

How are we? Are we doing well? Okay, let's go to Matthew, chapter 28. It'll be a bit of a different morning. We're going to take a break from *Recovering Redemption*. If you've been here a while, you'll see us getting more aggressive along these lines, so I wanted to just lay out before you again our heartbeat here, the things we're passionate about.

It was about three days before my eighteenth birthday when I became a Christian. That's when it happened. I was very much a skeptic. We had moved from California to Texas, from the Bay Area to down by Galveston Island. Some people might take that as God's wrath, but we moved down there. I played football, and by "played football" I mean I was on the team, so I had pads and a helmet.

I am in the locker room when a guy by the name of Jeff Faircloth walks up to me. I can vividly remember taking off my very clean shoulder pads to put back in my very clean locker when Jeff said, "I need to tell you about Jesus. When do you want to do that?" First of all, I was taken aback at his boldness in regard to "I am going to tell you about Jesus. Where would you like that to take place?" He was humble enough to say, "You get to decide where" but aggressive enough to say, "But this is happening."

Jeff and I started this really strange friendship. I just respected him because he was gutsy. That was a gutsy thing to do in high school. It's still to this day a gutsy thing to do, regardless of where you are. I've always appreciated that kind of thing. So Jeff and I have this weird friendship. He's taking me to church, and I just want to lay my cards on the table. I thought church was ridiculous. We were going to this Wednesday night youth gathering called JAM. It stood for "Jesus And Me."

I mean, we're high schoolers, juniors and seniors in high school, and the kids would spell words with their bodies, like J-O-Y. Not Y-M-C-A, because that was cool. "I've got joy down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart... Spell it!" and everybody would go J-O-Y. To me, this is a *Saturday Night Live* sketch. I'm in the back just waiting for Eddie Murphy to pop out somewhere. I mean, it looked comical.

I remember at The Summit in Houston (which is now, ironically enough, Lakewood Church down there)... I remember seeing Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys on Friday night, and then I went to a concert with Jeff to see Michael W. Smith and DC Talk the next night. Again, I'm just like, "This is ridiculous." But here's what didn't sink in that I chuckle at now, knowing theologically what was going on. I just kept coming back.

I thought it was corny and dumb and goofy. I thought the idea of one way to God was offensive. I thought the laying on of a moral code on everyone as though it were true for everyone was an offensive idea.

I would hear the things that were being preached, I would think they were ridiculous, I would tell Jeff they were ridiculous, and then Jeff would be like, "Yeah, all right. Do you want to come back on Sunday?" I was like, "Can you pick me up?" I didn't know what was happening to me. I just thought it was so dumb, but almost like a car wreck I just wanted to watch. So I'd come back, and then I would literally be listening in order to argue with Jeff on our way to Casa Ole, which is a real high-end Mexican food place down by where I graduated high school. This became Jeff's and my relationship.

I went to youth camp with him, and I thought that was just... Like if they were serving Kool-Aid, I wasn't drinking it, all right? It was just scary for me. Everybody was crying up front. I thought that was where God hung out, so I just avoided it. I was like, "He's not going to get me. I'm not going up front. I'm staying in the back." Then through all of this, by the next year... I can't tell you the entire story, but the next year I became a believer.

Here's what's crazy about it. God didn't answer any of my questions or concerns when he saved me. I had issues with the Bible, and God didn't resolve those issues to rescue me. I had massive issues with Christianity's moral framework and why it should apply to me, and the Lord didn't answer any of those questions before he saved me.

Since he has saved me, I have grown tremendously in my confidence in the inerrancy of the Word of God and it literally being God's Word. I have grown to love God's moral grid that has been set up so we might flourish as men and women, not to hard-press us. It does God no good to have begrudging followers. So he has answered questions since, but my heart was given over to him in a moment without him answering any of those questions.

It was a Thursday night when I came to know Christ, and I literally left where I was and bought a shirt that said, "I [heart] Jesus." I went from partying with my crew, literally going out partying, drinking quite a bit (I never really got heavily into the drug scene), looking for girls with low self-esteem... That's what unregenerate boys do. They're dogs. That's why I have guns in my house. I have two daughters. Come on, I know the game. I know I can't kill you, but I'll beat the mess out of you and make it look like it wasn't me. "I was preaching in... I wasn't even there when that kid got beat up. That's tragic."

