

Open up to Romans 1. If you're using one of our Bibles, it's page 937. While you're turning there let me tell you who I am and what my role is and what my task is at the Dallas Campus. My name is Brandon. I'm the Spiritual Formation Pastor at this campus. So what that means is it's my responsibility and my joy to get to oversee and lead the teams and lead the staff members who lead the ministries of the Dallas Campus. So that includes the ministries of Recovery, of home groups, of NextGen (our 0-18 ministry), our Connections ministry, which is everyone you've seen on your way in from parking to Connection Central to Welcome, and then our missions ministry.

Before I jump into the sermon, I just want to say something really quick about the staff members who lead those ministries. You are served by a group of men and women who are some of the most gifted men and women you're going to find, some of the most gifted, talented pastors, shepherds, thinkers, writers, and teachers you're going to find. They are men and women who feel the weight of the glory of God in their lives, and they live under it. They love you, and they love you deeply and long to see Christ formed in you.

Here is why that's relevant. I was asked to preach today on a vision for spiritual formation at the Dallas Campus. Steve asked for it. He said, "I want you to preach on what your vision is for spiritual formation at the Dallas Campus." I want to say this is not *my* vision, not *my* heart; this is *our* vision, *our* heart. When our team sits down and talks through the ministries, we go, "What do we want to see the Lord do in these ministries? What do we want to see these ministries become by his grace?" This is our vision.

The text we're going to be in today is Romans 1:1-7. I'll confess to you guys, I feel cheated. I feel cheated because to do what I've been assigned to do out of this text, we're going to have to do a flyover of the passage. I feel cheated because the more I studied, the more I got in, the more I looked in this text, I realized we can take these seven verses, this introduction, and we could preach on this for a year. So I want to encourage you guys and charge you guys to go and just delight yourself in the Lord in this text for however long you want to spend in it. When you get home, tomorrow, just take some time and dig into this text for a little bit longer. It's just a power-packed little text.

Here's the way we're going to do it. We're going to start in verse 7, and we have to lay a quick foundation. Our foundation is... *Who is the audience? Who is he writing to?* Then we're going to jump back up to verse 1 and just go line by line through the text. As we do, Paul is going to give three markers of spiritual formation. Then we're just going to close, asking and sharing through what it is we're dreaming the Lord

might do in and through the ministries at this campus. So let me pray again and ask the Lord to bless our time.

Father, I just come right now asking you to, by your grace and in your mercy, send the Holy Spirit to be rich and mighty among us. Would you grant illumination to who Jesus is out of your Word, out of the Scriptures? Lord, would you create in us a war for your glory against sin? We love you. We ask you to do this in the mighty name of your Son Jesus Christ, amen. Amen.

All right, verse 7. Let's just jump right into the text. So here's the audience. This is who he is writing to. It's, **"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."** So the audience is those who are loved and those who are saints. The word *saints* is the word *holy*. You're going to read it a little bit when it says "the holy Scriptures." The same word. So the audience is loved and holy, holy and loved. So when the Father looks at you, church, believer in Jesus Christ, this is what he thinks of you. He thinks, *My beloved. Holy*. His love is set on you.

This is not a love you earned or you can earn; it's a love that was set on you, fixed on you before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1 says before the world ever existed he said, "You're mine." That's my paraphrase of about 15 verses. He said, "You're mine." His love was set on you before the world ever existed. As we just sang, "It never runs out. It never ends." The love was set on you. The love of the Father was set on you.

This has to be our foundation because if we get this wrong, if we think we can earn the love of God, we're going to spend all our days misfiring. All our days. We're going to spend our days doing nothing but chasing a rainbow that has no pot of gold at the end. You cannot earn the love of God. If you come to the church looking to earn the love of God, if you are sitting in this room right now in an effort to earn the love of God, it will not work. If you're going to a home group or to Recovery or you're headed to Somalia to try to earn the love of God, it will not work. You will not find it.

