



## **Acts (Part 1) – The Beginning of the Church**

Matt Chandler – February 2, 2014

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If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Acts, chapter 1, is where we will start. While you're turning there, let me just set up our new series. In the fall of 2002, I was interviewing with the search committee and the deacon body of Highland Village First Baptist Church to become the senior pastor of Highland Village First Baptist Church, now known as The Village.

I was 28 years old. I had no real pastoral ministry and no seminary degree, so it really was crazy for us to be in this dialogue, and yet it became clear as we moved throughout the process that the Lord was in it. I was having dinner with the then deacon body right across the street here at the Village Grill when one of the deacons asked me... They peppered me with questions that night, and then they asked me this question: "What's your vision for The Village Church?"

Now if I'm fully honest, my vision was to preach the Bible and hope good things happened. Again, I hadn't had the type of experience to have this full-blown, "Thirty years from now, here's what we're going to look like" kind of vision, so I just thought, "I'm going to preach through books of the Bible, that's what I know how to do, and let's hope the Holy Spirit does big things around us."

I wasn't planning on coming into an existing church and becoming the pastor of it. My hope was to plant a church, and I'd actively begun to recruit guys and read everything I could about what it was like to plant a church and how to go about planting that church. With that in my bloodstream, with that idea in my mind and heart, I took a crayon out of the cup there, and on butcher paper I drew a circle and wrote in the circle, "TVC."

Then I drew lines out from that circle and drew other little circles, and then I said, "If the Lord would bless us, if God would move profoundly and powerfully among us, I would like for us to be a place that leverages the blessings of God, not just to terminate those blessings on ourselves, but to be a church that is serious about the growing of the kingdom of God in and around the Metroplex and to the ends of the earth."

My preference is that we're always a fairly simple church. My preference is that we'd be a very giving church, a very generous church, and that we would leverage our days to plant churches, to serve other churches, and to send out our best and brightest to gospel works all over the Metroplex and to the ends of the earth." So that's what I drew at the Village Grill.

My first day in the office, Barry Keldie, who was the youth pastor at that time, walked into my office and said, "Hey man, I know when new pastors come in they like to bring their own team. I know you didn't hire me. You don't know me well. I have another job offer I can take in Arlington. So if you want me to resign so you can bring your own team in, I'm more than willing to do that." Now that to me was just intriguing. I loved that brother the second he said that.

I said, "First, sit down." So Barry sat down. I said, "What do you want to do? Do you see yourself doing student ministry for the next 30 years?" He said, "No, man. I want to plant a church. I feel called by God to plant a church. I'm not sure where I'm supposed to plant that church, but I want to do that. I don't know if it's in the Metroplex or if it's over in Raleigh, North Carolina," which was a place he was thinking of at the time, "but this is what I want to do; this is what I feel called to do."

I said, "Well, how about this? How about you stay with me for the next two to three years? I'll give you complete access on how we're building our teams here, how we're going to approach ministry here, and then why don't you become our first church plant? What I'll do is put you up on the stage, let you preach, and actively recruit from among our members those who would be either willing to move to Raleigh, North Carolina, with you or just be willing to go and be a part of your plant somewhere in the Metroplex, if that's what you want to do."

A couple of years passed, and we planted Providence Church in Frisco with Barry Keldie, and a ton of our people went with him, as well as a ton of our resources. Then we also planted Rick White, CityView Church. Again, we let him speak. We had these meetings where we said, "Hey, if you live out in Keller, I want you to come to these meetings. I want you to hear Rick White's heart for the Keller area and then consider no longer coming to The Village but actually joining this church plant."

In that same period of time, I was actively (and I'm interested to see how many of you are still here) saying, "If you live farther than 20 minutes from here, quit coming." How many of you were here when I banged on that drum all the time? So, still here. I was actively saying, "Hey, the gospel works

best when you live where you live, worship where you live, engage where you live, and walk alongside of those in your neighborhoods who you'll see at restaurants, who you'll see at stores.

