



## A Testimony of Campus Transition

Beau Hughes – February 11, 2018

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**Josh Patterson:** Good morning, church. How are we? Doing okay? Great. My name is Josh Patterson. I serve as one of the pastors here on staff. I'm going to spend just a few minutes setting up the weekend, giving a little bit of context for where we're going to go in terms of the rest of our time. What I want to do is kind of reintroduce to you the vision we laid out this last spring, the vision we called *Multiply*. This really fits in the context of where this morning's time is going to be dedicated.

*Multiply* really has three components. The first component is *missions*. We have *missions*, *church planting*, and *campus transitions*. Just a couple of weeks ago, we talked about *missions*. Trevor Joy preached here, and different pastors preached at the other campuses, about going to the nations, going to the unreached and the unengaged.

*Church planting*, starting new churches here in DFW and beyond. In fact, here in Flower Mound and at the Dallas Campus and at the Plano Campus we introduced four new church planters to you. We're really excited about that. *Campus transition* is the vision we have for taking our campuses and transitioning them off to become local, autonomous churches. We believe God is asking us and leading us to do this over the next five years. So it's a really big deal.

This morning, what we're going to do is spend our time thinking and working through and talking about campus transitions. I have the privilege of introducing a dear friend and a friend of our church body, Beau Hughes, to you. Beau is going to begin walking us through a word of testimony, a word of exhortation about campus transitions.

As many of you know, Beau served here on staff for eight years. He was a campus pastor here at The Village Church up in Denton, which was our first campus. Beau has been a pioneer of sorts, been a dear brother, a faithful pastor to many of us. So would you welcome up Beau? As Beau comes up, I do want to say this. We invited Beau this past year to come and share with our staff at our monthly staff Restore, which we do every month, a time of coming together as a staff family.

Beau came and shared about campus transitions, and he shared a word of testimony, a word of exhortation from a place of honesty and a place of experience. When we heard that and walked through that as a staff, were edified by that, encouraged by that, we felt it was prudent to invite Beau to come and share that with the greater church body. So let me pray for him and ask the Lord to be mighty among us.

Father, we love you, and I'm grateful for this man, this brother. He has been a dear friend of mine for a long, long time, and I'm grateful for how he has personally ministered to me and to my family, and I'm grateful for how he has ministered to so many of us. We're grateful for The Village Church Denton as they're flourishing, and we're excited to give testimony to that reality and to that fact.

I know Beau is going to share a lot of that in his time with us this morning. I pray a blessing over them in Denton. I pray a blessing over Beau's family, his wife, his children, and I pray for us, that you'd open our hearts, you'd ready our hearts to receive what you have for us this morning. We pray all of this in Christ's name, amen.

**Beau Hughes:** Brothers and sisters, good morning. It is great to see you again. Those of you in Plano or Dallas or Fort Worth or Southlake, it's great to be seen by you again. I bring greetings from your brothers and sisters in Denton. As Josh mentioned, we're there, and we're thinking about you often, and we thank God for you and love you.

Just so you know, those of you I don't have a relationship with, I love this church so very much. I love your pastors and your deacons, and I love the one most of you know as your primary public pastor, Matt Chandler, very, very much. In fact, I knew Matt right as I became a Christian. I became a Christian in college. There were a couple of guys there leading a college ministry, and as I got born again, they were kind of like spiritual midwives.

I was born again. They caught me and sort of grew me up. (I'm sorry if that's too graphic for some of you.) Matt was there the first week after I became a Christian. He blew through town. He was living in Abilene, ministering there at the time, and he preached. He was a part of this group that raised me up. The impact that he and you have had on my life is so profound it's hard to even explain.

In fact, I was with a group of men this week and just spent the week with them. Some of them I didn't know, and one of the things they mentioned at some point in the conversation, as we were

getting to know each other, was, "Man, you're so different in terms of your tone and your personality than Matt, but there are so many little mannerisms and whatnot that remind us of him, at least as we know him from a distance."

I said, "Well, yeah. Not a lot of people have said that, but it makes sense." Because he and you, as a church, have so shaped me and, thus, so shaped our church in Denton. So it is a privilege to be here and in some small way, hopefully, to encourage you. As Josh mentioned earlier, that is how I perceive my role this morning. It's going to be largely testimonial, not as much a sermon, which is somewhat foreign to me these days.

I'm typically used to opening the Bible and walking line by line through it. We're going through the gospel of Luke right now at our church. Today is going to be a little bit different, and that's okay. This is what I've been asked to come do. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14, just to bring what I have in terms of a testimony and to boast in the Lord.

Just to note, although I'm here in Flower Mound this morning, obviously, testifying here, I'm going to be primarily speaking to the campuses that are *not* here, which may feel like a little flip of sorts. Typically, if you're a campus, maybe sometimes you can feel like you're listening in to what's being done here in Flower Mound. Well, this morning, Flower Mound, even though I'm here, you're listening in to what I'm saying primarily to these campuses that are not here. I hope that's okay.

That's not to say I don't think there are things to glean here in Flower Mound in regard to transitioning a campus. I think there are going to be some significant and maybe even surprising implications of campus transitions for you as a church here, and yet I'm primarily going to be trying to encourage the campuses.

