



Our First Love

Matt Chandler – March 31, 2019

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to dive in. While you're turning there, I want to take a second and honor a good friend of mine. One of the things that I think makes The Village Church a healthy church is that there's a group of men and women here with an extraordinary amount of longevity.

Surveys would tell you that a pastor's life cycle at a given church is around three years, yet we have 15 to 20 people who have been here 10 years or longer, and some of those are actually chief architects for how God has put us together as a community of faith. One of those is my closest friend, sans my wife, Josh Patterson. I'm going to ask Josh to come out. Josh has been here 15 years this week. So will you thank Josh for 15 years of service?

If you're a member, more than likely you know who Josh is. You've interacted with Josh. What has been fascinating as we've celebrated his time here is the testimonies that are coming up are things like this: "I first met Josh in the parking lot. I pulled in. He grabbed ahold of me. I had no idea I was dealing with an elder and a lead pastor. He was helping park cars on a rainy day." Somebody else was like, "I first met Josh when I went to pick up my kid. He was the one teaching in Kids Village that weekend."

I get a ton of credit for what God has done here, and I'm telling you, we're not here and we're not built like this... Who brings order to my chaos via the Spirit of God is Josh Patterson. I love you. I want to honor you today. We've been doing this all week. If you want to give him a \$100 handshake or a \$20 handshake...I know him, I love him...he'll take it. Only if you feel led. We've honored him, but if you want to do that, he is not going to give it back to you. The dude has like seven kids. So bless him. Thank Josh one last time.

Okay. I want to take a second and explain... I think JT explained it some, but I want to stop for a second and explain why in the middle of our series on the gospel of John we would press "pause." I

don't know if you picked up on the fact that, hey, we haven't been in John in a bit. I'm glad you asked. I want to try to answer.

I love preaching books of the Bible. I feel safe in it. I feel drawn to it. I love that it'll make me say things I wouldn't naturally say. Not because I'm afraid to say it, but I just wouldn't think about it in regard to where we currently are. So I was really enjoying going through the gospel of John, but as Multiply began to move forward... Multiply is not Flower Mound voting on land. You know that. Right? Multiply is the rolling off of our campus model to make The Village Church Flower Mound an autonomous church, just like our other campuses.

It is \$22 million of real estate being given to the kingdom of God by the planting of autonomous churches all over the Metroplex. It is simultaneously sending out four church plants and multiple missionaries. In fact, right now, we have one of our own on the ground in Iraq sending us pictures. He's just walking and praying and hoping to run across those who the Spirit of God draws him to to share the good news of the gospel with. This is what Multiply is all about.

But for the first time, I've been able to feel for us here in Highland Village, Flower Mound, Lewisville, Argyle, Bartonville, wherever... What would it look like for us to be the church in this place? I started picking up on the fact that in my journal I was getting angsty. Do you understand what that means? I could just feel in me stuff coming alive in my bones that I don't know how you're wired, but if I don't get out of me, bad things happen.

The elders, for my 15 years, graciously gave me an extended sabbatical, so May 12 will be my last Sunday in the pulpit until early August, and then I'll be back. That is unbelievably generous to me and my family, and I am super excited and super terrified by the notion all at once. If you know me... What am I supposed to do? On Tuesday, if I get up early, 7:30, and then I spend a couple of hours with the Lord, and then I go work out... Okay, it's noon. What now?

So I've had a couple of minor panic attacks around this idea of rest. I have a guide who's trying to help me build it all out. I'm eager to just enjoy my family and recover and get ready for the next 23 years, because I promised you 40, and by the grace of God, I think we're going to get there. With that said, I need to get this out of me before I go. This isn't a vision series. This isn't "This is where we're going." This is what's in my guts.

I went to the elders... In fact, it started a couple of weeks ago. What I told JT English on those two sermons was, "Let's get out of John. Preach your guts." So you heard two epic sermons from JT English that came out of how God has wired him, and then I thought Trevor Joy burned the place down last week. I got to listen to it, and I wondered, "Is the building still there?"

