

Hey, how are we? Let's go to Deuteronomy 6 and your bulletin. You'll need both of those. I guess if I'm honest, I'm not as far along as I thought I would be. I came to know the Lord just a few days before my eighteenth birthday. I was not a church kid. I think I just thought that by age 34 I would be holier than I am, more disciplined than I am and that some of my struggles would be completely gone. I just thought I would be holier by now than I am. Is that anyone else? Part of that is good and right and biblical. What I mean by that is the Scriptures are pretty clear that there's always going to be this angst, this longing, this desire for more of what we already possess inside of us. There's always going to be this holy discontentment. You see it in the Psalms all the time. I think one of the more unfortunate things about Evangelicalism is we've taken really weighty, thick, difficult psalms and we've put them on t-shirts and coffee cups. So when King David says, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for You," that's not cute. That's an agonizing "Where are You? I want more of You than I'm experiencing." That just doesn't belong on a mug with a picture of a deer on it. That's not where it belongs. Or again in Psalm 63 when he's like, "My flesh yearns for You. My heart fails inside of me." That is a "I need more of You than I'm experiencing." And then you see it in Romans 8 where the apostle Paul says that even as children of God inwardly we groan. So yes we have Him, but the fullness of what we want is not realized until the consummation of all things. And so we want to be more in Christ than we are right now. And then we've got that tension of really never being able to get completely where we want to be until God either kills us or we return. So that throws me at this time of the year into this kind of intellectual vortex of doom. What I mean by that is I get caught up this "Hey, this is a new year. We're going to do things differently, we're going to be different people, we're going to get things done" despite the fact that is not happening.

I am a big fan of David Brooks who is an op-ed writer for the *New York Times*. He's not a believer in Christ, although I am praying for him daily. He is just by far one of my favorite writers. He wrote a book two years ago called *Bobos in Paradise*, which was the best book I read that year (besides the Bible) in regards of just understanding our culture. This week I went to just read Brooks' op-ed piece, and I noticed that there was an article in the *New York Times* that just about New Years resolutions, "Do them or don't do them. It doesn't really matter." What they found is that close to 90% of Americans who actually set resolutions will break them by Valentines Day. They'll no longer be trying to pursue them. So let's check American resolve. You don't even get through the whole month of February. You make it to the middle of February. So literally we have the resolve and willpower of about six weeks. And that's the type A, anal retentive, freak show disciplined fools. Most of us are already off the rails before then. We'll be like, "In the new year, I'll get in shape." But that's already turned into, "Well the first Monday of the new year, I'll get in shape." So it really doesn't matter whether you set them or not, it's not going to happen.

Which really emboldened me for what I said last week. I said as believers in Christ, we don't find our strength in our own willpower. It's just not going to happen, because we are going to fail, we are going to struggle, we are going to have bad weeks. And then there are going to be times when it feels overwhelming to us. So we can't go by willpower or it's just not going to work. So last week we looked at 2 Timothy 2, looking to 2009 to be a year where we took our spiritual walks very seriously and didn't just boil it down to weekend religion. Instead we said, "Let 2009 be the year that we really try to grow, that we really try to get after Him as best as we can control it." And so we came out of 2 Timothy 2 where the apostle Paul says to Timothy, "Find your strength in the gospel of Jesus Christ." We said last week that that means that we find our strength not in our own willpower but rather in the fact that all of our sin, past, present and future, all of our struggles, all of our shortcomings and all of our failures were paid for in full by Jesus Christ in the cross. So everything

in your past, your current struggles and any failure in 2009 has already been paid for. And we said that's monumentally important for you to get this, because if you don't get this, it will only take a couple of failures and shortcomings to make you go, "Forget it. I can't do it." So we find our strength there, and the second piece to the gospel is not just that all of our sins are covered and paid for, but it's also the reality that in the cross God has given me today all that I need to be all that He's asked me to be today. So God will not allow me to enter into a scenario today that's not winnable. God's not going to put something in front of me that I have no choice but to stumble into wickedness in. So He's given me all that I need today to be who He's called me to be.

