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PRIORITIZING PREACHING AS A PRIMARY MEANS OF  
ENCOURAGING SPIRITUAL GROWTH AMONG THE  
BODY OF BELIEVERS AT LIFEHOUSE CHURCH  
IN TOWNSEND, DELAWARE

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Presented to  
the Faculty of  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Mark Anthony Lashey  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

PRIORITIZING PREACHING AS A PRIMARY MEANS OF  
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To Tammy,

You are an absolute treasure, the love of my life, and my best friend!

It is an abiding joy to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with you.

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## PREFACE

As I reflect on the journey of this project and the entire Doctor of Ministry process, words fall short in capturing the depth of gratitude that fills my heart. Three years ago, this endeavor began with an extremely intimidating leap of faith. Nevertheless, I vividly recall the joy I experienced during the first lecture of my first class, Theological and Historical Foundations of Expository Preaching, where Dr. Michael Pohlman imparted rich wisdom. (I was literally moved to tears!)

Throughout this journey, there were moments of feeling humbled, overwhelmed, and discouraged. Yet, in his faithfulness, the Lord provided sweet fellowship with like-minded brothers, timely inspiration and encouragement from SBTS faculty, grace upon grace, and new mercies every morning! Indeed, my God supplied every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

To my loving wife, Tammy, I extend my deepest gratitude. Your unwavering prayers, patience, and encouragement have been steadfast. Your sacrifices and understanding during the long hours of study and reflection have not gone unnoticed, and I am forever grateful for your partnership in this journey.

To my family, whose love has been a constant source of inspiration, thank you for praying and loving me through the many challenges and triumphs.

I am immensely thankful for my church family, whose prayers, encouragement, and shared commitment to the Kingdom of Christ have been instrumental in shaping my perspective and providing a supportive environment for this endeavor.

Above all, my deepest gratitude goes to the Lord Jesus Christ, my King. My utmost desire is to serve and honor him in all things at all times, stewarding well the opportunities he graciously entrusts to me.

I am humbled to present this Doctor of Ministry project, acknowledging that it is not merely an academic pursuit but a shared effort of a loving family, a supportive church, and the Holy Spirit.

Mark A. Lashey

Townsend, Delaware

May 2024

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project was to document the efficacy of prioritizing preaching as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth among the believers at LifeHouse Church (LHC) in Townsend, Delaware. While preaching has been a core element of ministry from the inception of LHC, it is a crucial inflection point for LHC's leadership team to analyze further and elevate to improve the quality, energy, and construct of ongoing ministry efforts.

This project began with the assumption that unity was the ultimate goal of leveraging this learning experience into even greater ministry through LHC. However, as I studied, prayed, sought wisdom, and listened intently for the voice of the Lord to strengthen understanding in that regard, the answer was simultaneously humbling and encouraging.

Like many lead pastors, I am aware of the need for spiritual growth in the local congregation at LHC. Like many churches, we have sought to encourage unity, effective discipleship, a sincere commitment to evangelism, generosity, genuine repentance, and a more robust faith among our body of believers through various programs, events, vision casting series, and many other avenues. Despite a wide range of initiatives and energy toward this end, the spiritual maturity desired by this local group of believers was not the reality. While each of those initiatives is good and well-intended, it was misguided to depend on them to bring about spiritual growth in the body of believers.

I recognized it is not within the control or power of any man to bring spiritual growth to anyone. I realized genuine spiritual growth is only accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must trust him to work in and through the pastoral staff,

leadership team, and body of believers to experience the genuine, sustainable, and God-honoring spiritual growth desired. The God-given role of a pastor includes the profound responsibility to faithfully set the Word of God before a congregation through preaching. It is primarily through the consistent fulfillment of this responsibility that the Holy Spirit empowers and equips a local body of believers to make known the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and produce a spiritually mature body of believers for God's glory. This is the aim of this project: to prioritize preaching further with the hope of experiencing greater spiritual growth in LHC and beyond.

### **Context**

This ministry project occurred within the context of LHC. LHC was planted in February 2012 and experienced steady and significant growth. Currently more than 1,000 people gather regularly for LHC Sunday morning worship services and there are approximately 400 official members, referred to as partners. In the first few years following LHC's inception, there was evident spiritual growth fueled by the work of the Holy Spirit. However, as time and size progressed the challenges associated with experiencing spiritual growth became more pronounced.

Nevertheless, there are incredible opportunities for the now larger body of believers at LHC. What can be accomplished multiplies when more believers wholeheartedly commit to pursuing spiritual growth together. Our leadership team sees public evidence of spiritual growth through repentance, discipleship, evangelism, and unity. Many gifted, generous, hardworking people contribute to the cause of Christ in various ways at LHC. Relationships connect each partner of LHC within the community to wisdom and knowledge, experience, and gospel-led opportunities.

The community where LHC is located is thriving. When LHC first began, it was inspiring to realize the Lord sent people from all over the nation to the area through job opportunities and economic growth. It now seems the Lord is sending people from all

over the world. It is “for such a time as this” that LHC exists. This profound opportunity necessitates the encouragement of LHC toward greater spiritual growth. While the numerical growth at LHC is exciting, LHC must understand and diligently seek what Scripture reveals in order to remain faithful and emulate the early church from which it extends.

### **Rationale**

Several factors have made it difficult for LHC to continue growing together in recent years. First, most leaders are not experienced and do not have the needed wisdom to apply to the growing pains. This season of growth is entirely new to the leadership team; there is not much history, past relationship commitments, or experience from which to draw. Systems and policies to adequately support the growing congregation are needed. Therefore, more grace and patience are required from the partners as leaders navigate and respond to uncharted territory. Additionally, LHC is a diverse church comprised of various ethnic, socioeconomic, generational, political, and denominational backgrounds. While diversity is exciting and reflects the global and historical church, it often presents conflicting opinions, preferences, convictions, and doctrinal beliefs. These perceived obstacles pose significant distractions for the community of believers pursuing spiritual maturation as a body of one. LHC also exists in a stoutly secular and liberal context. Christianity, let alone church life and community, is not familiar. In addition, the pace of life is rapid, and people are generally overworked and over-scheduled. For most, pursuing a life more committed to spiritual growth will require reorientation and a significant change in priorities.

Perhaps most notably, I believe the most significant factor contributing to an underwhelming sense of spiritual growth at LHC and within the global church is sin. Sin separates and isolates. Pride and selfishness are the antithesis of maturing in faith.

Unfortunately, these traits are unapologetically celebrated and promoted in the world today.

Despite these many challenges, LHC has many positive and exciting opportunities. LHC trusts in the Lord for more growth as followers of Jesus faithfully preach the gospel and share the message of Jesus to the world. LHC believes God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, can continue to do what he has done in the past. Jesus is still building the same church he promised to build. He is still graciously saving and sanctifying believers, joining and securing them together so they remain steadfast. “The gates of hell shall not prevail” (Matt 16:18).<sup>1</sup>

With the hope of more significant maturation and growth within and through a body of believers, my pastoral responsibility remains to preach the Word of God faithfully. LHC benefits from bold preaching to reveal the truths of Scripture and the redemptive power of the gospel. The church prayerfully expects the Holy Spirit to empower the local body of believers to achieve more remarkable spiritual growth. My burden for this project stems from the examples and descriptions of the church and of preaching in the Bible.

Over the past fifty years, there has been a slow abdication of sound biblical preaching amongst churches in the United States. The abandonment of the Word of God as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth has facilitated devastating damage in households, ministry circles, and now generations of Christians. Abdication of biblical preaching is evidenced by the American people:

1. Only 39 percent say they read the Bible multiple times in a year.
2. Only 10 percent say they read the Bible daily.
3. Approximately 6 percent now hold a biblical worldview despite 87 percent of households having at least one Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

4. Fewer than half (47 percent) of Americans say the Bible is 100 percent accurate.
5. Approximately 51 percent say the Bible was written for each person to interpret as he or she chooses.
6. A shocking 74 percent disagree with the belief that even the smallest sin merits eternal damnation.
7. Over three quarters (77 percent) of Americans say people must contribute their own effort for personal salvation.
8. Over half (52 percent) of Americans say good deeds help them earn a spot in heaven, with 45 percent believing there are many routes to salvation.<sup>2</sup>

The priority of faithful preaching is well-documented throughout the Old Testament: Moses as the conduit for the people of Israel receiving the Pentateuch, King Josiah reading the scroll before the assembly of God’s people, the prophet Jeremiah preaching the message of repentance by the riverside, the ministry of Ezra to the Hebrew people after returning from captivity, and more (2 Kgs 23; Neh 8; Jer 3:1–4; Heb 3, 8–10). The New Testament further elevates the role of preaching. Jesus consistently preached the Word throughout his earthly ministry.

It is no coincidence the early church, so powerfully birthed at Pentecost, was devoted to “the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The believer’s devotion to these disciplines directly correlates to their dynamic experience and continued growth. Churches can engage in many programs, initiatives, activities, and ministries. However, prioritizing preaching is a primary means of encouraging greater spiritual growth. The apostles made it clear that preaching the Word of God was paramount when they appointed deacons to handle responsibilities that would hinder their devotion to and faithfulness in preaching (Acts 6:2–4).

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffery Fulks, Randy Petersen, and John F. Plake, “State of the Bible, USA 2022,” American Bible Society, 2022, [https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State\\_of\\_the\\_bible-2022.pdf](https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State_of_the_bible-2022.pdf); Anne Reed, “Only 6% of Americans Have a Biblical Worldview,” American Family Association, May 13, 2021, <https://afa.net/the-stand/faith/2021/05/only-6-of-americans-have-a-biblical-worldview/>; Bob Smietana, “What Do Americans Believe about God? New Study Explores Our Theology,” Lifeway Research, September 27, 2016, <https://research.lifeway.com/2016/09/27/what-do-americans-believe-about-god-new-study-explores-our-theology/>.



The author of Hebrews highlights the Word of God as being “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). God’s Word, when proclaimed, always accomplishes its intended purpose (Isa 55:11). “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul encourages the believers to endure warfare associated with the schemes of the devil while urging them to “stand, having put on the belt of truth” (Eph 6:14). And with divine wisdom and significant first-hand experience, Paul’s most profound, fundamental, and final charge to Timothy was, “Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2).

The biblical evidence that supports prioritizing preaching is reinforced by many historical and modern-day examples; faithful witnesses that inspire a conviction to further elevate the emphasis on, attention toward, and quality of preaching at LHC.

### **Purpose**

This project aimed to prioritize preaching at LHC as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth, specifically toward greater unity, a more resilient faith, a more substantial commitment to evangelism, and more intentional discipleship of believers for the mission of Jesus Christ.

### **Goals**

Four goals were pursued for prioritizing preaching as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth among the body of believers at LHC.

1. The first goal was to lead the LHC elders, staff, and specific ministry leadership teams in demonstrating a more significant commitment to the priority of preaching.
2. The second goal was to develop and preach an eight-week sermon series emphasizing the paramount importance of preaching for the local church.
3. The third goal was to assess the impact of the sermon series through a brief survey on the overall biblical understanding of and commitment to the faithful stewardship of preaching as the primary vehicle for sanctification, unity, resilient faith, commitment to evangelism, and ministry, fully equipping believers for the mission of Jesus Christ.

4. The fourth and final goal of the project was to lead in developing and implementing a 2024 ministry plan that demonstrates a churchwide commitment to prioritizing preaching.

### **Research Methodology**

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of four goals for this project.<sup>3</sup> The first goal was to lead the LHC elders, staff, and ministry leadership teams in demonstrating a more significant commitment to preaching's priority. This goal was accomplished when the leaders of LHC implemented efforts that promote and protect the importance of preaching.

The second goal was to develop and preach a series of eight expository sermons about the role and importance of preaching for a local church. In conjunction, a supplemental discipleship initiative was implemented to coincide with and reinforce the effectiveness of the sermon series regarding the role and importance of preaching. This included sermon series promotion, a prayer and fasting initiative before and following the sermon series, and the development and implementation of a small group curriculum aligned with the sermon series.

The third goal was to assess the impact of the sermon series and the initial implementation of efforts to better prioritize preaching on the partners of LHC. A brief survey assessed the biblical understanding of and commitment to the faithful stewardship of preaching as the primary vehicle for inspiring churchwide sanctification. This goal was considered successful when 200 partners of LHC completed the survey and the results were examined.

The fourth and final goal, to lead in developing and implementing a 2024 churchwide ministry plan, was considered successful when a plan that demonstrated a

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<sup>3</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

commitment to preaching's priority was officially approved by LHC elders and distributed to the church body.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

*Attractional model.* This ministry alignment model emphasizes high entertainment to attract curious onlookers who would not usually attend church or Christian ministry-related activities. The attractional model places significant value on events and capturing public interest, often at the expense of sound biblical preaching, close adherence to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and true discipleship grounded in the growing maturation of faith.

*Discipleship.* The act of Christian obedience and the intentional examination of everyday behaviors, beliefs, and perspectives to elevate each to be in greater alignment with the message and call of Jesus.

*Expository preaching.* In *Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>4</sup> Preaching that is expository attempts, above all else, to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage.

*Expository sermon.* In *Christ-Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chappell describes an expository sermon as “a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context

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<sup>4</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 5.

of the text to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.”<sup>5</sup>

*Pragmatism.* This is “the notion that practical consequences determine meaning or worth.”<sup>6</sup> A pragmatic ministry philosophy tends to falsely believe whatever is well-received and championed by a group of believers deserves imitation and promotion.

*Preaching.* The obedient, authoritative proclamation of the divinely inspired, inerrant, infallible, and sufficient Word of God now canonized in the Bible by a commissioned servant of God.

*Spiritual growth.* One matures in belief in, obedience to, and response to the Word of God, specifically the redemptive teachings of Jesus Christ, as a sign of greater devotion to living a life of discipleship.

*Topical preaching.* A subject-centric communication of topics and ideas is derived from the Word of God but is not bound by the surrounding biblical text.

*Unity.* A group of Christ-followers who act collaboratively. Varying degrees of belief, philosophy, and ministry practice coexist with mutual respect, without compromising the core truths of Christian faith.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the time frame for seeking results is limited. This project took place within a year’s time. Nevertheless, the leadership team at LHC intentionally embraced the time necessary to conduct this project, even as it exceeded the official timeframe of the project, valuing the Holy Spirit’s divine timing for maturing believers following the faithful preaching of God’s Word. Second, the sample size of assessment respondents was small relative to average weekend attendance. This project was limited to LHC partners. To mitigate this limitation, the LHC leadership team

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<sup>5</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 30–31.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

actively engaged partners through regular phone calls, text messages, emails, and in-person conversations to encourage more responses to the project assessment.

One delimitation applied to this project. The project assessment was open for all 444 current LHC partners at the conclusion of the sermon series.

### **Conclusion**

Most local churches today fall significantly short of the faithful preaching evidenced throughout Scripture. There are many reasons for this widespread deficit. However, one of the most significant factors contributing to the disheartening, inconsistent approach toward preaching is collective ignorance, albeit unintended. Most believers simply do not know why regularly gathering as a body of believers around preaching is essential for spiritual growth.