In the end, in the middle of all of this, I show back up, used to chasing girls, used to getting drunk, and I show up with an "I [heart] Jesus" shirt on. I mean, you want to talk about freaking my friends out. Then they started actually coming to know the Lord. Jimmy Hereford was the first one. I'd never met a brother who

struggled with weed like Jimmy did. Then he gave his life over to the Lord and became one of the most ferocious evangelists I'd ever met in my life. Then Brent Baird... I could just go on and on. These buddies of mine started to come to know Christ. There were several who didn't but many who did.

Then all of a sudden other Christians who were at our high school but weren't bold... They were nervous about how they would be perceived. They saw boldness, so then our numbers swelled and we had this huge Bible study at high school and began to see our friends get saved. It was amazing. It's amazing to think back on it and to consider I'm still friends with Jimmy, still friends with Brent. In fact, they're in the Metroplex, going to churches in the Metroplex, still loving the Lord, married with kids, faithfully serving God, and all that started for us when we were juniors and seniors in high school.

One of the things that occurred to me a couple of years after my own conversion is that I'm caught up in something that's so much bigger than I am. You and I are caught up in something that's so much bigger than we can even fathom. What you and I are caught up in in this moment is *so* much bigger. It would put to shame every epic movie you've ever seen, every great drama, every great war story you could ever imagine. What you and I find ourselves invited into and caught up in makes all of that look like a Disney cartoon. Let me explain what I mean.

In Genesis, chapter 12, the world lies in ruins. Sin has absolutely ravaged the earth, and God comes to a man named Abraham. If you have a background in church, this is Father Abraham who had many sons. Right? Many sons had Father Abraham, and you're one of them. I'm not going to do the little dance thing to that kids' song, but that is who this is.

God comes to Abraham and says, **"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."** God comes to Abraham and says, "I'm going to fix this thing. I'm going to put this thing back together, and here's how I'm going to do it. I'm going to make a people through you." If you really want it to mess with your mind, Abraham is from Cush, modern-day Iraq, so the first Jew was an Iraqi. *Bam!* That's crazy. Abraham becomes the Jewish race, becomes the nation of Israel. God comes back to him in Genesis 22:17-18 and says it again.

**"I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."**

If you read the Old Testament, what you're going to find is this refrain that God is doing a work and that God is going to accomplish something globally, not through one group of people, but rather via all groups of people. God is calling to himself a people that is made up of every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth,

every socioeconomic position, every ethnicity, every background. He is creating for himself a people, and that people is not ethnocentric. It is not a homogeneous group.

He's going to do it globally, but he's going to do it first through the Jews and then overflow to the ends of the earth. The Old Testament will ring and refrain that over and over and over again. Jesus shows up. It doesn't change anything. He actually reminds them this isn't just about Israel, that this is about the ends of the earth. You want to talk about confused. They simply don't grasp that, but Jesus keeps harping on it. Finally, after his resurrection and right before his ascension we read in Matthew 28:18-20:

**"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.'"**

At this moment you have Jesus saying, "Go." The disciples then go back into Jerusalem and huddle up in the upper room. For those of you who know your Bible well, they're praying, seeking the face of God, and then...uh-oh...the Holy Ghost shows up. The Ghost shows up, they are filled with power and begin to preach the gospel, and men and women start to be saved by the thousands. But it's still predominately Jews, if not all Israel.

From there you have Acts, chapters 10-11, where Cornelius of the Italian Cohort is converted and we have our first Gentile (non-Jew) Christian. Then the church does what the church...God help us...is prone to do. They gather up in Acts 15 to decide whether or not God is allowed to do this. "Is God allowed to save Gentiles? I think they should have to become Jews first." There becomes this argument about whether they have to become Jews before they can become Christians.

Peter is like, "Look, man. I was there. I preached the gospel. I didn't talk circumcision. I didn't talk dietary law. I simply preached the gospel, and Cornelius and his entire family became believers." After that moment, Paul and Barnabas split and head out on two missionary journeys that directly led to you being in this building today. Let me show you.

In AD 42, Mark goes to Egypt. In AD 49, Paul heads to Turkey. In AD 51, Paul heads to Greece. In AD 52, the apostle Thomas heads to India. In AD 54, Paul heads out on his third missionary journey. In AD 174, the first Christians are reported in Austria. In AD 280, the first rural churches emerge in northern Italy. That's important, because Christianity was completely an urban religion for the first 200 years. It found itself playing out not in the 'burbs, not in the countryside, but in the city centers, and then it moved out to the

rural areas. From there, by AD 350 some historians would say 53 percent of the Roman Empire, 31.7 million people, confessed Christ as Lord.

