

Thank you for being so gracious as to have me here. There's no other place I'd rather be at this moment than among the saints, worshiping and serving with you, gathering around the Word with you and enjoying our God together. And so turn if you would to Psalm 51. That's where we'll spend a good bit of our time this evening. As you do that, let me pray for us. "Father, as we sang this evening, You are everything. We pray this night that we would come to realize that more deeply and trust You more emphatically. We are humbled that we can come together and gather in Your name in peace with Your blessing, with Your presence, and come to know You, to love one another, to serve one another. And Lord, all of this is at the expense of Christ, at the expense of His blood of His body. I pray now, Lord, that we can join now together in holy communion and enjoy You and enjoy one another. So we pray, Lord, as all men and women come in from all walks of life, Lord, You know where they come from. You know why they're here and You know where they're at. And so we would pray that You would speak to them through Your Word and through me. We pray that You would cut through the scar tissue and the hardness of our hearts and the difficulties of our lives and lift us up. Help us to see You, to comprehend You, to understand the gospel and to apply the gospel more deeply as we leave. And so we are reliant on You and we depend upon Your Spirit to do this work and we trust you. In Jesus' precious name, amen."

When Beau asked me to come speak from the Scriptures, he asked that I speak about the heart or the soul, the inner person. It's something the Scriptures speak to everywhere and constantly. Between the Old and the New Testaments, there are more than 800 direct references to the heart, there are more than 300 direct references to the soul, there are more than 150 direct references to the mind and countless allusions to the inner person. And all of those words speak to and speak about that immaterial part of our inner being that for now is clothed and draped with a temporal, cursed, dying body. And then in the end, at our death, it will be clothed in a new, glorious, eternal, unfading body. So the Scriptures speak to it constantly. God speaks to it everywhere. And I think we have to pause and ask ourselves why. Because that's staggering. In the 66 books of Scripture, there are 800 direct references to the heart and hundreds of other allusions. Why? Why would God hammer home and speak so often and so deeply to that issue?

I think one simple explanation is because it matters so much to God. The first and greatest commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." It matters to Him. To God, it is the essential aspect of who we are, the essential aspect of our being. Joel 2:13 says, "rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster." So the Scriptures counsel us that as we come to God broken and repentant, let's not just come in an outward shell of religion or an outward shell of behavior, of tearing of clothing, of external fasting, but let there be a real rending of the heart. We should come to Him with a broken heart.

But I think a second simple explanation why He speaks to it so often and so deeply and comprehensively is that it matters so much to human life. Our heart affects everything dramatically, drastically, seriously. It touches everything. Solomon counseled his son in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Like a well of water comes up and feeds the surrounding field and vineyards and homes and a community, so our heart comes forth and feeds everything in our lives for better or for worse depending on whether that water is healthy and nutritious and feeds and waters well or that heart is full of contaminants and poison and kills everything it touches. Keep that heart with diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. It matters that much to human life.

So why do we think and feel and act the way we do? How do we really explain ourselves? "Why am I bitter? Why am I angry? Why am I unforgiving? Why am I anxious? Why am I depressed? Why do I lust? Why do I look at porn and masturbate? Why do I binge and purge? Why do I quarrel and fight with people? Why do I war with those around me? Why am I stressed? Why each day do I arise to the world and just live for myself? Why am I joyful? Why am I loving? Why am I peaceful? Why am I kind? Why am I longsuffering? Why am I forgiving?" Well, the Scriptures answer it. It's the heart.

I think it's the third reason the Scriptures speak so constantly to the issue. You will find about a thousand other explanations for yourself available to you, from the flesh and from the world around us. There's thousands of other ways to explain why we are the way we are. And we've all used them hour by hour, minute by minute. "Why are you angry? Why are you bitter?" "Well, my mom and dad were cruel...they were withdrawn...they were mistreated me." "Why are you despairing and anxious and depressed?" "Well, my kids are so troubling...they're so difficult...they're such a burden and strain on me." "Why are you constantly fighting and quarreling with people?" "Well, because other people are so selfish." I used one just a few days ago. I was being cranky and irritable and grumpy around the house and quick tempered with my kids and cold with my wife. And Ruth asked, "John, what's wrong?" And just reflexively out of my mouth without even thinking I said, "Allergies. My allergies are acting up." Something in me believed that and wanted to believe that little particles in the air, interacting with my nose and my sinus cavities creating swelling and difficulty breathing is why I'm so selfish. That's why I'm short and unkind.