The love of God is poured out on you freely through Jesus Christ. It's to be received, not to be earned. This is our foundation. This has to be our foundation. If we don't get this right (I think it was last week Matt preached on this), the church will always be enslaving; we'll never be enjoying. If you miss this, you're always going to be enslaved to your need to be loved by God and never enjoying God's love for you. This has to be the foundation for us, for everything we do, and for you.

Okay, now let's jump back up to Romans 1, verse 1. **"Paul..."** Stop right there. I love to read the word *Paul* in the Scriptures. I love to read the word *Paul* in the Scriptures because when I read the word *Paul*, this is what I hear the Father saying: "Anyone is welcome. Anyone is welcome. No matter what your background,

no matter who you are, no matter where you came from, no matter if you grew up in church or just got off Death Row, anyone is welcome."

In Paul we have this collision of both religion and irreligion. We have this guy who was a Bible scholar, more educated in the Scriptures than any one of us, and simultaneously murderer, killer of Christians. I hear, "Anyone is welcome." I'm welcome. You're welcome. Your background, your past cannot keep you away from the love of God in Christ. Here is what I think. If I can be honest with you, I think those who do reject Jesus reject Jesus like I've rejected coffee most of my life.

Let me explain. I spent the majority of my life saying, "I hate coffee. I hate coffee. I hate coffee. I don't like coffee. Why? The flavor. It's disgusting." Here is the truth: I had never tried coffee. Ever. If I did, it was a sip or two of the bad stuff, Folgers. I had never tried the good stuff. A few of you guys were offended by that, and you should be. Then two months ago, I was introduced to Oddfellows, and my life changed. Addiction was born. My hands are shaking. I can't wait for 10:00 to get here so I can unwind with some coffee.

Here is what I want to say to you. If you're in this room right now and you equate church with trying Jesus, you're sipping on Folgers, but you've never had the good stuff. If the sum total of your pursuit of Jesus is sitting in a room like this, if your total of trying Jesus is this, that's nothing more than Folgers. I think the truth is we don't want to take an honest look at Jesus, because if we do we have to take an honest look at ourselves. If we take an honest look at ourselves, we just feel the hurt and shame we walk in.

Here is the beauty of the gospel. The beauty of the gospel is the sin that breeds shame that leads to hurt has been paid for on the cross of Christ. Paid for. All of it. It's been paid for. It's been paid for. Your capacity to sin is not greater than God's capacity to forgive. Let me say that again. *Your capacity to sin is not greater than God's capacity to forgive.* I worship God for this and praise God for this, because I've been both distant pagan and dry pastor. Praise God for this. Let us keep reading. **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle..."** Now here is our first marker of spiritual formation. **"...set apart for the gospel of God..."**

1. *We are set apart for the gospel.* Now to understand this marker we have to do two things. We have to define two things. First we have to define the gospel. We have to know what the gospel is. Then two, we need to talk about what it means to be set apart. So flip over to 1 Corinthians 15. If you're in our Bibles, it's page 961. I'm going to read 1 through 4. Keep your finger in Romans 1 because we're not going to be here long. This is 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Verse 1: **"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you..."** So the word *the* in there, *the* gospel, what does the word *the* mean? It means there is one gospel. There is one gospel alone. It's not my God, his God, her God, or their God. It's one God, one gospel. **"...I preached to you, which you**

received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved..." Now listen to this text. This is a frightening little text right here. Some of you need to feel the weight of this text right here. **"...by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."**

Here is what this text does. It takes Reformed guys, of which I'm one, and it just drops a bomb on our theological grid. Here is what I think the Lord wants to say to you right now. Some of you are sitting in this room, and you doubt your salvation because you *need* to doubt your salvation. I think that's the weight of this text right here. Some of you are sitting in this room right now. You're listening to me say these words. You're walking. You have a lot of fear over your salvation, a lot of trepidation over it.