How gracious is God to us that we run that deep in men who love Jesus and are serious about the Word of God, not to mention the women we have here who are the same way. I've just said, "Hey, let's preach our journals. Let's just preach our journals until May 12." So that's what we're doing. I'm just trying to get out of me what's in me so I have a shot at resting.

My first year here, I preached through the book of Ephesians. How many of you were here 16 years ago on that first...? There were a ton of them in the last service. I don't think there are as many in the 10:30, although there are some. I wanted to preach through the book of Ephesians because I thought in it you could see God's heart for the church.

You could see God's call on our lives. You could see the centrality of the gospel. You could look at what it means to be spiritually alive. You could look at what it means to model and live a holy life that shows that Christ has come and that Christ is superior to the idols of this world, and you could see that we are a sent people.

Here's the bottom line for me: for all of our dreaming about what the future looks like, I know there will be three things that are ever-present, because if they're not, I can't be here. And I *am* here, so they have to be there. Here's what I know about me. I've been profoundly shaped in three areas, that wherever I go, there it is, and wherever it's not I start to feel like, "This isn't for me."

First, The Village Church will always be a biblically serious church. We're going to preach the Bible, love the Bible, read the Bible, memorize the Bible, take seriously the Word of God. This isn't a pep rally. We're going to start our stuff with "If you have your Bibles, grab them." We're going to read the text. I don't know if you know this, but every song we sing... Did you see it? Where did we get it from? The Bible. We're going to be people of the Book. That can never change, because I don't know how to do anything else than read this book and then talk about it with you.

But we're also going to be spiritually alive. To be doctrinally pure and dead is no win. It's rebuked in the Book, not exalted in the Book. The point of the Bible is love and understanding of Jesus, his preeminence, and his lordship over our lives. So any knowledge of the Word of God that doesn't

lead to spiritual vibrancy isn't a knowledge of the Word of God. It's knowing some sentences, but they certainly haven't been illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

We're going to be serious about the Word of God, we're going to be serious about spiritual life, being alive in Christ, and we're going to be serious about being a sent people. We're going to be serious about going. If any of those three pillars fall apart, then I just don't know what to do. I can't do it. I can't be the guy.

I told the elders that's no threat. We need to pray and fast and seek the face of God, but I wouldn't even know how to preach in an environment that doesn't value those things or every time I talk about them they were like, "Well, you're putting a little bit too much weight on that, brother." I wouldn't know how to operate.

So wherever we're going, those three things will be pillars. If that's a new building, if that's a new format, if that's a new style...whatever it is, those three things have to be ever-present, at least in *my* 40-year run, because they're so woven into who I am. I don't know how to go about this any other way. Certainly, there are other things that are important and there are other things we need to consider, but those three are going to be the things we keep coming back to over and over and over and over again, because it's all I know.

What I want to do with my first "journal" sermon is really something I've talked about before, but it has been about 13 years. The reason I preached through the book of Ephesians is not just all of its content but because you can see its life span. You can see it born, you can see it struggle, and you can watch it die. There are a lot of lessons in watching that process take place. I don't know if you know this. We know more about the church at Ephesus than we know any other church in the Bible.

We watch Ephesus born in Acts 19. We watch Ephesus be encouraged in the book of Ephesians. We watch Ephesus get challenged in 1 and 2 Timothy. We watch Ephesus get rebuked in 1, 2, and 3 John, and we watch Ephesus get threatened by Christ himself in Revelation 2. Can we just talk about how all-star *that* staff is? "Who's your pastor?"

"Timothy."

"Really? Where did he train?"

"Under Paul."

"Where did *he* train?"

"Christ."

"Okay. Yeah, that's a pretty legit résumé there. We like him."

"Another one of our guys is our executive pastor John, the disciple Jesus loved."