I was reading an article in the Washington Post a couple of weeks ago, and the title of it was "Facebook Saved My Life." I thought, "I've got to read this. This is good." So I began to read, and it was just the testimony of a man who, several years ago, was just depressed and suicidal and there was conflict in all of his relationships...until he opened a Facebook account. And then he began to have meaningful relationships with people and get friends and have ongoing dialogue. That week before, he had celebrated his 200th friend on Facebook, and he was overjoyed and said, "I now have happiness in life. There's now peace in my life. Life is worth living now." And there's hundreds of those kind of explanations available to us of "This is why I feel and act the way I am. This is who I am. This is how I explain myself." And just as important as the question "How do I change? How do I improve my life? How do I make it better?", many of you are here this week beginning college because you believe education will improve your life. And in many ways it will externally. But what is it that really causes an improvement in our estate? How do we really change for the better?

That's what the Scriptures try to make us understand. Let's take a look at Psalms 51 and draw from it as we peruse it six principles, six truths about the heart. These are truths that the Lord does not intend us to miss or misunderstand, but they're truths that we're constantly missing, misunderstanding and neglecting. So you see the occasion for Psalm 51 is given at the beginning, "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Some of you know the story. It's given in 2 Samuel 11. In the spring time when kings go to war, David remained in Jerusalem at his palace. And one evening he was walking on his rooftop where he could see much of Jerusalem, and he looked down and saw a woman bathing in a home nearby. And the Scriptures say she was very beautiful. He sent and asked, "Who is this woman?" Those he inquired of said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, both of them away fighting your battles?" So David, after inquiring, took her, and lay with her sexually, committed adultery with her. And after she had cleansed herself, she returned home and in the time after conceived with his son. So she sent word back to David, "I'm pregnant." And David goes, "Uh oh, this is a problem." So he immediately thinks of a solution. "Send for me Uriah the Hittite and bring him back from battle." So he brings Uriah back, and for a series of days he tries to persuade him to go down to his home and have relations with his wife in order to cover up the adultery. He even tries to get him drunk and send him down, but Uriah, being more noble in many ways than David, says, "If the ark and the people of God are in the fields fighting, I'm not going to go into my wife." And so he slept on David's doorstep with all the rest of the servants and slaves. So David's efforts fail and he panics. He sends

Uriah back to the battle bearing a note from his hand to Joab. And without knowing, Uriah was carrying his own death sentence to Joab. David had written to Joab, "Put Uriah in the front of the fighting where it's the fiercest. And when the battle grows fierce, withdraw from him so that he would be struck down." His plan succeeded and Uriah was struck down and killed in battle, and word was sent back to Jerusalem as to what had happened. Well Bathsheba grieved and mourned for the loss of her husband for seven days. There is no record of David mourning at all. At the end of that customary period of mourning, David sent for Bathsheba, brought her to himself and made her his wife. And the chapter closes with the words, "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" He saw it. God knew.

And so He sent Nathan the prophet to confront him, to tell him a story that would convict him and break him and humble him. And it was effective. The word of God came through Nathan, David was broken, contrite and sorrowful. And in that context, from those events, the Spirit inspired him to write Psalm 51. So it's a beautiful psalm of repentance, but it's also a beautiful picture that the Lord gives us about the heart. This is what David believes about the heart. This is what God believes about the heart. This is what we're to believe about the heart. He begins in verse 1, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions." In other words, "Don't give me what I deserve, don't leave me with what I should receive, but according to Your compassion and mercy, be gracious." "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." Skip down to verse 11, "Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit." If there's something that David understood, it's that he was totally and completely at the mercy of God to redeem him, to spare him and to save him. David was so aware of this truth about the heart. And that truth is what rules my heart rules my life. And so David prays, "Do not let Your Spirit let go of me. Do not leave me to me. If You leave me to me and my flesh, I'm dead. So Lord, You have to overshadow me; You have to take over me; You have to rule me by Your Spirit." It's not what's going on in my marriage that rules me, it's not what's going on with my kids or my parents, it's not what's going on in my relationships or at school or at my job or with my bank account or with my health or my body, but what rules my heart rules my life. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 12, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." So David is praying, "Lord, make that tree good. Make it full of You. Don't let me be ruled by my flesh. Don't let me be ruled by the things of this world that I covet. Don't let me be ruled by the opinions of others. Don't let me be ruled by carnal desires and passions. Rule me with Your Spirit, because what rules the heart rules our lives."