You need to have a lot of fear over it because the confidence that comes with the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a part of your life because the gospel is not part of your life. The grace of God that brings that confidence has never landed on your life. That's just because you're afraid. If you fear this it doesn't mean you need to. Just because you fear a lack of salvation doesn't mean you don't have salvation, but it does for some. For some in here, we need to hear **"unless you believed in vain."** We need to hear this text. We need to feel the weight of this.

Every week we sit here at the end of services, and there will be men and women who come. It's consistent. It's not every week they ask for this, but there is a consistent request. It's, "Right now, man, I'm struggling. I'm really doubting my salvation right now." Then I start asking you questions, probing questions. You feel uncomfortable and awkward. I start feeling uncomfortable and awkward. Here's what I'm doing. I'm trying to probe, to as best I can to discern...*Does this person need to be afraid?* I know now none of you are ever going to come pray with me again. I get that.

Some of you need to feel the weight of this text, and some of you need to know there is good reason to doubt your salvation. But the invitation that is about to come is for you. The next thing I'm about to read is for you. Verse 3: **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins..."** That word *for* is just such a beautiful, weighty word. Our life hangs on that word right there, that Christ died for our sin, in the place of our sin. **"...in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."**

The gospel is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what we call *the great exchange*. On the cross, God the Son hung there, and he took the wrath for your sin. Our sin was laid on him, and he got the punishment due to us. We get his righteousness, his life, his joy, and his glory that is and is to come. This is the great exchange.

If you're in this room right now and you're like our sister we watched in the video and you're wrestling, you're struggling, and you are thinking about suicidal thoughts, you've mapped out how you're going to take your life, can I just invite you, plead with you, to bring that into the light. Tell a friend. Send an email. Come tell one of us. Grab someone. Stand up right now. We'll shut the service down. Tell someone.

I want to tell you, 7:15 service especially. I sensed the whisper of the Holy Spirit yesterday when I heard about the video, saying, "There will be somebody in the room like her." If that's you, I want you to know the Father is inviting you away from that pain to Jesus. Tell someone. Get in the light. The gospel is your hope. It's your only hope. I loved the story. I loved her testimony. I loved that she said, "I just sat in this Bible study in Dallas. Someone told me the gospel I'd heard 1,000 times before, and it landed on me. I just believed. It broke my heart. Then after I became a covenant member, that's when I started having more suicidal thoughts."

I have no doubt that in a room of this size, this many people here and a balcony, there might not be someone in this room right now wrestling and wading through the same things she is. If it's you, just come on. Just come on. I get you don't want to stand up right now, but come on. That's just the gospel: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Now what does it mean to be set apart by Jesus for Jesus? Here is what it means. It does not mean we have to leave Dallas or we have to get out of Dallas and move away from the city. It means we have an identity in Dallas distinct from Dallas. It means we live in the city, for the city, loving the city, but distinct from the city. Our identity is that which we think gives us worth or makes us worthless. So what we think gives us value and meaning and worth, or what is that thing we think makes us worthless? So I want to throw out a couple of questions to you because this is Dallas. These might be clues for you that you need to hear.

If your car costs anything near your annual salary, it might be a clue. If you can't leave the house without looking perfect... Men, that's not just for the ladies. Some of us go to great lengths to look like we're not trying, and some just embrace that we are trying. It might be a clue. In Dallas, wealth and sex just rule the day. If your value, if your identity, if your worth, is fixed on what kind of car you drive, what kind of house you live in, or ladies, how many men find you attractive, you're walking down a road that is going to lead to a spiral of sin that will leave a wake of heartache and shame in your rearview mirror. Dallas has a subtle and slippery influence on our lives.

Friday night I am headed to a birthday deal downtown in Dallas. Nice place, valet parking. Here is my thought at 5:00: *I don't want to take my car because my car doesn't fit in. Put me next to a Lexus and my car stands out. Front right and back left corners are bumped in.* It just wells up inside of me. So let me tell

you, Dallas does not make me vain, but here is what it does: It bubbles my vanity to the surface. It just helps bring it up.