Based on biblical evidence, this pastor is convinced LHC's only hope of enduring escalating societal opposition and obstacles is in the unity of the Spirit in connection with faithful expository preaching. Jesus said those who obediently respond to his words will, "like a wise man who builds his house on a rock," not fall when faced with the storms of life (Matt 7:24–25). Jesus also clarified that a kingdom or house divided cannot stand (Mark 3:24–25). To be fully engaged with bringing about the mission of God in this world, the church must understand the critical role of preaching.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT

It is absolutely essential for churches to prioritize preaching. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones proposes, “The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.”<sup>1</sup> Many churches have forgotten what their predecessors reclaimed during the Reformation—specifically, the emphasis on the centrality of preaching.<sup>2</sup> The importance of preaching for the local church today cannot be overstated. In *I Believe in Preaching*, John Stott states, “Nothing is better calculated to restore health and vitality to the church or to lead its partners into maturity in Christ than a recovery of true, Biblical, contemporary preaching.”<sup>3</sup> Scripture establishes preaching’s importance for the local church as a primary means for encouraging spiritual growth.

#### **Preaching’s Importance Made Known in the Old Testament**

##### **Exodus 18–19**

Exodus 18–19 documents the origin of the standard and defining practice of preaching. After delivering the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, the Lord summoned them to the foot of Mount Sinai to establish a covenant with them. This covenant afforded them tremendous blessings but required their faithful obedience to his

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Kevin DeYoung, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 1998), 83.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 338.

voice, made intelligible to them through the preaching ministry of Moses. To hear the voice, the Israelites, having consecrated themselves, took their stand together at the foot of the mountain (Exod 19:17).

Through preaching, Moses warned the Israelites. He “made them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do” (Exod 18:20). The Hebrew word translated *warn* in Exodus 18:20 is a metaphor meaning “to illuminate.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Moses delegated ancillary leadership responsibilities to able men so he could give priority to illuminating God’s voice through preaching (Exod 18:21–23).

## **Deuteronomy**

Moses faithfully preached for many years. At the end of his life, he reminded Israel of their momentous encounter with God at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses recounted how the Lord had commanded him, “Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on earth, and that they may teach their children so” (Deut 4:10). That day became known to Israel as the Day of the Assembly (Deut 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). On the Day of the Assembly, Israel first reverently gathered in unity at the appointed time and place to encounter God. It was the day all of Israel first intentionally positioned themselves to hear and heed the Lord’s voice. It was the day God spoke to them loud and clear! As Moses recounts in Deuteronomy 4:12, Israel was overwhelmed by powerful manifestations of the Lord’s presence that day. He spoke to them out of the midst of the fire! That day, Israel heard the voice they gathered to obey.

In many ways, the Day of the Assembly points forward, beyond Moses’s recollection in Deuteronomy, to local churches reverently gathering thousands of years later to hear and heed the voice of God through preaching. The book of Deuteronomy is

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<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, ed. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 240, Logos electronic book.

Moses’s exhortation for the people of God to “not forsake the assembling” (Heb 10:25). In *The Priority of Preaching*, Christopher Ash explains, “Deuteronomy is a mandate for the people of God to assemble under the preached word of God, or to be more accurate, the written word preached.”<sup>5</sup> Moses viewed preaching as necessary for ensuring Israel’s continuity (Deut 32:46). Through preaching, Moses set before Israel “no empty word” but their “very life”—the only means by which they would “live long in the land” they were about to enter (Deut 32:47). Israel understood Moses’s role as the conduit through which God’s voice was made known to them. They knew Moses would not enter the promised land with them. What would they do? How would they hear the voice without Moses’s preaching?

Moses made known God’s plan for more preaching in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers.” This prophetic promise is particularly fulfilled in Jesus and is linked to preaching for local churches. Moses’s passionate appeal to Israel in Deuteronomy validates the importance of preaching for the local church today. According to Ash, “It foreshadows the normative shape for the church and the assembly called together by the Word of God, called together to hear the preached Word of God, called together as a place of unity of the whole people of God, and called together under grace and so filled with joy.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Ezekiel 47**

Ezekiel 47 illustrates preaching as a means to a more excellent end. God shows Ezekiel the temple and water flowing from it in a vision. The water continues to flow, rising higher and higher from the temple, eventually becoming a deep river that empties

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching* (London: Proclamation Trust, 2018), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 83.



into the Dead Sea. Incredibly, the river transforms the sea into a body of water teeming with life and vitality. The river's banks, once a barren desert, are populated by all kinds of trees that "bear fresh fruit every month" (Ezek 47:12). Although the interpretation of the vision is debated, it serves as a picture of the spiritual transformation possible when a church faithfully prioritizes preaching.

By shaping the church through preaching, God reaches the world.<sup>7</sup> As God's Word is sent forth from the pulpit, it transforms the hearts and minds of a congregation. As the congregation grows, the Word continues to increase and bear fruit for the glory of God. The church and its connected communities thrive. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm what Ezekiel 47 illustrates, God's chief method to carry out his redemptive work is the Spirit-empowered proclamation of biblical truth. There is a direct correlation between a church's commitment to preaching and its impact on the world it encounters. Therefore, a revival in the pulpit is the best opportunity a church has to reach its full potential.

### **Nehemiah 8**

Nehemiah 8 is an incredible example of a revival catalyzed by preaching. The book of Nehemiah recounts the Lord's gracious orchestration of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall and, more importantly, of the people of God as they return from Babylonian captivity.

Upon their return, the people are committed to re-establishing the covenant God made with their forefathers at Mount Sinai, the same covenant Moses reaffirmed in the book of Deuteronomy. Knowing their exile had resulted from neglecting God's Word, Israel was repentant. They knew that to experience revival and the blessings God

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<sup>7</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 102.

promised, they had to know and live by his holy Word. Therefore, as a matter of priority, they assembled in solidarity to hear and heed the Word they had long neglected.

The people initiated the preaching event documented in Nehemiah 8. They eagerly assembled in an Exodus 19 manner. In the square before the Water Gate, they all faced the same direction, seeking the same thing: God’s Word (Neh 8:1). They appealed to Ezra, a scribe committed to preaching (Ezra 9–10), to bring the Book of the Law of Moses. The people knew they needed God’s Word and trusted Ezra would be the one to deliver.

Ezra placed God’s written Word before the entire assembly, “men and women and all who could understand it” (Neh 8:2). In so doing, Ezra did not merely lay a scroll before them. The assembly did not *see* Ezra as much as they *heard* him. Ezra authoritatively proclaimed the Word of God “from early morning until midday,” and “the ears of all the people” were fixed on the Word (Neh 8:3). Everyone present understood the paramount importance of preaching.

The people had prepared an elevated wooden platform for Ezra to facilitate their hearing (Neh 8:4), demonstrating the profound significance of that moment and ministry. In the same way Moses stood elevated at Mount Sinai, Ezra stood on the platform. When everyone saw Ezra open the scroll, they rose in reverent readiness to receive the Word (Neh 8:5).

Nehemiah paints a profound picture. Ezra, facing the assembly, gloriously fed God’s people God’s Word. As he did so, the people remained focused and attentive.<sup>8</sup> Preaching was prioritized. All the people worshipped the Lord as they affirmed the words Ezra declared to them and, with the help of the priests, understood (Neh 8:6–8).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Nehemiah*, Pulpit Commentary (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 80, Logos electronic book.

<sup>9</sup> Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 225, Logos electronic book.

The people were convicted and encouraged by the preaching. Their hearts were gripped with godly sorrow; so much so that they were moved to mourning and weeping (Neh 8:9). However, Ezra confronted their grief, declaring, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10).<sup>10</sup> When all was said and done, the people departed joyfully, having understood the preaching (Neh 8:12). The preaching’s profound impact on the entire assembly served as a catalyst for the revival God’s people desired.

### **Preaching’s Importance Modeled by Jesus**

God fulfilled his promise to “raise up a prophet like Moses” (Deut 18:15). He had provided many prophets but eventually and specifically identified Jesus as *the Prophet*. While Jesus was transfigured on a mountain, God re-issued his specific command, “Listen to him” (Matt 17:5). While preparing the world for the cross, Jesus devoted himself to preaching and teaching. He modeled a philosophy of ministry that “always played a part in the spiritual maturity of the church.”<sup>11</sup>

Although he performed many miracles, Jesus revealed himself as the preaching Messiah (Luke 4:16–21). He explicitly told the disciples that he came to *preach* (Mark 1:38). As a connection to Moses, Jesus “went up on the mountain” to *preach* in Matthew 5. Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and *preaching* (Matt 7:28–29; 9:35). Jesus was like Moses in many ways, but “worthy of more glory” (Heb 3:3). He established a covenant through his blood, which exponentially adds to preaching (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:11–15).

In mediating the new covenant, Jesus also established a new assembly, “[T]he assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb 12:23). This is the *ekklēsia* (church) Jesus promised to build and fortify and withstand “the gates of hell” (Matt

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<sup>10</sup> John Peter Lange, Phillip Schaff, W. Schultz, and Howard Crosby, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Nehemiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 35, Logos electronic book.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Shirley, *Expository Sanctification* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2019), 45.

16:18). The new covenant assembly is sustained by means similar to the assembly established in the old covenant, God's Word. As such, Jesus modeled the importance of preaching throughout his three and a half years of earthly ministry.

### **Preaching's Importance Mandated by Jesus**

Very early in his earthly ministry, Jesus intentionally "appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to *preach*" (Mark 3:14) to the multitudes he saw as "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:35). The desperate condition of Israel at the time was, in part, the result of their having neglected preaching. They had long experienced a famine of "hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Therefore, Jesus compassionately fed and filled those who were deprived of the nourishment only God's Word provides.

Jesus first told his disciples to pray God would "send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt 9:35). Then he sent the Twelve out, instructing them to preach to his "sheep" (Matt 4:17; 10:5–7). Jesus made it clear preaching was to be their priority, telling them anyone who did not receive them and listen to the words they preached would merit divine punishment on the Day of Judgment (Matt 10:14). The town that refused to receive the apostles' preaching would answer for its response (Matt 10:15).

The importance of the apostles' preaching also is revealed in Jesus's exhortation to endure persecution and boldly continue to preach what he tells them "on the housetops" (Matt 10:16–27). Jesus directly correlates the apostles' preaching with the Old Testament prophets—vessels through which God spoke to his people. Reward would be for whoever received (and listened to) the apostles' words, as they received (and listened to) Jesus's words, which were God the Father's words (Matt 10:40–42).

There also is a direct commission for preaching in Matthew 13:51–52. After teaching large crowds in parables, Jesus explained the meanings of those parables to his disciples. In that smaller setting, Jesus gave three more parables and asked the disciples if

they understood them (Matt 13:51). With their affirmative reply, Jesus called them scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was training them to “bring out,” or exposit, “what is new and what is old” from the Scriptures (Matt 13:52). The truth revealed to them was “treasure” (Matt 13:44–50). As disciples who, by God’s grace, discovered the treasured Word of God, Jesus commissioned them to preach (Matt 13:52). Like a *master of a house*, they were to bring *the treasure* out with authority.

Jesus’s plan to build his church involves preaching. While declaring his mission accomplished during his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus also expressed, “I have given [the disciples] the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me” (John 17:4, 8). Considering his coming departure and having sent them with a message, Jesus specifically asks God to sanctify those he commissioned in the *logos* (Word) (John 17:17–18). This prayer is connected to the Great Commission. Preaching remains paramount for the church Jesus continues building today.

Mark’s Gospel records Jesus’s Great Commission in a direct, unapologetic manner related to preaching. Jesus explicitly commanded his disciples to “preach the gospel to the whole of creation” (Mark 16:15). Matthew records Jesus telling his disciples to make and baptize disciples of all nations and to “teach them to observe everything he commanded them” (Matt 28:18–20). Luke recorded Jesus’s instructions to his disciples to “be his witnesses” (Acts 1:8), further establishing faithful preaching as the watermark of gospel stewardship.

In the conclusion of John’s Gospel, Jesus establishes the importance of preaching as an ongoing necessity for spiritual growth. There John records Jesus’s command to “feed his sheep” (John 21:15–19). With this exhortation Jesus passed the torch of preaching to Peter and the apostles to nourish the church in his stead. Peter, expressing his love for Jesus in John 21, understood and accepted the responsibility. Jesus charged Peter to *boskō* (feed) and *poimaine* (tend) his sheep (John 21:15–17). The

verb tenses denote present continuous action. Jesus was referring to his people under the new covenant, the church. They would live “not by bread alone” but “by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). A good shepherd faithfully feeds a flock through preaching. Fascinatingly, God promised he would provide shepherd pastors according to his own heart to “feed [his church] with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15).

The Lord’s sovereignty and the reality that “all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus” revealed through preaching helps churches understand that the Great Commission is not a suggestion but a command to be obeyed (Matt 28:18). Whoever loves Jesus, will obey Jesus (John 14:23), including faithfully sharing the message of the gospel through the practice of preaching.

### **Preaching’s Importance Maintained by the Apostles**

Having demonstrated preaching as a primary conduit for delivering the gospel, before his ascension, Jesus further urged his followers to preach. Some of Jesus’s last words on earth to his disciples, found in Luke 24:46b–49, underline the importance of preaching:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be [*preached*] in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Acts documents how the apostles obediently responded to Jesus’s commission and the church Jesus promised to build was born. Although often attacked and persecuted, the believers were led as the Holy Spirit empowered the early church to preach the message of Jesus boldly to the nations. Despite obstacles and opposition, God’s Word continued to sustain and multiply them. Furthermore, the priority of preaching is evident in the church’s specific devotion to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42–47).

The church continued to grow as the apostles continued preaching. Subsequently, when the church exploded to a size whereby it was impossible for them to manage all the duties pastors are responsible for, they maintained their devotion to “preaching the word of God” by appointing deacons to “serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Under this newfound leadership structure and armed with their commitment to preaching, the church continued growing as the “word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:4, 7). While the church grew in number, it also grew in strength and vitality. Beyond the book of Acts, “the New Testament demonstrates that preaching was the primary means by which the church grew.”<sup>12</sup> When the legitimate demands of the people threatened their commitment to the occupation assigned to them by Jesus, the apostles did not concede; their preaching in the following days resulted in multiplication—the planting of local churches (Acts 1:8).

### **Paul Prioritized Preaching**

In Romans 10:14–16, Paul encouraged believers in Rome to faithfully preach the Word:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone *preaching*? And how are they to *preach* unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who *preach* the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

At the end of his first letter, Paul admonished Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). In Paul’s second letter to Timothy he tells him it is so that he may be prepared at any given moment to preach the Word and to defend the truths of Scripture and God’s holy ways (2 Tim 4:1–2).

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<sup>12</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 31–45.

Paul demonstrated a perpetual commitment to preaching when he went about preaching among believers in Ephesus for over three years (Acts 19:25, 31). He encouraged the leaders there to follow his example, testifying that he “did not shrink from declaring to them the whole counsel of God” (Acts 19:27). Paul charged the elders of the Ephesian church to continue guarding and protecting their flock from “wolves” who “speak twisted things” instead of God’s Word (Acts 19:28–30).

When considering what Paul said about himself and his ministry to the believers in 1 Corinthians, one can conclude he practiced what he preached. Paul begins to close that letter by reminding the church of “the good news he *preached* to them” (1 Cor 15:1). In doing so, he obviously referred to much more than one sermon preached to them on one occasion. Paul knew the believers in Corinth, and they knew him. He had engaged in ministry with them for over a year and a half (Acts 18). “Certainly, this could not be defined as a short-term evangelistic crusade.”<sup>13</sup> In the letter’s introduction, Paul clarified that when he came to Corinth, Jesus had explicitly sent him to preach the gospel (1 Cor 1:17). Paul obediently did what Jesus sent him to do in Corinth and elsewhere. For example, in his letter to the Galatian church Paul reiterated his passion for preaching, telling the Galatian believers that God saved him so he could preach (Gal 1:16).