I don't know if you watch the Discovery Channel. There's some great stuff on there, and then there are some really ridiculous things in there, if you know anything about history. The big play is that Constantine made Christianity, but here's something to think about. If you're the emperor of Rome, you know you're not serving a four-year term, right? How do you get out of office if you're the emperor? You die, or your best friend stabs you 70 times in the shower. That's how it ends.

You die of natural causes and then they'll have another emperor, or (*et tu, Brute*, anyone?) you get shanked 190 times while you're trying to clean yourself up. In the end, if you're an emperor and you see that over half of your empire is now passionately following Christianity... You've watched this thing explode in 300 years to 31.7 million people. Do you think you might go, "Yeah, I'm with those guys. Do you know what we should do? We should just say this is our..."

Now listen, I hope and pray Constantine was a legitimate convert to Christianity who loved the Lord and followed him. I don't know. We'll find out in glory. I try not to make that judgment about many people, but especially people I've never met who are a thousand years distant from me. In the end, you can't say Constantine made Christianity. You almost have to say Christianity made Constantine, historically speaking.

From there, it just gets better. At AD 432, Patrick heads to Ireland. We celebrate this every year by pinching each other. In AD 596, Gregory the Great sends Augustine and a team of missionaries to what is now England to introduce the gospel. The missionaries settle in Canterbury and within a year baptize ten thousand people. In AD 635, the first Christian missionaries arrive in China. In AD 740, Irish monks reach Iceland. Are you picking up on the movement here? Patrick heads to Ireland, and then from Ireland the Irish head to Iceland. This is what we do. We go.

Let me keep going here. In AD 900, missionaries reach Norway. By AD 1200, the Bible is now available in 22 different languages. In 1498, the first Christians are reported in Kenya. In 1554, there are fifteen hundred converts to Christianity in what is now known as Thailand. In 1630, an attempt is made in El Paso, Texas to establish a mission among the Mansos Indians. In 1743, David Brainerd starts his ministry to the North American Indians. In 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention mission organization is founded.

Here's where it starts getting into us, not that we haven't been in all of this. In 1869 (Were any of you around back then? If so, I want to meet you), Holford Prairie Church was formed by 13 people who lived out in the prairies here and wanted to worship together. They built a church where Old Hall Cemetery is, if

you guys know this area, out on McGee Lane. That little cemetery out there with that little building... That was the first church. Thirteen people gathered in that little deal.

By 1882, that Holford Prairie Church had exploded to the size of 37. Some of you are laughing because your Home Group is that big. From there, they moved into town, because that's way too big of a church to have out on the prairie. They move into town and become the First Baptist Church of what is now Lewisville. In 1962, First Baptist in Lewisville plants Lakeland Baptist Church. In 1978, Ben Smith, the pastor at Lakeland Baptist Church, decided *they* needed to plant a church in the new suburbs being built outside of town in Highland Village, and they planted Highland Village First Baptist Church, which in 2002 became The Village Church, à la what you're sitting in right now.

From there, The Village Church has planted a church in Frisco. We have planted a church in Keller. We have planted a church in Coppell. We have helped plant churches in Philadelphia, in New York, in Boston. We have actively planted churches in China, in Kenya, in southern Sudan, in Guatemala. What we have done for years now is taken the resources and energies of this church and said rather than ever expanding and making a big name for ourselves, we would rather spend our lives on making a big deal of the one name that will always be made a big deal of: the name and renown of Jesus Christ.

So the reason you can't get a coffee here is that we think you can get a coffee out there, and we'll take that cash and plant a church somewhere else with it. You could cheer that, but it's how we're going to operate. There's always going to be a little bit of ghetto chic here, all right? We want it to be nice so you feel safe but not too nice, because the building communicates. Here's what I always want to communicate to you: It's so much bigger than you, so much bigger than me, so much bigger than us.

Every year we have been actively planting churches. What has made it a bit different this year is we've done some residencies. We have two guys who are currently in residency with us who will be planting churches in 2014, and I'm going to introduce you to those two guys. They're going to come out and share their hearts for about 10 minutes apiece on where they're going and what they're doing. We had three. We were looking at planting a church in Chicago with Brandon Barker, who's on staff. After digging around in there, we've decided to extend that runway, so we're not quite sure it's going to be in 2014 now.

