

God Listens and Responds

JOSH PATTERSON, *November 28, 2010*

My name is Josh Patterson. I'm one of the pastors on staff. This was not a regular weekend for me to preach. Last night Matt got sick and called me up and asked me to fill in for him. That being said, I had nothing prepared to speak this morning. I kind of felt like a pinch hitter who was called up but didn't have a bat with him. So I needed something this morning and was hoping to just hit a single and get on base. So the Lord was faithful and we were able to get through it and get something together. For whatever reason, this is what the Lord has for us this weekend. I trust Him in it, and He has been faithful to sustain, to lead and to guide. So this is yet another testimony to His goodness in my life and hopefully in yours as well. So thanks for bearing with me.

This time of year for me is a time where things begin to slow down a little bit at the church and I begin to look towards the next year. As I look towards the next year and my own personal life, I tend to look back and do a time of evaluation and see where I've been, what the year has looked like. And then I begin to look forward, maybe for some goals, hopes or dreams moving forward and what it's going to be like. This is just this real season of reflection, and it's typically a good time for me. The church also is in that same season. As the leadership of the church, the elders of the Village are in that same time of reflection beginning to ponder and think about where we've been, not only this past year but in the past four to eight years in the life of the church. And it really extends beyond that. This church was founded in the late 70's. So so we're beginning to see the thread of God's faithfulness and how He's lead us, what He's done moved here and beginning to ask the question, "What's next for us? Lord, what do you have next for us as a body?" And certainly we've got our calendar down for next year and all that's been sorted out and settled. But we're really asking the bigger questions of, "Lord, where are You taking us directionally as a body?"

Specifically, we have felt like the Spirit is leading us into to real specific areas. One of those areas is church planting, and you saw that a couple weeks ago where we introduced to you Scott Brooks and the Door Church that's being planted in Coppell. Some of you will go, most of you will not but we want to put that before this body and invite you to see what God is doing among us. So we want to plant more churches, and we're asking the Lord, "What do You have next for us in church planting?" And we're also asking the question regarding campuses. We sense that the Spirit is leading us to more campuses across the metroplex. We have no idea what that means, we have no idea where and literally there is nothing on the landscape. There is no strategy that's tucked away in an office, and there is no map with pens on it. We have no idea where or what that looks like, but we're asking that question of, "What's next?" And when we ask the question, what we wanted to do before we started to strategize is pull the body together and begin to pray, to center our hearts, to focus our hearts on Him and a desire for more of Him. Because as we look back, that's exactly what He has done.

So I'd like to just give you a brief history of the Village Church since 2002. For those of you who have been here for the long haul, much of this will be a reminder, and I hope that it's a reminder that encourages your heart to see that God has been faithful to us. For those you who are new to the Village, this will be an opportunity for you to hear how we got here, what life has been like leading us up to this season in the life of our church. The Village was planted out of Lakeland Baptist Church in 1979 as a little neighborhood mission church, and the church was just that, a neighborhood, small church tucked away right across the railroad tracks in Highland Village. It was a loving community with people who absolutely sowed into that body in prayer. I could name for you men and women who have labored for this body for twenty-five years faithfully. I just got an email this week of encouragement to show me that very thing from a home

group. That home group had been circling a prayer chain for members of their home group for upwards of twenty years. Tiff and Doreen Cothran have been praying for you and for one another faithfully year in and year out for over two decades. I could mention Dell Steele, who was the chairman of our elders before he went home to be with the Lord several years ago. Dell was a man who labored in prayer for you. Most of you have never had the privilege of meeting him, but faithfully he would meet on Tuesday nights with about two or three other men and go before the Father on your behalf and my behalf. It's astonishing. Matt got here in 2002 amid some real difficult times in the life of the church, and that next season and ministry was a season and ministry of transition. It was a transition theologically and a transition philosophically into what most of you now know to be the Village Church.

