how can there not be a seat for me?"

Yet this was our experience. The Spirit of God was pouring himself out in these unique ways. We couldn't solve the space problem. The median age in those first three or four years... We were about 24 to 26. In fact, Todd Wagner, who pastors Watermark... Watermark was swelling at that time too. We had this interesting dialogue that we were actually a lot larger than they were, and they had like three times the budget we had, because *his* people owned companies and *our* people worked entry-level jobs for those companies that his people owned, so the budget discrepancy was significant.

I have an entry-level 24-year-old making 35K a year, driving a \$35,000 car, wearing \$400 jeans. So he's tithing, but it looks like about \$6. A lot of change in the boxes in those early days. Many of you are here because we prayed you in. I was like head on a swivel for anyone with gray hair and a Bible by year three.

I was like, "Oh my God! Are you a Christian? Is that your Bible? Anything highlighted in there? Please don't leave. We are not a youth ministry. Please stay. This is not a collegiate ministry. We need your wisdom. We need your insight. We need your life skills. Oh, you don't know much? Okay, we'll help you grow in your knowledge of the Bible. We need, like, basic hygiene for some of these dudes. Just come and help us with this."

God was blessing. Things were exploding. These things are not normal. God was just doing something among us that no man could own, nobody could touch. Just the Spirit of God. We didn't mail out mailers, like, "New hot series after Easter. Come check it out." I'm not against those things. We just weren't doing them. God was just sending people who were hungry, who were hurt, who were broken, who were lost, who were addicted, who were confused, who never felt safe in a church. God was doing these things.

The Spirit of God in nothing but the generosity of God was pouring himself out, and then we were stuck. Six services, turning away from all of them. One of my favorite parts of our history is in 2007 we realized, "We're not going to make it. We're just not going to make it. I can't do this much longer. Bleecker can't do this much longer. Our staff can't do this much longer. But what's the answer?"

So we gathered together as a body for something we called *Venture*. How many of you were here for *Venture*? What we did in *Venture* is we just said, "Hey, for the next six weeks..." It ended up being eight weeks. "...we're going to fast and pray, and we're going to ask God to do something that only God could do." It's the only series of prayer meetings we've ever turned away from. On Wednesdays we would fast all day, and then we would gather and just plead with the Lord to solve this thing we had been unable to solve.

I have this beautiful picture of me sitting on the stage and the room over at Highland Village filled with people on their knees, and we were asking God to do what we knew we could not do. We asked him to solve this thing in a way only he could get credit for. That was our heartbeat. We don't want to be looked at as a church with great leadership, although we want to be good leaders. We want to be a place that's undeniably a work of the Spirit's power.

That's why we never chased trends, and that's why I'm grateful to God that we broke all of the church growth rules in those early days about how you should behave and how you should operate. We didn't do any of that, and we grew by leaps and bounds because the Spirit of God was upon us. So we gathered and prayed. Week two we prayed this specific prayer, 720 or 740 of us, whatever we could jam into HV and not get in trouble by the fire marshal, who was actually there, so we had to be like, "Oh, sorry, closed. If Roland wasn't here we could add more."

We cried out, "God, do this in a way that we can't really teach anybody else about it; we would just have to point to you as being the sustainer and the provider. That's what we want, Lord, because we want you to be magnified. We don't want the name of The Village Church to be magnified or any minister here to be magnified. We want people to go, 'Wow! Jesus.'" That's how we prayed.

On Tuesday of that next week, I had a lunch already scheduled with a man named Lan Leavell, pastor in Denton, confusing, looks like a biker, rolls his own cigarettes. I just haven't sat with a lot of pastors who roll their own cigarettes. It was a bit discombobulating for me. He was the pastor (this will start to make sense to you) of Grace Temple Baptist in Denton. That started to make sense for me.

As we sat there, he said, just blanket statement, "We're dying as a congregation. Our worship minister has just left. We're down to about 30 or 40 families. We can't keep up our building anymore. UNT wants our spot for a parking garage. We sit on the campus of the third largest university in the state of Texas, and we're not going to make it. What do you think about coming up

here and," to use his word, "marinating with our leftover people and this becoming the north campus of The Village Church. You guys can show the video up here, and let's go."