What I want to say to you if you're in Plano or Fort Worth or Southlake or Dallas is simply that by God's grace and with the help of your love and support on this side of our campus transitioning to a church, we're doing okay. I just want you to know that. We're doing okay, and more than okay. As Josh mentioned, in many ways, by God's grace, as he has carried us, our church is flourishing.

So if you're a campus and you're thinking about... I know it's initially going to be Plano and Fort Worth. In Dallas you're thinking about just getting a pastor there, and in Southlake you're thinking about just getting your feet underneath you of what it means to be a campus still, in some ways. But

as you think about campus transitions, what I want you to know is you don't have to be afraid. There is life and joy out here. It's okay out here.

Once you get outside of this beautiful multisite ecosystem of The Village Church, it's okay. I don't say that merely tongue in cheek, because I realize that, especially at these campuses, this is a genuine concern for many of you, even as you hear Josh talking about it again this morning. When you think about campus transitions and multiplying, it can be a concern.

It almost can feel, to some degree, it's like, "Okay, Denton, which was the first kid, the first campus... They moved out of the house, and it seems to have gone okay. Great. Let's get the other kids out of the house. Let's be eager to do that." That's not necessarily the case, but it can kind of feel like that. So if you're one of these campuses, here's the heart of what I want to say to you today.

If for some reason you were forced to transition your campus tomorrow, which would not be ideal, but if you were forced to do that tomorrow, you would be okay. It would certainly be less than ideal, but you'd be fine. There would be certainly utter panic, accompanied by immediate and extended disorder, but you would unite together as a people, you would prayerfully ask the right questions as your elders and deacons led you along, and you would work toward and slowly gain clarity around those questions, and by God's grace you would move forward together as a church.

By the way, that's the general process you're going to go through whether you transition tomorrow or five years from now. What I want to say to you on this side of things, as one who has done it...you're going to be okay. So as I share this testimony, not to think too highly of what I'm doing or even to be melodramatic, but I've imagined the essence, at least from theological conviction, of my encouragement to be similar to that of Mordecai's to Esther, if you remember that story in the Old Testament.

Obviously (this is the melodramatic part), we're facing far less dire circumstances than Mordecai or Esther or the rest of Israel altogether, perhaps, but by way of Mordecai's theological conviction as he exhorted and admonished Esther... If you know the story, Esther was faced with this challenging set of circumstances where her people were going to be destroyed. She was there in the kingdom, in the king's palace.

The narrative paints this tension, as Mordecai is encouraging her to go in to the king and speak up for her people. Esther is faced with this challenging set of circumstances and this risky calling.

There's this internal wrestle of her stepping into that calling. Mordecai is telling her, "This is the direction you should go," much like many of the elders here are saying, "This is the direction we're going with campus transitions."

Within her there was this tension to that. She said to Mordecai, "Listen. I've actually not been called by the king to come into his chambers during these 30 days, which is what you're telling me to do. I'm not sure about this." Of course, she had a legitimate list of what could go wrong with what she was being led and admonished into by Mordecai, at the top of that list being, "I could die. I could lose my life."

Yet Mordecai said to her (this is my paraphrase), "Regardless of what you end up doing, God is going to use someone to take care of his people." His theological conviction behind that was, "And who knows whether you have come into *this* place, into *this* moment, in *this* kingdom for such a time as this?" As I give this testimony this morning, that's the theological anchor I want us to filter it through: the anchor of a theology of time and place and your role in that.

If you've been here at The Village, if you're an old-timer here, which I know many of you are not... If you were here 2002 to 2012, you'll know one of the passages of the Bible Matt taught on probably more than any other in those years, except for maybe Romans 1, was from Acts 17. So if you have your Bible, turn to Acts 17. I just want to show you this text of Scripture and the theology of time and place that's behind it, and then I'll transition into the testimony.

What Matt would do... This constant refrain from Acts 17. Sometimes the whole sermon was anchored around it. Many times it was just him referring to it. In Acts 17, Paul is in Athens. He's preaching the gospel to the people who are gathered there. It's a very different culture than Jerusalem where the book of Acts started.

He's there preaching, and the constant refrain Matt would always make is in verse 26. "[God] **made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place...**" We would talk about this all the time, that God has put you where you are at *this* time, *this* place, *this* job, *this* hangout, *this* friendship on purpose, so let's live missionally.

Remember we used to use that language? Let's live intentionally. Let's share the gospel as much as we can consistently. That same burden we typically use to refer to and sort of frame up

theologically being evangelistic, living on mission... I want us to consider these same theological truths in light of this vision to transition campuses.

As I share this testimony, there are three things I want to encourage you about: *why campus transition might be good for the leadership of your campus*, *why campus transition might be good for you and your congregation* (the very campus itself), and *why campus transition might even be good for you and your neighbors at your campus* (and maybe good in ways you wouldn't necessarily expect or even, possibly, have the categories to expect given your current reality today). So let's think about this, rooted in this theology of time and place.

1. *Why campus transition might be good for your leadership*. This is anecdotal, but let me just read, and be hopefully appropriately vulnerable with you for a moment, a prayer I wrote in my journal last April. This is just to frame up the context. This is almost two years after we've transitioned from a campus to a church.

That means, among other things, we have, as a congregation, made it over the hump organizationally of unwinding a campus from this multisite ecosystem of The Village to a local church, which was no small thing. We've made it over the hump organizationally. At this point, our elders and deacons were working together to serve and lead the church more beautifully than we had ever done in my 10 years of being there.