That's the way this thing was designed to work. If you're driving 30 minutes and driving past Bible-preaching, gospel-believing, missionally-engaging churches to get here, then I think you're really robbing yourself and harming us as we seek to become a church for *this* city, for *this* little three- or four-town area." We had these big "state of the union" sermons once a year where I would say, "Please quit coming."

Then here's what just drove me nuts. You would go, "I can't believe that dude just said we shouldn't come," and you would go get your neighbor who lived next to you in Rockwall and drive 45 minutes back so they might hear this dude who was telling them not to come. Anytime I would give the "state of the union," we'd grow by like 600 the next weekend.

All the while, we were actively planting churches, encouraging you to go with church plants, even church plants that weren't ours, that were coming into the area that we knew, trusted, and loved. We would say, "Hey, consider this. Consider going to this church. Consider giving your gifts, time, and abilities to this church."

Seven years ago, we launched our first campus, our first site, in Denton, Texas. When that happened, God immediately began to bless the work up there, and we began to see men and women come to know Christ. Men and women began to grow and mature in their relationship with the Lord. Disciples were being made. Nothing there was bad. It was brilliant and beautiful and to this day continues to be that. Yet we continued to plant churches.

So we were planting churches, and then encouraging you if you lived farther out than 25 or 30 minutes to no longer come here but find a church closer to your home in which you could worship and be a part. Then we added on the Dallas Campus. Then we've added on the Fort Worth Campus, and we have made no bones about our desire and our prayerful plea with the Lord to launch a Plano Campus.

Yet all the while we're continuing to plant churches. We're continuing to raise up young men, continuing to train them, put them in front of you, and encourage you to leave with them. In fact, we just threw up before you Steven Lee, who's planting in Washington, DC. You might be surprised to hear that several of our members actually have relocated up to DC, where they're going to help

Steven Lee. Then we just planted a church with Blake Chilton down in Bryan-College Station called Declaration Church, and a lot of our people went down to Bryan with him.

So from day one, the DNA of The Village Church has been that we want to be about gospel-centered multiplication. We want to be openhanded with our resources. We want to be openhanded with our best and brightest. We want to be openhanded and leverage what God has done in this place, not just for the good *of* this place, but for the good of the one Church that'll be sung about forever.

When I think about how I want to spend my days and how I want the Lord to wring out my life and the gifts he has given me, I do not get overly excited about one ever-increasing, ever-expanding "globo-church." Now the Lord has seen fit to do that, regardless of what my desires are, but when all is said and done, what I get most excited about is distinct churches in distinct locations within the Metroplex that are churches that are about that part of the city.

They take on the context of that city. They engage in the local businesses of that city. They serve within the confines of that city. That more than anything else excites my heart and makes me feel as though I have found the heartbeat of God for his bride. So over the last five years, the elders of this church have been actively praying about whether or not we are maximizing the influence, the resources, the young men, and the campuses God has given us to this end.

Over the last five years, we began to feel (I'm trying to use the right language here) compelled by the Spirit to consider taking the Denton Campus in particular and rolling it out to be an autonomous campus. For those of you who are wondering why the Denton Campus, I'll tell you. The Denton Campus has a superb man of God at the helm who has led well, who has built a leadership team around him that is lights-out, who has developed a membership there at that congregation that is by far the most mature group of members at any campus we possess.

So those things were kind of compelling us to consider, "Why do they need the feet? Why do they need me to be piped in? They have an unbelievable preacher and teacher. They have an unbelievable group of leaders. They have an unbelievable passion for Denton." Denton is different than here, right? I'm not going to dog you, Denton, but you're different. It's just a different place.

So why not, led by the Holy Spirit...? Not because this is something new, but rather because this is how we started, going, "How are we going to spend our days? How are we going to leverage the opportunities God has given us, how are we going to leverage the resources God has given us, how

are we going to leverage the energies God has given us to grow the bride of Christ for the glory of God in the Metroplex and to the ends of the earth?"

So will it just be the Denton Campus, or will it be all campuses? For now, we'll just take it one at a time. We're just being led to pray along with you whether or not the elders have heard correctly, although I will tell you it was unanimous. For the elders to talk and pray and wrestle and have robust dialogue (which is what I call disagreeing) for five years at varying intensities and to finally unanimously say, "We think the Lord is in this" I think is significant.