That was his nickname. They called me "Alfalfa" in seventh grade. (If you weaponize that against me, I will preach so angry. I'd better not get an email this week. That's church discipline stuff. That'll be later.) Yet this is a church that despite all of that gifting drifted in a really painful way. They drifted in a way you wouldn't expect, or at least *I* wouldn't expect. So let's look at the end and then go back to the beginning, because I think in the beginning we get some insight into what we need to think about, dream about, pray about, hope for as a family of faith. Revelation 2, starting in verse 1:

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'"

There are some things about this church I want to highlight. At the beginning, it sounds like the kind of church I want my kids to join. Let's look at it. They're serious about holiness. The church at Ephesus, 65 to 70 years after they began (that's what this time frame is), is still serious about

holiness. They work. They toil. They have patient endurance. They're serious about holiness. They are doctrinally sound.

The only way you can spot a false apostle, a false teaching is to know true teaching. Right? That's how you spot false teaching: to know true teaching. So someone has shown up. "I'm an apostle." And they start to teach, and they're like, "You're no apostle, because this is what's true. You're teaching what is false." They're doctrinally sound. They're serious about holiness. Look at verse 3. They endure. Let's think about endurance. You know this, but I just want to highlight it.

Do you know none of the compulsions you and I struggle with are new to humanity? Just stop and think about it for a second. None of the compulsions of the modern era are new to the modern era. We're looking around like, "Oh my gosh. We are such a sex-crazed, sex-obsessed culture." Yeah, and in Ephesus the Temple of Artemis existed with thousands of both male and female prostitutes, and you would worship by visiting them. I think that probably puts some things in our day in check.

It's not like, "Oh, look at what has happened to humanity." Humanity has been a train wreck since Genesis 3. Just stroll through Genesis this week. You'll actually start to feel better about 2019. Seriously. You're giggling. I'm trying to help us. It's like, "All is lost!" Apparently, you haven't read Genesis. So, you have this church, this group of men and women, that has all of the compulsions you and I have...the compulsion toward anger, the compulsion toward lust, the compulsion toward [you name it]. It exists.

On top of *that* compulsion, the compulsion that at different times hits many of us of "Should I walk away from my faith?" is on a group of people that is being tormented and persecuted by the prevailing culture. No one in this room is going to have their house looted today because they love Jesus. No one is going to be arrested. No one is going to be killed. No one is going to have their stuff taken from them.

That's not the world *they're* living in. On top of their own compulsions, on top of their own desire to follow the Lord, they also have the full force of a secularized, enraged, Christianity-hating, "Let's wipe it off the face of the earth" government pressing in on them. What Jesus says is, "You've been faithful. You've endured. You haven't turned your back. You keep moving forward. I'm proud of you. I see you." That's what's being said.

Again, if I'm on the website now, and you have this blurb from Jesus down at the bottom, and he's like, "Hey, they're serious about holiness, and they're doctrinally sound. They endure. They're a people who endure. No matter what difficulty comes their way, they're in it," at that point, I'm kind of trying to navigate and find "How do I join?" Yet I think the critique is devastating and undoes all of that. The critique is that they have abandoned their first love. They've abandoned it.

In fact, the rebuke from Jesus says, "Remember the heights from which you have fallen. You were at one point in the heights, and you're not in the heights anymore. You're in the valley, and *you* chose, *you* abandoned, *you* turned." There's this rebuke that despite their seriousness about holiness, despite their seriousness about doctrine, and despite their endurance, they're in danger of the presence and power of Jesus being removed from their midst.

That has haunted me since day one 16 years ago, that you can be serious about holiness, you can be serious about doctrine, you can be ferociously walking in endurance and abandon the love you had at first and fall from the heights at which you began. What I want to do is highlight how serious of a deal this is, because it's easy for us to go, "Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's just love." But love is the point. That's where this church is in a lot of trouble regardless of how pretty it looks.