So rather than Brandon sharing right now, we're kind of rallying around him and his team to see when it would be best to plant that church in Chicago. We're going to continue to pray with Brandon and look at that; we've just extended that runway. So for the purposes of today, we have two: Blake Chilton, who's going to be planting in Bryan/College Station, and Steven Lee, who will be planting in Washington DC. Let me pray for us, and then I'll let these two men come chat with you.

Father, thank you that we're in this room today because people before us have sacrificed, they have prayed, they have gone, and they have given. I thank you for that. I pray now for Blake and for Steven and continue to pray for Brandon, God, just as we consider how you might ring us out for your name and renown, Father, that you might encourage us via and through these men. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

**Blake Chilton:** Hey, my name is Blake Chilton. I know some of you just because I've been here for about eight and a half years serving in student ministry and groups ministry. My time here at The Village has been unbelievable. It really has been amazing. When I came, we met at the little church over there off Desiree and Highland Village Road. There were 400 seats in the sanctuary, and we had the paper sack for the roof. Some of you guys remember that.

To go from about a thousand people to now about ten thousand at four different campuses has just been an unbelievable journey. And not just to see the church grow numerically, but to also see it grow in depth. Literally every quarter when we do a celebration service, those baptism waters over there are stirred by people giving testimonies of how their lives have been changed by the gospel, because you guys are doing the work of the ministry. It has just been amazing to see that.

You almost begin to think that's kind of commonplace, like that's what happens at church, that literally hundreds of people are getting saved at churches every year. The truth of it is that's not really the case. I mean, there are churches out there that are doing a great job, but that's not the norm any longer. It has been amazing to be a part of The Village on a big level like that, but even on a personal level... My eight and a half years here have been incredibly good for my own personal walk, for my marriage, for my kids.

When we came, we had a 4-month-old. Now I have four kids, and we've seen several of our own children trust in Christ. To leave on a Sunday and go home and have gospel-centered conversations about the things they're learning in Little Village and in Kids' Village... It has just been life-giving. It has been amazing. So why would anybody ever want to leave this? As much as God is doing here, and as great as God has shown himself to be here, and as much as God has done in us, why would we ever want to leave here?

Well, in 2011, God began to burden my heart for my hometown of Bryan/College Station. I didn't really understand it. We went there for a weekend. We kind of blew in, went to a football game, and then hung around for church and just spent a little more time there than we normally would. I was burdened for that community. I was burdened for the people I still know there. I couldn't even put my finger on it. I couldn't

even place it, necessarily, but I was like, "Man, something is off." I began to get a little angry and to want the gospel to continue to press forward in this community, but I didn't really know what that meant.

I went back to The Village and began to talk with different people. They were like, "Yeah, every community needs more gospel-centered churches. You're right." But there was something about that in my hometown that really burdened me. In 2012, I was still wrestling with this a little bit. In the summer of 2012, on June 28, I had three conversations within a span of about 24 hours, where I felt like the Lord said, "Hey, you need to pay attention to church planting."

Church planting was not on my radar at all. I had no desire to church plant. I didn't want to do that. I didn't even think I had the gift set. I was just like, "No, no. That's not even on the radar." But those three conversations woke me up to the fact, "Maybe this is what God is doing here." Honestly, it scared me. I had no idea... How do you plant a church? Where do you even start? How do you even begin to do this? I had done student ministry for about 15 years. That means I knew how to make really stupid videos where I could embarrass myself in front of middle school kids. I was good at that. So how does that correlate to church planting?

I had all of these questions, but what was interesting is in that summer of 2012 the Lord began to put two words on my heart. They were *declare* and *demonstrate* the gospel. I wrote those down, and I did some study on those words, and I began to chew on those words and meditate and think on those words. I began to look back and go, "Okay, here's what God is doing. He gave me a burden in 2011, and now he's formulating that vision within me for this church."

Still, I was super nervous about that. What does it look like to go back to my hometown? I started to have a lot of doubt. A lot of insecurity started coming up, a lot of things like, "Man, am I really called to do this? I don't know that I'm gifted. Will anybody follow me? Can I do this?" Just a lot of doubt and having conversations... A lot of doubt began to come up, until one morning...