And for so finding our strength in the gospel and not in our own willpower, Paul gives us this three-headed metaphor. "Be like the soldier." And can I tell you I always thought it was weird having a Christian flag and even pledging allegiance to the flag. You don't pledge allegiance to flags in our faith. You pledge allegiance to Christ. So if you know anything about soldering, when you're a soldier, there is an objective to reach and none of the details mattered. Just get to the objective. And so we said last week that by the grace of God, we're to be single-minded in what our pursuit is. So our single-minded objective in 2009 is "I want to position myself by the grace of God under the waterfall of God's in hopes that He will grow my understanding and worship Him and put to death sin my life." And then he moved on and used this metaphor of the athlete and how an athlete, in order to win, has to compete by the rules. So we talked about how you have to get in your mind very early on that you're not as smart as you think you are. I'm not as smart as I think I am. And there are going to be these moment sin business, in relationships, in finances where, instead of doing things the way God has designed them to be, I'm going to go off on my own and try to win another way. And you've got to get in your mind early that you're going to need to submit to the Scriptures and godly counsel often. And then he ends it talking about how we need to be like the hard-working farmer. And it wasn't just "Be like the farmer." It was "Be like the hard-working farmer." The farmer is much more dependent on God than the other two. A soldier can call in reinforcements, he can call in an air strike. The soldier has options. The athlete has options. He can take some creatine monohydrate, a couple more protein shakes a day. He's got options. The farmer is more dependent on God than the other two because he can't make it rain, he can't stop it from freezing, he can't make the wind blow at a certain speed. Completely dependent on God, he does not get up in the morning and go, "Dear God, weeds are destroying the north forty. Will You please remove the weeds from the north forty? Because if you don't remove the weeds from the north forty, it's going to choke out that crop and I will not be able to tithe as much as I would like to. I'll be here if you need me. Just for clarification, it's the north forty, the problem is weeds. Good luck with that. By the way, I think You're great. Amen." That's not how it works. The farmer gets up with the sun and goes out all day long and picks the weeds while he begs God to make it rain. And so I really wanted to push on you, I have to wonder how many of you are like the farmer who's not hard-working. I wonder how many of you, if you really talked about your spiritual life, would look back on the last year, last three years, last five year, last decade and would be like the farmer that would say, "God, do this...move this...change this...start this...do this. I'll be here if you need me, sitting on the couch waiting for that one great sermon that's going to change everything." That sermon is not coming. Now through the preached word, God can penetrate a mind and a heart and open it up, but the painful work of sanctification will always be there. So we talked about this last week at length, and I wonder how many of us have just been perpetually caught up in this "I wish this...I want this...I wish God would do this...I want this..." but there's been no movement.

So here's what I want to attempt to do this week. I just want to lay some track for you. I want to say, "Here are some options for you if you are really going to take your walk seriously, if you're going to take your spiritual life seriously in 2009." So that's my attempt this morning, to lay some track for you and say, "Here are some options for you here at the Village." So let's get to work. Deuteronomy 6, we'll pick it up in verse 1. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore,

O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey." Now I want to say this to you so many times, that your first thought when asked about the commands of God is what I'm about to say. God is not like an earthly father in that the response to His commands is "Because I said so." God is not after begrudging submission. He is not after you doing what He told you to do or He'll destroy you. "He's God, He designed it, He built it...you just do it." That's not the God of the Bible. Every one of the commands of God is God lining you up with how He created things to be and how He created things to work so that, in your obedience to His commands, ever increasing, immense joy might be yours so that worship would be ever increasing. You see this idea four times in just the text we read. He says in this text, "Hey, I'm giving you the commands of God, I'm giving you the statutes of God, that you might obey them. And there are four reasons why you should obey them. Number one, that the fear of the Lord might always be present in you, in your sons and in your son's sons." In regards to fear, this is not "Oh scary God, please don't kill me." That's not what's happening here. This is the idea of awe or wonder.