I very quickly said, "No. No, thank you. I don't want the same problem in two locations, so, no. Thank you. I appreciate that." I don't know how you interact or how the Spirit interacts with you, but in my follow-up to why this was a bad idea, I felt like the Spirit was like, "Hey. Hey, man. I'm trying to answer one of your prayers here. Remember? It was less than a week ago you were like, 'Hey, do something that nobody can take credit for.' I'm trying to hand you an \$11 million facility 20 minutes from where you are. You should probably listen."

Then Lan and I were like, "Okay, let's just do this. Let's get our teams together and see if the Lord is in this." That set up this long period of time where we were asking, "Could God be in this?" I had written an article for the *9Marks Journal* about multisite and not really being a fan of it, wondering, "Where does this lead?" You can actually find that. That's the thing about being in our day and age. Anything you ever say lives on forever. That was not a problem 60 years ago.

People will oftentimes say, "Didn't you say...?" and I'm like, "Yeah, that's like '04. Why don't you give me some grace to grow? I was in my 20s." I had written an article in the *9Marks Journal* called "Clouds on the Horizon," and it was a critique of the multisite model about "How does this end? Where does this lead? What is this going to look like? Are we going to have six teachers over all evangelicalism in 40 or 50 years? How does this end? How do you transition these things off?"

Nobody had answers to these questions at the time. It was a new idea that everyone was rushing headlong into. I had written this article about "I don't have the answer to these questions. I think this would be a foolish move," and here was the Spirit of God smiling at me. "That's cute. That's cute, Pastor. Here's what we're going to do."

Then here's what we did. We launched The Village Church Denton. That was our first campus. Here's what we knew about that at the time: *nothing*. We didn't know what we were doing. Beau Hughes had been our college minister, had no upper-level executive pastoral experience, wasn't a great teacher at the time, and we were like, "Be the campus pastor," right as he got home from his honeymoon. He had just gotten married, no kids, in his 20s. "We want you to be a campus pastor."

"What does that look like?"

"We're not sure."

"Who's going with me?"

"No idea."

"Is this going to work?"

"We'll find out."

That was kind of the compelling vision we laid before the men and women of The Village Church, and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of men and women left The Village Church to join The Village Church of Denton. It wasn't long after that when Milfred Minatrea at Northway Baptist Church down on Walnut Hill said, "Hey, that looks really cool. Can we do that here?" We were like, "Oh my gosh. Who would we even send down there?"

We launched Dallas Northway without a campus pastor. We just thought we had a good mix of guys who maybe together could pull it off. Think about how crazy that is. We have been a people that over and over again have taken the risk and God has blessed it. Here's what we said. "Hey, if you live down in Dallas, good news. We're going to launch a campus down in Dallas."

"Who's going to lead it?"

"We're not sure."

"What's it going to look like?"

"We don't have a lot of answers."

"What does the body look like?"

"They're mainly 80- and 90-year-old men and women. You guys are in your 20s. What could go wrong? Let's get down there and let's see."

Man, if you could see the kind of ministry that campus has done... They sit in one of the more compelling places in all of Dallas. From 35 to our campus is nothing but first- and second-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants, for the most part, and then at our intersection *this* way is nothing but multi-millionaires and multi-million dollar houses. In fact, my neurosurgeon is about four miles from our campus.

So they sit at the crossroads of beautiful opportunities. The Transform they do there for that community is one of the most stunning things The Village Church has done, but all of those men and women went with not a lot of answers, with a lot of courage, and God has blessed it. In that short little window, coming out of Venture, God provided to us something like \$20 million worth of real estate that people just gave to us. They just deeded it over to us.

From there, there began to be additional sites added. You had Fort Worth that came in, and then you had Southlake that came in. You had Plano that was born. Most of us here in Flower Mound remember Plano because they cherry-picked our staff something fierce. They had like 20 first-round draft picks and took all of them. So we were like, "Oh, okay. Oh, him too? Oh, her too? Oh, okay. Well, I guess we'll survive. We'll figure it out."

Plano to this day is such a stacked team, from Melissa Lampe (who's no longer Melissa Lampe; she is married) to Jamin Roller to Hunter Hall to Adam Hawkins. They're just lights-out gifted. They were born in that time. In the middle of all of this, I was having this conversation with Beau Hughes. Beau and I go way back. In fact, I met him about a week or two after he became a Christian. I actually was a part of a group of guys that baptized him in the Gulf of Mexico. (That *is* gross, but it *is* water and awesome.)