Our membership at the point I wrote this was stable to where it was. It was actually maybe up a bit from when we had transitioned, numerically speaking. We had made budget as a church two years in a row. I know many of you don't know anything about Denton. That is a miracle. When we were a campus, we didn't even know what a budget was. We were *that* kid in the family. It was like, "Oh, we have a budget? What is it?"

"Well, we don't know, and we certainly don't have the money. We have all of these college students, and they bring energy, but they don't bring any money." That was always our role, to some extent, in the family. The primary concern of our campus when we voted to transition and we began to think about it was the financial sustainability of it. It was like, "Can this work? We're not going to be having a sugar daddy down the street, are we? How are we going to do this?"

So we had made budget two years in a row. We had actually been able to give about 10 percent of it away, as you had modeled for us as a generous congregation. All of this was where we were at, and

here's what I wrote in my journal. Speaking to the Lord, I said, "I know you've seen it, but my heart has been riddled with so much fear and shame, and I've been eager to cover it over in my own strength and effort."

I got more specific and said, "Father, I'm afraid this church is going to shrink," and I wasn't just talking numerically there. I was talking about shrinking back from its flourishing under my watch, under my leadership. "Deep down, I'm afraid I'm going to fail. I'm afraid that I'm not a good enough preacher, not a good enough leader." That's all I'm going to share with you from where that went.

You may be thinking, "Uh, I thought you were going to encourage us. You're sharing sad stories from your journal. That's not encouraging to me. I mean, I appreciate you. It's kind of awkward here." Listen. This is almost two years into our transition as a church, and by all objective measures, certainly based on what we typically define as success in our Christian subculture, we were doing fine.

What I want you to know is I never one time wrestled with these kinds of questions while we were a campus of The Village Church. Not once, which I think probably speaks a great deal about my sense of self-sufficiency or at least my confidence about how God would continue to use Matt's unique and Spirit-empowered voice to continue to grow and build up the church.

Now to be sure, I wrestled with other things besides this, but not until we began a transition did these fears, concerns, and insecurities begin to surface. Though I know these fears, concerns, and insecurities are common in pastoral ministry, what I want you to know, as you think about why campus transitions might be good for your staff... Let me just give you a little glimpse into your staff.

I think these common fears, insecurities, and concerns of pastoral ministries in some, if not many ways will be magnified for your pastors, your leaders at the campuses here at The Village who lead you into campus transition. If you think about it, how could it not be? Think about this with me. When you begin a campus by taking one of the, and in my estimation *the* most powerful and winsome preachers of our generation, one of the princes of preachers of our generation, and you put him on a screen...

When that is quite literally at the center of your philosophy of ministry and you allow that voice, that person, that gift to be the primary attraction of your church or your campus for over 10 years,

and then you decide to pull the plug to that attraction and replace him with *me*, with *you* at *your* campus... Yeah, you're going to have some journal entries that look like that, at least if you're self-aware, if you're being humble and honest.

So at the end of the day, there are innumerable important aspects, organizationally and otherwise, of transitioning a campus to a local church, but what is at the heart of campus transition, at least here at The Village Church, is transitioning from Matt's unique, God-given (and beautifully stewarded by him and this church) voice. If you're at a campus, that is what you and your staff, especially the campus pastor, will feel the most. It's what you will quickly begin to understand has the most significant implications for your campus.

The implications of transitioning from Matt's voice at your campus will be different at each campus, given where your campus is at. It'll be different here at Flower Mound. There will be some implications for that in Flower Mound that you'll need to think through and pray through. I think many are already thinking through and praying through. What I want you to hear is that wrestling through those implications is going to be a good thing for your staff.

You see, those of us who have served on staff here at The Village, at your campus, co-laboring alongside Matt's unique leadership and preaching... Do you know what it has done? It conditions us, necessarily so in many ways, to an experience and an expectation of ministry in a local church that is simply atypical. The experience of being on a staff at a church like this is, in many ways, as unique as is Matt's gift.

Yet here's the thing. As a staff member, once you've become accustomed to this, once in your mind it's not atypical but actually normal, then transitioning away from this atypical experience and expectation and into something we actually, in the flesh, call *normal* or *average*... That is a jarring transition for your staff.

Brothers and sisters, how could it not be? You know this in your own lives, if you think about it in your work, in your family, whatever. You can filter this down. Once you've been a part of something special, who wants to be average? Who's charging up *that* hill? "Yes! That's what I've always wanted. That's all I've ever wanted: just to be average, just to go from something that is atypical to something that is (in the flesh) typical."

So campus transitions, transitioning from Matt's voice... It goes against the grain of so much of what our church subculture, especially here in a place like North Dallas, the suburbs of Dallas, has trained and conditioned all of us to consider as successful or desirable or important or special. Your staff will feel that.

In fact, I was reading a book called *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*. It's written by a couple of guys. They wrote it for those in pastoral ministry. They went around and interviewed a number of different elders in the world of the Christian faith. They interviewed J. I. Packer, John Perkins, and Marva Dawn, these people who have followed the Lord faithfully for all of these years. They were interviewing them to gain the wisdom of all of those years of following the Lord faithfully. A lot of these people are in their 70s and 80s and at the end of their race.