Here is my pastoral confession to all of you. This will be my monthly counseling session, so I'll call to cancel next week. We all preach a better gospel than we live. All of us. I do it. Matt does it. Steve does it. We all preach a better gospel than we live. It's why we need the grace of God in our lives day in and day out. We need the grace of God that comes through Jesus Christ in our lives day in and day out.

All right, let's keep moving back to Romans 1. Paul is going to give just three rich, rich statements about the gospel again that we could just sit in, preach in for a year. We're going to cover these in about five minutes, and that's preacher for at least 10. A few of you got that. Verse 2: **"...the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures..."**

Christ was preached long before Christ ever showed up. I love Hebrews 11:26. This is my paraphrase, but Moses is looking to the Christ. Egypt or Christ, and he chose Christ. I love that little text right there. Here is what we need to see. Jesus has always been the hope of the world and always will be the hope of the world. The Village Church is not the hope of the world. The Village Church is not the hope for your life. Jesus is the hope of your life.

If we miss this, then here is what is going to wind up happening. We're going to wind up going to a ministry and placing an unfair expectation on that ministry. So here is what happens. We wind up going to Recovery for depression. Then we get let down, and what happens? More depression. We'll go to home group because we're lonely. We get let down, and what happens? More lonely. Jesus is the hope of the world. It's just far too easy for us, especially in the Belt, especially in Dallas, to look to the activities of Jesus and not Jesus for the answer.

All right, let's keep reading. Verse 3: **"...concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh..."** This is God breaking into humanity for the rescue of humanity. Here is the thing about spiritual rescue. None of us think we need it until we're rescued. This is part of the blinding effect of sin on the world and in our lives. None of us think we need rescue until we've been rescued. How many of you guys, men especially, remember hammer pants? How many of you men, hands up, wore hammer pants? Come on, if I'm coming out so are you. Put them up. Dang liars. If you don't remember hammer pants, each leg was like that big, shaped like that.

In seventh grade I am going to a party at Deer Park Civic Center. I am standing in this room wearing my hammer pants. I vividly remember the line of kids standing there looking at me. One of the kids' names was Summer Salisbury, who I believe lives in Dallas now. So Summer if you're here, we'll chat after. She is

the one I was trying to impress by wearing the hammer pants. As they stood there looking at me, here is what I felt. I felt cool. I'd seen MC do it, and I felt like MC. I felt cool. Here is what I needed. I needed someone who loved me enough to take a picture, hold it up, and say, "Hey man, this is what you look like."

The gospel of Jesus Christ takes a picture of your heart, holds it up to Jesus, and says, "This is what you look like. Idols and all, warts and all, this is what you look like. This is who you are. This is what you are. This is what you look like. This is your heart...idol factory that just churns idols. This is what you look like. It's who you are." It reveals who we are. It says, "You need him. You need the grace of God in Jesus Christ. You need him. Every day you need him." I need him. You need him. We all need him. The beauty of the grace of God that comes in Jesus is it's always there. Always. Sometimes it's a gentle hug of a friend, and sometimes it's strong, tough love of a brother. The grace of God in Christ is always there.

All right, let's keep reading. Verse 4. So we're speaking of the Son. I love this verse right here. This verse just captivated my heart this week. **"...and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord..."** Here is what this is. This is an authoritative declaration of Jesus' divinity by the Spirit in Jesus' resurrection. My heart that longs for you to see this.

So I sat in my office this week. I looked at this and I read this verse, just tears in my eyes. I wanted you to know this. I wanted you to feel this and experience this. The same declaration of the Father about the Son by the Spirit, "That's my Son," he now says of you through the Son. "That's my son. That's my daughter." So for you and me, those of us who sit in this room right here with Daddy issues abounding, we can look to the Father through the Son and say, "*Abba* Father, you're my father. I love you. I worship you. Thank you for adopting me in. You're my father. I love you."