Nevertheless, by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, his conviction regarding the priority of preaching for the local church had not wavered. Paul demonstrated and reiterated the first importance of delivering the Word of God that he had received, through preaching (1 Cor 15:2–3). Paul urged the church in Corinth to continue following his example, explaining he sent Timothy to them to remind them specifically of his “ways in Christ,” which would have included the prioritization of preaching (1 Cor 4:17). Paul further notes how he continued teaching those same ways “everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:17). With this appeal, Paul unapologetically maintained the importance

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<sup>13</sup> Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, 73.



of preaching for the local church. In doing so, Paul's burden was for preaching to continue as a priority. Paul aimed to "make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints" (Col 1:25–26). Paul did not preach any word; he preached God's Word and God's alone. It was paramount to Paul that the scope of preaching be the Word of God, only those mysteries graciously revealed to him.

Interestingly, Paul's tone in 2 Corinthians is similar to Moses's sermons in Deuteronomy. He understood his message about reconciliation to God as a matter of life and death. Paul viewed his preaching as a means of God fulfilling his promise. It was important to Paul that the Corinthian church have the same high regard for preaching that he did. He was burdened for them to assemble to hear and respond to the life-giving words preached. He wanted them to understand their innate need for faithful preaching.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul also correlates his preaching ministry with, and even humbly elevates it above, the prophetic ministry of Moses. He claims God compelled and led him to preach the gospel of Christ to the Corinthians (Acts 16:10; 2 Cor 2:12–14). Unlike many motivated for wrong reasons, Paul was a legitimate man of God, sent by God who spoke in Christ (2 Cor 2:17).

To Paul, proper preaching was glorious. He reminded the church of the tangible glory on Moses's face when he met with God. Paul explained how that glory always faded and, even more, was hidden behind a veil covering Moses's face. Paul declared that the glory associated with Moses under the old covenant remains veiled. However, under the new covenant and through Christ, when Paul preached God's Word, the Spirit of the Lord allowed men to behold the glory of the Lord freely. Paul said believers can experience greater glory through preaching under the new covenant as the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18).

The rulers at the synagogue in Antioch Pisidia invited Paul to share any *logos paraklēsis* (exhortation message) for the people (Acts 13:13–16). Timothy, as a young

pastor, is instructed by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:13 to, among other things and within the context of church life, devote himself to *ho paraklēsis* (the exhortation).

Paul prioritized preaching because it strengthens the church in Christ. The church can behold the glory of the Lord through preaching even more than the Israelites could under the old covenant through Moses. Paul explained that because of this, he was conscientious about preaching God's Word and Jesus as Lord, as a faithful servant (2 Cor 4:1–5). As a preacher, he rested entirely on the power and purposes of God. He was wholeheartedly committed to continuing to *elalēsa* (speak) for the glory of God (2 Cor 4:7–18). These many examples demonstrate Paul's commitment to the importance of preaching for the local church.

### **The Book of Hebrews**

Whether or not Paul was the author of the book of Hebrews is debated. Nevertheless, as a sermon for an assembly of believers, Hebrews also contributes to validating the importance of preaching for the local church. The author specifically refers to the work as a *logos ho paraklēsis* (word of exhortation/sermon) (Heb 13:22).<sup>14</sup> The author employed present tense verbs associated with speaking and hearing throughout (Heb 3:7, 13), implying the expectation of an immediate response to hearing the authoritative and emphatic admonishments therein (Heb 13:19). The author strongly urges the church to receive the sermon and, considering its significance, *anechomai* (bear) it (Heb 13:22). Hebrews is clearly not the mere musings of a man, rather when preached, it necessitated encouragement to endure what “is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament, An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2017), 104–5.

## Timothy and Titus

In Romans 1:1–5, Paul acknowledges his call and commission to preach came directly from Jesus Christ. He argues that an obedient *apostalōsin* (preacher) is sent with a message to those who will hear and heed the *kēryssontos* (preaching), as it is necessary for salvation (Rom 10:13–1). Paul recalls that in Isaiah, God described preaching as “beautiful” (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15). Knowing the benefits afforded through preaching the Word of God, Paul urged his protégés Timothy and Titus about the importance of preaching.

In 1 Timothy, Paul strongly expressed preaching’s magnitude for Timothy, as a pastor, to devote himself to it for the sanctification of his church (1 Tim 4:13–16). Throughout his second letter to Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to carry on the ministry of the preaching of God’s Word: to himself preach what he heard Paul preach, and also to work to ensure the ministry of preaching God’s Word is carried on for generations (2 Tim 2:2). Paul urges Timothy to pastor and preach with the commitment of a dedicated soldier, a champion athlete, and a hardworking farmer (2 Tim 2:3–6).

Paul’s second letter to Timothy also reveals the importance of preaching for the local church. The letter issues a mandate for Timothy to preach the Word. He charges Timothy to do so “in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1–2). Paul knew the significance and solemnity of his charge for Timothy, whose sincere faith was evident to Paul (2 Tim 1:5). Paul knew Timothy could not disregard God, who had graciously called him (2 Tim 1:9). Furthermore, Paul believed that as a pastor serving the Ephesian church, preaching was a matter of paramount importance for Timothy. Knowing he was about to die, Paul did not charge Timothy to maintain a thriving children’s ministry, stay out of debt, attend men’s and women’s ministry retreats, or listen to relevant contemporary music. He charged his son in the faith to preach the Word.

According to Paul, for Timothy to *plērophorēson* (fulfill) his ministry (2 Tim 4:5), he must preach the Word. When Paul wrote the letter, the time of his “departure had come” (2 Tim 4:6), and he looked forward to the reward awaiting him in glory for his faithful service (2 Tim 4:8). This letter was Paul’s last written words to someone he loved dearly. In its conclusion, Paul rejoiced that through him the *kērygma* (preaching) was *plērophorēthē* (fulfilled) that “all the Gentiles might hear it” despite strong opposition to the *logois* (divine Word) (2 Tim 4:14–17).

Throughout the letter, Paul endeavored to associate his preaching with what he wholeheartedly believed Timothy must continue doing in his stead. For instance, Paul testified God had appointed him as a “preacher and apostle and teacher” (2 Tim 1:11). He acknowledged his responsibility to preach as a steward entrusted with that appointment (2 Tim 1:11–12), even in suffering. Paul then commanded Timothy, whom he had personally affirmed as “gifted” and “entrusted,” to be diligent in the same way (2 Tim 1:6,14). Paul instructed Timothy to entrust what he had heard to others, who could then pass it on to others (2 Tim 2:2). Paul was likely referring to the many occasions Timothy heard him preach. As Timothy preached the Word, he would be entrusting what he heard from Paul to other faithful men who, after listening, could teach others also.

Paul told Timothy to “follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me” (2 Tim 1:13). It was vital to Paul that Timothy preach only God’s Word. Paul wanted Timothy to preach Jesus Christ while avoiding any “irreverent babble” and “foolish, ignorant controversies” (2 Tim 2:8, 16, 23). Paul knew no other word would do. Even though Paul was in chains, he believed the Word of God could never be bound (2 Tim 2:9). In *Called to Preach*, Steven Lawson explains, “New ideas about preaching today promise church growth, numerical success, and personal fulfillment, yet minimize the biblical exposition” Paul charged Timothy to do.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Called to Preach* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 9.

Paul also declared the absolute sufficiency of Scripture immediately leading up to his passionate charge to preach the Word. Paul encouraged Timothy to preach the Word he knew (2 Tim 3:14), not a new message but the “sacred writings” he had known since childhood which are “able to make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15–16). In addition, Paul did not merely charge Timothy to teach the Word; Paul demanded Timothy preach it. He told Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). He admonished him not to engage in or be like the false teachers who “swerved from the truth,” but to preach in “loyal and simple exposition so that the hearers understand and follow it.”<sup>16</sup>

There is an aspect of preaching that naturally affords the opportunity for teaching. In fact, teaching is a goal of preaching. Paul encourages Timothy to preach with “complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). Paul had already expressed the need for the preacher to be patient and able to teach (2 Tim 2:24–25). Timothy must continue preaching to the church as a pastor, intending to help his flock understand and learn. His heart was for them to know everything they needed to understand to live.

Perhaps even more than the importance of preaching with complete patience is the need to preach with authority. Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word that is authoritative in and of itself. Paul declared it was “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). The Scriptures are what all people desperately need. Paul wanted Timothy to preach it to them. Paul did not tell Timothy to merely teach, discuss, or suggest the Word to them. He did not tell Timothy to write the Word and let them read it. Paul specifically told Timothy to *kērysson* (preach) the *logon* (divine Word). Likewise, Paul told Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5)

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<sup>16</sup> Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 136.

because men desperately need the good Word of God to know there is hope, healing, and a future. The verbs Paul used in connection with his charge to Timothy are not polite. They are confrontational. They point to the importance of preaching and the rescue it affords. They need someone to *elenxon* (reprove), *epitimēson* (rebuke), and *parakaleson* (exhort) them with the Word of God as a matter of life and death. The souls of men need the Spirit-giving power preaching provides; their situation is otherwise dire (2 Tim 4:3–4). Therefore, it was paramount that Timothy obediently “fulfill [his] ministry” by preaching the Word (2 Tim 4:5).

Paul’s charge for Timothy to preach the Word solidifies preaching’s importance for a local church. The New Testament leaves no room for confusion regarding expectations for servants of God to be ready, faithful always, and in all ways. Believers are to live prepared. According to Paul’s charge to Timothy as a pastor in Ephesus, readiness was, first and foremost, how he faithfully preached the Word. Many aspects and activities associated with today’s church life, ministries, and endeavors can be considered God-honoring. Paul addresses a few of them in his first letter to Timothy. However, none were to hinder or distract from preaching the Word.

Paul’s instruction for Timothy to “be ready” is translated from *epistēthi*, which means to stand at or nearby. It entails one being in position and ready to respond. Paul wanted Timothy to be like a soldier “who never gets entangled in civilian pursuits,” always ready to preach the Word (2 Tim 2:4). Paul further urged him to be prepared to preach the Word “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). This phrase translates from *eukairōs akairōs*, meaning in good time or bad time. Timothy was to preach the Word, even when it was not convenient. He was to preach, even when it was uncomfortable for him. Timothy was to preach, even if it meant suffering or persecution (2 Tim 3:12, 4:5).

Paul did not leave room for Timothy to make any excuse. He told Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God in him” (2 Tim 1:6). Paul wanted Timothy to preach with “fire” and without fear (2 Tim 1:7). Paul’s appeal to Timothy bears upon the error many

churches fall into as they seek other ideas, strategies, and methods in the hope of revival; none of which are prescribed in the Bible as a Spirit-empowered means of strengthening and sustaining in the way preaching is. Paul's desire for Timothy, as a local church pastor, was to ensure the importance of preaching. As such, preaching is mandated for pastors through Paul's God-breathed charge because local churches need it to survive and thrive until Christ returns.

### **Preaching Is Paramount for Encouraging Spiritual Growth**

Preaching uniquely feeds and fuels a church. Churches are to gather to worship and then obediently scatter to witness. In *The Priority of Preaching*, Ash expounds Numbers 10:7 and 20:10, detailing how "the assembly," referring to Israel, was summoned by the trumpeters.<sup>17</sup> In response, the assembly gathered together to *hear* and then dispersed, empowered with the Lord's imparted direction and wisdom. Ash indicates Israel was not a collection of individuals who sometimes assembled; they were collectively God's people even when they were not assembled.<sup>18</sup>

The same is true for the commissioned church today. The commissioned church, united by the Spirit through faithful preaching, is conspicuous, "like a city set on a hill" (Matt 5:14). Like a lamp placed on a stand, it is to shine forth in a way that elicits others to give glory to God (Matt 5:16). With the same principle in mind, golden lampstands symbolize the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus told the church in Ephesus, specifically, that their continuance as a "golden lampstand" would depend upon their *hearing* his Word.

Preaching also promotes obedience and submission to God's mission, purposes, and plans. It reveals who God is and what God wants and prepares and

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<sup>17</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 80.

positions his grateful servants accordingly. John Stott suggests, “A deaf church is a dead church.”<sup>19</sup> When a church is not committed to assemble to hear God’s Word preached, they are spiritually deaf. Without ears to hear, they are as good as dead. “Where there is no revelation, the people perish” (Prov 29:18). Through faithful preaching the Lord graciously sets before his people the vision they would perish without, “God quickens, feeds, inspires, and guides His people by His Word.”<sup>20</sup>

Paul prescribes the importance of preaching for the local church in Ephesians 4:11–16. One of the greatest needs in the church is unity, primarily in full knowledge and alignment with the gospel of Jesus Christ. After expressing the importance of zealously maintaining unity, Paul declares God graciously gave the church “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers” (Eph 4:11). God commissions these to preach and impart his Word as authoritative leaders. By nature of their bestowed position, they bear responsibility before God. God judges these teachers with greater strictness (Jas 3:1). The apostle Paul further explained how Jesus accordingly gives shepherds and teachers, who preach and teach God’s Word, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:11–13).

After spending more than three years with the church in Ephesus and having “declared the whole counsel of God” to them, Paul was able to leave them knowing “the word of his grace” would more than sufficiently “build them up and give them the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32–33). Later, when Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, he decried believers who remain like “children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.” Through the ministry of the shepherds and teachers, believers are to, instead, grow in maturity in every way, resembling Christ (Eph 4:13, 15).

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<sup>19</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (1982; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 81.

<sup>20</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 81.



In *Called to Preach*, Lawson explains, “Every history-altering era of church history has been defined by the strength of its preaching.”<sup>21</sup> The Spirit of God knits hearts together when people reverently gather to worship under the authority of the preached Word. The need for leaders to continue equipping the saints through preaching affirms Paul’s goal for unity, maturity, and fullness in Christ despite constant challenges (Eph 4:13–14). Paul does not want the church to surrender or settle in any way. He wants the church to continue growing more in Christ under the preaching of God’s Word (Eph 4:15–16). Lawson asserts, “The scripture rightly preached in the power of the spirit will elevate worship and mature believers.”<sup>22</sup> For the church to experience the ongoing unity and vitality Paul exhorts in Ephesians 4:11–16, preaching must remain a priority.

In Romans 10:5–21, Paul emphasizes the importance of preaching beyond the apostolic age. He explains preaching is the continuation of how God speaks to his people. In verse 5, Paul points back to Moses’s sermons in the book of Deuteronomy and his declaration about obedience to God’s Word as a matter of life and death. Moses specifically encouraged the Israelites that they did not need to go on a quest to hear God’s Word or experience the life it afforded (Deut 30:11–15). Moses told the Israelites the Word they needed was precisely what God commissioned him to preach to them (Deut 30:12–40). In Romans 10, Paul contends that, like Moses, he is a man commissioned by God to preach his Word to his people. Just as Moses’s preaching was what the Israelites needed, for salvation, men must hear the “word Paul preached” in and through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9).

For Paul, the importance of obediently preaching correlates to the faithful prophets under the old covenant who continued to proclaim God’s Word, even when rejected (Rom 10:18–21). The Israelites’ rejection of the Word of God had no bearing

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<sup>21</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 10.

upon the Word's significance. The same is true for the Word preached under the new covenant. Rejection does not change, nullify, or minimize the importance of obediently continuing to preach because saving faith is the fruit of hearing about Jesus through preaching (Rom 10:17).