There's a little office right back here behind the stage, and I would come in early in the mornings after I dropped my kids off at school. I would slip in there, and I would spend a little time in prayer and studying the Word. That was my routine. That morning I came in heavy. I came in with a burden, just going, "God, have I missed you? Am I crazy?" Have you ever been there, where you feel like God is calling you to do something and you're like, "Man, I have lost my mind"? That was me.

There's a couch and a little desk in there. I got down on my face at that couch and just began to pray and go, "God, have I missed you completely? Am I so far off your will and what you would have for me that I've just missed it?" As I'm praying through that... Jesus didn't walk through the door and speak to me. There

was nothing like that. So I kind of pushed away from that couch, and I was like, "All right, man, let's start the day. Let's get in the Word."

I ventured on over to that desk, and I opened up the Scriptures to where I was that day in my daily reading. I was in Luke 8. Luke 8 is the story of Jesus going across the lake to another region, where he gets confronted by a man who has demonic attachments. The guy is naked and broken, in shackles and chains. The guy confronts Jesus, and Jesus says, "What is your name?" The man says, "My name is Legion, for we are many." Kind of a scary little deal there.

Jesus ends up healing him and casting those demons out into the pigs. The pigs run off the hill, and there's ham everywhere. I mean, it's a bad deal. I'd love to see it, but it was a bad deal, right? Then the man is sitting there in front of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and the people from the town hear about this. They come down, and it says they are afraid. They tell Jesus to get out of the region. "We don't want you here. You're not welcome here."

Jesus gets in his boat, and he starts to head back over. The man whom Jesus healed tries to get in the boat with Jesus. He says, "I want to come with you." Luke 8:39 says Jesus responded to him and said, "No. You return to your hometown, and you declare what God has done for you." At that moment, I pushed that Bible back. I didn't get on the couch; I got on my face. I was like, "Okay, God. Thank you for answering my prayers. Thank you for speaking to my doubts. Thank you for showing me clearly this is what you've called me to do, to return to my hometown of Bryan/College Station and declare what God has done for me."

Listen, that's kind of crazy. I'm going back home. I don't know how many of you guys have done that, but for me, that's a little weird. Half the people probably think I'm dead. I was a little bit of a hellion back then, a little bit of a troublemaker. The other half probably thinks I'm in prison. I'm going to show up and be like, "Surprise! I'm a pastor." Yeah. It's going to be crazy. But God is not just calling me to return to my hometown and declare; he's calling me to start a church there that declares what God has done, to declare the gospel.

I'm not going back to go, "Look, look. I've figured out how to live a good moral life. That's not me. I've figured out how to make right decisions so I don't have all this baggage and all this carnage." No. I'm just going, "Anything good you see in me is because of Jesus Christ." *Declare and demonstrate the gospel.* That's in our mission statement. I couldn't think of a better name to name our church than Declaration Church, because that's what we want to be. We want to be people who declare the praises of his excellent name. So we're going back there to plant Declaration Church in Bryan/College Station. I love that, because even the name... People are like, "Well, what are you declaring?" We're declaring the gospel.

I don't know if you know this, but churches, just like people, have this tendency to veer off the truth, the central message of Christianity. We can get caught up in great things, social justice things. We can get caught up in this thing or this program or this thing that's going on at church, and we get off the gospel. That's when churches begin to lose their influence. I love that even our name, Declaration Church, is tying us to the very thing Jesus is about: declaring the gospel. It's the Great Commission. It's what we've all been called to do, to declare the gospel with our mouths and demonstrate it with our lives.

So why Bryan/College Station? I mean, that's hometown for me, but why there? What's going on there? The town has almost doubled in size since when I grew up there. I did a recent demographic study with an organization, and I learned that 40 percent of Bryan/College Station residents would say, "We attend church regularly." That means they go Christmas, Easter, special occasions, and maybe once a month. Forty percent...and half of that is Catholic. So you're looking at one in five people in that community attend an evangelical church on a regular basis. There is the need there for more gospel-centered churches, just like there are in so many other communities across the country.

So we're headed there to plant this church, and we would love for you to partner with us. This is an invitation. It's a call for you to jump on with us, to be a part. Maybe for some of you that means you go with us. That means just like us... We're uprooting our lives and moving there. For some of you, that may be stirring you. I talked to a guy in the last service, and he was like, "Man, I feel like that may be happening. Can we talk?" That's awesome. Praise the Lord.