As a son and as a daughter it means we have a new authority in our lives. We are no longer controlled and mastered by sin. We no longer sit under the binding, absolute influence of sin in our lives. We've been granted a new authority. Don't get me wrong; you're going to wrestle with sin. If I can be honest, this mentality that too many people for too long have had especially at our campus, that "Sin is just what I do," is nonsense. We're in a war against this.

Here is what I think we look like. I have a 1-year-old son, and homeboy can fill up a diaper, man. I mean he can fill that thing up, right? We'll put him on the bed with the wipies out, go to just try to wipe him down, and he'll start alligator rolling. You know, an alligator roll. The kid is strong. I think he gets that from me. I think it's just a picture of us where God is sitting there with us. He is trying to be gentle. He is trying to clean us off, trying to wipe us down. We've played in the mud too long, and he is trying to wipe us down.

We're trying to alligator roll back to sin. We're trying to fight our way back to sin. We are not dominated by sin any longer. We have a new authority in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Listen to Romans 8:11. Don't get me wrong; you're going to war sin until Jesus returns, until he calls you home. Listen to this text. **"The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you..."**

Through the Spirit we have the authority to keep on warring. We have the ability to keep on warring by the grace of God and Jesus Christ's deposited Spirit in us. We're to war against sin, to battle sin, to fight sin. I want you to hear this because you're going to struggle. You're going to stumble. You're going to fall. Part of that war is believing that even when you do fall, God loves you and he delights in you. Jude 24 says it brings great joy to the Son to present you holy and blameless. Great joy. He delights in you.

It's been a battle in my life. I have no doubt it is in yours. That's the war. It's a battle to fight. That's why every ministry we have, everything we do at The Village Church has to have in view, in our radar, your enjoyment of God's delight in you. He delights in you, and you need to enjoy that. We're going to lead you toward it, but we can't make you drink.

Let's keep reading. In verse 5 we're going to get our next two markers of spiritual formation. Our first one is set apart for the gospel, and here is verse 5: **"...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship..."**

2. *We are to bring about the obedience of faith.* Here is the debate in the commentary. There's a little nerd world debate right here. *Does obedience of faith mean that initial act of saving faith, or does it mean obedience every day thereafter?* I think the answer to that is just *yes*. The answer is just *yes*. It's coming to God in faith. We don't come to God earning our way, earning favor, but we come to him in faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us and faith in the gospel.

Then out of what has been given to us, out of that faith flows obedience we live day in and day out. There are commands on our lives. Church, there are commands on our lives on how to live and how we're not to live. To think I can just do anything I want... Romans 6 would say that is contrary to the gospel. Contrary. We're not free men in the sense that we're free to do anything we want anytime we want. Jesus wants, desires, and strives to take over every area of our lives.

The last seven weeks I had this sty show up in my left eye. I just want to thank you guys for staring at me the way you have. It's really felt wonderful. I've appreciated it. My self-esteem has been really boosted. So I love y'all. I love you for that, okay? Here's what happened. On a Sunday the sty showed up. On Monday it just took over. It blew my eye up, then it hopped to my other eye, and it just took over. This is Jesus. This is him settling in 11 years ago, 12 years ago. Jesus took over my life. He set in and he owned everything.

That's what he wants in your life. He wants to just engulf your life. We're not meant to have a department store faith. Do you know what I mean by that? No. Let me explain it. Department stores have a women's section, a men's section, a kids' section, and God help us, the makeup section. That's the most uncomfortable part of the Metroplex every time I walk into Macy's. Y'all don't care about that.

What God is *not* after is for us to come to church to gather up and be the Jesus guy here, and then go to work and just be an accountant, go home and be a husband, or go to our softball team and be a third baseman. He wants to infiltrate every area of our lives. He is after complete and holistic transformation. When this transformation lands on you, when the gospel lands on you, it births a couple of things. It births a love for the church and a love for the Scriptures.