It wasn't made in haste. It has not been rushed. It has been pulled back and prayed upon, pulled back and fasted over, pulled back and considered. What we're moving toward and what we're praying about... The Denton Campus will vote on whether or not we do this in the late spring. In fact, if you want the exact timelines, we've already announced that here at member meeting in Flower Mound, but at member meeting both in Denton and in Dallas and Fort Worth this week the exact timeline of a vote and all of that will be laid before you, so make sure you make it to covenant member meeting.

In the late spring, the Denton Campus will vote. You don't get to vote, Dallas. You don't get to vote, Flower Mound. "Yeah, they can go. This is awesome." You don't get to do that. In the end, the Denton Campus will vote, but I thought what would be helpful is to start this series in the book of Acts to show you what is biblically compelling us.

Now let me say this. I do not believe that what we're doing now is wrong or bad or foolish. In fact, I have nothing but amazing things to say about what God is doing among us, what God is doing in Denton, what God is doing in Dallas, what God has done through the technology he has provided for us in this day and age. Nothing but praise.

Men and women have been saved. Disciples are being formed. Cities are being engaged. I mean, God has been at work. So why would you...? I mean, think about this. Why would you mess with something that seems to be working? I think the adage is...what? If it's not broken, why would you mess with it? Well, what if there's something better than what's working, even though it's not broken? That has to be considered.

I thought what we would do is take 12 weeks and walk through the book of Acts so that I might show you what is compelling my heart and compelling us as elders to believe that this is the right

move, not just for Denton, but for The Village Church. So for the next 12 weeks, we're going to be looking at the book of Acts. Let's talk about the book of Acts for a second, because the book of Acts tends to bring out some of the best in people and some of the worst in people. Here are four quick things about the book of Acts.

First, this 12-week series on the book of Acts is not for the Denton Campus. God has not given us the book of Acts so that I might leverage that to some end. Rather, this sermon series on the book of Acts is about me being obedient to the Lord and trying to shape how we see the mission and vision of The Village Church moving forward.

The first series I did at The Village Church was on the book of Ephesians. I did that series on the book of Ephesians on purpose because it held, "This is what the church is. If you want to know what the church is, let's dig around in Ephesians. Let's look at what God has done in the first three or four chapters and look at how the church is supposed to behave in the back part of those chapters." I rolled out Ephesians in the hopes that we might understand what the church was and what God was out to accomplish in his bride.

This sermon series is once again about refocusing us on where God would lead us in regard to what we have always believed and what we have always practiced, and how that might philosophically and practically shape out in the years to come. So don't get caught thinking, "He's talking to Denton." I'm not. I'm talking to The Village Church.

The second thing to consider is in this sermon series there will be weeks where we have giant chunks of text, and for the purpose of the sermon I'll tell you what's before, I'll tell you what's after, and then I'll land on a singular text or a small grouping of text, which means I'm going to put a lot of the onus on you to keep up via reading.

When you came in this morning, you got handed a little handout that has the texts you should read coming into that week. If you're more technologically savvy, we have a digital guide built out for you, so you don't get the feeling coming in that you're 30 minutes late to the movie. Are you tracking with me? It's not going to be a good thing if you come in and go, "Now who's Philip? What happened with the fire tongue thing?"

The book of Acts is narrative. It's a story. So if you miss out on the flow of the story... My goal in the book of Acts is to show you the movement of the people of God as the bride of Christ begins to grow

and the church is established. I want to show you how it moves, how it grows, how the Holy Spirit works, what God accomplishes. I want to show you that in the book of Acts. There will be weeks where there will be four chapters that we cover, and I'll read about 12 verses of those four chapters, so you'll need to read to keep up.

Also, here's where we need to have some conversation about your expectation of Acts and where I'm going, so I'll either relieve you or frustrate you right out of the gate. There is wild argument about the nature of the book of Acts. What I mean by that is there are different genres of literature in the Bible. There are historic books. "Here is a history of..." Then there are books that are just filled with prescription.