This teacher of the law comes up to Jesus in the book of Matthew, and there's this massive debate in the first century among the people of God about what the greatest commandment is. Like, what's the whole point of the Christian faith? What's the point of the law? You had a group of people who were like, "*This* is the point of the law," and you had another tribe over *here* saying, "*This* is the point of the law." Then you had another stream over *here* going, "*This* is the point of the law."

It's not all that unlike what we see in evangelicalism today, where you have these different tribes who go, "This is the point." "No, *this* is the point." "No, *this* is the point." This teacher of the law decided to just go straight to the source and go, "Tell us what the point is." Here's Jesus' response. Matthew 22:36-40:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

The response to "What's the point of this whole thing?" according to Jesus, is love for God and love for others, a vertical reconciliation that leads to a horizontal reconciliation that shows that Christ is supreme and preeminent. So if a church loses love, they lose the point of what's happening. A church that knows *about* Jesus and does not *love* Jesus is a dying church and a church that will not be around long.

A church that has knowledge of the *character* of God and does not find himself or herself captivated by the *beauty* of God is a church on the clock, waiting for someone else to buy their building. Love is the point...love for God, love for our neighbors. That's what Jesus said. The point of it all is that you be reconciled to God, that you would love God, and that that would spill out in love for neighbor. In fact, you can see this everywhere.

What drives out fear? Courage? No, not according to the Bible. What drives out fear? Love drives out fear. Do you want to battle fear? Grow in love. You don't conquer fear by being courageous; you conquer fear by growing in love. Love stabilizes our souls. Love received can be love given. Listen. One of the reasons I am just a madman about God's current, right-now, at-this-second, passionate love for you is that if you'll ever get it, you can actually love other people, but as long as you think you have to fix something up in yourself before he cares for you, you are in a world of trouble.

You cannot love others if you feel like you're unloved. You can't do it. It's white-knuckled nonsense. It's nicety. It's Southern hospitality. It's not a soul transformed, walking in joy that can empathize, weep, and rejoice with others. The danger, if we're not careful, is that we'll do a lot of things well and that'll get lost. Faith, hope, and love remain, but the greatest of these is...what? Love.

Let's talk. Can we just agree that faith is a pretty huge deal? What about hope? I have about three or four seasons of my life that if it wasn't for hope I'd have been like Thanos snapping. I would have just dissolved and blown away in the wind. The Bible is going faith is necessary, hope is a gift of God's grace, but love is the greatest. In fact, if you don't have love, it doesn't matter if you know all of the mysteries of the universe; you're like a clanging cymbal.

No one I have ever met has said, "Hey, cue up that song with just cymbals clanging together. It just brings me peace, restores my soul. Just bang that cymbal over and over and over again as close to my head as possible." No! No one says that. Think about 1 Corinthians 13. "If I speak with the tongue of angels..." I don't even know what that is. "...but I have not love..." Love is the point. Love is

why we've been called unto Christ. The Spirit of God establishes love in our hearts...love for God that bleeds out into love for others.

Then you have this threat here. I know people are like, "That's too strong of a word." It's certainly *not* too strong of a word. It's exactly what's happening. "Remember the heights from which you have fallen. Repent and do the works you did at first or I'm removing your lampstand." "If you so love to do Christianity without Christ, how about I just remove the presence of Christ, and y'all can get on about building your man-centered thing?"

I know that's not your view of Jesus. He has wings and he's smiling. He has glitter like he's been at a rave. Everybody is fine and good. He's never upset by anything, and that's what love means, except it's *not* what love means. If you have children or anybody you love, you *know* that's not what love means. That's why David says, "The boundaries have fallen for me in pleasant places." Why? Because there are boundaries. So Jesus here, without wings, hasn't gone to the rave, says, "You want to do Christianity without me? I'll give it to you. Good luck."

We're like, "I want him back on the felt board smiling, Pastor," but that's not what's happening in this text. "You want to do this without me? Go ahead." Does not God say the same thing to Moses in Exodus? Isn't this the same thing God lays before Moses? "You are a stiff-necked people, and I'm afraid I'll wipe you off the face of the earth. You can have the Promised Land, you can have milk and honey, you can have wealth, you can have your inheritance, but I'm not going."