So I would just say to you, back to our...*Do you need to be concerned?* If you're sitting here, whether you feel like you doubt your salvation or not, if I said to you, "Do you love the church? Do you love the Scriptures? Do you have any love for the church? Any love for the Scriptures?" and your answers are, "No and no," there is good reason to pause. Just good reason to pause. Take inventory of your life and ask the hard questions.

When I was in Colorado in February with my sister, I went skiing. A day early I went to go see her. As we were driving around, Steve Hardin calls. We talked for a minute, and I said, "I love you." I hung up the phone. My sister looked at me puzzled and said, "You just said, 'I love you' to your boss. That's a little weird, man." I was like, "You're so Colorado."

My sister would say, "I'm a Christian." But if I were honest, I think the reason this kind of love in and among the church is foreign to her is because Jesus is foreign to her, just like it was foreign to me. It births a love for the church in us. It births a love for the Scriptures. The Word is fuel for this love. It's why the Scriptures have to be central to everything we do.

Let's keep reading. There is a third marker of spiritual formation. **"...the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."**

3. *We are called to belong to Jesus Christ.* This word *called* right here is the definition of being a Christian. To be a Christian is to be called. To be called is to be a Christian. Here is the thing about this calling. You were not the active agent; God called you. He called you to his Son. There is nothing in you, nothing in me, nothing that says, "I want Jesus." The Father has to send His Spirit to open up your eyes, open up your mind, and open up your heart to see and love. *He called you. He pursued you, not the other way around.*

If it feels like the other way around, it's not. It's the other way around. He pursued you. He chased you. He hunted you down. Our response is to exalt Jesus among all nations. Here's what can happen. This is what I'm afraid happens for a lot of us. We cannot get caught up in a Village Church movement. It's not a Village Church movement; it's a gospel-of-Jesus-Christ-across-the-globe movement that he is by his grace working out and living out through The Village Church.

My fear is many of you think, *Because I'm at a church that's growing and large and new people are coming, I am missionally engaged in the world.* It might be true, but it might not be true. My hope is you and I would feel the weight of the perishing around us. We would feel the weight of looking at our city and knowing the majority of our city falls in the category of the perishing, those who do not see the need to see. They need to have their eyes opened by the grace of God.

Can I just say this, because heaven is real, hell is real? We do well when it comes to building relationships with people in the city. We need to do better at speaking the gospel inside those relationships. I had a guy at our last service who was at my house last week, sitting there in my living room telling me about his daddy getting saved two months ago on the golf course. This guy had been pleading, loving, and sharing the gospel with his dad forever. He was on the golf course. They get done. This guy looks at him and says, "Hey man, I'd hate myself if I didn't tell you this. Jesus loves you and he died for you." The Holy Spirit falls on his dad.

We need to be better at getting the words of the gospel, speaking the gospel built into our relationships. We can't be afraid of confrontational evangelism because we saw it done poorly in our childhood. We have to engage the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why every ministry has to have a missional edge. It's why everything we do has to have both the church and the city in view. Everything we do has to be about the building up of the body of Christ through redemption of man. Everything.

It's why we dream that home groups would be a place where community is just built into the fabric of life, where those communities have names, faces, stories, hurt, and pains, where you would grow in love and repentance. We dream we would see more of what takes place in Recovery taking place inside of home groups, that they would be the places where you bleed, where you hurt, where you walk in pain. You wouldn't have to feel like you have to go to Recovery if life is bloody right now. It just lives out inside the context of the community.

I want them to be places where the mission of God is carried out. I want them to be places where the global mission of God is carried out inside of our city through the community. What I mean by that is I want when you're thinking TopGolf, which is fun but overpriced, you're thinking, *Home group, co-worker. Home*

group, neighbor. Home group, friend. Where friends know people in a home group, people in home group know your friends. They should be overlapped and interwoven together.