### **Conclusion**

God ordains preaching as the primary function of the church. The church “which is awakened by the proclamation of the word of God will demonstrate the genuineness of its faith by honoring the office of preaching in its unique glory and by serving it with all its powers.”<sup>23</sup> The texts of Scripture previously examined here confirm that local churches today must prioritize preaching. The incredible opportunity to encounter God through faithful preaching establishes its importance for the local church. Although there are many ways and opportunities to minister, no venue or means of word ministry supersedes what God does through preaching. Without faithful preaching, believers “become increasingly vulnerable to the winds of false teaching and, more subtly, the conditioning of unbelieving society.”<sup>24</sup> Shepherds must feed their flocks with preaching to equip champions and guard against casualties in the raging spiritual battle. John Piper argues,

Preaching and worship services are not the totality of the life of the church. There are 100 worthy ministries for the children and young adults, the men and women, the singles and the married, the grieving and the aged. There are untold possibilities of reaching out to an unbelieving world. There are countless good deeds to show the glory of our Father in Heaven. There are more ways to meet in small groups than we can imagine, to encourage each other and pray for each other and care for each other. But the preacher knows this, it makes no pretense that preaching is all people need. But the preacher also knows this, if he fails in his expository exultation, if corporate worship languishes and lifelessness because the word of God does not

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<sup>23</sup> Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, 147.

<sup>24</sup> John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 160.

come with clarity and faithfulness and soul-satisfying power, all the ministries suffer.<sup>25</sup>

The Bible makes known, models, mandates, and maintains preaching as a priority for the local church: “When the pulpit is strong, the church is strengthened, and her witness to the world is fortified,” and most importantly, God is glorified.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Piper, *Expository Exultation*, 307.

<sup>26</sup> David Strain, *Expository Preaching*, Blessings of the Faith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2021),

CHAPTER 3  
PRINCIPLES, PRACTICALITIES, AND PRECEDENTS  
FOR PRIORITIZING PREACHING

From the beginning of the church, there is no proven strategy for encouraging spiritual growth and vitality more meaningful than preaching. If a pastor desires to see the flock entrusted to him grow in maturity, love God and one another more in Christ, and experience the abundant life Jesus promises, he would do well to preach God's Word. Prioritizing preaching accomplishes all those things and more.<sup>1</sup> While Scripture alone more than sufficiently establishes the importance of preaching for the local church, the principles, practicalities, and precedents of preaching reinforce its primacy.

**Principles of Proper Preaching**

**Preaching's Power**

While many churches, faith-based organizations, and those claiming to be Jesus's followers do not prioritize preaching, preaching is a critical factor in ministry growth empowered by the Holy Spirit. The faithful preaching of God's Word correlates with a growing localized church ministry.

Amos 3:8 asks, "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but preach?" History reveals the connection between the miraculous birth and subsequent growth of the church to powerful preaching. God sends his Word through preaching, and despite overwhelming opposition and obstacles, gloriously accomplishes "the thing for which [He] sends it" (Isa 55:11).

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 48.

Preaching wields that which is sharper than any two-edged sword and accomplishes in otherwise impenetrable places what is necessary for salvation and sanctification (Heb 4:11–13). It can consume like fire and deliver a blow with force like a rock-breaking hammer. However, apart from the Spirit of God, preaching is impotent. Preachers can faithfully “plant and water,” but only God gives growth (1 Cor 3:6–8). Jesus told his disciples in John 15:5, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” However zealous, any effort or energy expended apart from the Spirit to build the house of God is done in vain (Ps 127:1; Zech 4:6). Colin Marshall and Tony Payne rightly declare in *The Trellis and the Vine*, “Genuine spiritual growth only comes as the Holy Spirit applies the word of God to people’s hearts.”<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit’s role in preaching is essential. The Spirit is the ultimate author of Scripture; without the Spirit’s quickening power, preaching is like speaking without breath. However, when a man of God preaches the Word of God through the Spirit of God, as in 1 Corinthians 2:4–5, he does so “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Preaching is a Spirit-guided endeavor from start to finish. The Spirit is able to teach and transform through the simplest of words. In 1 Corinthians 2:12, Paul expresses how the Spirit teaches, “interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” through preaching.

While preaching is powerful, the lack of a discernible response does not necessarily mean something is amiss. The prophet Jeremiah faithfully preached for forty years and witnessed no sign of a positive response. The Pharisees often rejected Jesus and even accused him of blasphemy: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). There are many more names not included in history books, who

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N. S. W.: Matthias Media, 2009), 99.

in this life, received no accolades or acknowledgment but faithfully preached in the power of the Spirit and for the glory of God without experiencing tangible growth.

In addition, what may seem impressive and exciting on the surface is not necessarily the work of the Spirit. There are self-professed Christians and churches who are not what they claim. With worldly wisdom and persuasive words, false teachers can build something, perhaps even something impressive, but not enduring or glorious. False conversions, gospels, prophets, and preachers with significant followings can cause confusion. A church can only be built and endure by the power of God's Word and the Spirit, despite the enemy's attempts to prevail against it.

### **Expository Preaching**

There are vital factors connected to the faithful stewardship of preaching, evidence that expository preaching provides a better presentation of Scripture. There is no more excellent resource than Scripture to equip the people of God. Nothing else is "able to make one wise to salvation," or "complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17). Knowing we "wrestle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," believers must choose to arm themselves with nothing less than "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:12, 17).

In *Ashamed of the Gospel*, John MacArthur surmises, "No church can remain healthy long if the pulpit is not strong. And no pulpit is truly strong if the Bible is not the basis of the preaching."<sup>3</sup> Although the Word of God may seem foolish to the world, as Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "To us who are being saved it is the power of God." By storing up God's Word in one's heart, one can overcome the temptation to sin and live in purity and righteousness (Ps 119:9, 11). In the same way a loving parent will

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 196.

choose to feed their children what best ensures their health, a pastor will decide to preach Scripture to the flock entrusted to him. Even more, Scripture must remain the church's steady diet.

In the Great Commission, Jesus specified making disciples is to “teach them to observe everything that he commanded” (Matt 28:20). When Jesus asked the Twelve if they wanted to join those who walked away, Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Paul told Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). In conjunction with Paul's exhortation for Timothy to preach, not *a* word, but *the* Word, he instructed him, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Preachers are not at liberty to preach beyond Scripture. Paul was so adamant about this. He wrote in Galatians 1:8, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” Steve Lawson argues,

New ideas about preaching flood our conferences and podcasts. They promise church growth, numerical success, and personal fulfillment, yet minimize biblical exposition. They fall woefully short of the permanent pattern set by God in Scripture. Only the centrality of preaching his Word can accomplish the task. We cannot improve on what God has ordained.<sup>4</sup>

Expository preaching conveys a high view of Scripture and is the best avenue to adequately communicate the totality of God's message to his creation. There is a holy moment when we recognize the full context of revelation throughout history to men and women who were moved by the Spirit to pen his truths to us. There is value in a journey through the narrative of Scripture without abridging the message of God. Interrupting or disorganizing that message robs the hearer of the intended experience.

Developing every principle or point of truth is a dedicated endeavor. Each passage of Scripture demonstrates God's sovereignty through humanity's lens.

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<sup>4</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Called to Preach* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 10.

Expository preaching is a continuous journey rather than an episodic experience.

Although some believe the Ten Commandments is the entire story of Moses, a more comprehensive picture is available in the Pentateuch.

There also are controversial topics a pastoral team cannot and should not bypass. Preaching verse-by-verse forces churches to examine Scripture's uncomfortable truths, which the Spirit uses to bring about growth and repentance. Some practices of topical preaching can be expository; however, a truly expository preaching approach does not attempt to soften or swerve from the course.

A commitment to expository preaching flows from a high view of the Bible. Harrell says, "Jesus made it clear that our sanctification depends upon the truth revealed in Scripture, and he prayed that his Father would help us to that end in John 17:17."<sup>5</sup> Preaching is the means of grace employed by the promised Spirit. Jim Orrick, Brian Payne, and Ryan Fullerton, in *Encountering God through Expository Preaching*, affirm, "The divine Author's overall purpose for Scripture is to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness."<sup>6</sup> Preaching the God-breathed Scriptures facilitates the man of God "complete and equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17). Expository, verse-by-verse preaching ensures the best opportunity for comprehensive Christian formation.<sup>7</sup> Expository preaching holds preachers accountable for setting all Scripture before their congregations, even challenging or controversial truths. It prepares a congregation to engage with and disciple their hearts through controversial passages. Furthermore, expository preaching affords natural credibility by elevating the Word of God.

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<sup>5</sup> David Harrell, *Warrior Preachers: A Spiritual Call to Arms in an Age of Militant Unbelief* (Columbia, MD: Shepherd's Fire Media, 2022), 177.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Orrick, Brian Payne, and Ryan Fullerton, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching: Connecting God's People to God's Presence through God's Word* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017), 22.

<sup>7</sup> David Strain, *Expository Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2021), 49.



## Topical Preaching

In contrast, topical preaching can abstract God’s Word from its full context. Biblical texts supporting topical sermons can be forcibly fused and subject to the topic’s agenda.<sup>8</sup> While topical preaching may be more appealing or relevant, John Broadus suggests, “The preacher easily becomes interested in finding subjects that are interesting and readily yield a good oration rather than those that have a true Christian and scriptural basis or those that come close to the needs of the people.”<sup>9</sup> According to Walter Kaiser, topical preaching can facilitate “witty and clever messages on the widest-ranging topics interspersed with catchy and humorous anecdotes geared to cater to the interests of those who are spiritually lazy and content with the pleasantries of hearing another good joke or story.”<sup>10</sup> Compared to expository preaching, a topical approach facilitates a mentality in which worldly wisdom supersedes the canon of Scripture.

God’s Word is authoritative, inspired, inerrant, and infallible. As such, it contains everything needed to know about God and his plan for salvation. These realities establish expository preaching, over topical, as the best type of preaching. In *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, MacArthur contends the only logical response “is to preach God’s Word expositionally . . . in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented entirely and exactly as it was intended by God.”<sup>11</sup> In his book *Famine in the Land*, Lawson shares that John Calvin believed preaching should be an “explication of Scripture, unfolding its natural and true meaning, while making application to the life and experience of the congregation.”<sup>12</sup> Expository preaching usually follows a verse-by-verse format and submits wholeheartedly to the biblical text in

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<sup>8</sup> John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 20.

<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 23–24.

<sup>12</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 27.

every way possible to accomplish this. The main point of an expository sermon should be the main point of a passage of Scripture “as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and in light of the overall context of Scripture.”<sup>13</sup>

Ash suggests a commitment to expository preaching includes the following:

1. “Safeguards God’s agenda against being hijacked.”
2. “Makes it harder to abuse a text by reading it out of context.”
3. “Dilutes selectivity of a preacher.”
4. “Keeps content fresh and surprising.”
5. “Makes for variety in the style of the sermon.”
6. “Models good nourishing Bible reading for ordinary Christians.”
7. “Helps us preach the whole Christ from the whole of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Responsibility of a Pastor**

Those who preach must remember they can do nothing apart from Christ and are merely servant stewards, entrusted with an opportunity and a responsibility (1 Cor 4:1). They are responsible for stewarding well, guarding and guiding the flock entrusted to them. The church in which a pastor serves is not his but belongs to Jesus. Jesus is the head of the church. Furthermore, they must never forget he is faithful and always provides what is needed.

Pastors must regularly feed their flock with God’s Word; nothing else will nourish and sustain them. They must labor to help their congregations understand (1 Tim 5:17). Jesus did not *suggest* Peter feed and tend to his sheep; he commanded it (John 21). Paul did not recommend or advise Timothy to preach the Word. He charged him in strong language, leaving Timothy no room to make excuses or justify doing otherwise (1 Tim 4:11–16; 2 Tim 4:1–2). Pastors are duty-bound to feed the flock entrusted to them with a

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<sup>13</sup> Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching* (London: Proclamation Trust, 2018), 111–21.

thorough proclamation of the Scriptures.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, pastors fulfill God’s promise from Jeremiah 3:15: “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Preachers must be diligent in preaching *the whole counsel* of God. They must teach *all* Jesus commanded.

Accordingly, beyond faithfully investing the time, effort, and prayer necessary to prepare a sermon, a pastor also must live above reproach, humbly and faithfully living according to the Scriptures he boldly proclaims. Unfaithfulness and sin in the pastor’s life only serve to discredit and further diminish the fruitfulness of preaching. In contrast, seventeenth-century poet George Herbert wrote, “Just as the beauty of the light of the sun is enhanced by passing through a stained-glass window, so the beauty and effectiveness of God’s Word is enhanced when it is preached by a holy man.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Responsibility of a Congregation**

While a pastor is responsible for feeding the flock, the flock is responsible for humbly listening with ears to hear. Believers are to assemble regularly with a submissive heart, an eagerness to feast, and a willingness to respond in worshipful obedience to proper preaching. Local churches today should follow the example of early church believers’ devotion to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). Believers are not to tolerate false teachers and the false doctrines they proclaim. They are to receive the exhortations delivered to them that accord with the Bible (1 Cor 11; Heb 13:22). Believers should crave proper preaching, endeavoring to mature their appetites beyond the basic principles of the faith and even to receive proper preaching, “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13; Heb 5:11–14; 1 Pet 2:2–3). In *Expository Preaching*, David Strain explains, “Preaching is the public, corporate engagement of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 109.

<sup>16</sup> George Herbert, “The Windows,” quoted in Orrick, Payne, and Fullerton, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching*, 7.

whole people of God with the Word of God through pastors and elders called by God to shepherd the flock.”<sup>17</sup>

In *Word-Centered Church*, Jonathan Leeman proposes, “The ministry of the Word indeed begins in the pulpit, but then it must continue through the life of the church as God’s Word becomes absolutely central in the lives of members.”<sup>18</sup> The preaching event, not the preacher, is to be prioritized. That includes and involves the presence of a listening body of believers.<sup>19</sup> Christians are to live out their faith in a united and submitted community, not in isolation or loose association with one another. As Ash proposes, “The purpose of preaching is not preaching. Preaching is not an end in itself . . . . The purpose of preaching is performance—not the performance of the preacher but the corporate performance of the whole assembly whose lives and relationships are shaped by the preached Word of grace.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Successful Preaching**

Successful preaching is not necessarily preaching that results in drawing the largest crowd or evoking the most emotion. Proper preaching is, essentially, genuine worship. It is successful when marked by obedience. When the preacher faithfully and obediently proclaims truth from God’s Word, God is glorified. In the same way, when a congregation responds obediently to the Word proclaimed, God is glorified. Paul sheds light on this when recounting his preaching ministry in Ephesus. In Acts 20:24–27 he claims, “I did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God.” Even more so, at the end of his life and just before the charge to Timothy, he rejoices in the reward awaiting

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<sup>17</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 37–38.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Word-Centered Church: How Scripture Brings Life and Growth to God’s People* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 21.