Then after we baptized... I've just been near to him since his conversion. So I was in Beau's ear going, "Hey, how does this end? What does this look like? Have you ever thought about leading Denton to be an autonomous church?" To which he easily responded every time I brought that up, "Not interested. I appreciate that, but no, I'm good. I don't want any part of that. I'm not getting up there after you. Just let me shepherd and love people, and you do your little Rain Man thing. All right? You leave me alone. Let me do this. I'm not interested."

Little did I know at the time, Steve Hardin was talking to him about that, and so was Josh Patterson, and he said the same thing to all of us. "Not interested in that. That's not really my deal." Around that time, we took a trip up to New York City, where we had several partner churches, and had a

breakfast with JR Vassar, who's now in Grapevine but was pastoring Apostles Church in New York at the time.

He had a conversation with all of us, and the Spirit of God pricked Beau Hughes' heart, and on the flight home he was like, "I think we should have that conversation." In 2014, we began to pray and seek God's face on campus transition and what campus transition would look like. During that time, I preached through the book of Acts. We called it "Out of joy the church multiplies." How many of you were here for our study of the book of Acts?

Then we moved to campus transition. The Denton Campus voted at 96 percent to break off from The Village Church and become an autonomous campus. The 96 percent didn't really hurt my feelings. It was the fact that my parents stayed there instead of coming back, but I've worked through that. It's fine. I don't need your encouraging emails this week. We've had a conversation. It's cool.

Ninety-six percent of those people, who just 10 years earlier said, "We're going to risk it; we're going to head up here," now said, "Hey, we're going to risk it again," and the amount of fear and discombobulation in that season... That's one of the busier seasons of my life in pastoral ministry, because there was all this "What if everybody leaves? What if we announce this and everybody comes back to [what was then] the Flower Mound Campus?" We hadn't moved quite yet.

Like, "Are we going to be able to hold all of the people who are coming back?" So we were bracing here, and they were preparing there. Then the transition happened, and nobody came back. Well, maybe four people came back. So we braced for this. "Oh my gosh! There's going to be this mass exodus," and the Lord just smiled and said, "Oh no, no, no. I'm doing something here, and it's bigger than you and it's bigger than them. I'm up to something here."

Since 2014... One of the things that has led me to recount the generosity of God to us as a church is that when Denton rolled off and began to really soar... They didn't die. They didn't shrink. They became highly contextualized to Denton. Denton is a different place, but so is Plano, and so is Southlake, and so is Fort Worth, and so is Dallas. These are all very different locations in very different settings.

As we watched Denton become highly contextualized in preaching, in staffing, in outreach, and in organization, and we watched them thrive, we began to collectively perceive that there was a

weakness in how we were doing ministry, so over the last two years, the elders of The Village Church have been in a lot of prayer and dialogue about where God is leading us as a community of faith. As we look back on God's generosity to us, we see that where God tends to meet us is when we step out in courage and risk.

Last May, all elders at all campuses gathered together, and after multiple Monday night meetings that started at 5:00 and were scheduled to end at 10:00 but didn't sometimes end until the next day... We prayed and argued and fought, and in May, all elders at all campuses stacked hands together and affirmed that the Spirit of God was leading us into what I want to announce this morning in what we're calling *Multiply*.

Since multiplication is in our DNA and has been how we have functioned and thrived as the people of God in this place since the beginning, Multiply is a five-year plan The Village Church, all of us, are stepping into, where our hope is that by the end of that five years all of our campuses will be autonomous churches, highly contextualized to their location, with live preaching, a central or an elder board of their own, seeking to reach that part of the city with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let's breathe for a second. Multiply is our hope that over the course of the next five years all of The Village Church campuses will transition from being campuses to autonomous churches with live preaching, with lead pastors of their own, ministering to their part of the Metroplex in highly contextualized ways. That's our plan.

Now, if that feels kind of jostling to you, here's one of the ways that helps. What were you doing five years ago? If you start thinking about what you were doing five years ago, you start to see that five years is a long time. Our commitment is we're stacking hands together and saying "We're all going to work on this together. We're all going to celebrate this together when it happens. We're all going to rejoice that this is what God is up to."