In the interview portion with J. I. Packer, he talks about this idea of being a special church. He's responding to their question, and he says, "Well, many churches today try to choose pastors who, in one way or another, are headline hitters and platform heroes. Eloquence, certain skills, personality, and force are the things that matter. They are looking for qualities that will make the pastor stand out in the larger Christian scene."

You're not doing that, but what I want you to know is that's your pastor. I'm not saying you came here looking for that or that's why you're here. I'm just wanting you to know that describes the experience of this church. This is you. This is me. This is who we're talking about here. We just need to understand that. He's talking about when churches become conditioned to look for this...

He says, "The thought is that such a pastor will, on the one hand, be attractive to those who are not yet members of the church..." Which is a great thing. "...and, on the other hand, be a leader to the members of the congregation." Which is another great thing. But he says, "[This] makes the congregational members themselves stand out as 'special.'" This is Packer reflecting. "That is the key phrase, I think. They get *special* wisdom from their *special* pastor." And *they* feel special.

"Being special is the Achilles' heel of many churches today. They want to stand out and be noticed. This passion to be seen as special is what drives the choice of pastor, and very often it works, at least on a surface level." Let me tell you who feels this the most out of anybody here in this church. It is your leadership, and in particular, your staff leadership.

Probably outside of whether or not or for how long (and this is my own experience coming out) they're going to continue receiving a paycheck (that was our experience in Denton)... What I want you to know is the heart of most of the things the staff and the leadership at your campus, as well as many of *you* at the campuses, are going to have to wrestle with regarding transitioning your campus to a church is this...*Is your staff still special or still part of a special church once they transition from The Village?* That is hard to wrestle through.

Once they transition from Matt's voice, once they're not a part of this larger ecosystem and platform of The Village Church, are they going to be okay with being a part of something (again, speaking in the flesh) that's ordinary? Will they be okay with that? The entire multisite model, at least here at The Village as we've organized it, has been set up in such a way that the journey of transitioning a campus to a church requires the church's leadership, especially its staff, to wrestle in their hearts through these matters.

Again, you're going, "None of this is encouraging, man. When are you getting to the encouraging part?" Right now. Let me tell you why this is encouraging. It's because for your staff to be compelled and provoked to wrestle through these questions... It's a good thing for them. It's going to be a good thing. It has already been a good thing. It has been a good thing for me.

Do you know what it has done for me? It has forced me to be honest about how I define success as a pastor, and you want your pastors being honest about that. You want them defining success in clear ways biblically. It's easy to preach (I'm just speaking for me) that success in the pastoral ministry is being faithful when you're turning people away from your services every weekend.

I'm not saying it's not true; I'm just saying it's far easier to say that when you're turning people away from your services. It's easy to be like, "Oh, we're so busy. We have multiple services." It's easy to kind of lament that until you're canceling one of your services. Campus transition has ushered me (and I think it'll do the same for your staff at the campuses) into a space where I've been compelled to consider things from a different and even more honest perspective.

This is my experience. Again, it's anecdotal. When you've been in this atypical environment as a staff member and the narrative changes after you roll off, when the Celebration service numbers begin to wane, it reveals, like few things can, whether you really believe some of the platitudes you've parroted throughout the years about faithfulness equaling success in ministry. So it has forced me to be honest about how I define success as a pastor, which you want.

It has certainly revealed and sanctified, purified my motives and desires in ministry, which, as a congregation, you want that as well for your pastors. It has also, as a pastor, compelled me personally to a greater posture of dependence and faith upon the power of God's Spirit in ministry. Not that I had to transition from a campus to a church for that to happen.

But, listen. When you're here in this ecosystem, it is easy and tempting to just believe and presume that as long as Matt is preaching and God is empowering him in that, people are going to get saved, and a *lot* of people are going to get saved. I've been around him for 20 years, so I have nothing but 20 years, two decades, of evidence of this.

Yet as I've transitioned, what I've been compelled to ask and think through is, "But what if he's *not* preaching? Do people still get saved? What if *I'm* preaching? Are people going to get saved then? Is it the man?" Certainly, God uses people, and we should not apologize for that. We thank God for that. It's obvious. He has done it from the very beginning. Yet is he going to use *this* person? Can he use other people? Is the gospel the power to save? Is the Spirit of God the one empowering that gospel?

I had to wrestle through all of that. So campus transition has forced me into dependence in a new way, and it has also fanned the flames of the gifts God has put within me and within the rest of our staff. There are some gifts that were laying dormant in this multisite ecosystem, and they've been awakened as we've transitioned. They've been provoked to awaken. They've been forced to awaken. Then there are other gifts that were already being exercised, but they're being exercised all the more now. We could go on and on, but here's what I want to say.

If you're in Fort Worth or Dallas or Plano or Southlake, as your campus, over these days and months and years, prepares to multiply, your leadership is going to be led in new ways to consider whether or not *they* believe God has called them to this time and to this place and to *you*, this people, and that will be good for your leaders. Not only will it be good for your leaders and particularly your staff; I think it'll also be good for you, as a congregation, as well. That's the second thing.

2. *Why campus transition going to be good for your congregation.* I'll just say this. Eleven years now at the church in Denton. I've seen nothing more humbling or unifying or maturing for our congregation over the past 11 years of being their pastor than being faced with and stepping into

both the opportunity and the responsibility of becoming a church and growing into *being* a local church, especially one with much smaller staff, all that that entails.