I'll give you some examples. If you've ever gone to the Grand Canyon, they've got these rails so that you can't fall off. And there's this weird thing that happens when you're there. You look out on just that expanse and there's these two things. You're captivated by just how beautiful and big it is, and yet at the same time it's just nerve-racking. Or if you've ever been to the base of any real mountain. If you've ever been at base camp at Mt. McKinley or Mt. Everest or one of those, there's something weird that happens in the face of such massiveness. You're completely emptied of your own accomplishments. Nobody stands at the base camp at Everest and goes, "Summa cum laude, baby! I had my first \$1 million by the time I was 34. No one does that. They feel small, they feel insignificant and there's a little bit of fear there. And yet in that smallness, we become so aware of beauty and something bigger, and that moment doesn't feel empty at all. That's fear, awe. The religious word is "worship." And it's what you were designed for. It's why grown men paint their bodies still and go watch 18 year old boys play with a ball. Why do we do that? Why do we flock to concerts? If you go to any concert, you're going to see people lift their hands, they're going to clap, they're going to yell. There is an insatiable thirst in the heart of man to worship, which is why we do the things we do. He's saying here in this text that to obey and follow God is to be and walk in where He designed the soul to be. So it's not God going, "You do what I say, because I'm going to kill you if you don't." It's God going, "I'm trying to get you back to where I designed you to be."

That's not the only thing. He also says, "...that your days may be long." I know several godly men who died very young. This is not saying that if you obey the commands of God, you'll live to be 114. Once again, this is God tapping you in to how He designed the universe to work. We're a stressed out society. We like stress. Some of us don't even know how to function without it, so we create more of it. We've got to have stress to function. It's like a fuel. In fact, it's like a one-upmanship. Just ask anyone how they're doing and I guarantee you one of the first two sentences will be about how busy they are. It's like the busiest guy wins. I'll give you a little exercise for when you get home. Go home and Google "Sabbath." Because of the elevated stress of our culture, there has come a lot of stress related illnesses. And if you Google "Sabbath," you'll find some of the most liberal publications imaginable these giant articles on Sabbath where the scientific community has come out with this idea that if you will take one day a week and be rather than do, you will greatly reduce stress related illnesses in your life. Man, where do they get that? I read that somewhere very early on. Yeah, God creates for six days and on the seventh He rests. It's not because He's tired; He's wiring the universe to be a certain way. And so if you've got trust in a sovereign Creator God, then you don't carry all your stress by yourself even in the most dark times, because you've got a God you can trust who has not abandoned you, who is walking with you. And on an on I could go here. This has the chance to increase both quality and quantity of life.

Then He goes, "...that it may go well with you,..." It did not say that it will go well *for* you. This is not a genie in a bottle type deal. "I'm going to rub the lamp and then my first wish is for 10 million more wishes." This is not Santa Claus. This is not "I do this so that You do this." You don't get to control God with your obedience. That's a common misconception. It's

not saying that if you obey Him, there will be no struggles and no suffering. It's saying that in your obedience to Him, He will never abandon you to those things.

And then there's this last thing, "...that you may multiply greatly..." In the context, He's talking about babies. So I don't think this necessarily means if you obey the commands of God, you're going to have a lot of kids. Two weeks ago, we talked about this idea of the kingdom of God. I think what you've got happening here is their idea of the kingdom of God as this land flowing with milk and honey was this place where there's an ever increasing presence and power of God in their lives. So I think He's saying here, "Obey the commands of God, and the kingdom of God will be ever increasing. Your awareness of the presence and power of God will be ever increasing."

Now at this point, He's said, "Listen to these things, obey these things because of these reasons," and He hasn't commanded us anything yet. So let's look at what He's commanded us to do. The very first thing out of the gate, He's going to reiterate what I've already said about God not wanting begrudging submission. Let's pick it up in verse 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." So I think there are two pieces here. The first command is not "do" but it's "love." "...love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." He's saying that at the very center of your being there is a throne that God had better sit on. And if He doesn't sit on it, things are not going to go like they should.