This is one of those moments that sounds a lot like Gideon's army slurping water at the stream, because in human capacity this is a foolish move. "Let's purposefully shrink one of the larger churches in the United States by 6,000 people." Who does that? That sounds crazy unless the Spirit of God is in it, and then it sounds brilliant, because at the end of that little battle with Gideon's army nobody was like, "This is stupid." No, there was too much victory there to be celebrated.

So this will be the plan for the next five years. We're calling it *Multiply*. We believe the Lord is in it. After all elders affirmed it, it went to our exec staff, and the men and women on the exec staff were like, "The Spirit of God is in this," and then all of our staff across all campuses said, "We're a little anxious about this, a little nervous about this, but we're in. If this is where the Spirit of God is leading, let's go. Let's go get it." So, this is Multiply. This is what we're announcing today: our plan that over the course of the next five years all of our churches will become autonomous churches.

This isn't a crazy move in that all of these campuses already have their own elder boards, and the campus pastors have never been asked to be emcees. They preach at least 14 times a year, sometimes 16 times a year. They all sit on the central elder board and the executive team. They have built The Village Church and how we operate just like any other...in fact, *more* so than any other...group of people have. So they're already in this mode of looking forward to transition, looking forward to becoming autonomous churches that are more highly contextualized.

So, what does this mean for you and me? I say this every week, but I always do love it when you hit right where my outline is. Let's dive in. Here's what we can do as we consider this. First, we can pray. We need to pray. We think the Lord is in it. I know our elders across... We got all of them to agree on everything without any dissent, without any group of them going, "Well, if you brothers think the Lord is in this, go ahead, but I'm just..."

Just positive stacked hands, "Let's go get it," across that many campuses with that many different men and then have it affirmed on all of those different staffs? The Spirit of God is in *that*. You can't get that kind of "We're all in together despite the level of risk that's involved here" unless the Spirit of God is up to something. So we can pray. We don't want to get out in front of the Lord. We don't know who's first or who's next or where this falls.

We know Plano appears to be the closest, but that's not to say they *are* next. We just know we're all stacking hands and working on this. At the end of five years, if a campus isn't ready, we're like, "Too bad. It's time. Get out." That's not... We are they. You are us. We are The Village Church. Our commitment together is to build up the body in such a way that it can flourish and thrive. I want you to pray about this.

We want to pray for unity. We want to pray for courage. We want to pray that God would bless this in really beautiful ways, like he has every time we've stepped out and taken crazy risks. Here's the second thing: we want you to give. If you think this is the place where I start to pass a plate, you're

wrong. That's next weekend. (I'm just kidding. It's not next weekend either.) There will be unique opportunities and needs at each one of these campuses.

In fact, next week, everybody is off stream, and the campus pastors at these given location are going to lay before these campuses and men and women, "These are the needs of our campus in particular. These are the things we need to shore up, we need to get better at." They're going to cast vision for what contextualized ministry looks like in that place, at this time, for the glory of Jesus Christ. So, you can pray. You can give. There *will* be some financial needs at these campuses. There will be some financial needs here in Flower Mound. Again, we'll talk about all of that next week.

Lastly, you can go. Let me just lay my own heart in front of you. When I think about this place and when I think about our campuses, here's what I want. I'm so contending for this in the morning time and when I get to get alone. I so want this for us. I want us to be consumed with great urgency, with a desire to see God do something profoundly beautiful and powerful in our day.

When I'm reading about revivals in the Bible, when I'm reading about the Welsh revival, when I'm reading about these outpourings of the Spirit of God on his people, I just start to wonder, "Why *not* us? Why *not* now? Why *couldn't* we be a part of that?" What I know accompanies that is the Holy Spirit of God captivating your heart so all you can see wherever you look is the possibility of what God might do.

So what I want for you, Plano, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Southlake is when you drive into your neighborhood, I want you to feel this urge to see God do something on your block. When you're walking your Labradoodle for there to be this compelling angst for the Spirit of God to do something on your street. Why couldn't he?

I want you when you drive into work for there to be this vision in your mind of the Spirit of God breaking loose in power. When you go to where your kids play, when they play their sports, I want you to have a compelling vision for where you are, for what God might do, for an outpouring of his Spirit that transcends the best leadership principles and practices out there. I want us hungry for that.