Outside of unique seasons of suffering in our congregation, nothing else even comes close to the unity or the maturing that has happened because of transition in our congregation. In our experience, the campus transition was good for our congregation if for no other reason than, just as it has done for our leaders, it provided our church with an explicit choice about what they understand a local church to be and to be about and what they understand themselves, as members who constitute that local church, to be and to be about.

I'll just say this to those of you at the campuses. Certainly, some of you may be compelled to leave your campus when it transitions. Maybe that's because it'll lose, in your mind, what has made it special and drawn you there, in terms of Matt's voice, but there will be other reasons you might leave as well, *plenty* of reasons, and good reasons. There's no shame in that. There are relational reasons to do that. There are maybe even geographical reasons to do that.

For instance, one of the things we used to talk a lot about in the early days here at The Village... Matt would get up and he'd often say, "If you're driving 45 minutes to come be here with us, if you're driving out of your neighborhood by handfuls of local churches that are healthy and good that are closer to you, where you can actually invite your neighbors who are lost, because they won't drive 45 minutes to come here... Whatever you're here for for a season, we can talk about that, but maybe you would want to be back at a local church." We used to say that all the time.

Do you know what happens? Maybe as Matt's voice gets unplugged at the campus and you're driving in *because* of his voice, maybe you'll be compelled to do that, and that would be a wonderful thing. There's no shame in that. If you stay at the campus, you need to be really careful not to think of yourself as more righteous than others if they decide to leave. There are a lot of good reasons people will leave.

In fact, if people leave, what we should do, more than getting upset or, worse, condemning... We should think through (and maybe lament this), "Okay, what has happened that the commitment or sense of calling to the church never moved beyond what first drew them there?" We should not do anything but expect some people to leave when you unplug the very attraction that brought them there in the first place. If you're self-aware, that should be expected to some extent.

But for those of you who stay at your campus, and I pray most of you would stay, if that's where the Lord has you... For those of you who would stay, what I'm telling you is that you will be compelled to grow up in ways together that a multisite ministry, a multisite campus, at least at The Village, simply does not and cannot provoke and provide in you.

If you're a member at one of the campuses, the decision for you to stay will itself be a decision that grows you up in your faith. The decision for you to think through, "Okay, maybe this is why I came initially, but I'm here now. There are these relationships. I'm a member of this church. What does it mean to be a member of this church? What does it mean to be a church? What is a church?"

You thinking through that and deciding to stay and give yourself in a newfound way to your brothers and sisters there... It will deepen the affections and bonds of your congregation, not to mention mature you in the process. So even the decision itself for you to stay there... Again, that's one of the clear ways multiplication has compelled *our* church, both collectively as a congregation but also personally as the individuals of it, to mature.

In so many ways, the transition, us deciding to stay together, forced upon us the opportunity and the responsibility to serve one another and to own the ministry of our church in ways we *had* not and, in many ways, *could* not when we were a campus. So much fewer staff... It's like, "Man, these banners are great. We should get some of these banners at our church."

"Well, who's going to get them? Who's going to do that? We don't have a staff to do that anymore. Who's going to do it?"

"*You* are. *I* am. We're the church. We're thankful for the staff and all the ways they serve us and lead us, but we're the church. It's on us now. Sugar daddy is not here anymore. We're going to have to do this."

I'll tell you what. That sense of weight, the beauty of that weight falling on our congregation has compelled us to grow up together, and it has been beautiful. Not only that. It has not just affected those of us who stayed at the campus to see it through to becoming a church; it also affects those who are now joining our church on this side of transition, because now for Christians who are stepping into the life of our congregation on *this* side of our transition...

First of all, they're no longer being drawn by the specialness of what was once there. You have (speaking in the flesh) ordinary preaching, ordinary ministry programming, hopefully extraordinary Spirit-empowered love for one another. That's the primary attraction, but they're no longer being drawn by that.

Do you know what else? There's also now a greater sense from the very first day, as they begin to step foot in the life of our congregation, that being part of this church is going to entail a greater degree of commitment and ownership from them than maybe it once did. Again, I'm not saying the only way to get that is to transition your campus. I'm just telling you anecdotally that is what it has done for us.

The last thing I would say here in terms of why campus transition has been good for our congregation is there is simply no way to overstate the significance of the effect of contextualizing ministry to your congregation, to your campus.

If you were here before Denton rolled off, you'll know one of the jokes Matt always had in his back pocket was to highlight and mock the cultural differences between the city of Denton and the city of Flower Mound. All the time. It's like essential oils and hippies and ducks and goats. It was a joke that was always there, and it always worked. Hippies and essential oils and ducks...it's all true. It took me 20 minutes to get here to Flower Mound this morning. I left my house and drove here.

It's only 20 minutes down the road, but it's like entering into a whole different country coming into Flower Mound from my neighborhood in Denton, where we're right down the street from the University of North Texas, right down the street from Texas Woman's University. It's just two different worlds even though they're 20 minutes apart. Yet do you know what I've learned the last two years? Just as important, if not *more* important, than the cultural differences of our cities where our campuses were are the contextual differences of our congregations themselves.