So let's talk about loving the Lord God with all your heart, mind and soul. I'm speaking specifically to Christians here. Right before my eighteenth birthday, I had been walking with a group of Christians for about a year and a half. They were real patient with me, giving me books to read. And I was at this deal where God just opened my eyes and all of a sudden I believed it. I have a rough background. And what I mean by that is there was a lot of dysfunction in my home growing up, a lot of abuse. So when you grow up in that home, you grow up with what therapists and scholars call "baggage." So I had quite a bit of baggage. I always thought religion was "Do these things and God will love you," and I always resented that. So for me to find out that God's love for me was not predicated upon my behavior but on the cross was really a powerful idea to me. I never really understood the cross, what it meant. So when that became clear to me, it really created in me this unbelievable affection that I could be as bad as I was and as much of a failure as I was and still have God love me to the point of Jesus dying on the cross. That was a very profound idea to me and so contrary to anything else I had found in the world of religion that I had all of a sudden this really deep affection for Christ, but I also had massive baggage. I had massive anger issues. And then I had some lust issues. And so my love for the Lord continued to grow, but those issues didn't go away like I thought they would. And then it became difficult for me because at church, everybody was okay. Everybody was pretty and nobody struggled like I did. And then if I was honest about struggling, all of a sudden I become "project of the year" for the entire church. It's like everybody wanted to fix me. I don't know if you've ever been in a relationship where you're trying to fix them or they're trying to fix you, but it always goes bad. And so I'd end up in that, and I'd just go, "Forget it. I'll just be quiet and keep it to myself." And then very good Christian people would open their mouths when they shouldn't. Sunday school teachers and ministers would say things like "If Christ reigned in your heart, this wouldn't be there." And they'd say that from the stage. And I would be going, "Oh no! Because that's there. I hate it, but that's there in me. And so let me tell you what began to happen with my "Love the Lord God with all your heart, mind and soul." I began to grow resentful and cold towards God. Because I just couldn't please Him no matter how hard I tried. If that's the game, if it's He's in my heart so I don't struggle with these things, I just began to be angry with the Lord. And so then I defaulted back to religion and I was just trying to be as good as I could in the hopes that

God might somehow go, "Well the good outweighs the bad. Come on in." But that's contrary to even the essence of the gospel.

And so after I learned to study the Scriptures for myself and found out that people who said stuff like that were well meaning but ignorant of what the message of the Bible was, Lauren and I developed this real weird ministry. Everywhere we went we wanted to create this culture of it being okay to not be okay. So when we came to the Village, we brought that with us. We were like, "Hey, we want this to be a place where it's okay to not be okay. We want busted, hurting real people. No masks, no pretending." Now people are still going to pretend, but it's not going to be because of the environment we create. And so early on, I got up here and was just real honest about my own struggles, where I still was in a lot of my struggles. We had testimonies that first year where guys would come up and they'd just be like, "Uh, I just really struggle with this, and I can't seem to find God anywhere." and that's where the testimony would end. People would be like, "What?!? Where's the happy ending?" People didn't know what to do with that. We had like good Christian people leave the church going, "Oh, you're causing doubt." You're not causing doubt; you're being honest about the journey. And so this was really an immature prayer at the time, but I was always wounded by the guy who had the miraculous testimony. You know the guy who's like, "For twenty-two years, I struggled with this addiction, and Christ came into my heart and I never struggled again. Hallelujah." And everybody would be clapping and going, "Oh yes." I'd be like, "What a jerk." To me, that was like, "Look at how good looking I am. Look at my car. Look at how big my house is." It's like bragging. I was like, "Shut up. Sit down. The rest of us aren't there." And so we got here and this was our prayer. We were like, "God, we don't want a bunch of church people. What we want is hurting, broken people who struggle with dark, real things, God. Please send them." And then here's what happened the first year. He did send them. People would be coming going, "This is where I am and this is what I struggle with and this is where my heart is. What do I do?" And we were like, "Uh oh, we have not thought that far. Let's pray for the miracle real quick. God, give this guy a miracle."

And here was what we were learning. By the way, that second year, the prayer switched to, "Please God, send me someone who owns a Bible." And He answered that, praise His name. What we learned, and I'm still an adamant believer in this, is most people struggle because they are constantly addressing symptoms and not deeper issues. Let me give you an example. The reason most men can't get victory over addiction to pornography is because they think lust is their problem. Nine times out of ten, lust is not their problem. There is a deeper issue that is causing the problem of lust to flare up in their lives. They spend all their energy trying to address the issue of lust when it's a heart issue. If you simply treat symptoms and not deeper heart issues, then you're never going to beat it. So you've got to go after the heart. So we said, "How do you go after the heart?" We stumbled across something called Celebrate Recovery that Saddleback had put out, we started rewriting it. I love Saddleback, we just have some different theological convictions. And so we just started rewriting some of the stuff. We started rebuilding and rescheduling and doing it differently. We would run a group through, we would sit back down and work through it again and we'd run another group through and tweak it some more and so on. And then finally it became dishonest to call it Celebrate Recovery anymore, so we just called it Recovery at the Village. And Recovery at the Village is like discipleship on steroids. Its soul purpose is to get you past symptomatic issues and go after your heart.