We want Recovery to be a place where the gospel is on center stage, not your sin, not what you're struggling with. Our hope in Recovery is not to get you off of your addiction but to get you addicted to Jesus. That's what we want. We want the gospel to transform your life in a powerful way and be a place for the hurting to find healing and hope through Jesus. We want it to be a safe place for you to walk through suffering from the effects of the fall, from your own disobedience, and from being sinned against. We want it to be a safe place for hurting. We want it to be a temporary community for heart surgery.

Then we get you back to a home group. We want connections. We want everything you guys saw coming in to be a place where we welcome others into the family of God as we have been welcomed into the family of God. We want this to be a place where we're on the front line engaging the men and women who... I can't tell you how many stories from emails we get in. They'll just say, "This was my first time. I was so nervous. Then a parking guy looked at me, said hi, and smiled, and I just felt so at home." I want you to know when you're helping people park, you're doing so much more than helping people park. You're engaging the world with the gospel. You are taking gospel hospitality to the world by the grace of God.

I want our missions ministry to be woven into who we are, that the nations are just who we are. The nations are just part of what we do. All across the globe we'd have men and women who come here, who are built up here, and who are sent out to the nations. We'd pray for them, we'd know them, and we'd love them. Our home groups would fund them. We just want the nations woven into who we are and what we do. We want the nations to infiltrate missions, to infiltrate our NextGen ministry. We want to raise our kids with the nations in view.

Here is what I'm dreaming. I want us to dream. I want us to pray for our kids beyond education and safety. I'm not against both. I'm for both, but I want our prayer to be much more than that for our kids. I want to pray that our kids grow up to be pastors, elders, missionaries, and God-fearing leaders in the community. I want to pray right now that over in Somalia is a 2-year-old who is going to grow up. In 20 years, they're going to abandon Islam and worship Jesus because a 2-year-old in our NextGen ministry right now said, "I'll go. I'll forsake it all and I'll go."

I know, because I'm a parent, it's a scary prayer. I know that's a scary prayer that honestly I only want God to kind of answer. If he does I want him to answer it through *your* kids. That's my own sin. That's my own idolatry. That needs to be killed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I want to see men and women grow up through our NextGen who just say, "I don't remember a day I didn't believe. I always believed. I was born. I believed. I don't know. I just believed." I want to see our waters filled with kids, 4,5,8, 10, 12, being

baptized, saying, "I love Jesus. I was mean to my brother last week, and now I love Jesus." That's what I want to hear. I don't want to hear my testimony more. That's what I want for my kids.

I want a ministry in a place where we resource parents well. I want it to be a place where raising your kids, and I know only a few of you have kids in here, is your responsibility. It's not Adam Griffin's. It's not Cassie Bryant's. It's not Caroline Smiley's. It's yours. We're a community of men and women who are going to walk together, walk in that. It's our job to come around you and be with you, but you'll stand on account before God for your kids. So we want to resource you and equip you well in that.

That's what we're dreaming. That's what we're asking the Lord to do in and among our ministries for your joy and for the glory of God. We're asking him to form us into a people who are set apart by the gospel for the gospel, asking him to transform us holistically into people who love and worship Jesus in every aspect of our lives and people who desire to glorify God among all nations.

Here is the reality. We, your leaders, your pastors, in our pursuit of this, we're not perfect. We are not perfect. We will drop the ball. We will make mistakes. We will let you down. When we do, here is what I need from you for our team. I need you to extend the same grace to us you would want extended to you. We are an imperfect family, full of imperfect people with imperfect leaders who worship and are redeemed by a perfect Savior. Let's pray.

Father, I love you, and I just pray right now you would just settle this word into hearts and lives. Where we have bought into a religious game, would you open our eyes to see Jesus is our only hope? Where we have misplaced trust and we've trusted a ministry and not Jesus, would you break us of that? Then Lord, through the ministries of the church by the grace of God that's found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ, would you form a people who walk in great joy, who delight in you, who find hope in you, and who long to glorify you here and among all nations? We love you, and we pray this in the mighty name of your Son Jesus Christ, amen.