So early 2003 and 2004 was very much a time of transition, but there was something that marked us as a body from 2002-2006 very distinctly. It was Wednesday night prayer services. Week in and week out, we would meet on Wednesday nights and pray. One of the things that caused us to get away from Wednesday night services was six services on the weekend. We just simply couldn't sustain another night. So what we did after 2006 was push prayer into the groups and ask the groups to pray, and we began to meet once a month. In 2007, there was a benchmark season in the life of our church. It was a season that we called Venture. Venture was simply birthed out a frustration of not knowing the next steps to take and a desire to have more of Him. It was simply this opportunity of us just lifting up our hands and saying, "Lord, we don't know what You have next for us. Here's what we want. We want more of You." And it was evident that He had prepared us as a body for that season. So the first Venture, we met on a Wednesday night. Everyone fasted on that day, we met together with the Highland Village campus completely packed. We had to turn away hundreds of cars from the parking lot. All for a prayer meeting. It was unreal. And people weren't even frustrated. They were actually excited about being turned away because of what it meant. And week in and week out we would gather together. On the second Wednesday night, we prayed this prayer, "Lord, would You do something that only You could take credit for?" Those of you who were there remember this. We prayed this. "Will You do something that only You can take credit for here?" That was on a Wednesday. That next Monday, Matt had a meeting with Dr. Landrum P. Leavell III, who pastored a church called Grace Temple Baptist Church in Denton, Texas. Lan Leavell asked Matt and said, "Hey, our body is a body that is struggling. It is a body who is ready and willing. We believe in mission, and here's what we want to do. We want to join the Village Church. We don't know exactly what that means, but it could mean that we just want to give you the facilities and we want to become a part of the Village. What do you guys think?" That's how multi-site campuses were started here at the Village. That was our first multi-site campus, the Denton campus. It came over a lunch meeting with zero strategy, birthed out of prayer asking the Lord to do something that only He could take credit for.

In that same season of Venture, the Lord opened up the opportunity for us to purchase the Albertson's building, which is now this building. And we started what is now the famous and highly organized capital campaign called, "We Need Four Million Dollars in Sixty Days." That's what we did. Those of you who were here can remember that Matt would stand up here on the weekends and say, "Hey, we need four million dollars. We have sixty days to do it. We believe the Lord is in it. If you're in it, give." And people responded. You gave. And this building is a testimony, a monument to God's faithfulness and the generosity of His people. This building has very little to do with bricks and mortar. It has everything to do with a response of God on behalf of His people when they sought Him in prayer. This is what this is about. It's absolutely astonishing.

We moved out of the season of Venture, which will forever be marked in my heart as a significant milestone moment in the life of this church, and we moved into 2008 and 2009 where space continued to be a challenge. Then early in 2009, the same thing happened in Dallas. There was a body, a congregation of people who were ready and willing to join, whose hearts had been prepped and primed to understand mission in such a way that they were willing to lay down what they knew and embrace what they didn't necessarily know for the sake of the kingdom. And that became what now is the Dallas Northway campus.

Later in the year of 2009, we opened this facility. And as we think about the time line of the church, as we think about the seasons of the church, another interesting season began last Thanksgiving. Last Thanksgiving was the day that Matt had his seizure. This weekend a year ago was the weekend that we walked in to our last service at the Highland Village campus, and we had a lot of questions, a lot of concern and a lot of sobriety about the season we found ourselves in. We gathered and we prayed. The church was packed. We sought the Lord in that season. And this past year has been a year of reminding us of what we have been telling ourselves for the last eight years, that God is good and He does good. He is merciful and gracious to His people, He sustains, He is faithful, He cares, we can cast our cares on Him, He is able and He loves us. This is not punishment; this is mercy somehow. His joy is sustaining and satisfying. On and on we could go. It was a season where God seemed to move leadership to the side and come full front to display that He alone leads us, He alone is the One who sustains us and He alone is the One. It has been an interesting year. In many respects, it has been a really challenging year, but it has been a beautiful year. It has been a rich year, it has been a deep year. So all of those things are woven together as we begin to ask the question, "What's next?" We don't get to pick and choose a part from our history; we dive into it and try to understand it and see how God has woven Himself into this story, which is really His story. So we're asking the question, "Lord, what do You have for us next? What do You have for us next regarding church planting? What do You have for us next in regards to the direction of the church? What do You have for us next regarding campuses?"

So just to let you know how we frame those decisions, we do it this way. We try to have a theological understanding of the church and ask, "Why did God create the church? How are we here? Why are we here? Why did He call out and draw out a people unto Himself? What does He charge the church with? What does He commission the to the church? What has He given us? How has He empowered us? What is He asking of us?" So we get this theology that we derive from the Scriptures. That theology is lead down into some principles called a philosophy. We have some guiding parameters that we tend to use to navigate as we make decisions. It informs us as we take next steps. So the theology is distilled down to a philosophy, which is distilled down to a practice. So my hope is that you can take decisions that we make day in and day out as leadership of the Village Church and trace it back to a philosophical understanding that is derived from the Scriptures.