Let me give you some examples. If your relationships are constantly unhealthy, that's a heart issue. Let me define that for you, because I think that if your relationships are constantly unhealthy, you might not even know it. If every two years you have a new group of friends and it's not because you've moved around, there is more than likely a serious heart issue. If your whole life is "They hurt me, then they hurt me, then they betrayed me, then they hurt me, then they failed me..." you probably have a heart issue. If you have a dark secret you're constantly hiding, there's a heart issue there. And can I talk to you just as a fellow dark secret guy. God's given each of us a certain amount of vitality and energy to walk in joy in life. The thing about hiding segments of who we are is that it takes up an unbelievable amount of energy to do it. So the energy given to you to do life well is used up on trying to hide. Here's another thing. It is impossible to love

or receive love if no one knows who you really are. Because if anyone tries to love you, it will be too easy to deflect and say that they actually love the version you are presenting, not you. So it is absolutely devastating to walk in a perpetual secret. If you are controlled by something, if something just owns you, if you just can't conquer it, whether that's an addiction to food or drugs and alcohol or pornography, you have a heart issue. Some people are addicted laziness. They just can't help but be lazy. This is a heart issue. If you can't seem to forgive this person or that person. Nothing is more painful than knowing you should forgive and not being able to figure out how. If you're constantly depressed or melancholy, if you just have no real affection for God and you feel like you're always in the desert, these are heart issues.

So let me lay down some rails. If any of this is you, on January 17, 9:00AM, Saturday morning here in this room, we'll start our step studies. And as I said before that's discipleship on steroids. It's a group of men and women coming together with similar struggles getting to the core issues, getting to the root issues. I'm not saying that if you do this, all of the struggle goes away. That would be a lie. There are no magic potions here. This is a part of positioning ourselves under the waterfall of God's grace in the hopes that He would move. This is pulling weeds while begging God to make it rain. And I know some of you are already in your mind justifying why you can't give up your Saturday morning. I heard a comedian one time talk about a friend who just would never go get his eyes checked despite the fact that he was nearly blind. And his joke was, "How can seeing well not be at the top of your to do list?" How can having a broken, fractured part of your soul mended not be high up on your to do list for 2009?

That's not the only thing here though. There's a second piece, so let's look at it. Verse 6, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." I believe He's covered everything. So, "When you lie down, see Me in those things. When you get up and go, walk, drive, see Me. When you are sitting, see Me. In that weird moment between sitting and rising, see Me. When you drive into your house, see Me. When you walk into your door, see Me. When you work with your hands, see Me." Frontlets is literally "Everywhere you look, there I am." He's saying, "See Me. Know Me well enough to teach Me."

Now I'm passionate about this next one, because I think it gets misrepresented. It's sinful how it gets misrepresented. Let's say I finish up here, my wife is at home and let's say I'm shutting down my computer with a picture of her fine face right there on it. For whatever reason, I see it and get stirred up in my affection for her. Like all of a sudden, I'm just so aware of my love for her that I'm almost hurting. And so I get in my car, I bang through some traffic and I get home. And I walk in and there she is just as fine as she could be sitting on the couch. I walk up and get down on my knee in front of her, grab her hands and go, "Baby, I don't know why, but after all these years I love you so much. When I see your black hair and those green eyes of yours, something just happens my soul." Right now some of you ladies are asking their husbands, "Why don't you talk to me like that?" Let me explain to you why that's going to go bad for me. Despite the fact that that would be legitimate affection, let me explain why that's going to go bad for me. My wife has blond hair and blue eyes. So correct affection applied wrongly is not a win. Now some of us have affection for God, but we have no idea what His attributes are, what the gospel is, what the Scriptures say He is and He isn't, what He's responsible for, what He's not responsible for. And so in the end, theology and doctrine are viewed as some sort of killjoy, some sort of love-robbing, man-made contraption to your affection for God, and in the end your love is a manipulative type of love that is no real love to begin with. What people do on this side of things is they like to look at theology and the Bible as some sort of cold, dead orthodoxy. But let me tell you what you're doing. It's the same as me walking up to my wife going, "It's your black hair and green eyes that stir up my affections." To which my wife would respond, "I don't have black hair or green eyes." But then I go, "Don't you tell me who you really are. I want you to be what I want you to be. Get contacts and dye your hair. That's who I love." Now is that love? That's a ridiculous version of love that those on the hyper-spiritual,