In other words, contextualization is not just about us living in different cultures in terms of our cities; it's that the campuses are actually different congregations. Do you know where that primarily comes out, that contextualization of ministry to these different congregations? Certainly, you can slip in some essential oil jokes here and there in Denton, but do you know where that comes out primarily, how it gets expressed? In the preaching.

If you're one of the campuses, I can't see you right now. I know you're there. I hope by faith you're there, that you didn't find out I was preaching and not come. I know you're there, but I can't see you like I can see people here in Flower Mound. Do you know what I can do right now? I can relate to you in Flower Mound.

Preaching, if we think theologically...creationally and incarnationally about it...it's relational. So what I can do right now is I can look over here at Brad Payne, and I know him. I have years with him, so even extemporaneously, like I'm doing right now in this sermon, I can speak to him and to his family. I can't do that... I'm assuming Steve Hardin is there somewhere in Dallas. It's like, "Where's Steve at?" I know he's there, but I can't speak to him like that. That's not unimportant. It's not insignificant when you're preaching.

Do you know how many times, just based on our congregation, where there are all manner of things going on in any given service, whether it's what I just did and I'm thinking through an illustration on the spot to encourage somebody or whether it's someone with disabilities or someone with special needs who has a moment I need to respond to in the preaching, I need to lead into responding to in the moment, in the room, how many times we've done that in the last two years?

You can't do that in this system. It doesn't mean it's bad or wrong; it just means you can't do that. So I've learned... It's not just about "Oh, our cities are different." It's the congregations are different. The rooms are different. The people in the rooms are different.

Even this week, I was meeting with a group of friends, and one of them told me... They're at a church. It's a really great, beautiful church. It's organized really similar to The Village in terms of multisite and primarily video preaching. He was telling me how recently he sat in the service with his 8-year-old daughter, and the screen came down and the person came on the screen, and his 8-year-old-daughter said, "Dad, does that man even know we're here?" Man, there's a lot to think through with that statement and a lot for us to process through.

As a campus, as a congregation, here's what I want you to know. In ways that maybe you can't even think through with the paradigm you have now, not only is transitioning campuses maybe going to be good for your leadership, I think it's also going to be good for *you*. It has certainly been good for *our* congregation in ways we expected and hoped but also in some ways we *didn't* expect or even *know* to hope.

At the end of the day, if nothing else, it has increased our love and commitment to one another, and not just to one another but also to reaching our neighbors, which is the last point I want to make in this testimony this morning.

3. *Why campus transition might be good not just for your leadership and for you but for your neighbors.* I'll just say this. On good days... Not like the day I wrote in my journal. That wasn't a good day, but on good days on this side of campus transition, God has provoked and brought much comfort and encouragement to our hearts to think about the fact that he has, by his Spirit, burdened your elders here in Flower Mound and all of the other campuses to transition campuses with what seems to be, at least in Denton and in our little neighborhood there, a pivotal moment of cultural transition.

At the same time this vision to transition campuses is happening, we're in a moment of massive cultural transition. Maybe we feel a little bit differently in Denton because of the demographic there, but we're there. Let me just give you an illustration of that. I came to The Village at the end of 2006. In 2007 we became a campus. We were the first campus out.

When it was just Highland Village meeting down the street here, a big part of the growth was all of these college students coming from Denton, so when we became a campus that all got pushed up to Denton. We were right across the street from the university there. It's where we still meet. In 2011, we had four services, and our 7:15 p.m. service was the largest service. Every person there was a college student.

We were turning away every single week, and we didn't even have a college ministry at this point. This was before we had brought in our college ministry, Campus Outreach, before we had gotten any traction evangelistically at UNT or TWU, certainly not like we have now. So in 2011, that's where it was. I had to do a research project for a deal, and what's interesting... In 2015, four years later, before we transitioned our campus, we cancelled that service because the attendance had evaporated.

Somebody here said, "Wow." Yeah, wow. It's like, "*That* seems like a good time to transition this campus. Are we sure we want to do...? Like, we're cancelling a service. Typically, that's not the point that you go, 'Yeah, let's step out and transition now.'" I'm just trying to get some empathy for my journal entries. Maybe I'm feeling insecure about it. But it's like it didn't make sense. That's tough timing.

What we looked at in the research was in 2011... Pew Research and all of these other demographic studies that are more empirical that are going on across the nation are seeing the same thing. This generation... I'm not talking about Millennials. I'm talking about even those behind Millennials and behind the ones who are behind Millennials. They're just not showing up like they used to, and we felt that. So in 2011 all the way down... By 2015 it was like, "Well, it's time to cancel this service."

I want to be really careful here in what I say, but I want you to just consider something with me. Might it be that God led The Village through what is now going to be this little parenthetical season of multisite in its life together, when the Bible-Belt cultural winds in DFW were still blowing people toward church attendance...? Might it be that he led us to this because he knew it would be a fruitful way for that season to gather and equip and multiply the church in DFW and beyond when those Bible-Belt cultural winds *stopped* blowing?

We'll see, but could it be that given the post-Christian direction our culture is headed... Again, I'm in Denton. Maybe we're 5 to 10 years ahead in feeling this, in some respects, but might it be, given that direction our culture is headed, that campus transitions long-term and the church plants in Dallas and other places that are coming out of them might be the most strategic plan to reach our neighbors and neighborhoods in this new post-Christian culture we're heading into more and more and more?