So I want to just quickly give you a survey of a theology of the church. I'll start in Genesis 3, and we'll work all the way through the Scriptures. Genesis 3 really begins with everything being in a good place. But then everything turns. Everything hinges on the eating of the fruit. Everything hinges when Adam and Eve fall into sin, the world is fractured, sin enters and it is now broken and death and destruction are ushered into life and begin to perpetuate out of control. In Genesis 3, you see something very interesting. It's called the first gospel, the protoevangelion. It's in Genesis 3:15 where God tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God is saying to the serpent, "There will come a day where you will be destroyed. There is coming One through the offspring of woman who is going to come that will crush your head. There is coming a time where you will no longer rule over this earth. There is coming a day where you will be destroyed." It's the first gospel. It's a small trace that you begin to see that God, even from the beginning, was working into the story of redemption how He was going to do it. It would come through the offspring of a woman.

In Genesis 12, God says to Abram as He makes a covenant with him, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So He says to Abram, "Through your offspring, which will outnumber the stars in the skies, I'm going to bring you One who will bless the world." So you have the first gospel, the One who will come from a woman through the line of Abraham, and He will be born and He will be a blessing to the world.

And if you fast forward, you wind up in John 1. In John 1, the apostle writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John begins to pick up the overtones of the Genesis account, and he opens his Gospel by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So right out of the gate, John begins to paint the picture of the Son of God as one who has always been, who is eternal with the Father, who has always been at the Father's right hand. This One, who John says is the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. So the eternal Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity takes on flesh, wraps Himself in flesh, cocoons Himself in flesh and now dwells among a people, His people. He comes down, He incarnates here with us. This is not only to be celebrated, it's to be imitated and modeled. So as we think about ministry, we should ask, "What implications does the incarnation of Jesus Christ have for the Village Church?"

So Jesus comes, wraps Himself in flesh and lives here. He calls men out to Himself, men whom He is going to pour in, invest in and ultimately give authority to begin the church. So He leads them, He guides them and He instructs them. He walks with them for three years. They see Him perform miracles, heal lepers, give sight to the blind, raise from the dead, preach, teach and proclaim the good news of the gospel. They see Him beaten, tried and hung on a cross. And Jesus hangs on a cross and, as he hangs there, to Him are nailed the sins of the world. The wrath of the Father is being poured out against sin, and Jesus is there absorbing the wrath of the Father like a sponge soaking it in, so that those who believe Jesus do not have to bear it. As He hangs there, He utters these words, "It is finished." It's complete, it's done, it's satisfactory, it's perfect. His death was all that was needed to assuage the wrath of God, but it cost Him His life. His death accomplish something for those who would believe. It accomplished redemption, it accomplished salvation, it accomplished forgiveness, it accomplished reconciliation. His death was a sufficient, full, complete and perfect death.

Three days later, Jesus is risen from the grave. It's at that time when He rises again that He ultimately crushed the head of the serpent to fulfill Genesis 3:15, the first gospel. In Jesus' resurrection, He defeats sin, He defeats death and He defeats the devil. Jesus comes back victoriously, both validating His personhood as Messiah and His work on the cross and also giving resurrection power to His people and the promise that Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. That means those who love and trust Jesus, those who come after Him will also rise. That's an unbelievable promise. It's an unbelievable reality, because the resurrection of Jesus Christ has an implication for your life and my life. I live life differently knowing that when I die I will be raised. It impacts the way I live. If I believe in the resurrection, then Jesus is the firstfruits guaranteeing that I too will rise. It impacts the way I live. It impacts the way I view comfort, safety, security and fear. All of these things are shaded a bit differently if I am anchored in the reality that I too will rise one day.

So Jesus rises and begins to speak, teach and proclaim His name yet again for forty days before His people. He gathers His disciples upon a mountain and we have Matthew 28 where Jesus gives his disciples the charge for the church. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." So He gives both a charge to the church and He gives to us His authority. The charge that He gives to you and me is that we would go to make disciples. The reality is He did not say, "Go and make converts." Conversion is the business of the Father. He says, "You faithfully go, preach, teach and proclaim My name, and you train, equip and duplicate yourselves in the lives of others that they too might be learners and followers of Me." That's the charge. It's a weighty charge.