And it's for that reason that truth number two is so important. My own proud, sinful heart is the dominant problem in my life. It's not merely a problem, it is the problem. David says in verse 3, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." He's saying, "It's not that I know everybody else's sin, it's not that I'm so focused on what everybody else is doing wrong, it's not that I'm worried about how everybody else is screwing up. The sin that is before me that most disturbs me is my own." "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." If you were to ask David, "What is your problem?", he would say, "Me." "When did your problem begin?" "At conception, when I was brought forth into this world with the motto of 'My kingdom come, my will be done. Give me what I want and don't take from me what I have – my mission, my glory and my name.'" David realized it was those things coming up from within him that was the dominant problem in his life. And what makes this so hard to discern is the last thing that wants to see it is our own heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" And what we must realize is just the role our heart plays in ruling us. We want to blame everyone and everything else. We want to put the blame somewhere other than with ourselves in explaining who we are and what we are about.

A great example is in Exodus 32 where the people of Israel made a golden calf. Aaron had taken the gold from the people and shaped it and fashioned it into a golden calf for the people to worship. The Scriptures say that they ate, drank and rose up to play at the foot of this idol. Well Moses comes down after 40 days on the mountain with the tablets that the law is written on in his hands, and he sees what is happening and he casts them at the base of the mountain and shatters them. Then he confronts Aaron and he said, ““What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?” Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”” That's his explanation. And I go, “If I was there, if this was me, that's what I would have said too.” Because we look at that and think that's absurd, but hour by hour, day by day that is how we often we explain ourselves. Why are these calves in your life? Why the rage? Why the lust? Why the bitterness? Why the hatefulness towards others? Why the lack of generosity? We say, “I don't know, my mom, my dad, my kids, friends, school, the weather, allergies get in there and just out come calves.” And we fail to see the massive amount of work that happens in the middle. What's going on in the furnace of our hearts that's taking the raw data of life, the pain, the suffering, the toil of life, often real pain, real suffering, real hardship, what's happening when that gets put into the heart?

A few months back, I was loading our four kids up to go on a little outing, and so they were getting into the little van. I strap in the younger two and then I realize I forgot something, so I run back into the house. I come back into the garage to the sound of screaming, which is not unusual so it didn't throw me aback. What they were screaming about is what took me aback. I come to the van door where my oldest son is already strapped in in the back, my oldest daughter is strapped in in the back and Gabriel is weeping inconsolably and screaming. He's reaching over to his sister for something screaming, “She took it. She took it. She took it.” So I look at Faith and she's just cradling something. I say, “What is it? Faith, what did you take?” She shows me and there's nothing in her hands. Gabriel is going, “See? She took it. She took it.” It was an imaginary trophy as it turns out. You see, when they got in the van together, they decided to have a race to see who could buckle themselves in first, and Gabe won. And so he imagined a trophy for himself. He was holding it aloft and boasting to his sister and she snatched it and was not giving it back. So I, being a minister of the gospel and seeing the deep spiritual implications of the moment put my head in and say, “Gabe, just make another one. But this time, keep it out of her reach.” I never know what to say at those moments. I think, “That's not in the parenting books.” But I remember walking away from that moment in the days after going, “Man, that is us. That is human nature.” We spend our days fashioning and erecting for ourselves and fighting over imaginary trophies, imaginary prizes, the approval of man, body image, wealth, income and possessions. We take the gifts of God, some of them good, and use them as a means to exalt ourselves, to put trophies in our trophy case and then to parade them before others. And that comes from within me. That began at my conception, that kind of idol worship and idol creation.