Listen, I know for some of you, that's not what God has called you to do, but God is stirring in you to partner with us through prayer and encouragement. Church planting is a lonely, lonely venture. Maybe your Home Group wants to adopt us, adopt our church, adopt our family, and say, "We will commit to praying for you every time we gather. We'll put a picture of your ugly mug right up on the refrigerator so every time we get some milk out we're thinking about you, we're praying for you." I would love that. We need that. We desperately need that.

We also need people to support us financially. Our goal is to raise \$300,000 a year for the next three years, so we need people to support us. I'm not just making an appeal to the people who own a small island in the Pacific, but the common person who goes, "I can give you \$100 a month." If 250 people would give \$100 a month for the next three years, we'd have it done. Isn't that crazy?

So maybe God is calling you just to go, "Hey man, we'll support you." I don't know where God is moving, but I pray that you would listen to his Holy Spirit and just move and join us and join in declaring the gospel to Bryan/College Station, to the community, to the 50,000 college students who are there. We're going to spread out all over the world and plant churches all over the world. Let's pray.

God, I thank you that you are a sending God, that just as you sent your Son Jesus down to earth to die on the cross for our sins, you send us out with the message of the gospel to a people who have not heard. God, I pray that you would stir in these people's hearts a desire to go, a desire to partner with prayer and encouragement, and a desire to give, that you would enable us... No, Lord, that you would build your church there. We love you and we thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Steven Lee:** Good afternoon. How are y'all doing today? My huge fear is that I would lose some of you all when you saw Washington DC and automatically thought of the Redskins. I want to comfort your hearts a little bit. There are hundreds, even thousands, of Dallas Cowboys fans in Washington DC. So I don't want that to stand in your way if you're really considering going with us. You'll be right at home with everybody else.

Again, my name is Steven. It is my pleasure to be here. This weekend really hasn't been about us. We're just part of the larger story, but my family and I are just so personally thankful to be part of a church that has as their mission and their heart to send out and to launch and to prepare people like myself for areas like DC. We've just been overwhelmed.

I've had an opportunity over the last couple of months to spend time with your elders and your executive staff and the people here. They have such a genuine heart for serving you all well. A lot of times I leave those meetings and say, "Man, I get an opportunity to do something like this for the rest of my life." I'm always kind of overwhelmed by that and really, really appreciative.

I've been married for eight years. My wife is Tiffany. She might be in here somewhere. We met at the University of Maryland, College Park, right outside Washington DC. We met about 10 years ago. I always tell the story about the first time we met and our first date. I picked her up in my granddad's 1983 Crown Victoria. Some of you guys are like, "What's a Crown Victoria?" The Crown Victoria started at this cross and extended all the way to the other screen. It was that long. Inside there were cashmere seats, and the wheel was about this big. So the wheel was kind of that small, and it wheeled this really, really big kind of tank.

I remember picking Tiffany up, and she was just blown away. She said, "Man, you know what? I'm just so excited to do this and to hang out with you and to get this date." Everything went really well, and that was kind of the history of that. I always tell the story to guys who are dating. I say, "Man, it's really cute and kind of fun if you're 19 years old and you pick up a girl and go to IHOP. If you do it at 32, you are a loser. You will not have a second date."

Our marriage has been blessed with two wonderful children. We have Shania, who's my little princess, and she is absolutely in love with Rapunzel. We went to Disney this summer. I'm dad of the year right up until December 31. Then I have to renew again and do something special. I also have my little man Silas. He's 16 months old. He's the toughest kid you'll ever meet wearing a onesie. He likes to get on things. He'll climb up and then fall down, but I'm not a hundred percent sure what he likes to do the most. He's just really crazy. We also have one other child we're expecting at the end of December, so we have a lot going on.

Just a little bit of our story... We moved to Dallas in 2003 to 2007 to attend Dallas Seminary, and I really thought Dallas would be kind of a pit stop. We'd get in here for four years, we'd get trained, and then we would launch out, because we just couldn't endure the summers. But God had different plans in extending our time here in Dallas. He did three specific things with our time here in Dallas.

First is that God gave us a huge heart for lost people. He gave us a heart for communicating the gospel story to people who had never heard it before. We were excited and passionate, and God continued to bring people into our lives who had not heard the gospel, had never been connected in biblical community. Secondly, it really has become my core conviction that planting of local churches in areas of need is the primary way by which God fulfills the Great Commission.