<sup>19</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Kevin DeYoung, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 102.

him for having obediently “fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). Perhaps one of the most successful preachers in modern times is John MacArthur, the senior pastor of Grace Community Church. When reflecting on his many years of ministry, MacArthur noted,

I must ascribe our church’s numerical and spiritual growth to the will of our sovereign God. There are no marketing techniques or modern methodologies than can explain it. Nor would we rely on such tactics. We don’t want growth that is manufactured by human formulas, programs, and gimmicks. We are content to focus on aggressive biblical ministry and leave it to the Lord to add to His church. Our task is to be faithful in what he has designed us to do.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Problem of Pragmatism**

A grave abdication of responsibility is common throughout many churches today. There are far too many churches, congregations, and professing followers of Jesus who do not seem to prioritize preaching. A growing number seem to regard preaching archaic, irrelevant, and less impactful than dialogue and discussion as means of communicating the gospel. When preaching is not prioritized, it is often the result of religious pragmatism, which is essentially a philosophy that defines truth by the tangible results or outcomes of a practice. According to MacArthur, “The poison of religious pragmatism is now an enormous global problem.”<sup>22</sup>

Pragmatism often plays out in a local church when practices result in the largest gathering. MacArthur suggests, “Pragmatism is often advocated by church growth specialists who elevate numerical growth over spiritual growth and believe they can induce that numerical growth by following whatever techniques seem to be working at the moment.”<sup>23</sup> The error of pragmatism rejects ideas that do not appear to bear noticeable results and ultimately defines truth by those that do. Basing theological

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<sup>21</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 184.

<sup>22</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 18.

framework and ministry practices primarily on what seems to work or not work is incompatible with Scripture. Unfortunately, this is the trap into which many churches fall. MacArthur claims, “Evangelicalism’s growing superficiality is a spiraling loss of confidence in the power of Scripture, the relentless pursuit of worldly fads, and a steady drift away from historic evangelical convictions were already widespread and serious problems.”<sup>24</sup> Believing one can remain biblical while operating pragmatically is ridiculous.

Pragmatism emphasizes and works to manipulate emotions and experiences. It prioritizes meeting the desires of all people, often at the expense of providing what they truly need. Attempting to entertain, resources are inappropriately directed toward music, drama, and performance, at the expense of preaching. Church leaders look to conventional wisdom and creative marketing strategies, neglecting the preaching of the gospel. The result of this practice is spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness in preaching.

In *Ashamed of the Gospel*, MacArthur states, “It is impossible to elevate human wisdom without lowering God’s truth. Human wisdom caters to self-will, human pride, fleshly lusts, and the desire for independence from God.”<sup>25</sup> He says, “The Bible, not a marketing plan, is supposed to be the sole blueprint and final authority for all church ministry.”<sup>26</sup> The church of Jesus Christ must “challenge secularism, not surrender to it.”<sup>27</sup> As the church waits for Christ’s return, it must contend for the faith, not compromise, concede, or cower in any way (Jude 3). Only by believing and obeying the Word of God can his people flourish.<sup>28</sup> For a church to remain faithful, the preaching

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<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 123.

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 103.

<sup>28</sup> Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 78.

must remain faithful.<sup>29</sup> Harrell warns, “As our world sinks into a deep abyss of depravity, we need men who will not cower to the opposition as they proclaim the truth.”<sup>30</sup>

When a church surrenders to pragmatic ideologies and fails to prioritize preaching, the church will, over time, overdose on entertainment and suffer from spiritual malnutrition; it could potentially starve to death. When believers are not afforded the opportunity to hear and heed God’s Word, they will not endure the storms of life. They will bow to cultural pressures and unbiblical ideologies. While they may enjoy momentary relief from life’s challenges, they will lack a firm foundation to build a legacy. Pragmatism may seem provocative, popular, and pertinent, but it engenders division, confusion, and spiritual impotence for a local church.

When the marks of Christian living among the members of a church are generally absent or difficult to recognize, it is often a problem that stems from pragmatism. The principles and convictions of a local church will likely not rise above the principles and convictions of a church’s preaching. John Stott, famously once proposed “sermonettes make Christianettes.”<sup>31</sup> He also says, “More often than we like to admit, the pew is a reflection of the pulpit.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Paul Shirley asserts that, in general, “the maturity of the church will never outpace the maturity of the pulpit because the spiritual growth of the congregation is an outflow of the Spiritual power in preaching.”<sup>33</sup> To grow and build up mature Christ followers, pragmatic ideologies and practices must be confronted with a resurgence of assured, insightful, pertinent, and scripturally grounded preaching.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Shirley, *Expository Sanctification* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2019), 49.

<sup>30</sup> Harrell, *Warrior Preachers*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Shirley, *Expository Sanctification*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Green, foreword, in Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, ix.

## The Practicalities of Preaching

Although the aim of proper preaching is the glory of God, Scripture makes it clear preaching bears much fruit for the benefit of a local church. A church awakened through preaching will demonstrate a commitment to honor and protect it as the primary means of grace for their sanctification. They will pay attention to and protect the role of preaching. Strain posits, “If preaching has been the principal means by which people come to Christ, it will not be difficult to introduce them to preaching as the principal means by which we expect them to grow and mature in Christ.”<sup>35</sup> As the Body of Christ regularly feasts upon the Word of God, it grows in spiritual maturity and strength. Other word-based ministries of the church will thrive. Members who regularly worship together are more inclined to love and submit to one another.<sup>36</sup>

A close tie exists between faithful Christian living and faithful preaching. Historically, when the faithfulness of Christian communities has declined, so has preaching. Accordingly, revival and reformation are connected to powerful preaching.<sup>37</sup> The proclamation of God’s Word, empowered by the Spirit, can transform the hearts of men, the churches they are a part of, and the entire communities to which they belong. In *Expository Sanctification*, Paul Shirley celebrates preaching as “a time-tested, divinely authorized source of sanctifying grace.”<sup>38</sup>

When a church feasts regularly upon God’s Word through preaching, they crave more and are dissatisfied with anything less. Therefore, the congregation is committed to regular assembly on the Lord’s Day, expecting to hear the authoritative Word of God and respond obediently to it with submissive hearts. A church of this persuasion will yearn not for superficial trends, but for authentic, substantial biblical

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<sup>35</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Shirley, *Expository Sanctification*, 50.



preaching and nourishment for the soul. As 1 Peter 2:2 describes, “Like newborn babies, [they] long for the pure milk of the word, that by it [they] may grow in respect to salvation.”

Whether to whet the appetite for the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven or simply to serve as a reminder of the sustenance one can find in the Word of God, a church must not “neglect meeting together” (Heb 10:25). Ash warns, “Nevertheless, if [a church family] fails to gather under the preached word of God [they] cease to be a church.”<sup>39</sup> Moses also warned the people of God in Deuteronomy 4:27. After commanding them to continue gathering to hear and heed the Word of God, Moses made it clear that failure to do so would result in “scattering them among the peoples” and “left few in number among the nations” (Deut 4:27). Stott writes, “The Word of God is the scepter by which Christ rules the church and the food with which he nourishes it.”<sup>40</sup> God’s Word is precious, to be revered and “rightly handled” (2 Tim 2:15). Paul charged Timothy to “preach the word,” knowing that “healthy preaching produces healthy Christians.”<sup>41</sup>

As a farmer does not immediately see and enjoy what he expects to harvest in the seeds he plants, the fruit of spiritual growth from preaching is not often instantaneously discernable. The ministry of preaching is “largely a hidden work in the human heart.”<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 55:11 promises God’s Word proclaimed will not return void. In the same way soil, weather, and many factors affect the harvest of planted seeds, many factors affect the products of faithful preaching. Nevertheless, the Bible demonstrates that faithful preaching is right and best: “Paul understood that nothing deepens the love of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 78.

<sup>41</sup> Shirley, *Expository Sanctification*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., “The Primacy of Preaching,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008), 5.

Christian for his Savior and moves him to walk in holiness and humility more than the gospel of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> James Montgomery Boice charges churches to “stick with the foolishness of preaching in an age in which biblical authority is at a discount and congregations want their ears tickled instead of their hearts and minds challenged and instructed.”<sup>44</sup>

Lawson also encourages pastors to build up the church through preaching. He writes, “When the pulpit is strong, the church is strengthened, and her witness to the world is fortified.”<sup>45</sup> This is the reason Paul charged Timothy with a singular purpose to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:1–2). Preaching enables believers to “keep their ways pure” and free from sin (Ps 119:9, 11). Preaching directs followers of Jesus in a dark world (Ps 119:105). The Word of God preached in the authority and power of the Spirit is unstoppable (Isa 55:11). It is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). It demands the ears of those able to hear it as the primary means of grace for a church to grow in spiritual wisdom and strength.

When Jesus promised to build his church, he also promised “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). The battle is real, and there have been many casualties throughout history. However, Jesus graciously provides his church with everything needed to overcome until his return. Churches that overcome adversity and remain faithful to God make the most of God’s Word to equip members for every good work. They understand preaching is essential for navigating dark times. They know “weak pulpits and weak Christians go hand-in-hand.”<sup>46</sup> There is no alternative to the

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<sup>43</sup> Beeke, *Reformed Preaching*, 420.

<sup>44</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “The Foolishness of Preaching,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Shirley, *Expository Sanctification*, 2.

God-breathed Scriptures authoritatively and regularly preached in the power of God’s Spirit for preparing God’s people to endure and overcome adversity. As Mohler says, “The awesome power of authentic preaching is seen in the fact that God uses preaching to present His saints complete in Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Proper preaching builds up the saints in their life together. In *Word-Centered Church*, Leeman suggests, “When preparing a sermon or lesson, teachers of God’s Word should always ask themselves, ‘How does this text call us to greater unity as a church, and the employment of our gifts in service to one another?’”<sup>48</sup>

In the closing of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul gave glory to God for his ability to strengthen the believers in Rome “according to the preaching of Jesus Christ and the revelation now made known” (Rom 16:25–27). Paul’s commitment to preaching the Word of God was strategically unwavering. Church leaders must understand and remain steadfast in their high view of Scripture and the absolute necessity for preaching it. Leeman explains, “Reverberation—‘the ministry of the Word’ indeed begins in the pulpit, but then it must continue through the life of the church as God’s Word becomes central in the lives of members and bounces back and forth to one another.”<sup>49</sup> A church’s survival depends on the Word’s regular and “right division” (2 Tim 2:15). There must be a deep belief that “the work of God thrives the most where there is bold, biblical preaching in the pulpit.”<sup>50</sup>

The church is not described in 1 Timothy 3:15 as a pillar and buttress of *some* truths but of *the* truth. The Lord does not make provisions for his people to excuse or justify disobedience. Jesus did not tell his disciples they would have tribulation so they

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<sup>47</sup> Mohler “The Primacy of Preaching,” 15.

<sup>48</sup> Leeman, *Word-Centered Church*, 133.

<sup>49</sup> Leeman, *Word-Centered Church*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 36.

could decide if they would continue following him (John 16:33). He was preparing them. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus stresses the importance of them knowing and abiding in the Word (John 17:8, 14, 17, 20). The world is sin-cursed and filled with suffering. However, believers are without excuse for disobedience. The grace of God is more than sufficient for every “thorn” (2 Cor 12:7–9). Preaching is God’s grace to help a church hold fast to truths that transcend temporary pain, circumstances, and situations. Preaching awakens the hearts of God’s people to eternal realities. It forges faith in the face of fear, ensures comfort amid confusion, and prepares God’s people for persecution and problems. It affords assurance by reinforcing that God is righteous in all his ways and sovereign over his creation. Preaching makes those who require mercy “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:31–39). This glory is why Paul was willing to endure suffering, diligently labor, and boldly face opposition to preach. Mohler writes, “He said the purpose behind it was to see every man, every Christian, perfected in Christ and presented to our Lord and Savior.”<sup>51</sup> Paul’s agenda in preaching was God’s agenda.

Not only should the church endure, but it also is to stand alert and ready, donned with the whole armor of God and wielding “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” against “the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:11, 17). For Beeke, preaching “brings the believer to the battlefield, shows him how to fight the war, tells him how you win battles and reminds him of the ultimate victory that awaits him, a victory in which God will receive all the glory.”<sup>52</sup> Paul boasted that the weapons afforded believers “have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4). By the Spirit of God and with his Word, the church will prevail.

Faithful preaching anchors a church in turbulent times and prevents “being tossed to and fro by the waves,” of false teaching (Eph 4:14). There is great wisdom and

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<sup>51</sup> Mohler “The Primacy of Preaching,” 17.

<sup>52</sup> Joel R. Beeke, “Experiential Preaching,” in Kistler, *Feed My Sheep*, 60.

benefit to hearing and obeying the preached Word of God. Jesus explicitly compares the hearing and heeding of his words to building a house on a foundation firm enough to endure the storms of life (Matt 7:24–25). He also explains the great destruction when his Word is ignored and rejected (Matt 7:26–27). Amidst times of unparalleled fear and unparalleled tragedies, the need for Spirit-empowered preaching to initiate, instruct, and inspire faith is greater than ever.

Just as Jesus overcame temptation with the Word of God (Matt 4:1–11), he sent the promised Helper to “guide men into all the truth” (John 16:13). Heisler declares, “When the Word and Spirit combine, combustion happens and power results!”<sup>53</sup> Men can walk in wisdom and purity with the help of God’s Word (Ps 119:9, 11). Paul humbly boasted of his ability to endure all things in and through the strength of Jesus Christ (Phil 4:13). He rejoiced in God’s enduring faithfulness to his people to “supply every one of their needs according to his riches in Glory” (Phil 4:19). It is imperative to remember Jesus’s words to Martha as she labored in serving at the expense of sitting at his feet to listen to him, that only “one thing is necessary” (Luke 10:39).

The book of Revelation was not written to scare believers, as some may assume, but to prepare them for the return of Christ. Faithful churches are to exist in a state of readiness. Jesus addresses seven local churches that existed at the time of John’s writing. Each church is exhorted to hear and obey Jesus’s words and everything written in the book (Rev 1:3). Each of the churches is addressed individually and exhorted with promises to those who conquer. Despite great warfare and tribulation, Jesus’s prevailing church is revealed as ruling and reigning with him for all eternity (Rev 22).

In light of dark days and promised persecution, preaching must be paramount. Harrell says, “The church desperately needs faithful pastors who will lift their voice with

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<sup>53</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 60.

increasing courage and declare the life-changing message of Scripture.”<sup>54</sup> Lawson also emphasizes, “In every generation, the Church of Jesus Christ rises or falls with its pulpit.”<sup>55</sup> Unless many churches today prioritize preaching and repent of their negligence and perversions like those Jesus confronts in Revelation 2 and 3, “great will be their fall” (Matt 7:27). Many churches today need to acknowledge their error in prioritizing their own ideologies and approaches over the divine guidance provided in the Holy Scriptures, and repent. Expository preaching is God’s explicit prescription. It is a tested and powerful resource for the church to employ and ensure its perseverance. God leaves no room for alternative methods or substitute strategies. Regardless of the time or the trial, the God-breathed Scriptures expounded under Christ’s authority and by the Spirit’s power, position a church for complete readiness and conquering.