There's no way to know at this point, maybe ever. There's no triumphalism here. I just want you to think about this with me, because on a good day this is how I'm thinking and how I'm encouraged in some ways. In a culture where people are as diffused as they've ever been, sociologically speaking, where there's not as much integration in our cities and in our society more generally, we seem to be moving into a time where local embodied witness of particular ordinary congregations might have new opportunities to flourish in real neighborhoods.

I'm thinking about my neighbors in Denton, my block, the people right there with me who I see every day. When more and more of the neighbors we hope to reach are growing disillusioned and cynical about distant authority, not least because of the political rhetoric and dysfunction... When more of our neighbors are not only growing cynical about distant authority but the talking heads on their television screens that represent it...

To bring those neighbors into a church to find a geographically distant preacher on a television

screen... That might not, to those types of neighbors, be the most initially reassuring experience, certainly for those who are not Christians. They might not even understand that. Certainly there's still a type of person in terms of religious background and class and even maybe ethnicity who's still drawn to the model we're operating in here, and we praise God for that. We steward that as much as we can.

But as culture continues to move forward with our neighbors growing more post-Christian, more diffused, more multiethnic, there seems to be fewer and fewer people in this group, at least in our neighborhood in Denton. This might actually be why many of the churches that have operated historically with an attractional mindset and now are kind of plateauing or even declining in attendance, even in places in the South as the Bible Belt evaporates, culturally speaking...

This may be why many of those pastors are rethinking their models of ministry. As James Emery White says in one of his books, it seems we've moved in our culture from an Acts 2 type of evangelism to an Acts 17 type of evangelism opportunity. Acts 2 evangelism and Acts 17 evangelism are different, if you want to go read and compare those later. *Much* different, both in terms of the numbers and the response to the message and everything else in between.

Over the last 20 years, I have often marveled at God's kindness and providence in how he has raised up Matt. As I've said, I've had a unique seat for almost 20 years as first a friend and then a co-laborer... I've had a front-row seat to watching God raise him up, going all the way back to the year 2000. I've marveled at how kind and wise God was to raise him up out of Abilene, Texas, no less. Nazareth. Just brought him out of Nazareth at just the time podcasts were created.

I want you to think about that, and how kind God was to plant Matt at The Village here in this culture in DFW right at the tail end of Dallas Metro when there were thousands of singles looking for a healthy church. Even in this neighborhood here in Flower Mound, right when Crossroads Bible down the street... They're at a healthy, good place now, but at the point Matt was here, they were needing some health. They were looking for some health in their church.

Other people at other churches had gotten to a place where maybe they felt like they'd hit a ceiling in terms of their discipleship, and they were looking for healing and for hope and for vision and for just the glory of God, to experience it, and on and on. He raised him up right here. He planted him right here, and all those around him, like Josh and the other leaders here, and how then right at the

right time in 2006, when all of our services were filling up and we were turning away from services every week in Highland Village...

At just that time, technology made multisite a possibility. It wasn't a possibility before, but we could steward the growth with that new technology. So now, on a good day, to think about the timing of campus transitions in light of the shifting culture... I don't know what God is doing. I don't presume to know what he's doing. I'm not trying to truncate what he *can* do. It just encourages me to think about this moment the elders are being provoked and led to lead you into campus transitions and how significant that might be.

We can talk all we want about being a "go and tell" church versus being a "come and see" one, and hopefully every church is always striving to be both, as long as non-Christians are still coming to our services because that's maybe something they're inclined to do culturally or otherwise. But I can tell you this: campus transition has forced our congregation into a "go and tell" mindset, and it has done so at a time when the "come and see" crowd seems to be evaporating quickly, at least in *our* neighborhood that's filled with thousands of college students and professors and others who increasingly didn't grow up in church.

None of them had Matt as their high school or junior high camp speaker, and they've only known these cultural shifts of the last 10 years regarding technology and race and sexuality and politics as normal. This isn't a shift for them; it's normal. It's all they know, these 18-year-olds who show up day one in the fall. It's just normal to them.

All that to say, the point I'm beginning to believe is that being forced into this mindset of "go and tell" is better not just for the leadership of the church or even you, as the membership of the church, but ultimately for our neighbors. We have more non-Christian neighbors we're aware of in our services now than ever before.

I don't mean to say there are more there numerically than there has ever been. I don't know if there are. I assume there are probably not. But there are more we know of, because the only way they're getting there is because someone is inviting them. So we know they're there because one of our members, one of *you*, invited them. That's the only way they're going to get here. The only way they're going to hear the gospel is if they share it and invite them to come.

So I can preach, and I'll know who's sitting with who and where they're at, sometimes, in the journey of evangelism. All of that that's going on... We're aware of that in a different way, and we're now having to ask questions that when we were assuming or maybe even presuming that Matt would just draw people we never had to ask.

There were years where I would just humblebrag about, "Our church never sends out mailers." Just kind of a humblebrag with not a self-awareness, and I just stepped into that. Now there's a lot more self-awareness on *this* side of it, and it's like whether we choose to do that or not, the idea is that we're aware of what has sort of been the centrifugal force and God's grace to our church but now how that force has gone and we're together, by the Spirit of God, going to have to be those who go out and tell the people of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new way.