There are those who would argue that the book of Acts is prescriptive, that it is telling us what we should do, and there are those who would be like, "No, no, no. It is descriptive. It is telling us what God did in that day and time, but it is not prescriptive." Let me get my cards on the table. It is both, and to argue any other way, I think, becomes foolish. For those who go, "It is 100 percent, every part of it, absolutely prescriptive," then I would immediately bring your attention to the back part of chapter 1, where the disciples of Jesus cast lots to replace Judas.

Is that how we find Home Group leaders? If Acts is just prescriptive, then get out the dice, because we need a new Home Group guy. No. That's not prescriptive; it's descriptive. So how do you know the difference between prescriptive and descriptive? Well, we'll roll out a blog tomorrow that kind of fleshes out some of that for you to read. I don't have the time in our time together today to flesh that out.

There will be parts of the book of Acts you can clearly see are prescriptive. There are things the Lord wants us to take from this and apply to our lives. And there will clearly be parts of the book of Acts that are simply letting you know what happened. The blog tomorrow will let you know how we ferret through the difference in those two given the genre of the book of Acts.

Now here's the other thing I want to chat with you about. The book of Acts is filled with signs and wonders, and they're awesome, and they are not the point of the book. The book of Acts is filled with signs and wonders, tongues and prophetic words and healing the sick and raising the dead, and they're not the point of the book.

Although I will address the miraculous and we will look at how God accomplished certain things through miraculous means, I do not feel compelled to use this study to unpack for you how the gifts work or how they relate on a day-in and day-out basis here at The Village. Although I do think that sermon series is coming for our good and for the development of our body, that will not be my point in the book of Acts.

So if you were going, "Get 'em, Chandler..." If you're one of my charismatic men or women, you're like, "It's time. I brought my oil. Let's go!" You're just going to have to breathe. We'll get there, but it's not this series. We have another point going right now. So just contain the tongue of fire for now, and we'll get there. It's important that you know all that as we move into our study of the book of Acts. With that said, let's get going. Acts, chapter 1. We'll start in verse 1.

**"In the first book, O Theophilus..."** The first book was the gospel of Luke. **"...I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering [his death] by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.**

**And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"**

Verse 8 is what the book of Acts is about. It is the mission statement of the book of Acts. It is the anchor that must go into the ground as we move into this study to hold us from getting swept away into anything else. This is what the book of Acts is about. So if you like to write in your Bible or highlight in your device, verse 8 is where we'll camp out today.

**"But 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 ends of the earth."** What happens next is Christ ascends into heaven. The disciples are staring up at the sky when an angel says, "The Lord who just ascended that way will return that way."



So you have right at the beginning of this book really the mission of this book, the goal of this book, the purpose of this book, and here's what it is: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you..." That little "comes upon you" is not insignificant. "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Here in this simple verse we have this outline. You have *the power*, *the purpose*, and then *the plan*, right there in that text.

Let's start with the power. The Holy Spirit is an interesting topic of dialogue, because people are wildly in different spots about the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit for many of us just makes us super nervous. He's like the crazy one who shows up and things get out of control. We like kind of Father, Son, Holy Bible. We just feel so much more comfortable there. We're more linear. It's not out of our control. We can kind of control it.

*Father*. "Yeah, I get that." *Son*. "Yeah, I get that." The Holy Spirit blows where he wants to blow. "That wigs me out. Just read a text." Then there are others of you who have elevated the Holy Spirit beyond his spot in the triune nature of God, that he is the *only* point, the *only* power, rather than a part of the triune God who, when all is said and done, has a role within the Trinity that is not to make much of himself but rather make much of Jesus.

So let's talk about the Holy Spirit quickly. There are two things we need to talk about. First, the Holy Spirit and his relationship with you, and then we need to talk about what it means for the Holy Spirit to come upon a person or (to go back to Luke, chapter 24) to be "clothed in power from on high," and whether or not that's the same thing.