So it's especially concerning when we think about this third point, and that is what the Lord really wants. Heart truth number three is that the Lord wants my heart, the total devotion of my inner being. Look at Psalm 51:6, “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.” Verse 17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” The very greatest commandment is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your mind, with all of your strength.” 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.” It's this idea of possession that we sang tonight, surrender, where our heart is His, that's what He's after. He doesn't just want all our external religious activities, He doesn't just want all of our things and our bodies merely, but He wants expressions of worship, expressions of affection, expressions of devotion.

I've been walking for a number of months with a dear brother who by his own admission has spent the last ten years of his life performing for God, doing great things for God in order to earn from God approval, esteem, good feelings and pleasure. I know this well. It's a road I have walked well in my own past and still battle with. One of the things he had prided himself on is that he had gone five years without missing a church service. Not a single Sunday in five years had he missed. He hadn't gone a single month where he didn't tithe what he thought he needed to tithe. He had done all this until a week ago where he slept through his alarm in the morning and missed the morning service. He just thought, "Okay, I'll go to the evening service, I'll bring my money in and I'll catch up with God then and do my duty then." On the way to the church service, his tire blew out. It's interesting how God works. He didn't have a spare, so he was stranded and missed the service. By the time he and I sat down over coffee this past Monday morning, he was in a flat-out panic, in a terror that God was going to strike him. He was afraid God was going to punish him and strip from him all that was precious and dear because he had failed God, hadn't done his duty for God. We just slowed down, reflected and talked. And one of the things I asked him was, "Do you really believe that God wrote your name in His book since the foundations of the world and fashioned you in your mother's womb, and as fallen and sinful as you are, God gave His only begotten Son to become a man to live a sinless life, to suffer, be tortured and crucified to pay for your sins, to impute to us His very own righteousness, to be resurrected from the grave, to give us hope in a future resurrection, that He ascended into glory and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us and preparing a place in heaven for us and that He's done all that so that we wouldn't miss a church service? Is that really what we think this is about? So that He could get His hands on our money? So that He could get His hands on our stuff?" It's just so easy for us to flip over and miss that and reduce the Christian life to a bargaining with God as opposed to merely offering God the affections of our hearts, thanksgiving to God and worship toward God.

In Psalm 50:7-14, Asaph quotes God, "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me." They were doing all the religious acts, they were praying at all the right times in the day, they were bringing the right sacrifices, going through the right motions. "I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine." God's saying, "If I needed the animal, I'll go get my own. If I needed the stuff, I'll go make it. I don't need the stuff." "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High; Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me." What the Lord is really after is our hearts and our devotion. The sacrifices and the prayers and even our time in the studying of the Scriptures and gathering together and walking the Christian life together is not the end. They are all a means to an end. They are a means to express our devotion to God, a means to express our affections for Him, a means to display our thanksgiving and our gratitude toward him, a means to enjoy Him. They are beautiful gifts, but they do not make good trophies. God is the trophy. God is the prize.

And that's really the point of this fourth truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises a new heart. Verse 7 of Psalm 51, "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Absolute, complete trust in the good news of who God is and what He's going to accomplish through His Messiah. Even then, David's clinging to the gospel. "Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." That's the promise of the gospel, that He makes all things new. He makes us a new creation in Christ and He promises a new heart, a heart that will worship Him, have affection for Him, be thankful to Him and a heart that will express that in love and kindness and service toward others. The gospel promises a new heart. But also behind that, it promises a new heart that is filled with His Spirit. In Luke 11, Jesus says, "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a

scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" There's the prize; there's the gift. We get a new heart, a heart that is suitable and prepared to be indwelt by God and His Spirit, a new master (that is Christ), a new mission (that is His kingdom), a new eternal treasure in God, not just a temporal, worldly treasure. And I really think that many of us fail to enjoy all the beauties and delights of the gospel, all the beauties and delights of fellowship with God. Because we have reduced the gospel to a way to come to God for Him to give us temporal, earthly, fading things and treasures. "Oh God, give me a better spouse (or a spouse). Give me kids (or no kids), a better job, or more money or better health, a better body, a better social circle or better church." So we often fail to see that the promise of the gospel, the gift is God. And every moment of bitterness or resentment in life is a moment where in our heart we look Jesus dead in the eyes and say, "You're not enough. You have not given enough. Your Spirit, that's it? That's all You've got? Eternal life? Forgiveness of sins? Hope? A Spirit? That's not enough. I cannot, I will not be joyful, at peace, trusting or rest in You unless You also give me this, this, this and this." And so it's vital that we realize that the promise of the gospel is Jesus. It's fellowship with Him. It's God Himself. And the gifts are marvelous.

They're wonderful, but they're just a means to enjoy Him, a means to have fellowship with Him. And trial and suffering and pain is real trial and real suffering and real pain, but even that is meant to refine us, conform us to the image of Christ, mold us to His very image. That's why James says, "Consider it pure joy . . whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." And I think that takes a lifetime to learn. I think that takes day in, day out, difficult, hard sanctification to learn that God is enough, to learn to say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever," Psalm 73. I think it takes a lifetime to learn it.

And that's why truth number five is especially important and encouraging. The gospel of Jesus Christ produces through the Holy Spirit ongoing transformation and sustaining of my heart. Look at verse 11, "Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You." David had a deep appreciation for the ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit over time in his life, and he really needed help over the long haul. And his hope was not that, by the end of the day, he'd be perfected, but it was that the Spirit be faithful, the Word of God be faithful, that God be faithful, what He begins He will finish in us. Paul said to the Philippians, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." That is to be the comfort of every saint, that what God has begun in you He will finish. If you would but walk with Him, trust Him, lean on Him, obey Him, and cling to Him, He'll finish what He started. In Philippians 2, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The Scriptures call this sanctification, the ongoing work of the Spirit in our lives to make us more like Jesus Christ, to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ.

I think this is where we also need each other. I think we need constant encouragement, constant reminders, constant stirring up of our faith in the body of Christ. More often than not, when the Scriptures speak of sanctification, they speak about it corporately. It's something that we do and something that happens to us together. In our American individualistic minds, we tend to read into sanctification as this thing that God and I do together alone. He and I just get together each day and get me perfect together. We tend to think we don't need people and we don't spend time with people. But when the Scriptures talk about sanctification, they usually talk about it as a corporate event, something we become together, something the Spirit does in us together. You can picture in your mind just a fleet of ships, each of us our own vessel, sailing toward an island a billion miles away, and island we will not reach in this lifetime, but that's where we're all headed. We cannot measure success as "I get there tomorrow," unless we just really want to be discouraged,

exhausted and bitter. We can't say, "Okay, I'll go home and figure this out by nightfall." It's an island an infinite distance away that only through death will we get there. But the Holy Spirit is always blowing towards that island. What we're called to do is just trim the sails and set the sails to be filled with that Spirit and be driven to that island. And as we go off course, through the Spirit, repentance and one another, we bring each other back. And there's always a current in the water that's going away from that island, and that's the flesh. That's our sinful nature that wants nothing to do with that island. And the more we get off course, the more we go in the wrong direction, the more the current presses against the side of that ship, the rougher it gets to be on course and the less the wind can fill the sails. And so we can go bad in a hurry, we all have. So again, repentance, the body of Christ are here to help one another back on course. And all along the journey, Satan and the world just set up islands full of dancing and karaoke and disco and ever-flowing beer and all you can eat brisket, and he'll just call to us from the shore saying, "Drop anchor. It's too hard. Look how far that island is. You'll never get there. Quit. Set in a while and put your feet up. I'll take care of you. Do what feels good. Do what feels right to you. It's too difficult to stay in the lane." He doesn't show us the pile of dead people's bones in the back who found it impossible to leave once they dropped anchor. Then as we get married, it's like lashing another ship to your boat. Now there's two of you joined together as one. And as you get goofy and start steering off course, you will affect your spouse. As they get goofy, you're going to be affected by them. But in an encouraging way, you can also encourage each other and exhort one another and help one another stay on track. When you start adding kids, it's like throwing little rowboats in the back that are tied to the back of your ship. And they're going to be jet skiing all over the place and just jumping waves and pulling you back and forth. But then God gives grace for the journey.