That can sound all good and sexy and whatnot, but let me just tell you this: it has been one of the scariest parts of campus transition. When we've organized our church around an assumption of a pipeline of new people being attracted into our services without us having to really make any efforts to get them into our services, what do you do when that pipeline does not exist anymore, besides cancel your 7:15 service?

What do you do, especially in a city like Denton, where the turnover of the city and of the congregation is over the top? As part of the little research thing I had to do... In five years, at our campus we affirmed 1,000 new members, and in the same five years we transitioned 750 of them. They're all coming *here*. They're at the campuses. Love you guys. They're there. We get this small time with them. Maybe it's two years, four years, and then we're sending them out, and we're perpetuating.

One of my friends who's in a similarly transient context says it's like hugging a parade. You're standing still and everybody else is moving on through. It's like you hug them for three years, and then you send them out. You step in and get to love them. Everybody is just moving through. That's kind of what our context is like.

Again, when the pipeline of incoming Christians, and especially young Christians who the church was once founded upon... When that dries up and yet the members of the church are still transitioning out of town at the same rate, what do you then do? How do you reach your neighbors *then*? That's what we've had to wrestle with.

What I'm saying to you at the campuses is that these types of questions we've been compelled to ask... Again, it doesn't take a transition of a campus, necessarily, to compel this, but it certainly helps. These questions we've been compelled to ask... I have a growing sense it's actually God's kindness to our neighbors.

In other words, the campus transition, which has compelled us to ask these questions, has not just been good for the leaders, it has not just been good for the congregation itself; it's actually, in many ways, good for our neighbors, who more and more need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and more and more will never step foot in an environment like *this* to do it, at least not without personal relationship.

So that's my testimony. I pray, intense as it was in different places, that you're encouraged, especially you who are at the campuses. If you're at a campus, I can tell you the experience of stepping out of this ecosystem of The Village Church and doing so particularly through a campus transition or a church plant, like some of your staff there are going to do... It's scary and painful.

Both relationally and otherwise, there will be different challenges at different campuses, and there will be sadness. What I want you to know if you're at one of these campuses... Whenever your time comes, it's going to be okay. The living God, by his Spirit, is with you, and as he has already been doing, he will continue to carry you forward into what the Lord has for you and for your church and for your neighbors.

I just want to end on this if you're at one of the campuses. Somebody is and always was going to have to transition your campus from Matt's voice into this new cultural reality and mindset of ministry. Why not you? Why not in these days? Could it be that God has raised you up in *this* time in *that* place among *that* people for such a time as this?

If you're here this morning and this is your first time here, I'm so sorry. I just want to apologize. You're like, "Uh, I don't know what a campus is. You tell me it's encouraging and good for everybody. Not me. I'm confused. What are we doing here?" I'm so sorry. If you want more information about multisite, campuses, all this language I've been using, ask one of the members here. They've hidden the Multiply vision deep in their heart. They'd love to tell you about it, as members of this church.

If you're here, especially if you're not a Christian and you're here this morning, the good news we'd want you to take away from this gathering of our church is not that our good and the good of our congregation and the good of our neighbors rests on us and on campus transition, because it doesn't. Our hope and our identity and our life doesn't rest on whether or not God has or has not raised up the campuses to transition, and you as a part of them, for such a time as this.

Our hope and our life and identity rests on the fact that at just the right time Christ came and died for the ungodly. If you're not a Christian, we want you to know about *that*. I know the time allotted here doesn't make it seem like this is more important, but listen. The heart of Christianity is not what's going on in *this* time and *this* place and *this* church.

This is a beautiful ripple of the heart of Christianity. The heart of Christianity is what Jesus the Christ did when he, though God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but he took on the form of a human being and became a human without ceasing to be God so he could rescue this world from where human beings whom God created had led it into in their sin.

Jesus the Christ came and lived a life we were created to live but could not, perfectly trustful obedience to his Father and faithfulness to what it means to be a child and son of God. He lived faithfully in your place. He died on your behalf and my behalf on the cross for your sins and my sins, and he was raised from the dead three days later.

Then 40 days later, he ascended into heaven, and he sits right now at the right hand of the Father as the King of the world, and he is ruling and reigning. This King has sent us his very Spirit. He has poured his Spirit into our hearts in love, those of us who are Christians, to lead us through this wilderness until we get to the new creation he has saved us for and is restoring us and the rest of the world with us into.

*That's* what we'd want you to know. That is the heart of Christianity. If you've never heard about this and you're here this morning, that's what we want to tell you about. I had to give this testimony, but I really wanted to tell you about *that* more than anything. So if you don't know about that, there will be men and women who will be up here to pray with you. Even now, as we come and celebrate the Lord's Supper and then dismiss, that's what we're celebrating, because that is what is of first importance in the Christian faith, regardless of what's going on in this church or any others.

Father, we thank you for this time this morning and pray that you would be near, especially to our

brothers and sisters at the campuses in Fort Worth and Plano and Dallas and Southlake. Would you strengthen their hearts? I pray you'd encourage their hearts through this testimony, and I pray here in Flower Mound that, Lord, you would find us here faithful to pray and to remember our brothers and sisters, even as we ourselves think about these things.

Lord, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord, and we want to do nothing more than give our utter, total allegiance to him all the days of our lives. So Spirit of God, even now, as we celebrate and remember him, would you lead us to that end more? In Jesus' name, amen.

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