What becomes clear in the Word of God is that the Holy Spirit comes upon those, or dwells inside of those, who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit does the work of illumination, reveals to the heart that it needs a Savior, and if you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells inside of you. Repeatedly, throughout the book of Acts, you will see that the gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit falls, and men are saved.

Two weeks ago we were looking at Cornelius' house of the Italian Cohort. If you remember, Peter is preaching the gospel, the Holy Spirit falls, and Cornelius and his household are saved. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit is inside of you. Yet Jesus says to this group of men who already have the Holy Spirit at *that* level that they need to wait until the Holy Spirit comes upon them or, it says in Luke 24, "clothes them in power."

Some of you might be going, "You are not going second baptism." No, I *am* going second baptism and third and fourth and fifth and sixth and tenth and twentieth and thirtieth and fiftieth and sixtieth and, God willing, two hundredth baptisms in the Holy Spirit. Let me kind of tease out the difference between just having the Holy Spirit living inside of you and walking along with the Lord and being clothed in power from on high, or having the Holy Spirit come upon you.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses this illustration. It's the best illustration I've heard on this subject. Lloyd-Jones talked about the Christian has a happiness in the Lord that is there because of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of him. Our Christian experience is one of a child holding our Father's hand, faithfully walking down the road. We feel safe. We feel secure. We are his, yet not overly compelled to sing about that or shout about that. We're just happy and safe and walking faithfully, holding our Father's hand.

There will be moments where the Father startles his sons and daughters by sweeping them quickly off the ground, pulling them in, kissing their neck, then pushing them back out, looking into their eyes, and saying with all the affection imaginable, "I'm so glad you're mine," and pulling them back in for one more tight embrace, and then putting them down on the ground and continuing to walk. Lloyd-Jones says that's what it looks like to be clothed in power from on high. That's what it feels like to be covered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, I'll read for you this piece of the quote from Lloyd-Jones. "The fuses of love are so overloaded they almost blow out. The subconscious doubts--that he wasn't thinking about at the time, but that pop up every now and then--are gone! And in their place is utter and indestructible assurance, so that you know that you know that you know that God is real and that Jesus lives and that you are loved, and that to be saved is the greatest thing in the world.

And as you walk on down the street you can scarcely contain yourself, and you want to cry out, 'My father loves me! My father loves me! Oh, what a great father I have! What a father! What a father!'" That's what it's like to be clothed with power from on high: a driving out of any doubt, of any lack of assurance or gladness of heart, a blowing of the fuses of our hearts under the weight of God's delight in his children.

I love the honesty of Lloyd-Jones. Here are a couple of things. He acknowledges that even when we're not conscious of our doubts, sometimes we're subconsciously walking in them, and he says this isn't every day, always, but that really the Christian life is holding the hand of the Father and

walking, and every now and then he'll startle us. I love that, and it has been my own personal experience. Every now and then he'll startle us.

Now let's chat. We have to do this. If you have not experienced this startling, it does not mean you're not saved. Are you hearing me? I love the supernatural, want to see the supernatural, constantly plead with God for the supernatural, but the supernatural has never anchored anyone to long-term faithfulness in following Jesus. If you want to argue with that, go ahead and email me, and I'll send you an unreal amount of passages that prove I'm right.

How do you walk through the parted Red Sea on dry ground and less than a month later boil all your gold and make a calf and begin to worship it after a wild orgy? Because miracles won't sustain the soul. Only Jesus can do that. If you have not been swept up like that, pray for it, ask for it, expect it, plead with God on high to let you have that, but it doesn't mean you're not a believer if you don't. To hold the hand of the Father in day-in, day-out obedience to his commands, to be safe and secure in the Father's love... What a gift that is, for most have no hand to hold.

When Jesus says here that the Holy Spirit will be given to you, in one sense he has been given to us so we might walk in the day-in, day-out obedience to the commands of God (more on that in a second), and we'll be clothed in power from on high in these moments where God wants to heighten our awareness, increase our affection, and use us in profoundly powerful ways that are outside the norm. It should be sought after, but we should not feel that we are broken if we don't have them.