In addition, while preaching should be promoted above the other activities and aspects of church life, it should not necessarily be at their expense; other church ministries should not be neglected. When God’s design in this is deployed, the other church ministries will thrive as they would not otherwise. In *Preaching: A Biblical Theology*, Jason Meyer says, “The life-giving grace of the ministry of the word has a clarifying and sustaining impact on the other ministries of the church.”<sup>56</sup> The proper practice of preaching will only strengthen the other ministries and programs a church engages to make disciples and reach the world for Christ. In *The Trellis and the Vine*, Marshall and Payne propose,

Clear, strong, powerful public preaching is the bedrock and foundation upon which all other ministry in the congregation is built. The sermon is the rallying call. It is where the whole congregation can together feed on God’s Word and be challenged,

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<sup>54</sup> Harrell, *Warrior Preachers*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 315.

comforted and edified. The public preaching ministry is like a framework that sets the standard and agenda for all other word ministries that take place.<sup>57</sup>

### **Precedents That Prioritized Preaching**

More than two thousand years of church history testifies to the importance of preaching for local churches. In general, when preaching is prioritized, both churches and the communities benefit greatly. However, when preaching is neglected, spiritual vitality in a church wanes and can dry up altogether.

#### **Early Church: Chrysostom (347–407)**

During the latter part of the fourth century, John Chrysostom was known as “Golden Mouthed” due to the great appreciation congregations had for his influential preaching ministry. Chrysostom demonstrated a clear commitment to feeding the flock through preaching. Chrysostom preached almost daily while serving congregations in the ancient cities of Antioch and Constantinople. Each of his sermons expounded the biblical text set before the congregation the day before.<sup>58</sup> His Spirit-enabled preaching effectively realigned the thinking and behaviors of men toward their submission to a sovereign God. Chrysostom’s preaching positively shaped the spiritual condition of the churches entrusted to his care, fueling their vitality and resolve. Proper preaching facilitates “a towering understanding of God and leads to transcendent worship and holy living.”<sup>59</sup> When believers have ears to hear, they are able to receive the warnings and encouragements necessary to thrive in any circumstance or situation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> More information on Chrysostom’s preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 171-222.

## Sixteenth Century: Reformation

Protestant Reformation preachers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasized the importance of preaching for communicating biblical truth to the masses and essential for the spiritual growth and health of the church. Preaching was emphasized to counter the corruption and abuses of the Catholic Church. “Each of the confessions of faith that came out of the Reformation speak early on about the primacy of preaching for achieving the mission of the church.”<sup>61</sup>

### *Martin Luther*

Martin Luther, the leading figure of the Protestant Reformation, was a proponent of preaching’s priority. He inaugurated a movement committed to the prescribed practices and doctrines outlined in the Scriptures. Lawson shares that Martin Luther explained the fruitfulness of the Reformation and his ministry by saying, “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; Otherwise, I did nothing. . . . The Word did it all.”<sup>62</sup> Mohler claims that Martin Luther, having confronted the pervasive false doctrine of his day, said, “Where the authentic preaching of the Word takes place, the (true) church is there.”<sup>63</sup> In contrast, “No matter how high the steeple, no matter how large the budget, no matter how impressive the ministry,” where there is no preaching, there is no church.<sup>64</sup>

Luther’s ministry celebrated preaching as the church’s “primary instrument of evangelism and principle means of discipleship.”<sup>65</sup> His legacy refutes the common fallacy that preaching is ineffective evangelistically. Recent studies affirm “preaching that truly

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<sup>61</sup> David Lewis Allen, “Expository Preaching and the Mission of the Church,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 27.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons 1*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 77, quoted in Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> Mohler, “The Primacy of Preaching,” 10.

<sup>64</sup> Mohler, “The Primacy of Preaching,” 10.

<sup>65</sup> Mohler, “The Primacy of Preaching,” 10.



teaches the Bible in its original context” is a strategic way to reach and receive new church members.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, a church or pastor is not at liberty to modify the biblical message and mission or to employ methods that rise above the pulpit.<sup>67</sup> Luther’s legacy affirms sinners are saved and sanctified primarily through preaching God’s Word.<sup>68</sup>

Scripture repeatedly demonstrates how God’s preached Word aids in convicting and consecrating the people of God—the church. The Westminster Shorter Catechism establishes that the Spirit of God “especially makes the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.”<sup>69</sup> Both the biblical record and church history show God primarily using the preaching of his Word to save sinners.<sup>70</sup> Mohler asserts that Martin Luther believed “The preaching of the Word is the first essential mark of the church.”<sup>71</sup> In pre-Reformation Europe the church was apathetic. Martin Luther’s message was a charge to preachers:

Your task, O preacher, is to make sure that you are faithful to the text, that you are faithful to the proclamation of the Gospel, that you are faithful to set for the whole counsel of God, and then step back and let it happen. I don’t have to try and cajole and persuade people with my techniques to get them to respond. I preach the law, I preach the Gospel, and the Holy Ghost attends to the ministry of the Word to bring forth the fruit.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 67–68.

<sup>67</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 78

<sup>68</sup> More information on Martin Luther’s preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3-42.

<sup>69</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Orrick, Payne, and Fullerton, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching*, 112.

<sup>71</sup> Mohler, “The Primacy of Preaching,” 1.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Luther, quoted by R. C. Sproul, “The Teaching Preacher,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008), 85.

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

John Calvin is an example of a church leader who impactfully prioritized preaching. Although primarily known for his *Institutes of Christian Religion* as a standard for systematic theologies, “it was his preaching that transformed the city of Geneva.”<sup>73</sup> Calvin’s ministry sparked tremendous resistance from Geneva’s city council members. Ultimately, they forced him to leave the city. When able to return three years later, he was received by many believers who recognized his influence on their faith and understanding of the Scriptures. At Calvin’s first opportunity to address them, rather than publicly denounce the city council, he simply directed the congregation before him to open their Bibles to the verse he left off preaching three years earlier. And he continued preaching through that book of the Bible.<sup>74</sup>

While serving as the senior minister in Geneva, he preached twice each Sunday and every weekday on alternating weeks from 1549 until his death in 1564.<sup>75</sup> He preached over two thousand sermons from the Old Testament alone, spending a year expositing Job and three years in Isaiah.<sup>76</sup> Calvin serves as a role model for those who champion the importance of preaching for the local church.<sup>77</sup>

### **Seventeenth Century: Puritans**

In the seventeenth century, the Puritans zealously regarded preaching as a priority. The benefits thereof fueled a movement that greatly influenced England and many parts of the world where they established a presence, especially the American

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Shirley, unpublished lesson on preaching by Dr. Paul Shirley called “Preaching 1,” 19.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, “Expository Preaching and the Mission of the Church,” 60.

<sup>75</sup> More information on John Calvin’s preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 90-133.

<sup>76</sup> James F. Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 20.

<sup>77</sup> Robert B. Ives, “The Importance of Expository Preaching,” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 32, no. 2 (August 2009): 318.

colonies. Puritan congregations were fortified by wise, balanced, and sensible preaching and anchored in the pages of Scripture. Charles Spurgeon once said of Puritan John Bunyan, “Read anything of his and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. . . . Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text for his soul is full of the Word of God.”<sup>78</sup> George Whitefield regarded the Puritans as “burning and shining lights . . . (who), when driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in a special manner wrote and preached as men having authority.”<sup>79</sup>

The Puritans had an insatiable appetite for consuming and meditating on the written Word of God, Bible study, and listening to sermons that faithfully expounded the truths of Scripture. This fortified “the foundation of their faith, their thought, their teaching, their worship, and their daily lives.”<sup>80</sup> Stitzinger describes the Puritans intentionally emphasizing preaching’s importance by strategically placing their pulpits in the center of their sanctuaries to highlight the open Bibles upon them.<sup>81</sup> Puritan preachers like Richard Baxter and John Owen celebrated “the Bible as the most valuable treasure and surest foundation for faith and life that this world affords.”<sup>82</sup> As such, they emphasized the importance of systematically and carefully exposing their congregations to its full range through preaching. This commitment ushered in “a season of spiritual

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<sup>78</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and his Private Secretary, 1878-1892*, vol.4 (Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 268.

<sup>79</sup> George Whitefield, *Works*, 4:306-307, quoted in Joel R. Beeke and Michael Reeves, *Following God Fully: An Introduction to the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 175.

<sup>80</sup> Beeke and Reeves, *Following God Fully*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” 21.

<sup>82</sup> Beeke and Reeves, *Following God Fully*, 14.

revival as deep and extensive as any that has since occurred in the history of British Churches.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Eighteenth Century: Great Awakening**

The Great Awakening, a revival movement emphasizing the importance of preaching as a means of evangelism and spiritual revival, was very much influenced by the legacy of the Puritans. Preachers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards traveled throughout the newly established American colonies, preaching powerful sermons and inspiring thousands of people to turn to Christ.

### **Charles Spurgeon**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon faithfully preached the Word of God to a church committed to making Christ known. According to MacArthur, “Preaching the Word of God was [Spurgeon’s] sole passion.”<sup>84</sup> He preached over 3,500 sermons, which comprised the sixty-three volumes of the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, published between 1855 and 1917. Spurgeon’s influence spans denominations and many churches and ministries today.<sup>85</sup> Spurgeon was particularly burdened by many ministries and churches in his day that downgraded the importance of preaching. He commented, “Everywhere there is apathy. Nobody cares whether that which is preached is true or false. A sermon is a sermon whatever the subject; the shorter it is, the better.”<sup>86</sup> Some

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<sup>83</sup> Beeke, *Reformed Preaching*, 142.

<sup>84</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 25.

<sup>85</sup> More information on Charles Spurgeon’s preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 6, *The Modern Age* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 422-44.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “Preface,” *The Sword and the Trowel (1888 complete volume)*, iii, quoted in MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 25.

believe Spurgeon's burden compounded the symptoms of other physiological issues and ultimately contributed to his death.<sup>87</sup>

#### **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981)**

More recently, preachers such as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Stott, and D. A. Carson represent twentieth-century preachers whose preaching ministries demonstrate the value and importance of preaching.<sup>88</sup> Lloyd-Jones, in particular, left a lucrative medical career to pursue preaching. God brought remarkable renewal growth to his local church through his ministry. Lloyd-Jones's focus on preaching, above all else, initially caused quite a stir.<sup>89</sup> However, he was unswerving in his conviction, saying, as Lawson reminds, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; And as it is the greatest and most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also."<sup>90</sup>

#### **Modern Day**

##### *Tim Keller*

Preaching remains a central element of Christian worship in many churches worldwide. The late Tim Keller led Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City for forty years while assessing the health of local churches. He recognized the need for more intentional biblical preaching. Focused on evangelism and biblically grounded social justice, Keller re-shaped the culture of his church by prioritizing expository preaching.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> More information on D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 6, *The Modern Age* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 935-46.

<sup>89</sup> Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 34–35.

<sup>90</sup> Lawson, *Called to Preach*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> More information on Tim Keller's preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, *Our Own Time* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 146-57.

In his book, *Center Church*, Keller described how he shifted his ministry philosophy from attracting people to church events to making disciples and engaging the city meaningfully.<sup>92</sup>

#### *Alistair Begg*

Alistair Begg is a modern-day example of a preacher who wholeheartedly champions the role of the church to share the Word of God through preaching faithfully. Begg committed to expository preaching as the pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio. God continues to use Begg's verse-by-verse approach with a gospel-centered perspective to further grow the ministry of Parkside Church and make it a thriving community impacting the world today.

#### *John Piper*

John Piper's name is synonymous in many ways with expository preaching for the evangelism of the world. His role as the lead pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minnesota, where he faithfully presented the gospel through his sermons and books, has impacted millions worldwide.

#### *Mark Dever*

Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, made a conscious decision to lead with expository preaching in the 1980s. By God's grace and through faithful preaching, the church has had a significant impact on the city's political culture. This approach has helped transform the church into a vibrant, gospel-centered community known for its biblical preaching and discipleship. In *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Mark Dever argues, "If you get the priority of the Word established, then you

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<sup>92</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

have in place the single most important aspect of the church's life, and growing health is virtually assured because God has decided to act by His Spirit through His Word."<sup>93</sup>

*John MacArthur*

John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, is a renowned voice in preaching against the darkness of sin and depravity. He has written numerous books on ministry and preaching. MacArthur asserts that preaching should be primarily concerned with the content of the Bible and emphasizes precision in handling the Scriptures.<sup>94</sup> Services at Grace Community Church are routinely packed with overflow seating. In *Encountering God through Expository Preaching*, Jim Orrick shares this perspective on MacArthur:

Here is a preacher who has nothing in the way of a winning personality, good looks, or charm. Here is a preacher who offers nothing in the way of sophisticated homiletical packaging. No one would suggest that he is a master of the art of oratory. What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes the Scriptures as the Word of God, and when he preaches it, it is Scripture that one hears. It is not that the words of John MacArthur are so interesting as it is that the Word of God is of surpassing interest. That is why one listens.<sup>95</sup>

Many have testified to the transforming power of the Word of God in their lives under MacArthur's preaching ministry. His stewardship of Scripture is a vital example of a faithful minister who prioritizes preaching for the name and glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>96</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From the early church fathers to the Protestant Reformers to contemporary

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<sup>93</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 39.

<sup>94</sup> Stitzinger, "The History of Expository Preaching," 31.

<sup>95</sup> Orrick, Payne, and Fullerton, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching*, 97.

<sup>96</sup> More information on John MacArthur's preaching ministry is detailed in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, *Our Own Time* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 551-57.

pastors, revered preachers communicate biblical truth to their congregations. The historical support for preaching's paramount importance for the local church highlights its enduring value to a local church's spiritual health and vitality. MacArthur observed, "If church history teaches us anything, it is that different times do not require different messages. Those who preach anything other than the unadulterated Gospel forfeit the power of God in their ministries."<sup>97</sup> As preaching prevails, so will Christianity.

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<sup>97</sup> MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 146.



## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Pre-Project Preparation**

Significant groundwork was laid for LHC to better prioritize preaching before the official commencement of this project. The preaching classes at Southern Seminary have greatly inspired and informed the direction of this project. However, in May 2022, after ten years as the lead pastor of LHC, I was afforded the opportunity to take a month-long sabbatical. During the sabbatical, I committed to intentionally and fervently seeking the Lord's wisdom on how to better serve him as the lead shepherd of the LHC family.

The sabbatical was an incredibly enriching time. Through it, I gained a Spirit-renewed passion for faithfully obeying my specific calling to preach the Word of God with boldness and make disciples. Though committed to obediently fulfilling this calling, the approach often required as a church planter, coupled with attempting to meet the ongoing ministry needs of a growing and larger congregation, resulted in often engaging in many other vital aspects of ministry at the expense of preaching. However, after the sabbatical I committed to prioritizing what was necessary and immediately shared this burden and cast the vision for better prioritizing preaching to the elders, staff, and leaders of LHC. Everyone was receptive to it and affirmed their desire to join in the endeavor.

#### **Personally Prioritizing Preaching**

While preaching had always been a priority for me, my weekly schedule and activities proved difficult and often felt overwhelming. On occasions, sermons had been prepared the same morning they were preached, after a week filled with ministry and family responsibilities. The LHC elders realized this was not from laziness or procrastination. They knew the preceding week had demanded other tasks. It was

necessary that I transition from the “whatever, wherever, whenever” church planting work ethic employed for too long and “devote [myself] to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). I repented from allowing tasks to hinder the specific ministry of preaching God’s Word.

To prioritize preaching meant delegating some of the day-to-day ministry responsibilities to others and requesting accountability from the LHC elders, setting apart Mondays exclusively for sermon preparation and planning. Doing so has limited incoming phone calls and texts and minimized distractions to maintain a weekly calendar that prioritizes preaching. In addition, I now regularly engage on Monday afternoons with a few pastors and church leaders for a sermon prep group. During this hour, those who attend first provide constructive criticism on the sermon preached the day before. Then, the group studies, brainstorms, and walks through the biblical text to be expounded on the following Sunday, all with a heart to facilitate the right division of God’s Word at LHC. The sermon prep group has proven a beneficial time and a helpful investment in the ministries of the next generation of preachers the Lord is raising at LHC.