Plano, you guys have a mosque two or three blocks from you. What would it be like to build everything around that? I haven't even touched on contextual preaching. Do you know how powerful contextual preaching is? Let's chat. Dallas, I have no idea how you're hearing this news. Do

you know why? Because I'm not there. I just see the camera. Do you know how limiting that is? I can't feel the room.

If we're really, really honest, I don't even know most of you. I love you in the sense that we've been put together for this time, this season, and God has done a lot of beautiful things in you and in me as we've journeyed this together, but I'm not there. I come down to Walnut Hill a couple of times a year to meet with staff or to be encouraged by Steve, but I'm not there. That's so limiting. But right here, I know people's names. I could just start naming people. I know their stories.

Do you know who knows your stories? The pastors there. Do you know who knows your stories? The men and women God has put there to love you and lead you and encourage you. Imagine what it would be like for contextual preaching to reach the people right in front of you, in your neighborhoods, experiencing the same issues and dilemmas that are going on right there, because we're not in the same place.

As I see people from all over the world flooding into Plano and Frisco because of the developments there... What would it be like to have a church that's built around the nations coming to them? What would preaching look like? What would music look like? What would philosophy of ministry look like? Just if your imagination would be provoked in this way.

Fort Worth, TCU and UTA are in your backyard. Do you know what we don't have around here? A Division I school. I know some of you are like, "UNT." No, no. UNT is like 25 minutes away. This is in their backyard. What would it be like to build ministries around where you actually are rather than to be centrally governed from some place, in some cases, 50 minutes from your location? We believe the Lord is in this. We want you to go.

I am aware that for some of us this kind of change is shocking and discombobulating and there can be a real sense of loss, but that sense of loss is shared by us all as we trust and believe that what God has for us next is greater than, without disparaging it at all, where we've been. The people of God tend to like being comfortable and having things like they like it. We're prone to it.

If you're like, "I don't think we're prone to it," just read your Bible. Everybody is always trying to pitch a tent in places where God is trying to keep them moving. Always. Just read your Bible. Anytime the people go, "This is great; we should never move," God is always like, "No, no, no. There is a ton more to do, brother. Put that thing back up."

Think about it. Over and over and over again. We've been through Exodus. They're like, "We should just stay here." "No. The Promised Land is *that* way." How about the Mount of Transfiguration? Jesus in all his glory there. There's Elijah. There's Moses. What does Peter say? "You know what we should do? I have a great idea. The music here is amazing. Jesus, you're giving the sermons. Whoa! Let's just live here." What does Jesus say? "Oh no, no. There's a mission to be accomplished, and we go to accomplish it. We're leaving the mountain. We're going back down."

I'm trying to lay before you that we cannot for God's blessing here grow comfortable with that blessing. We must be willing to risk and step into the unknown, because as I said earlier, that unknown space is where God meets us powerfully and profoundly. Not when it's in our strength but when it's in our weaknesses, asking God to really help us or all is lost. That's where he comes through. That's where our confidence grows. That's where worship explodes, not when everything is like we like it, so nobody move.

I am hungry to see an outpouring of the Spirit of God in our day. As hostility and marginalization occurs more and more and more, localized ministries that show hospitality to their next-door neighbor will be how the gospel penetrates and permeates culture. Localized ministries that show hospitality will be the way the gospel moves forward in a society that has marginalized and caricatured the Christian faith.

Your lives will be the light that people see and are drawn into the kingdom through. Not dynamic gatherings but your faithfulness in your neighborhoods, in your workplaces, and in your places of play. We are confident that this move will enable us to plant churches more effectively and send out missionaries more faithfully. We want not just a movement of God in *this* place but to the ends of the earth, and we're committed in that direction.

I want you to pray with us, and I want you to give to this, and I want you to be willing to go and dream. Even here in Flower Mound, I want your whole way of seeing this part of the world change when you leave this room. I want you to leave this room and, as you drive into your suburb, have a new fresh vision for what God might do in that neighborhood. When you go to Target today (and you know you're going to), I want you to be compelled for this community.

When you're out at the football fields in Brazos or when you're behind the... I want you to be compelled that the Spirit of God is up to something. He's going to do something. Teachers, when you

head back to school this week, I want you to be compelled that the Spirit of God could do something. He's up to something. Administrators, businessmen, businesswomen, I want you compelled that the Spirit of God is on the move, and we want to buy in.