If you think that way, you will try to manipulate God, and you will try to manipulate the Holy Spirit, as though you have some sort of power over him. Hear me. You most definitely do not. I say it this way over and over again. You are not Aladdin. You're just not. This power of the Holy Spirit at conversion and the Holy Spirit who will at times clothe us in power was given for a specific purpose, and that purpose is that we would be his witnesses.

So how are we witnesses by the Holy Spirit's power, both in day-to-day hand-holding of the Father, as well as being those seasons and moments when we're clothed in power from on high? Well, let's talk about that, what we learn in the Scriptures. First Corinthians 12:3 talks about how the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus as Lord.

**"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."** This text isn't talking about your lips being able to say, "Jesus is Lord." The most demonized, wicked human being alive can utter the words, "Jesus is Lord," but this goes back to what we covered last week about confession and conviction.

He's saying that no one who doesn't have the Holy Spirit can live a life that reveals and shows that Jesus is Lord. As the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us as Christians, we are governed by that Holy Spirit leading us into glad submission to Jesus' lordship, so that I will oftentimes find the way I live my life is in direct contradiction to the world, not because I'm trying to judge the world, but because Jesus is Lord and the Spirit testifies to my spirit that I am his son and he is Lord.

So there are things I do because Jesus is Lord. There are things I *don't* do because Jesus is Lord. There are places I go because Jesus is Lord. There are places I *will not* go because Jesus is Lord. There's a way I spend my money because Jesus is Lord. There is a way I *don't* spend my money because Jesus is Lord. There's a way I think and fantasize because Jesus is Lord, and there's a way I *don't* think and fantasize because Jesus is Lord. And on and on and on I go. The Holy Spirit does that inside of me, and that sets me up as a witness to the wisdom of God and how life is lived because Jesus is Lord.

The second thing we see in regard to being witnesses is that the Holy Spirit gifts us to do ministry like Jesus. This is John 14:12: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."** I want to chat about this verse, because I've heard it butchered.

Is this text saying that because Jesus has ascended and sent us the Holy Spirit, you're going to be able to take your lunch at work, bless it, and then feed all 5,000 of your coworkers and have some lunch leftover? Maybe. I think you should ask if that need arises. Does this mean you can walk into a funeral and say, "Hold up, guys. She's just sleeping. Get up"? I wouldn't recommend that.

Here's what's happening in this text. The Bible is saying that the ministry of Jesus that was so confounding to the world around him will be *our* ministry, especially as we engage the least of these, as we walk alongside of the poor, as we spend our time with the sick, as we let our lives be wrung out for the least of these, those kind of excluded from the norms, those objectified and sent to the fringes. This is where we play. This is where we love. This is where we preach. This is where

we engage. This is who we invite into our homes. This is who we love on. This is how the ministry of Jesus is multiplied.

Now am I saying that miracles don't exist? No. Don't put that in my mouth, because I've never said it. I'll head to the hospital this afternoon, Lord willing, for our sweet sister who is back in the hospital. It looks like her brain tumor grew again. I'm going to go today, and I'm going to put my hands on her head, and I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit of God to dissolve that tumor in her brain, and I'm going to pray in expectation that he does it, knowing and trusting that she belongs to the Lord and that she is in his hands and his will will be done.

I don't feel compelled to say, "Let your will be done." I feel compelled by the Word of God to lay hands on her because God has asked me to do that and ask him to heal her because God has asked me to ask him to heal her. So I'm not saying we don't ask for the miracle. I'm not saying we don't expect it. I'm saying this text doesn't mean you're going to be running on the ocean, but rather that we will be witnesses as we confess that Jesus is Lord and as we engage, serve, love, and encourage the least of these.

The last one we need to talk about is that the Holy Spirit throughout all of this will remind us of Jesus. John 14:26: **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."** I love this one. I need to be reminded over and over and over again that Jesus is my treasure, that he's better, that he's the goal, that he's the greatest treasure I could ever lay hold of. I need to be reminded over and over and over again, because the pattern of God in my life is to compel me toward things that don't make any sense.