Another change implemented in the weekly schedule to prioritize preaching is a commitment to regularly provide the sermon outline, points, and commentary notes to our elders and staff by Wednesday afternoons. Doing so facilitates more time to work through and meditate on the text of Scripture, while preparing to preach it. Also, the sermon outline, points, and commentary notes are provided to the congregation in the weekly church-wide announcement e-mail on Fridays and by scanning a Q.R. code in the Sunday morning hand-outs. Providing this information and these resources earlier in the week has allowed the congregation to prioritize preaching by coming to Sunday mornings prepared and already familiar with the text of Scripture and sermon outline. Furthermore, this resource is a helpful guide for LifeGroups and other discipleship opportunities for further discussion. LifeGroup leaders are encouraged to intentionally discuss possible

applications of the texts preached on Sunday mornings, in addition to prayer and fellowship.

### **Do Not Forsake the Assembling**

To join the effort to prioritize preaching at LHC, leaders began communicating to their ministry teams the importance and expectation for partners to assemble in a primary worship gathering to hear and heed the preaching of God's Word. Leaders stressed to prioritize preaching is not about prioritizing the preacher, rather the corporate preaching event—communicating and receiving the proclaimed Word of God. LHC holds two services, 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., which facilitate a policy encouraging those who serve in various positions on Sunday mornings to also participate in the primary worship gathering. Those willing can serve on Sunday mornings, but not at the expense of gathering for worship in the sanctuary.

Children's and student ministry leaders communicated that the opportunities provided in conjunction with Sunday morning services are intended to be supplemental, not alternatives, to the main worship gatherings. This communication encourages parents to be intentional and, when possible, to bring their teens and children to the services with them. In addition, to facilitate families worshipping together, LHC has begun providing text-related activity pages for children during the main worship gathering. With more children in the main worship gatherings, there will naturally be more distractions. In preparation for this, leaders charged the congregation to show grace and understand that families worshipping together supersedes the minor distractions associated with incorporating children into the worship gatherings. The congregation better understands that though a child may not fully understand the sermon's content, they can be impacted by witnessing believers regularly gathering and expressing their love for and faith in God every week.

## **Church-Wide Annual Business Meeting**

In January 2023, LHC's annual church-wide business meeting was attended by approximately 250 partners. At that meeting I communicated the burden for and intention to lead the church in better-prioritizing preaching. In conjunction with this communication, I announced an eight-week sermon series about the importance of preaching for a local church would begin the second Sunday of February, LHC's 11th anniversary.

### **Eight-Week Sermon Series: Prioritizing Preaching**

The primary goal of the sermon series was to encourage a greater church-wide level of commitment to the Sunday morning preaching events at LHC. The pre-project conversations and efforts leading up to the sermon series had already profoundly affected our church. The sermon series was simply reinforcing the vision already cast. LHC seemed already agreeable and submitted to better prioritizing preaching. In light of this change, using a pre- and post-sermon series survey to gauge the congregation's perspectives about preaching's priority was inappropriate.

Before the sermon series, most of the partners of LHC were convinced and ready. However, the specific goal was for the church to root their conviction regarding preaching's importance primarily in expository preaching rather than blindly following my lead. The impact of preaching the sermons would be reinforcing. Therefore, it was not surprising the sermon series became an affirmation for what LHC already felt and believed. The sermon series was titled "Prioritizing Preaching" and included specific texts from the Old Testament and the New Testament to inform preaching's importance for the local church. The series began on Sunday, February 5, 2023, and continued every Sunday through March 26, 2023.

## **Week 1**

The first sermon of the series, entitled “The Meeting at the Mountain,” was preached February 5, 2023. This sermon served as an introduction to the series and explicated Exodus 19 using the following sermon outline and points:

1. A Promised Commitment to Heed God’s Voice, vv. 1–8
2. A Prepared Congregation to Heed God’s Voice, vv. 9–17
3. A Powerful Confirmation to Fear God’s Voice, vv. 18–25

Exodus 19 documents the foundation of the preaching event for local churches today. The Lord summoned Israel to himself and entered into a conditional covenant with them, the Mosaic Covenant. After experiencing the power of God firsthand, Israel made a promised commitment to heed God’s voice (Exod 19:1–8). The entire congregation of Israel prepared themselves and were ready to hear God’s voice (Exod 19: 9–17). They consecrated themselves and gathered in unity and solidarity at the foot of the mountain, exactly where and when God summoned them. Lastly, the passage documents a powerful confirmation to fear God’s voice (Exod 18–25). God’s power and authority were unmistakable to the Israelites. They demonstrated an appropriate reverence as they listened to him.

The goal of the sermon was for the congregation to understand the importance of hearing and heeding the Word of God through preaching. It exhorted LHC to gather regularly for preaching, like Israel did in Exodus 19, in reverent fear and already committed to obeying what the Lord would say.

## **Week 2**

The second sermon, entitled “Listen Up!” was preached on February 12, 2023, from Deuteronomy 18:15–22 using the following sermon outline and points:

God speaks through expository preaching!

1. You have the opportunity to listen to him! vv. 15–18
2. You have the responsibility to listen to him! vv. 19–20

3. You have the necessity to listen to him! vv. 21–22

The main exhortation from this sermon was to remain committed to listening to God’s Word proclaimed through preaching. In this passage, Moses exhorts the Israelites to continue listening to the Lord’s voice in the Promised Land. Moses considers their obedience to God’s Word a matter of life or death. While prophetically pointing to Jesus’s preaching, Moses, who would not continue on with them, promised the Lord would continue speaking through prophets raised among them.

The aim of this sermon was for the congregation to understand the profound opportunity, responsibility, and necessity of listening to the Word of God preached; life and death remain in the balance just as they did for the Israelites. The congregation should understand that Almighty God speaks through expository preaching and preaching today is a continuation of what Moses and Jesus did. The church today has the direct opportunity to listen to the Lord’s voice through preaching (Deut 18:15–18), the responsibility to listen to the Lord’s voice through preaching (Deut 18:19–20), and are charged to remain devoted to listening to the Lord’s voice through preaching (Deut 18:21–22).

### **Week 3**

The third sermon in the series, “God’s Powerful Protection,” was preached from Nehemiah 8:1–12 on February 19, 2023. In Nehemiah 8:1–12 the people of God gathered to hear the Word of God preached. They gathered in reverence before the Water Gate to hear Ezra preach God’s Word. It is evident in the passage that the Israelites were desperate to know God’s Word and live by it. The following sermon outline and points explicated Nehemiah 8:1–12. The people of God are powerfully protected when . . .

1. Their priority is the Word of God. vv. 1–3
2. Their posture is to worship God. vv. 4–6
3. Their purpose is to walk with God. vv. 7–8

God's powerful protection, vv. 9–12.

The goal in preaching this sermon was to inspire more significant commitment to and love for God's Word and expository preaching. The main point of this sermon was that God powerfully protects his people (Neh 8: 9–12). God's people are powerfully protected when the Word of God is their priority (Neh 8:1–3), when their posture is to worship God (Neh 8:4–6), and when their purpose is to walk with God (Neh 8:7–8). The Israelites demonstrated these traits as they gathered to hear the Word of God preached through Ezra.

#### **Week 4**

The fourth sermon of the series, from John 21:15–19, was preached on February 26, 2023. John 21:15–19 could be considered the “Great Commission” of John's gospel. In the passage, Jesus repeatedly commanded Peter to feed his sheep. Jesus communicated the importance of regularly “feeding” the Word of God to his “sheep.” The sermon was entitled “Do You Love Jesus?” and used the following sermon outline and points to preach through the passage:

1. The mission of Jesus Christ is continued. v. 15
2. The motivation of Jesus Christ is conveyed. vv. 16–17
3. The model of Jesus Christ is commanded. vv. 18–19

This sermon was intended to inspire the church. First, the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ is continued through preaching (v. 15). Jesus wants his followers to continue to be “fed” with the Word of God following his departure. Jesus commissioned regular preaching. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commanded his followers to “make disciples” and “teach them to observe everything He commanded” (Matt 28:20). By asking Peter three times about his love in connection with the command to feed his sheep, Jesus reveals the motivation for the feeding of his sheep. The motivation behind preaching should be love

(vv. 16–17). This passage also reveals the importance of following Jesus’s example; the model of Jesus Christ is commanded (vv. 18–19).

## **Week 5**

On March 5, 2023, the fifth sermon was an exposition of Romans 10:8–17 entitled “Preaching is Beautiful!” It aimed to help the congregation appreciate the beauty and glory of preaching. In the passage, Paul asserts that one is near to God’s Word through preaching. Preaching affords a unique experience of knowing and having a relationship with God. Second, Paul declares that one can hear God’s Word through preaching. Lastly, Paul proclaims that one can heed God’s Word through preaching. Paul’s passion for preaching could inspire LHC through the following sermon outline and points:

Preaching is Beautiful! v. 15b.

1. You are near God’s Word through preaching! vv. 8–13
2. You can hear God’s Word through preaching! vv. 14–15
3. You can heed God’s Word through preaching! vv. 15–17

## **Week 6**

The sixth of the series was an expository sermon entitled “A Model Ministry Mindset.” Preached on March 12, 2023, it explicated Acts 20:17–28 using the following sermon outline and points. A model ministry mindset involves . . .

1. Great commitment to God’s cause. vv. 17–24
2. Great care for God’s church. vv. 25–31
3. Great confidence in God’s completion. vv. 32–38

Acts 20:17–28 documents Paul’s departing charge to the elders of the Ephesian church. After being with them for over three years, Paul instructed and encouraged the church leaders he had invested in. His passion for preaching God’s Word was evident as he reflected on his ministry with them. He encouraged them to guard the flock entrusted



to them by preaching the whole counsel of God with boldness as he had done. The hope for this sermon was that LHC would understand the most crucial responsibility of a pastor is in preaching the Word.

### **Week 7**

On March 19, 2023, a sermon entitled “Preach the Word!” expounded 2 Timothy 4:1–8. This is a familiar text for the promotion of preaching’s importance. The intention was that this sermon would help solidify LHC’s commitment to preaching the Word of God using the following sermon outline and points:

Preach the Word!

1. Know the sacred responsibility of preaching the Word. vv. 1–2
2. Know the sad reality for many people in our world. vv. 3–4
3. Know the sure reward for persevering in your work. vv. 5–8

### **Week 8**

March 26, 2023 was the last sermon of the series. Entitled “The Prevailing Plan of Jesus for His Church” from Ephesians 4:11–16, it used the following outline and points:

Jesus is Building His Church!

1. Jesus provides to fully equip us for the work of ministry vv. 11–12
2. Jesus provides to fully establish all of us in the faith and knowledge of him vv. 13–14
3. Jesus provides to fully engage every one of us in his life and his love vv. 15–16

In this passage, Paul explains how the Lord provides for building his church. He asserts the ministry of the Word maintains church health and vitality. When a church body operates according to God’s plan and takes advantage of what he provided, that church thrives.

### **Men2Ministry Discipleship Group**

The Lord has stirred several men from LHC to serve him in vocational ministry, specifically to pastor and preach the Word. To steward these sincere servants at LHC well and disciple them in preaching, I began a small discipleship group in March 2023 called Men2Ministry. This group's purpose is to encourage men who express a call to preach in the same way Paul encouraged Timothy. A focus of this discipleship group is expository preaching. The participants discuss sermons and read books about preaching together. One of the first books distributed to the group was *The Priority of Preaching* by Ash. This group has been meeting at least once a month and is fruitful ground for discipleship and support for these men as they seek to step out into their calling and preach the Word in the Lord's time.

### **Partner Survey**

LHC partners were sent a brief survey to assess their understanding of and commitment to preaching's priority (see survey in appendix 11). All partners using Church Community Building (CCB), the church contact management system, received the survey during the second week of November 2023. They were informed the survey would be available for one week. A reminder e-mail was sent one day before the closing. The survey consisted of fourteen statements relating to the importance of expository preaching for a local church. The survey asked participants to indicate their level of agreement, disagreement, or uncertainty about the statement. After the survey, the participants could comment on the preaching ministry of LHC. The results of the survey and the comments expressed were both encouraging and humbling. The survey results reflect an overwhelming commitment to celebrating and maintaining preaching's priority at LHC.

Including children, more than 1,000 people attend LHC on an average Sunday. The survey was sent to 391 partners of LHC who have e-mails listed in CCB. There are currently 423 partners in all. Exactly 200 partners (51.15 percent of 391) completed the

fourteen-question survey. One hundred thirty-two partners (33.76 percent of 391) also commented on LHC’s preaching ministry. The results of the survey are as found in Table 1.

Table 1. Post-project partner survey

Survey Question (208 Responses)	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. The Bible is God’s Holy Word, and as such, is divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant.	—	—	—	5	203
2. God is sovereign.	—	—	—	2	206
3. God speaks to His people today through the preaching of His Word.	—	—	—	18	191
4. Expository Preaching is the best kind of preaching.	—	6	12	46	147
5. Preaching is of paramount importance for my church.	—	—	1	23	184
6. My pastor has a responsibility to preach the Word of God.	—	—	—	6	203
7. My pastor takes his responsibility to preach the Word of God seriously.	—	—	1	4	203
8. I have a responsibility to hear the preaching of the Word of God.	—	—	—	10	198
9. I have a responsibility to obey the Word of God.	—	—	—	7	201
10. My understanding of the importance of preaching has increased this year (2023).	2	8	15	58	126
11. In general, my church has better prioritized preaching this year (2023).	—	4	23	46	137
12. I believe my church benefits when preaching is prioritized.	—	1	3	29	175
13. I believe the other ministries of my church (Children’s, Teen, Young Adult, Men’s, Women’s, Missions/Outreach, etc.) benefit when the preaching of God’s Word in the main gathering is prioritized.	—	—	7	26	176
14. I believe that LifeHouse Church should remain committed to prioritize the preaching of God’s Word.	—	—	2	11	195

## **S.E.E.K. 2024 Ministry Planning Process**

Where I hoped to see a measurable return regarding the effectiveness of leading LHC to demonstrate a more significant commitment to expository preaching was through what is called the S.E.E.K. Process (see appendix 10). S.E.E.K. is a several-month-long process in which different ministry teams (i.e., Women's, Men's, Youth, Children's, Missions, Outreach, etc.) assemble a leadership team to pray for, formulate, and then submit a ministry plan and budget for the following year, in accordance with the guidelines given to them by the LHC elders. The goal of S.E.E.K. is for various ministries to submit Spirit-directed ministry plans aligned and in conjunction with the church as a whole.

The acronym S.E.E.K. stands for surrender, engage, embrace, and keep on seeking. Prioritize preaching was the first guideline the elders established for the various ministries, as they sought the Lord's leading for the future. This was reiterated while introducing and casting vision at the S.E.E.K. launch meeting. The time leading up to the process' implementation, through discipleship and the sermon series likely led the individual and corporate ministry plans of LHC to reflect a focus on preaching. This was the case.