Thirdly, we have been so blessed over our time here to be involved in multiethnic, multigenerational ministry. Our huge heart as we go to a place like DC, which is one of the four most ethnically diverse cities in the United States, is that God will give us a congregation that looks a lot like The Village Church. We want to connect with people of different races, different backgrounds, and different socioeconomic classes. Our heart is that we'll demonstrate to a watching world that what really binds us is the love of Jesus. We're really, really excited about that.

From those three things, God continued to give us a burden to plant a church in a context like that. My wife is from Baltimore, about 45 minutes outside of DC, and my parents are on the cusp, about 30 minutes outside of the District proper. Every time we went home, there was kind of this tug, this reoccurring burden to check out the city. We would wake up on Saturday mornings and go into the city, and we would meet with pastors.

The pastors in the city always surprised me, because they would say, "Hey, this city is growing like crazy, and there are not enough gospel-centered, biblically-based churches here for the population growth we're experiencing." God began to tug our hearts, because again, he had been working on us through ministries like Apartment Life and me being a mentor in the public schools, and the more time we spent there, the more we felt an increased burden to be in this place.

I always tell a really important story. As I was talking to a friend who lives in the DC area and I was sharing with him our hearts for going to DC... We thought, "Hey, it's a global city. It shapes and influences culture, so we want to be where the next generation of decision makers and influencers are going to be." As we were sharing that story, I said, "Hey, we want to go here, we want to have a first service here, we want to get plugged into this public school."

He said, "Steven, I don't know if you want to go there, because the people there don't believe what you believe." Literally, I remember that hitting me like a rock in the chest. That was one of many confirmations that God was saying, "You know, Steven, this is the place where you and your family... You need to pick up your stuff, need to sell your house in Dallas, and you need to move to DC. You need to get plugged in there."

So our huge vision is that we're going as missionaries to serve, and we want to live out the implications of the gospel to a watching world. We want to invite some of you all to come with us. I talked with a family after service, and it was just so encouraging to hear. They said, "You know, Steven, you hit two or three different points, and God has really been working on us. We're kind of in the middle of jobs right now." It was an encouragement for them to hear there was a family of five who are going to be moving across country to set up shop.

We're praying that as we serve, as we preach the gospel faithfully, God will grow up the church around us. So that's where we are right now. We have about 13 people in DC who are committed to being part of our core group. Actually, there are a couple of covenant members who were transferred from the Dallas Campus, from Dallas proper, and they're actually in DC because of work. We have at least three or four of those people who are going to be coming alongside of us.

That might be you today. If that's you, we'd love to talk with you. My wife and I would love to have lunch with you and just share a little bit more of the specifics about our hearts and our burden for where we're going. Secondly, there might be some of you guys here who say, "You know what, Steven? We have family and friends or relationships in the DC area, and I'd like to connect you with them so you can meet with them, you can go to lunch with them, have dinner with them, and you can get a sense of what some of the rhythms are that are going on in the city, where you can create some entry points for the gospel."

Thirdly, one of the things that has shocked me in regard to church planting is the number one ingredient to the failure of church plants is undercapitalization. A lot of churches launch out in expensive cities like Washington DC or Boston or Chicago, and they never raise the money they need to do ministry well. As I began to think about our call, I thought, "That's really a small thing for our God." Amen?

As we begin to think about that, I'd like to invite some of the covenant members here at The Village to pray about supporting and joining our partnership team for three years. I'm asking that you would consider giving \$100 a month for three years. That would help us to launch well, to have the resources to be able to do what we want to do well to reach a very great city that is desperately in need for the gospel.

As I think about this church and what you all have meant to me, I think about the book of Philippians. In the first chapter, the third verse, Paul says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, and I pray for you with joy, for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." Can I pray with you all?

Father, I thank you so much, God, that you are a God who sends, but before you send, you save, you train up, you equip, and you launch out. The foundation, God, for this movement will be your people. This movement of planting gospel-centered churches in areas of need won't happen unless your people come alongside of us and support us and provide the foundation. So I'm thankful, God, for this church that has a vision for church planting beyond DFW, beyond the United States, but really to reach the world for our Savior.

God, we know you're honored in this, so I pray for your people. I pray you would bless them, that you would give them the resources that they could give and invest. God, you're calling some people potentially to go, and I pray, Lord, that their time of discernment would be sweet and that you would give them the sense that you are with them. I ask all of these things in the name of Christ, our Savior and your Son, amen.