So where are we in this? This is the charge for those who believe. So if you're a Christian, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, look around you. Who are you pouring into? Who are you investing in? How are you advancing the kingdom through others as you teach, preach, proclaim and live your life in such a way that you're creating disciples? This is not

a charge given to pastors. This is a charge given to people who believe. And here's the great thing about this charge. He says this, "This charge I'm giving you is weighty, therefore I'm also giving you all the authority that is invested in Me, I convey to you." He says, "All authority in heaven and earth is Mine and I give it to you so that you might take that authority and use it to create, mold and shape disciples all over the world." Think of that. There is no government, there is no man or woman, there is no place on this globe where the believer of Jesus Christ, when he or she arrives, does not stand in the ultimate authority of God Almighty. That's powerful. So wherever you go in your workplace, in your office, in your neighbor's house, in the classroom, wherever you go, if it's the ends of the earth, Somalia, Pakistan, the Middle East, China, or if you're going across the hallway or down the street, you go under the authority of Jesus Christ. He has given it to you the believer. And He says, "As you go in My authority, I am with you always. There is never a time when I am not there with you." So the charge for the church now is to go to the nations and make disciples, and the comfort for the church is that we go in the authority of Jesus Christ and He is always with us.

Just before Jesus ascends, we get His last word in Acts 1:8. In Acts 1, the disciples are asking last minute questions. "How do we know about this? How do we know about what's next?" And Jesus says to them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." So He gives the charge to make disciples, and He gives the scope of the mission. He says, "This mission will begin in Jerusalem. You can't do this without My Holy Spirit in you. You cannot do this in your own strength, in your own power. You've got to wait for the Spirit to come upon you. And then when the Spirit falls upon you, when you have the Spirit, then you will go and you will be My witnesses. You will bear My good name, and you'll start in your backyard. You'll start in Jerusalem, you'll move to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth." As you continue to Acts 2, the disciples and apostles are there waiting. They're waiting, praying and seeking, and they're wondering, "When? When will this happen?" The Spirit falls on these men in the room, they begin to preach and proclaim and prophesy the good news of Jesus Christ. There are thousands there who have come from the Pentecost feast who are now hearing the word of God in their own native tongue. There is confusion and questions, but what pervades that crowd is the Spirit goes out and begins to draw men and women unto the Son. Conversion after conversion, thousands upon thousands are changed, transformed and saved and the church is born.

It moves from Acts 2 into Acts 6 where you see Stephen being the first martyr of the church. Stephen is pulled aside, he begins to give testimony, he preaches and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. They pelt him with stones, he eventually dies there, fear enters the hearts of those who live in Jerusalem and they run. They spread out and get out of town, because persecution becomes too intense. There is a man named Saul who is breeding murderous thoughts, who wants to stamp out the church. And so the church flees. Guess where they go. They go to Judea and Samaria and eventually to the ends of the earth. Paul has his heart radically changed and transformed on a road to Damascus where the Son comes down and blinds him with His light and changes this man's heart in such a way that he gives his life for the charge and the call to go to the nations and make disciples. So the book of Acts ends in chapter 28 as the message has literally gone out to the world.

Those early believers who began to teach, preach and proclaim the message of Jesus Christ began to invest, they began to duplicate themselves, make disciples and share the gospel. And somebody told somebody who told somebody in generation after generation after after generation, and somebody told Tom Bailey who told me. I didn't go to Jerusalem. The message came to me, the message incarnated in my neighborhood. And somebody told somebody who told your mom or your dad who knelt beside your bed when you were young and said, "Sweetie, Jesus loves you, and He makes your little dirty heart clean. Because Jesus came to save sinners, and you're a sinner. And here's the hope. If you love and trust Jesus, you get the greatest treasure of all. You get Jesus. You get to be with Him." And faith was ignited in your heart. You remember that moment when your life was changed, transformed by the gospel. For some of you, it wasn't when you were six, but it was when you were older. Maybe it was a coach, maybe it was a coworker or a teacher or

someone on the radio or TV. Who knows where you were, but somebody told you. You're going to be hard pressed to find anybody who made a venture to Jerusalem to hear about the message of Jesus Christ. The message went out. It spread.