nonintellectual side of things try to build out as an excuse to those who would go, "Well wait a minute. What do you do with this difficult text?" And so maybe you have genuine affection for God, but you don't know anything about His attributes, you don't know how He works. Maybe that's where you are. Because He clearly says, "Love the Lord with all your heart mind and soul, but be able to teach My attributes and know them well enough that you see Me everywhere." Know enough about God, about how He's disclosed Himself to us in the Scriptures that when you drive into your house you're aware of Him, that when you're driving home from work you're aware of Him, that when you walk into your front door you're aware of Him, that when you're with your children you're aware of Him, that when you're laying in bed at night you're aware of Him, when you get up in the morning you're aware of Him, when you're working with your hands you're aware of Him. If you don't possess that, then you're running on a juvenile version of love that suffering or difficulty will eventually snuff out. It's the equivalent of loving your wife because you think she's hot. Now I'm not saying it's a bad thing to have a hot wife, alright. What I'm saying though is that my love for Lauren has grown exponentially since the first time I saw her and went, "Good Lord. And I literally mean good Lord for making something like that." Now that's a great type of infatuation, but love occurs when the layers start peeling back and you see both strengths and weaknesses. That's how love grows, not just "Oh, she's hot." And I think a lot of us have that type of relationship with the Lord. We just don't know anything about Him. So we're constantly saying, "Well, God wouldn't do this...This is who God is." And God's going, "I don't have black hair." So maybe this is where we are.

Okay, there's a lot of options even in that. Let me lay some track. If you're not a member of the church, if you're very young in the faith, six times this year we'll do the membership class. You don't have to join, but going through the membership class will tell you, "This is what the gospel is. This is what it's not. This is what the church is. This is how she functions. This is what we believe. This is why we believe it." It's a great tool for growth. I'll give you a couple more. This Tuesday morning, from 6:30 to 7:30, in three separate locations, we'll start Men's Bible Study again. The gist of Men's Bible Study this semester is: Where did we get the Bible from? Where did we get it? Who said those books were the books? Is there one story in the Bible or is there sixty-six? Is there unity or is there not? Are there inconsistencies? Is it inerrant? Is it authoritative? Are there problems in it? We're just going to get into it, dig around and answer it. And then for the first time, we're not just doing it here at the Highland Village campus. We're also doing it at the Denton campus. And looking over who's coming to the Village, we noticed about 1,000-1,500 people are coming from south of Carrollton, which is pretty crazy. So we're doing one in Dallas. We're going to do it at the old Prestonwood location. It's not Dallas Bible Church. It's located at Hillcrest and Arapaho. The address is 15765 Hillcrest Rd. So from 6:30 to 7:30 at Dallas Bible Church, we'll do it there also. It's a great chance for you to get plugged in and grow intellectually when it comes to our faith. Women's Bible Studies, I wish I could give a clear concise schedule of when and where they meet. They meet all over the place, they cover all sorts of materials. I believe you got a blurb about it in your bulletin this week. It would be a great idea to hop online and check that out. You've got Perspectives that's about to fire up, which is about how the church went from Jerusalem 2,000 years ago onto every continent in the world now, which is a great, great, great course. You have home groups. Can we agree that home groups are difficult? I've always equated them with trying to find a spouse. You're going to go to one home group and before the chips get there, you're going to be like, "Uh uh. I'm going to go to the bathroom. I'll be right back." There are going to be home groups that you get in and you go, "Well, maybe." And then six weeks later you're like, "Psycho," and you're out again. It's going to take a while, but you've got to fight for it. But your relationship with Christ, your spirituality, although immensely personal, was not designed to be private. The more you make your struggles and your victories private, the more you turn sanctification into a crawl. It was not designed to be that way. We were designed to have spiritual fathers and spiritual sons. We were designed to have men above us who speak into us and walk with us and men under us. And I don't care if you're 22. There's junior high kids here. There's 4th graders here. My first job in ministry was teaching 4th grade Sunday school. I am not banging the drum of home groups; I'm banging the drum of biblical community. This doesn't work well when you go, "I by myself am going to fix myself." That's not how it works.