What does Moses say? "Then *I'm* not going, because if you give us all that and you don't give us you, it's worthless. I'm not moving. You have already said you're taking us, so you're taking us." If you read that, it makes me uncomfortable. Every time I watch Moses talk to God, I'm like, "Oh, this dude is about to get lit up." And he doesn't, because God values and loves an honest heart, because he already knows it. He loves men and women who won't hide the honesty of their hearts.

So, if we go back and look at what they did at first... Acts 19 is a fascinating passage. What happens in Ephesus really is something I would love to see happen in DFW. The apostle Paul gets to Ephesus and finds a small group of Christians who had had John's baptism. He asked them, "What baptism have you had?" and they said, "John's baptism." John's baptism, if you're not familiar, is one of repentance.

Think youth camp as a sophomore, where you swore you would never do it again and you came down front crying, like, "I'm going to be a better moral person." Maybe you actually were converted at youth camp. I'm not talking to you. I'm talking about the one who was like, "I'm never going to do that again," and you did really well for about three weeks, but you weren't really surrendering to Jesus; you were just trying to be morally better.

Paul's question was like, "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" to which they replied, "What's that?" So Paul was like, "Oh man. You guys are doing this all wrong." *Bam!* The Holy Spirit comes. Now we've got ourselves legitimate converts, and then Paul starts to teach daily in the synagogue until some Jewish men begin to undermine and attack, so he pulls out.

At the hall of Tyrannus, he reasoned every day for two years preaching the Word of God. Two years, every day. I feel like I should never complain about the reps I have to give at TVC. Two years, every day, until the Bible literally says all of Asia had heard. Isn't that incredible? Then, in the middle of all of this preaching the Word of God, there are these stunning miracles.

People are starting to steal stuff off Paul because it heals people. They steal his handkerchief and throw it on their sick person, and that sick person is healed. They take his apron. I don't know if he cooked or worked. They threw the apron on people, and people were healed. Then he was just casting out demons left and right.

This reveals my own immaturity. Sixteen years ago this was one of my favorite stories in the Bible, and it's *still* one of my favorite stories in the Bible. There was a Jewish itinerant exorcist who had seven sons, the seven sons of Sceva. They watch Paul cast out demons, and they decide, "That would be a good time. We should try that." So they go and find a demonically oppressed person. You should read this. This is all Acts 19.

They say to this demon-possessed man, "In the name of Jesus Christ, Paul's God, I command you to come out." Then the demon speaks to them and says, "I know Jesus. I've heard of Paul." Which I've always liked. I don't know about you, but I just want the Enemy to go, "Dang. Yeah, I've heard of *that* dude." I don't know how you want to spend your life, but I want to be so fully surrendered and Spirit-filled that they're like, "Oh, don't go *that* way; go *this* way."

"I've heard of Paul, but who are you?" "I don't know you. I haven't heard of you." Then the Bible says that the demonically possessed man turns on the brothers and beats them bloody and naked

so that they flee the house. I've always said this because it's just gold. It's right there. If you've ever watched a fight, there can be debate about who won and who did not win, but if you were wearing clothes when the fight started and you're naked when the fight is over, you lost. It's just universally true.

I don't care if you had one wild, crushing right that knocked teeth out of a dude. You still lost your pants in the fight, which means nobody is talking about that right hook; they're talking about the fact that you ran out of the house naked and bloody. That's in the Bible. I didn't make that up. That's Acts 19. When that happened, the Bible says that awe filled the land, that the Holy Spirit of God fell in such a unique way the whole socioeconomic climate of Ephesus changed. Those who made money off the selling of idols couldn't make any money anymore, so they started a riot.