The first real job in ministry I had was at Beltway Park Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas. I was kind of a utility back for them. I did college. I did some home group. I wrote the constitution and bylaws there. I helped David McQueen with anything he possibly needed. I was just his man. "You let me know what you need, Pastor, and I'll get you done."

In fact, if you're a young man heading into ministry, I'll tell you this. I've never met a tremendous man of God leader who did not spend a significant portion of his early years making someone else look better. I loved David, served David. He gave me access to all... "Sit in the elder meeting. You can't talk, but sit in the elder meeting and learn." Do you know what he hired me for? Twelve grand. That's what I got paid that first year.

I was married. Lauren and I made \$12,000 my first year as a pastor. So the fights we had early on were, "You drank a whole Coke? Are you serious right now? You drank the whole thing by yourself? You didn't even think of me? I've been working all day, come home, and there's not even a Coke in the fridge?" That was our fight. We were just so broke we would get in an argument. It wasn't even a Coke. It was like Sam's Cola. It cost 27 cents, and we're getting into a fight that she drank all of it.

From there, finally, that church grew. Some of the best friends I had, Jeremy Kirles, guys I had been with for five or six years, who had kind of cut my teeth on what it meant to minister to the people of God, to serve the people of God... Just as we got to that place where they had raised up our salary and were able to pay us more and Lauren and I began to look at houses, I felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to move to Dallas with a couple of friends of mine and start a nonprofit organization. My wife is a beautiful woman physically, and that physical beauty pales in comparison to the heart God has given her in Christ.

So here we are. We finally have enough money to not have to share Sam's Colas, and I'm like, "I feel compelled that we need to move to Dallas with these men and start this nonprofit." There were no complaints from Lauren. She said, "I laid my yes on the altar when I married you, so lead us." So that's terrifying. I say "terrifying," but my wife would never say, "I told you so." I mean, I've been married to her for a long time now. We've been together longer than that. She just wouldn't. She's not that kind of woman. She might think it, but she would never say it to me.

In the end, we moved to Dallas and started this nonprofit. We took a half pay cut, literally a 50 percent pay cut, to come on and start this. Then I start traveling the world, literally traveling the world and preaching with these guys who were leading music. Shane and Shane is who we started this nonprofit with, and we were traveling around doing all sorts of college things.

Then right as that got built up... Once again, we built a tiny little 1,100-square-foot house down in Dallas. Lauren picked the floors, countertops, cabinets, roof, color, the whole thing, and we start interviewing with Highland Village First Baptist Church, who offered me, as the lead pastor, half of what I was making at the nonprofit. No one thought this was a smart, wise move. They thought I would destroy this place or I'd get fired within three years.

Yet compelled, driven, by the Holy Spirit, once again saying goodbye to some of the closest friends I had, some of the people I loved most deeply, those I walked in community with, who I was

confessing to, who were encouraging my faith... For the third time, I said goodbye to those friends, who were going to continue to travel the world, and moved up here.

Throughout all of those moves, what I needed to be reminded of was not that this success in this moment is God's validation that I'm walking in obedience, but rather Christ himself is the treasure. Less money and smaller crowds aren't God's judgment or a sign of a lack of success, but rather, if I get more of Jesus with less money and smaller crowds, then it's not a loss; it's a win.

I need the Spirit to remind me of this all the time. I needed him to remind me of it this morning as I walked out here, lest I shrink back in fear for my desire to be approved of by you. I need the Holy Spirit to remind me Jesus is what I need. Jesus validates me. Jesus is my all. I need the Holy Spirit to constantly remind me of this.

This is how we become witnesses under the power of the Holy Spirit. We confess with our lives that Jesus is Lord. We begin to do ministry as Jesus did, walking with, working with, loving on the least of these, and we are constantly reminded of the goodness and mercy of Jesus as our greatest pursuit and greatest treasure. So there's the power, and there's the purpose: them being witnesses.