The rest of the New Testament is written to the churches as warnings, exhortations and instructions on how we are to be as a body, how we're to live with one another, how we're to love one another, encourage one another, care for one another as we are living on mission. Because God has put before us a mission, a distinct and clear purpose. Our mission is to go and make disciples. And for some of you, that going means Somalia, it means Pakistan, it means China or the Middle East. For some of you it literally means finally walking across the street, finally walking down dorm hall. But it does mean that you go. So all of these things begin to inform how we understand the church, specifically the Village Church. So we begin to ask: what makes us unique? Not better than other churches, just different from them. The Village is a unique body. God has tethered things together here in a way that He hasn't done at other churches. And He's doing things at other churches that He's not doing here.

So here is our heartbeat for how we want to do things and to be the people we want to be. We want to understand the incarnation as something that is not only to be celebrated but to be imitated. So our ministry is incarnational. We have an understanding of the New Testament that is not "Come and see," but it is "Go and tell." The whole paradigm flips in John 4 when Jesus says to the woman at the well, "You don't have to come to this mountain anymore to worship. You worship wherever you want to be. Location is not the issue anymore. The issue is the state and status of the heart. The Father is seeking those who worship in spirit and truth. And so if you do that on this mountain or on that mountain, you do it." So understanding that model now is a "Go and tell model." We want to be incarnational in what we do. The fact that Jesus came and incarnated Himself informs how we do ministry. We want to be a body that incarnates into people's lives. Just as Jesus came and was among us, we want to go and be among people.

That's what makes the Denton and Dallas campuses so amazing. It was the opportunity to incarnate the message in a new way. If we just opened those campuses to work out our space problems, we have failed miserably. It didn't do anything. It just created new attendance patterns. But do you know what the Denton and Dallas campuses did? They have created little missional outposts in new neighborhoods. The Denton campus created an opportunity for those whose hearts have burned for Denton to have a place to rally together, to pray, to be built up together and then to go out and be a city in the city of Denton. That's what they've done. And Beau Huges, John Warren, Lan Leavell and the staff at Denton does a beautiful job week in and week out contextualizing this message and incarnating that message in Denton. We launched that campus with a few hundred people. This weekend, there will be close to 1,500 people on that campus, most of which have never come through the doors of this campus. They've never been here. Because their neighborhood is Denton. They live in and love Denton, and their hearts have been changed and transformed there through the ministry of the Denton campus. And the same thing is true about Dallas. So incarnation informs what's next for us. Incarnation informs how we do ministry.

The next thing is we want to be a people who fight for depth. If the Lord brings us width, if the Lord brings us numbers, we want to be faithful to steward that shepherd those people whom He brings, but our primary responsibility is to take a people and drive into this church the depth, the goodness and the grace of Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is not to stay on the surface, not to give fluffy, feel-good messages, but it's to give messages that are from the Scriptures and rooted in the deep realities of who God is. Because when the bottom of your life falls out, you'll soon begin to see whether or not you had a grand view of God. I think this is what this last year has been about. This last year has been a year where we have seen that what we have taught, what we have preached and what we have proclaimed is actually true and does sustain. Because God is able, He is sufficient, He does care, He is loving and He is faithful in the difficult times. And in the good times when all is well, you see how small and minute it is before a great and grand, loving God.

We want to drive our people deep. We want to take the church deep. We want you to understand who He is. We want you to understand the Savior, to know Him, to know His goodness, to know His grace, to know His mercy, to know what Christ accomplished for you on the cross, to know why that is so desperately significant. So week in and week out, we will preach and proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ. It's central to who we are and what we do.

So we want to incarnate a message, we want to take a people and drive depth into the heart of this church instead of spending our time and energy trying to grow a big church and we want to get a people on mission. As we unpack the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we unpack the realities of the church, our hope and our prayer is that our people would catch on to the mission of God. It's called the *missio Dei*, the sending of the Son and then the Son sends His people the church. Do you realize that we've been sent on mission? It's big, it's important, it drives us and it is the air we are supposed to breath. The reason you have a job where you have a job, the reason you work out where you work out, the reason you get coffee where you get coffee, the reason you live where you live and you do what you do, according to Acts 17, is all according to the purposes of God for such a time as this, as you have been divinely appointed there, here and now to be on mission. So if you're not going and you're not on mission, then what are we doing? Are we just meeting here and doing this because this is what we do on the weekend? Is this just a traditional Sunday routine for us? Are we gathering and doing these things because we want to socialize our kids in a moralistic environment? Really, what's at the root of all of this? If it's not worship and mission, I have no idea what we're doing.