How amazing would it be to drive down 35 and hit Walnut Hill where one of our campuses is and see that all of the strip clubs are gone because there wasn't any money to be made in there anymore? How amazing would it be for the Spirit of God to have a revival in such a way that those who make gain off the back of the oppressed and the marginalized couldn't make a dollar? That's what happened in Ephesus. No small thing. Here's what we read in the middle of all that. This is Acts 19:17-20. This is all we have around their works from which they had fallen.

"And this became known [that dude getting beaten and bloody and naked] to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily."

Four very quick things. The first thing you see, the heights from which they have fallen, is they *extolled the name of Jesus*. Now, since my guess is you have not used the word *extol* this week... Anybody? "Actually, I had a one-on-one with one of my salesmen and I used..." Here's what *extol* means. *Extol* means to lift up, to esteem, to praise.

So, whatever else they were doing, one of the works we see in Ephesus at the beginning is they are captivated by the supremacy of Jesus Christ. They lift him up. They esteem. They praise. They love him in song, in prayer, in the Lord's Supper, in study, in conversation. This is not overly complex.

One of the things the Spirit of God has been doing in our midst that I'm so excited about is people are taking a step of faith to live lives of affirmation and encouragement.

I can't tell you how many stories I'm hearing lately of some of you who took the risk of going, "How can I pray for you?" at work that has led into gospel conversations that have led to people coming to church to hear the good news of the gospel that has led into *you* getting to share the gospel with your coworkers, with your family members, that all started with, "Hey, how can I pray for you?" If you're like, "That doesn't quite sound like extolling the name of Jesus," I'm telling you that's exactly what extolling the name of Jesus is.

It's not "How can I fix your problems?" It's "How can I take your problem to the one who can, and then how can I introduce you to the one who can? Because your problem actually isn't your marriage; your problem is a corrupt heart that needs to be born again." Love for God that then horizontally works. Just story after story of people going, "I want to live more boldly in my faith. I don't want to sit in the stands and judge how others run. I want to run." God is growing that here, and I'm just asking him to continue to grow it here.

They extolled the name of the Lord, but they also *walked in transparency*. This is not new to us. What you see them doing is confessing and divulging their practices. Now, confessing and divulging their practices means they were talking to other people about these things. You can see the residue of this in Revelation 2. They're serious about sin, but they're serious about sin with one another.

There's a difference between confessing and divulging. Let me tease out what I mean. To confess would be something like this: "Hey, I'm really struggling. Can y'all pray for me?" Can we agree that's confession? It's better than just, "How are you doing, brother?" "Fine. Praise his name." The world is on fire behind you. Right? Confession is something, but then there's this divulging of practices that I think changes the game.

Again, use wisdom here. The divulging of practices is the details of the confession that brings the grossness of it into light. "I am struggling" is a lot different than "Here's the dirty grossness of what's going on in my heart and my life. Here's what I'm involved in, and I am embarrassed and ashamed. I'm just trembling, hoping you don't reject me here." That's divulging practice, and here's why it matters.

I'm currently listening to a book called *Gates of Fire* by Steven Pressfield. Has anybody read this book? If you haven't, it's fine. Oh, come on. My people. It is about the Battle of Thermopylae. If you don't know what the Battle of Thermopylae is, read more. It's the Persian army trying to wipe Hellenization off the face of the earth.

Xerxes sent a two million-man army to overthrow all of Greece. Surely you know the 300 Spartans... Listen. Y'all are going to frustrate me if you don't know this story. Three hundred Spartans holed at this pass. They all die, but they inflict, I think, 20,000 casualties on the Persian army. It messed with Xerxes so badly it ultimately turns the tide.

The book is historical fiction written by a military guy. The story is one of the Hellenist slaves survived. They pulled him out of a pile of bodies, and he's in front of King Xerxes, and Xerxes is trying to figure out how 300 guys just killed 20,000 of his. This slave is unpacking to him the way Spartans did battle, how they held their shields, the seriousness by which they approached war, how they thought about it, how they came together. Every once in a while, I need something like that to awaken the inner warrior. All right?