Here's the plan: "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." They're going to start in Jerusalem. For the next few weeks, we're going to become experts in the church of Jerusalem. "First Baptist Jerusalem." We're going to become experts on Jerusalem, and then the Holy Spirit is going to compel people in a strange way to get on out to Judea. Then they're heading into Samaria, which, by the way, is full of Samaritans who are half-breeds who are despised by the Jews. See that racial reconciliation piece coming back into focus?

Then, brothers and sisters, to the ends of the earth. When these words were spoken in Jerusalem, you and I were the ends of the earth. Let me close with this. Nothing has changed. The power given to them is given to us. The purpose given to them is given to us. Even how this works itself out is given to us, where we are and then where God will lead us, but all the while staying openhanded and believing and trusting that God is for God and God will establish his kingdom and grow his bride and use us.

Although there will be gospel goodbyes, and although we'll have to take steps of faith that seem strange, this is what God has always done, and there's a primary methodology by which he has always accomplished this. I'll flesh that out in the weeks to come. We must be a church that as we

grow older as a community of faith doesn't begin to tighten our grip around what we perceive to be ours. Are you tracking with me?

Maybe this will help. I'll be 40 this summer. When I was in my 20s, I wasn't afraid of anything. I really wasn't. Like, "Do you think you can do a flip on that wakeboard?" "How fast do you need to go for me to do it?" But what I've learned now at 40 is that I can actually get hurt badly, and that when I get hurt, I don't heal as quickly. When I was 23, I was like Wolverine. I'd just grow it back and keep going. It doesn't work like that anymore. Things nag. They just don't go away. I'm like, "Why won't my shoulder work?" It's just that kind of thing now.

What has happened as I've gotten older is I have started to pull back on risks and started to not take risks. Maybe there's an inherent wisdom in that, and there probably is physically, but there never is spiritually. On our run here, we must be willing to walk with an open hand and to trust the promptings of the Holy Spirit. God has always honored it here. Always. I can't think of one risky, "can't believe we're doing this" step that God hasn't honored.

We'll have a frank conversation. We have operated in a financial surplus here for years, but let me say this to you (I'm not passing the plates; everybody calm down): you're terrible givers. To be straight with you, you're awful givers. Part of that is on me. I haven't taught well on it. I haven't painted the biblical picture of generosity. But overall, you are terrible, terrible givers.

If our covenant members, just our covenant members (that's half of who will be attending this weekend, so 6,000 versus the 12,000 or so who will attend)... If all of our families here made \$30,000 a year and just tithed on that, we would have millions more than we currently do. You're terrible. Yet God has blessed us with surpluses every year, which has enabled us to give millions of dollars away.

How do you explain that? I think (this is conjecture) we've said, "We want your name to be known and loved. We want your glory to be praised. We want your church to be established. How would you like us to spend this?" We stay streamlined and simple here, and we've put air conditioners in other churches. We have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to other plants in other parts of the world.

Blake Chilton, who just planted Declaration down in Bryan... Do you know he was best man at my wedding and I was best man in his? My wife and his wife were best friends. My 10-year-old



daughter, when the Chiltons pulled out of town, wept for about two hours. Lauren has already made three trips to Bryan, and it has been a month.

This is gospel goodbye. This is openhanded. This is, "Your will be done. Not my will, but your will be done," because Jesus is the treasure. Now when I say *us*, that this power, this purpose, this plan is all the same for us, what do I mean by *us*? Well, I mean two things. First, it's true about us as individuals, and then second, it's true about us corporately, how we think corporately, how we behave corporately, how we operate corporately.

With this as our anchor, this is what God is after: the church as a missionary organization. Not always looking inward and entertaining, but looking outward. John Piper calls it "Battleship, not cruise ship." Engaging the world around us for the glory of God in Jesus Christ. May we be prayerful of how God is leading us in these days, that we might not miss a significant move of the Holy Spirit among us. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women. Again, just the opportunity to center... It's just a sentence, Father. So I thank you for how infused with purpose it is, with power it is, and really with your plan for our lives. Help us, Holy Spirit, give ourselves over to this end, that we might see the eradication of boredom, that we might understand better where we work, where we live, where we play. Be our all in all. It's for your beautiful name, amen.