So our hope is that we would incarnate a message, that we would drive depth into the people of the Village Church, that you would be a deep people who understand, know and love the God of the universe, that we would be a people and a church on mission and finally that we would be a people who walk in humility and sacrifice rather than giving in to the idols and entitlements that entangle all of us. Every single one of us has idols and entitlements that bubble up, that begin to rise up in our hearts and in our flesh and tell us that it's about us. It tells you your marriage is about you, your children are about you, your job is about you and your neighborhood is about you. And the little lie that we begin to believe as it sets in and takes root is that this whole thing revolves around us. The reality of the Scriptures this fact: it has nothing to do with you. That needs to settle in our hearts. It has nothing to do with us. We are bit players in a drama that is far bigger than what we know. And the fact that He even invites us in should crush any element of entitlement and any element of pride. The fact of understanding the grace of Jesus Christ in our life should crush entitlement. The cross of Jesus Christ lays before us the reality that the only thing, the one thing that you and I are entitled to is called "wrath." That's it. That's what you and I are entitled to. We're not entitled to good jobs, a great marriage, great kids, a neat and nice home, a comfortable life, health, longevity or a wonderful legacy. What you and I are entitled to is one thing, wrath, and it's eternal. If you don't understand that, you have no idea what the cross is about. At the cross, Jesus absorbs the wrath of God. He absorbs the punishment that was due to me for all eternity and He takes it on His back. And He does it perfectly and sufficiently. He accomplishes it wholly. And understanding that crushes me in such a way that entitlements have no place in my heart and in the heart of a believer.

So we want to be a church that continues to remind all of us that it's not about us, that the correct posture we are to take is when we dip down into the shadows and hide our faces as we being to hold up the jewels that is Christ and begin to spin the diamond in such a way that you see the different facets of His beauty and say, "Isn't He amazing? Isn't He lovely? Isn't He sufficient, satisfying and beautiful?" We should be like John the Baptist who said, "I've got to decrease so He might increase." Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it like this in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." That's the invitation of the Christian life, "Come and lay it down. Come and die." That's probably not going to be on our home page, plastered on a banner or on business cards, but that's the reality. That is the invitation of the Savior. That's what He says in Matthew 16. "Those who lay down their lives finally begin to understand what life is about. The ones who try to hold on, try to save and clamor for their rights and life, they will surely lose it." Is this not epidemic among us, that we fight for what we think we deserve and what we think we are owed? It just clearly

demonstrates that we have a shallow view of the cross, a shallow understanding of the gospel. So we want to be a place, we want to be a people who constantly remind ourselves, as we preach and proclaim the gospel over and over again, that it's not about us. It's not about what I want. It's not about what I think I need. It's about Him and recognizing that He meets all of my needs. According to Ephesians, I have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

So as we ask the question, "What is next for the life of the church?," our hope pretty simple. Our hope is that we get more of Him. Our hope is, whatever the next season is, that we get more of Him, that we get a better understanding of the treasure, that the processes reveal more about our hearts as we lay down our lives more and more before Him. So what's next for the Village? I have no idea. But this I do know. Looking through the rear view window of where we've been, all I see are traces of His faithfulness, testimonies of His goodness and lives that have been changed and transformed. That's what we have gotten to be a part of. So looking towards what's next, that's my hope, more of that. My hope is more opportunities to say, "Isn't He faithful? Isn't He sufficient? Doesn't He sustain? Doesn't He lead in mysterious ways? Isn't He good? Can He not be trusted? Does He not satisfy me in ways that I never thought possible?" So I just look forward to the stories of what God will do among us as we head into what's next.

Let's pray. "Father, I do thank You for Your goodness in our lives. I thank You for Your goodness in our church. You have been faithful to us, You have sustained us, You have lead us and You have allowed us to see more than we could have ever asked or imagined. We have seen stories of lives changed, we've seen testimonies of Your goodness and faithfulness, we've seen marriages restored and we've seen prayers answered. Father, we've suffered, we've gone through difficult times as a body and You've been there. The promise of Matthew 28 rings true, that there is never any place we are that You are not. You are with us to the end of the age. And the promise of resurrection is our promise, and we bless You for it. So I thank You, God, for what's next for us. I thank You that You have something for us. We don't know what it is, but You have something. We thank You that some will go, that there will be those who go to the ends of the earth. We thank You that there will be those who will be emboldened to go across the street or to make that phone call. I just bless You for the stories that will happen. We thank You for the Village. God, we ask that this place would be nothing more than a place where we preach, teach, proclaim and worship the glories of Christ. It's in His name that we pray. Amen."