On more than one occasion, he describes the importance in how the Spartans fought by linking up their shields together and then, with a long eight-foot spear, striking over the shields, so the only way a warrior could be safe is that a brother on his left and a brother on his right had their shields together to protect from the Immortals, the onslaught from the Persians.

I'm just geeky enough to hear that and go, "That's what it's like! That's divulging practices." If I come to you and say, "I'm struggling," you're going to go, "Oh, Matt is struggling. Let's pray for Matt." But if I divulge, if I go, "Man, this is a part of my life where my compulsions overtake me and I lose all sense and I become like an idiot," now all of a sudden you know me. Now you're able to slot in and lock your shield into mine, and then let's go together.

But if all you know is I'm struggling, what can you do? Just kind of ignorantly pray. "Oh, he's struggling with something somewhere in his life. Who knows? You know. Bless him, God." Which I'll take, but the transparency to step in and go, "No, this is how broken I am. This is how much I need a Savior. This is how much I need you" flanks you with brothers and sisters. It puts people around you.

The elite force of the Persians was called the *Immortals*. I loved even the concept. This kind of spiritual, weird assault crushes into the joined shields of the Spartans and are slaughtered by the tens of thousands. If we're thinking about what it means to be the people of God against principalities and powers and demonic forces of this present air, confession and the divulging of practices is about flanking ourselves against the attacks of the Enemy.

Ephesus loved Jesus enough to go, "Yeah, I'm gross, but *he's* not." What happens if you don't love Jesus is you have to go, "I'm awesome, and so is Jesus." But if you love him, if you see him as who he is, you're able to go, "Isn't he wonderful? In fact, let me tell you how wonderful he is. I am a moron. I have compulsions that lead me to such dark places, and he is unmoved in his love for me. The things I have been a part of are so grotesque I get nauseous when I think about them, and he delights in me. He has never regretted calling me unto himself."

When you love Jesus, you don't have to be awesome. When you love Jesus, you get to just be what you are: broken and scared and hoping and longing and wandering and unsure and resting in the one who isn't any of those things. This is why love is so important. But they didn't just walk in transparency, which brought about community and accountability, they were also *serious about sin*. Let's look at this last part.

"And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver." Just for the record, I'm not for book burning. I'm not even for... If you're around my age, maybe you became a Christian when all secular music was going to make you do meth and kill your parents. Maybe you grew up in that era or not. I don't know.

There were CD burnings back in the day when I was a kid, where you'd bring your Metallica CD and your Pearl Jam CD and burn it, and then it would pop and hiss, and you'd be like, "Demons!" Actually, it was just plastic burning, because that's what happens when you burn plastic. So I'm not for those kinds of things. I think, honestly, they might be a little silly, but I *would* highlight *this*: the church at Ephesus wanted to not go back to what they knew would destroy them. They were serious about sin in a way that I'm wondering if *we* are.

I think so many of us think we have our sin under control, and when it's full grown it will kill you, 100 percent. There are no small, respectable sins. All sin when full grown kills us. It overpromises, under-delivers, betrays us, and leaves us wanting. My daughter rodeos, which is something I never

thought I'd say, and barrels is toward the end. Just think track meet. Think hanging out for four hours to watch 16 seconds. That's the way to think about rodeo.

One of the things they do earlier in the rodeo, which I think they should probably save until last, because more people would hang out, even though it's still like a track meet. There are like 40 people there. There are these men, and something is wrong with them. I don't know what happened. Something is broken. Something is not right. They didn't get hugged by their... I don't know what happened.

What they do is they strap themselves to 2,000-pound mammals, and then they inflict a shocking pain in the most tender spot of said 2,000-pound mammal and try to hang on for eight seconds. They are confident as all get out that their technique, their draw, their experience is going to save the day, yet I have seen far too many get trampled, get hooped, get bucked off, not be able to get out of that rope they lashed themselves to this really angry animal with.