And then what the gospel requires of us in that journey is truth number six. The gospel of Jesus Christ requires a heart of humble faith, of lifelong repentance and genuine worship. What we deserve is hell on earth and hell on after. And what God has given us instead is a new life, a new hope, a new heart, peace with Him, peace with one another, eternal life. And that is meant to humble us. We're meant to go, "Whoa, God is good." No matter how wretched my life has been, no matter what kind of evil I've been into, no matter what kind of evil has been done to me, the day Christ took me over is the day I became a beneficiary of an immeasurable grace. No longer am I a victim of bad circumstances, the victim of myself, but I have become the beneficiary of overwhelming mercy and grace. And that's meant to humble us. And it's meant to produce in us just ongoing, lifelong repentance. Psalm 51:15, "O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." God desires a heart of worship, a heart of thanksgiving, a heart of repentance. It's not so much an event, a one-time activity, but it's a road we walk. Repentance is a way of life, a constant dialogue between God and us where we're praying, pleading, clinging, saying, "Search me and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," Paul said to Titus, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." We're called from self-righteousness, from self-indulgence and self-absorption and we're called to dependence upon God, trust and faith in God and then genuine worship. I am to worship God from the heart. All that I do and all my activities, all my behavior, all my time reading through the Scriptures and praying throughout the day and coming here and serving others are expressions of my heart toward God. Because it really is possible for us to be here and sit here in body but not really be here. We can go through all of the motions, do all of the right things as a Christian but it not be from the heart. And God isn't saying, "Stay away, go away, I don't want you." He's saying, "Change. Do the same things but for pure reasons." 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." It's the love of Christ at work in us, the gospel at work in us that compels us and controls us to do what is glorifying to Him and pleasing to Him and restrains us from doing what is displeasing or evil in His sight. It is God at work in us. So the gospel of Jesus Christ requires a heart of humble faith, lifelong repentance and genuine worship.

I have a few words of exhortation and then I'll close. First, be real careful about the deceits of the heart, because there's hundreds of them. Your flesh, the world around you will constantly be heaping upon us deceit after deceit trying to explain who we are and why we think and feel and act the way they do. Make sure to line it up with the Word of God. "How do the Scriptures explain me? Lord, help me to see me the way You see me, to see You the way You are and to not be deceived by what's really ruling me. Secondly, remember every day, every hour, every minute that God wants you. That's what He's after. And He gives you Himself. That's the exchange. All the stuff, all the gifts that He gives you, those are nice and good, but take them or leave them. All the outward expressions and actions that we do toward God, those are great, those are good, but they're merely expressions. He wants you, He wants me and He gives us Himself. And thirdly, dig in for the battle. It's long, it's hard and you will not go home and figure this out tonight. You will not arrive at your destination by the end of the week. It's a daily, constant, heart-felt dependence upon the Lord. And that's why we've got to be together in this. None of us can do it alone. He's made this a team sport, to let us remember Christ in it, remember His Spirit in it and remember each other. As Hebrews 10 says, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Let's pray. "Father, we are to say the least overwhelmed by Your grace. We are overwhelmed by the implications of the gospel, that You have given to us Yourself, You have given us forgiveness of sins, You have filled us with Your Spirit rather than hell, and death and punishment. All that punishment was instead poured out on Jesus, and we get to go free. Help us to worship, help us to be humble, help us to daily repent, to encourage each other to love one another, help us to remember the precious truths of the gospel and to cherish them. Help us to go from this place eager to share that kind of news with a world around us that is perishing. Give us a love for the lost, give us a love for one another and give us a perseverance in our hearts to see it through to the end. So when we meet again, whether it be in this place next week or whether it be in the sky when You call us up there to be with You, wherever it be, Lord, we pray that there would be no regret, no shame and no guilt in us. Let there be only the delight and joy of seeing You face to face and being there together forever in Your presence. So we pray these things for Your glory in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."