We want to cry out, and we want to just keep pestering, because he told us to do it. What kind of father is like, "Keep asking. I love this"? That's the kind of Father we have. Let's go hungry, with great hunger. Ask him and expect it and want it and not stop praying until we see it. Or we could just kind of manage this cute thing, but it'll die. This is not a threat. I plan on being with you the rest of my life. I certainly won't give my life to it.

Listen. This has never been about numbers to me. We can go back to the red brick building. I'm not doing six services, but what I want is to see us long for the things of God in greater ways with greater hunger, greater clarity. I'd love to see the eradication of biblical illiteracy. I would love to see a zeal for Jesus Christ that the world finds strange and yet oddly compelling. I think this is what the Spirit of God is leading us into. It's just going to take some guts. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women, for the opportunity to be together. I pray that you would, in your might and mercy, encourage us.

In fact, why don't we do this? Let's just spend a little time praying together. We do this once a month. This is a good time to do this, just commit all this to the Lord. Here's how we tend to do this. I know we're on streams. We're just all going to pray together, all six of us this morning. Why don't you group up with who you came with? If you're all by yourself and you're an introvert and this is going to stress you out, just spend some time with the Lord. I don't want to send you into distress. I'm not trying to trigger anything for you. Just pray there by yourself.

Here's how I want us to pray. I'm going to give us a couple of things to pray for. Here's the first one. I want us to pray for unity and peace. God has done a phenomenal work of this over the last 15 years. The kinds of changes and shifts we have made over the last 15 years have killed and led to many a church split, and God has always kept us unified around a desire to make Jesus known and to be serious about his name and his renown.

So let's ask him in this season to continue to protect the unity and peace of The Village Church. I'm going to give you some time to pray for that. You don't have to pray and then squeeze the hand next

to you. You can just pray, and the Lord will hear all of our prayers at once. Let's spend some time praying unity and peace.

Father, we thank you for how you have held us together through some really high highs and some really low lows over these past 15 years and really even preceding that. Thank you for how generous you've been to us. When I think of elder boards and executive teams and staff, God, there has always been a sweet brotherly, sisterly affection we've had for one another. We've been able to extend grace where we have failed. We've been able to encourage and rebuke when necessary, and you have always protected and held us together.

So we bless your name. We know that's of heaven and not of man, so we praise you for that. We ask that in this season that for many will feel discombobulating...for many, this level of change will feel so disorienting and difficult...that you would enable them, Father, to lean in and believe that better days are ahead and that unanswered questions right now will be answered in your perfect timing. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, because we know it delights you when we dwell together in unity, amen.

The next thing I want us to pray for is courage and fruit. One of the things I've noticed happens is when you're small and poor you're willing to take all kinds of risks, and then when you get big and you have some cash you no longer want to make those risks. That's a universal principle that can be applied to business, church, or whatever. We don't want to give in to the impulse to insulate and self-protect. We want to have courage and we want to step out, trusting that what God has for us next is greater than what he has had for us in the past, acknowledging the beauty of the past.

So I want us to pray for courage, and then I want us to pray for fruitfulness. I don't always equate fruitfulness with numeric growth. This is not a hope for numeric growth, although I am certainly earnest to see people come to know and love Jesus Christ and nominal Christians be awakened to the beauty of their Savior. What I want to see is a group of men and women utterly consumed by Jesus. *That's* the fruit I'm hungry to see...walking in power, submitting to the Word of God, joyful in a season of cynicism and serious about the name and fame of Jesus. So can we pray courage, and then can we pray for that kind of fruit in this place? Let's pray.

Father, we pray, as Nehemiah did, that you would strengthen our hands, that you would grant us courage to follow you into the unknown. We thank you that this space of discomfort, this space of not fully knowing but knowing that you're leading, that you would meet us in that place in a really

sweet way, that we would have the kind of courage to follow you into the unknown. I'm just earnest, Father. I contend that you would create fruit in this place that is deep and serious and zealous for the name and fame of Jesus Christ.

If that means you pare us back, then we welcome that and ask for that, and if that means you add to us we ask for that, but we ask for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that's undeniably your work among us. We thank you for all that you've done in this place, and yet it has left us longing for more. We are that kind of child who knows there are greater treasures our Father has, so we want to ask that you send them by the power of your Spirit. We ask all of these things for the name and fame of Jesus Christ, amen.

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