I think that's so like you and me when it comes to sin. "I've got this. I can handle this. I know a technique that can manage this." You can't manage sin; it's managing you. Sometimes, for greatest effect, for the glory of Christ being shamed and your utter destruction, your sin will just nibble and nibble and nibble and not take a giant bite out of you. It'll nibble because you'll go, "That wasn't that bad." Nibble again. "That wasn't that bad." Nibble again. "That wasn't that bad." Nibble again. "Not that bad." Then you're gone. The church at Ephesus so loved Jesus they burned it all. They saw it for what it was: refuse, waste.

Then the last thing I want to highlight here is that while all this is going on, they *increased and prevailed* so that the Word of God continued to spread. All of these things are connected. Being biblically serious and spiritually alive and being a sent people are interconnected. They're almost one and the same thing. They're not different things; they're one thing. I've noticed lately, to great delight (and I want to speak to it directly), there are two swells currently happening in our body.

There is a zealous swell to know doctrine and theology and the depths of God's Word. We see this happening, because we open up a class and you fill it, and then we have a waiting list. How many churches struggle with *that*? "I was trying to study 1 Samuel, and I couldn't get in." It's not like we're like, "Ten weeks on Revelation. Twelve weeks on sex." Those will sell out. But like, "First and 2 Samuel. Anybody want some of that?"

Most of you haven't read through 1 and 2 Samuel in your Bible reading plan. You punted at Leviticus before you even got to it. Yet we open up that class and you fill it. The Training Program fills up in a matter of seconds. I want to praise God for the hunger for the Word of God. Also, simultaneously with, there is the desire to experience and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, to hear his still small voice, to step out, to pray for the sick and see them healed, to hear prophetic words from God, to extend prophetic words.

I want to tell you these are not two things; they are one thing. They are the Spirit of God being poured out on the people of The Village Church in a unique way. You should not pick one of those; you should embrace both. It's what God is doing in our day. Praise his name. Spirit and truth is how worshipers will worship him. What I'm trying to lay before us is over the course of 65 to 70 years, these are some of the dangers.

What we need to fight for, what we need to contend for, what we need to pray around, when all is said and done, is that we're a church that extols the name of Jesus Christ; that we walk in transparency; that confession and divulging of practices, accountability, and walking in the light mark us as the people of God in this place; that we take sin seriously and we embrace God's call to go neighborhood to nations.

There are steps each of us will need to take here. We are bent a certain way. We're wired a certain way. You're uniquely wired in a certain way. You're drawn to some of these things over others. You don't need to kick against that; you just need to be aware of it. Not all of us have the same gifts. Not all of us have the same abilities, but you have been called into this place, gifted uniquely, gifted and seen by God as an individual, yet in the same sentence not to be seen individualistically, because you are a part of a whole, not a single.

You have been called into the community of faith, filled with the Holy Spirit, gifted by God, and when all of us buy into that, you have something special. So what's your step? Maybe this is a season in which extolling the name of Jesus is something... You have felt your affections for God wane, and maybe, if you thought about it, you'd be like, "Oh, I know why. Because I don't confess and I haven't been transparent." Or "You know what? I don't take sin seriously. I actually try to treat it as a pet and think I have it under control."

Or maybe it's "I have not embraced that God has uniquely wired me and called me and sent me out to be light in the darkness and salt in a dying world. I just have not embraced that, so my work and

family life is completely separate to my church life," and that's not what God is doing. He hasn't asked you to be a spectator. This isn't a conference; this is the body of Christ. That's why I'm happy to put so many other preachers up here in front of you. This is the body. So what's that step? We're meant to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. Let me pray for us.

Father, bless these men and women. I thank you for your grace on our lives. Thank you for the lessons you're showing us here. I pray for our church. We just ask that you protect us and guide us and lead us. We want to lift up, to esteem, to praise the name of Jesus. We want to be a people marked by transparency, known in community, held accountable. We want to be serious about our sins, and we want your name, your renown to increase and to prevail. We ask you to do these things by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus, amen.