Let me tell you the danger here. Going into 2009, I think you've got to be going, "This is what I need to do. This is the step I need to take. This is where I need to go." Let me tell you why. Mary, in her magnificent, says He takes the proud and sets them loose in the imagination of their hearts. Let me try to explain to you what she's saying, what God's saying in that. What happens to the proud is they spend the bulk of their day and the bulk of their mental capacity on what could be if they would have. So they go, "Oh, if I would have just taken Spanish more seriously, I'd be fluent right now...Oh, if I knew then what I know now, how much better of an athlete would I be...Oh, if I would have just chosen this instead of this...Oh, if I would have moved here instead of moving there...Oh, if this opportunity would have come instead of this... If I would have avoided this person and gone with this person...If I would have just been here and not there..." And all their energy is spent on "What if...what if...what if..." to the detriment of their present and almost the damnation of their future. There is no future if you're stuck in the imagination of your heart. There is no future if you're stuck in imagination land. You're perpetually where you are, always wishing you were more, always looking back to a past to fix your present rather than there being any real energy today to have God do something mighty so that tomorrow you're all that you hoped He could be in you. It happens to tons of us. We're perpetually stuck in this imaginary world of "Oh, if I just would have..." How about you just do, now. "Well, today kind of stinks, Chandler. Today's painful and I don't really like where we are today." Okay, but that doesn't get solved by fantasy. Science is not going to develop a time machine. And if they do by some crazy chance, I don't think the government is going to mass market it to you. So you're not going back and changing anything. That's why the gospel is so important. You're not going back and changing anything. Christ will, in the cross, redeem whatever is back there. But you're not going back. The decisions you've made, you've made. The decisions you haven't made, you haven't made. That's yesterday. Please don't sacrifice today and tomorrow because of fairy land.

So where are we going? The thing I'm pleading with you not to do right now is go "Okay, let's do it." Do what? That's what I'm asking. This isn't an ambiguous "2009, let's get a motto, make t-shirts." That's not what this is. Is this you over here? Are your relationships falling apart? Is your marriage a mess? Are you angry and don't know why? Do you struggle with forgiveness? Do you have no real affection for God? Okay Saturday, January 17th, let's start. Let's move...like the farmer, like the athlete, like the soldier, single minded. Let's go. Are you over here? Do you love the Lord but just don't know much about Him? Then here's the rails. There's more than this, but these are just what you can see in your bulletin. Let's do something, position ourselves somewhere. Because you and I both know, if all we're doing is just, "Yea, let's go 2009," nothing has happened. And I'm not a fool. I know some of us aren't tired enough yet. One of the things I hate the most about how the fallen world works is some of you are absolutely going to have to get your lives destroyed before you'll be able to think in any terms of what I'm saying here. And some of you are going to have to get so exhausted and lose almost everything before you're able to hear what's good news. But Paul says in 2 Timothy, "I do what I do for the sake of the elect." He's saying, "Some are going to hear." And so I say what I say today fully knowing that some will hear. May God kill the imagination, huh? And I like the imagination, just used well.

Is there a step? Is there a move? What is it? Maybe it's something I haven't mentioned. My hope is that on the way home we might be able to talk about these things. Like husbands and wives might be able to say, "Hey, I think this is a thing we need to look at in 2009." My hope is that good friends would be able to go, "I think this is something we need to look at in 2009." Maybe if you came here by yourself you'd be able to pick up the phone and call a good friend and go, "This is what I think the Lord's asking me to do and where He's asking me to walk." And listen, I think we're going to need the grace and mercy of Christ. I think we're going to have to constantly go back. I think we're going to fail at things, we're going to miss things, we're going to walk away from things. We're going to need that grace. This isn't about willpower. Discipline? Yes. But not willpower. We'll need lives submitted to God. Help us, Jesus.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women, and I thank You for our time together. I do pray that You would stir up our hearts and our mind towards you. I pray that there would be real practical, simple steps that we might know to

take in order to get our lives under the waterfall of Your grace, not to make things happen, but just to position ourselves while we pray that You would move, that You would rescue, that You would break, that You would heal. I do thank You for our time together. I never want to take it for granted. I pray for those who might not know what to do now. I just pray that You would give them the courage to come up and talk to one of our pastors, one of our elders and just ask for advice and maybe explain what their situation is and what direction they should go. I pray that in five years we might look back at 2009 as the year that You did a new work in us and a spectacular work in us. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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