### **Margin for Ministry Leaders**

On a few occasions, ministry leaders were questioned regarding team members' regular attendance in the main worship gathering. These leaders were unsure if all of their team members were participating in the main worship gathering. The ministry leaders, generally speaking, did not have enough resources and time to connect with their team members to assess their commitment to participating in the main worship gathering. In addition to expressing the expectation that ministry leaders model and regularly communicate the importance of prioritizing preaching to their team members, the elders shared the expectation that the leaders hold their team members accountable in that regard. Through S.E.E.K., the ministry leaders prayerfully formulated ministry plans

which allow them to better disciple and invest in their servant teams. With the implementation of the 2024 S.E.E.K. Ministry Plan for LHC, the ministry leaders have clarity regarding expectations for them to cast vision and lead their team members to prioritize preaching rather than serve at the expense of participating in the main worship gathering.

### **Fifth on the Fifth**

One challenge the youth leaders identified during the S.E.E.K. process was some students' struggle to transition from children's ministry. Although the children's ministry has always aimed to teach children the Word of God, the environment and methods are intentionally targeted to children. They are very different from the experience and ministry practices in the primary worship gathering. The children's leaders minister with energy and employ interactive activities with an age-specific curriculum. The challenge a twelve-year-old might face in a 40-minute sermon rather than a 15-minute interactive lesson is understandable.

LHC provides children's ministry opportunities through fifth grade during both services and encourages families to disciple their children. LHC also encourages parents to bring their children to the primary worship gathering with them as early as the children are able. It is always communicated and encouraged not to view the children's ministry opportunities as an alternative to the main worship gathering, but as supplemental. However, many families choose to attend the worship service while their children attend the children's ministries. In hopes of helping with this transition when fifth graders age out of children's ministry and begin to attend the main worship gathering, LHC plans to implement an initiative called Fifth on the Fifth. While some of the specific details of this initiative remain to be determined, it will entail inviting fifth graders to attend the primary worship gathering with their parents on the last week of the months that have five Sundays. Therefore, the fifth graders will experience the primary worship gathering

four or five times per year. The children’s ministry leaders will then engage in follow-up discussions, discipleship, and other activities like learning to take notes during the sermon and explaining communion and baptism. This aims to better prepare children to become a part of corporate worship and the larger faith community when they are older. As this initiative rolls out, it is possible families with younger children will take advantage of the opportunity as well.

### **Middle School Ministry**

LHC has traditionally offered supplemental gatherings for youth, sixth through twelfth grades during the 9:00 a.m. service. However, as a part of the 2024 S.E.E.K. Ministry Plan, this opportunity will only be available for middle schoolers, grades sixth through eighth. Regular opportunities and events for all grades will continue throughout the week and year. However, to better prepare high school students to remain active and committed to a church body when transitioning to college and adulthood, they will not be offered age-specific ministry on Sunday mornings. In addition, similarly to Fifth on the Fifth, the middle school ministry will not be available on fifth Sundays throughout the year to ensure the middle schoolers attend the main worship gatherings on those Sundays.

This initiative was necessary as many of the youth and their families view the age-specific Sunday morning opportunities as an alternative to the main worship gathering rather than a supplement despite efforts to discourage doing so. Although the youth tend to be more comfortable with their peers, it is essential to help them realize the importance of the preaching event and to “not neglect meeting together” (Heb 10:25).

### **Vacation Bible Fun**

One of the most fruitful outreach ministries LHC engages in yearly is Vacation Bible School, called Vacation Bible Fun at LHC. For the past few years, over six hundred children from the church and community have attended the week-long event, requiring hundreds of volunteers. Vacation Bible Fun demands much time, planning, and resources

to accomplish. It requires extensive participation from the church and is highly beneficial in Kingdom impact each year. In the past, because of all that Vacation Bible Fun requires, most church leaders and volunteers are exhausted and spent by the end of the week, leaving little energy for the following Sunday. Some partners chose to stay home the following Sunday.

The conversations and discipleship regarding preaching, has granted the leaders a better understanding of how important it is to gather on Sunday mornings ready, prepared, and excited to worship. During the S.E.E.K. process, the children's ministry leaders discussed and prayerfully sought ways to change how Vacation Bible Fun negatively impacted the following Sunday morning worship service. With the elders' affirmation, they decided to scale back Vacation Bible Fun where and when possible in 2024. Perhaps the most significant shift is eliminating an entire day from the event to encourage everyone to prioritize preaching and attend the primary service on Sunday morning. Rather than five days (Monday through Friday), the plan is four days (Monday through Thursday). They hope this change will require less but accomplish more in the end. The change will create space for the congregation and those who attend the event to rest and recover to prepare for gathering the following Sunday morning.

### **Scaling Back**

While prayerfully seeking the Lord's wisdom for the 2024 Ministry Plan, the elder team and ministry leaders agreed it was necessary to scale back all the events and activities that filled the calendar. This conviction aligns with Jesus's words to Martha in Luke 10:42 when she was "distracted with much serving." Jesus told her that her sister Mary, who was "sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching," had "chosen the good portion." LHC leaders realized that a full calendar does not facilitate a church's desire to prioritize preaching. The various activities and events were purposeful, sound, and even fruitful. However, the leaders now realize the importance of preaching and what is best.

This commitment to scale back the calendar in 2024 is not an effort to accomplish or labor less than in previous years. The congregation remains committed to working for the glory of God while awaiting his return. LHC desires to make the most of gospel opportunities, knowing they may not always be available. The church wants more than anything to remain faithful and ready, “dressed for action with our lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks” (Luke 12:35–36). This effort aims to scale back the frequency of the women’s, men’s, and LifeGroup ministry meetings and events. Traditionally, these ministries met twice a month. The women met on the first and third Saturday mornings of every month; the men met on the second and fourth. The LifeGroups traditionally met twice a month, on the second and fourth Sunday evenings. However, moving forward, these ministries plan to meet once rather than twice a month. In addition, the groups plan to be more intentional and resourceful with the monthly meetings. For example, the men’s ministry plans to provide breakfast and to facilitate more fellowship time and group discussion in their monthly meetings. In addition to better positioning the congregation to prioritize preaching, scaling back the calendar will create space to facilitate more small discipleship groups for men and women to meet more regularly.

### **Alignment**

Another issue the ministry leaders sought to address during the 2024 S.E.E.K. process was overall church alignment. LHC demonstrates a great deal of unity. However, rapid growth and lack of sufficient systems and organization have created need for significant alignment improvement. Improving communication and clarity is critical for facilitating better church-wide alignment. In addition, a specific spiritual discipline will be emphasized every month through preaching, beginning with an expository sermon. The sermon schedule, text, and topics are found in table 2.



Table 2. Spiritual disciplines sermon series schedule

Date	Biblical Text to Exposit	Topic
1/14/2024	1 Corinthians 9:24–27	Introduction to Spiritual Discipline
2/18/2024	James 1:19–27	Reading God’s Word Daily
3/10/2024	Luke 11:1–13	Prayer
4/14/2024	2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2	Evangelism and Discipleship
5/19/2024	Romans 11:33–12:2	Lifestyle Worship
6/9/2024	John 13:1–17	Serving Regularly (Employing Spiritual Gifts)
7/14/2024	James 3:1–12	Being Slow to Speak (Power of the Tongue)
8/11/2024	John 15:1–8	Resting/Abiding in the Lord
9/8/2024	Hebrews 10:19–25	The Gathering/Assembling
10/13/2024	1 Peter 4:1–11	Christian Fellowship (Unity/Loving One Another)
11/10/2024	2 Corinthians 9:6–15	Generosity/Giving Financially
12/8/2024	Galatians 5:13–25	Holiness (Practicing Purity)

Each month also will include a related verse the congregation will be charged to commit to memory. The various ministries will reinforce the importance and understanding of the specific disciplines through lessons and activities. For example, LifeGroups will have a curriculum diving deeper into the particular discipline and text while suggesting possible applications and discussion points.

### **Precise Calendar Planning**

During the S.E.E.K. process, as the different ministry teams considered past experiences with a heart to prioritize preaching and the Sunday morning worship gatherings, there were occasions where missing a Sunday gathering could be avoided through precise and intentional planning. For example, the same ten-day mission trip could require missing one Sunday at LHC rather than two if the leaders consider this when arranging the trip.

## Preaching Podcast

Although equipment still needs to be purchased and details worked out, one idea leaders hope to implement in the next year is a preaching podcast. A podcast will allow the congregation to engage in a different format. This could powerfully reinforce the importance of the preaching ministry at LHC.

## Planning Ahead

With the implementation of the S.E.E.K. process, a detailed sermon calendar for 2024 listing the passages of Scripture was provided to each ministry team to consider as they pray about the future. The various ministries can view the preaching calendar as they prepare for their meetings and events. The preaching calendar primarily follows a *lectio continua* plan through Matthew, including the monthly spiritual discipline topics from the 2024 S.E.E.K. Ministry Plan to facilitate better church-wide alignment. While this preaching calendar is tentative and subject to change, it will guide and clarify church planning throughout the year.

Table 3. 2024 detailed sermon/Scripture calendar

Date	Scripture	Date	Scripture	Date	Scripture
1/7/2024	Luke 1:26–38	5/12/2024	Matt 14:13–21	9/15/2024	Matt 19:1–15
1/14/2024	1 Cor 9:24–27	5/19/2024	Rom 11:33–12:2	9/22/2024	Matt 19:16–30
1/21/2024	Matt 11:1–19	5/26/2024	Matt 14:22–36	9/29/2024	Matt 20:1–16
1/28/2024	Matt 11:20–30	6/2/2024	Matt 15:1–20	10/6/2024	Matt 20:17–34
2/4/2024	Matt 12:1–14	6/9/2024	John 13:1–17	10/13/2024	1 Peter 4:1–11
2/11/2024	Matt 12:15–21	6/16/2024	Matt 15:21–31	10/20/2024	Matt 21:1–11
2/18/2024	James 1:19–27	6/23/2024	Matt 15:32–39	10/27/2024	Matt 21:12–22
2/25/2024	Matt 12:22–37	6/30/2024	Matt 16:1–12	11/3/2024	Matt 21:23–32
3/3/2024	Matt 12:38–42	7/7/2024	Matt 16:13–20	11/10/2024	2 Cor 9:6–15
3/10/2024	Luke 11:1–13	7/14/2024	James 3:1–12	11/17/2024	Matt 22:1–14
3/17/2024	Matt 12:43–50	7/21/2024	Matt 16:21–28	11/24/2024	Matt 22:15–33
3/24/2024	Matt 13:1–23	7/28/2024	Matt 17:1–13	12/1/2024	Matt 22:34–46
3/31/2024	John 20:1–18	8/4/2024	Matt 17:14–27	12/8/2024	Gal 5:13–25
4/7/2024	Matt 13:24–43	8/11/2024	John 15:1–8	12/15/2024	Matt 1:18–25

Date	Scripture	Date	Scripture	Date	Scripture
4/14/2024	2 Cor 5:11–6:2	8/18/2024	Matt 18:1–14	12/22/2024	Luke 2:1–21
4/21/2024	Matt 13:44–52	8/25/2024	Matt 18:15–20	12/29/2024	Matt 2:1–12
4/28/2024	Matt 13:53–58	9/1/2024	Matt 18:21–35	—	—
5/5/2024	Matt 14:1–12	9/8/2024	Heb 10:19–25	—	—

### **Conclusion**

Prioritizing preaching as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth among the body of believers at LHC is a holistic endeavor. The leadership team is confident God is calling the church further into this commitment. There are already identifiable fruits of this faithfulness as God blesses conversations, decisions, and growth in mature believers and new converts as the body continues to grow.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project's aim to better prioritize preaching at LHC was the fruit of prayer, the leading of the Spirit of God, and much effort. This final chapter includes evaluations of the project's specific purpose and goals. Also included are examinations of the project's strengths and weaknesses, what could be done differently, and theological and personal reflections of how this project impacted LHC and the author.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project flows from an abiding desire to honor and obey the Lord in stewarding well the responsibility of shepherding and caring for the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). Churches today employ many strategies to encourage unity and vitality. While other methods may not be unbiblical and may be fruitful, the biblical record specifically prescribes preaching as the best method for encouraging spiritual growth.

Before this project's implementation, many at LHC would have asserted that preaching was already a priority, which may have been the case. I would have testified preaching was a priority. However, it did not align with my actions before this project's implementation. Nevertheless, this project was fruitful because LHC implemented strategic changes committed to preaching's priority as a result. The LHC elders, staff, and ministry leaders and the partners survey affirm this commitment. Of the 200 partners who participated in the survey, 87.4 percent indicated they strongly agree or agree LHC has better prioritized preaching in 2023 than in prior years. Of the two percent ( four respondents) who disagreed, two expressed they did so because they believed the church has always prioritized preaching.

Prioritizing preaching is the best strategy for encouraging spiritual growth, specifically toward greater unity, more resilient faith, more substantial commitment to evangelism, and more intentional discipleship of believers for the mission of Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals preaching as a means by which local churches can hope to encourage these God-glorifying characteristics. However, these qualities are Spirit-birthed and maintained within the sovereign grace of God.

A local church's spiritual growth and vitality can be evidenced but is impossible to quantify or measure. Tangible growth may not be evident when the pastor is wholeheartedly obedient and the congregation champions the priority of preaching. Often, the fruit of prioritizing preaching is intangible. Seeds may be sown faithfully for years before the Lord brings any measurable growth. Perhaps it is God's purpose to bring about a benefit from faithful preaching not immediately perceptible to the preacher or congregation. For example, the preaching ministry of John MacArthur and Grace Community Church had profound influence long before this author considered a call to pastoral ministry and preaching. After finding a John MacArthur sermon online, never having had any prior exposure or awareness of his ministry, it began a long-time exposure to his example despite never attending his church or hearing him in person. In addition, it is doubtful Charles Spurgeon could have fathomed the ways the Lord still uses many of the sermons he preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle years ago.

While I contend the overall purpose of this project was met, preaching's priority at LHC must be protected and maintained. History reveals many examples of churches that once properly prioritized preaching but were sidetracked for various reasons. It is possible churches bustling with a great deal of activity and influence, while appearing alive and thriving, may be weak and shallow. It may be possible for those churches to be dead and not true churches at all. At the same time, small, seemingly insignificant churches in obscurity may be pleasing to Jesus Christ, functioning faithfully and according to his perfect design and plan for them in glorious but not apparent ways.

Although LHC is a healthier body of believers because it now further prioritizes preaching, there is still room for growth. Nevertheless, my love for LHC and gratitude for what the Lord has done cannot be expressed in words. Even though the project has officially ended, its purpose is only beginning. I am more committed than ever to remaining faithful to the calling of God and his Word for the church. In these turbulent times, there is no greater calling in which to engage than what God has already mandated. LHC also has expressed a desire to remain committed to prioritize preaching God's Word. The respondents of the survey indicated unanimous affirmation of this conviction.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

#### **Goal 1: Further Prioritize Preaching at LHC**

The first goal of this project was to lead the elders, staff, and ministry leadership teams in demonstrating a more significant commitment to preaching's priority. Because the ministry leaders of LHC were already committed to Scripture and its authority. This goal was a natural progression. Many leaders already were committed to preaching's priority. Therefore, only putting forth a concerted effort was necessary. This goal was met primarily through proper planning rather than convincing. While I did cast vision, this goal simply rested upon the project's implementation. Elders, staff, and leadership subsequently supported and sustained it without reservation. The survey revealed that the LHC partners are aligned in their beliefs regarding the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the paramount importance of preaching for the local church. The survey respondents unanimously affirmed the three statements assessing these points. Six differed regarding expository preaching as the best type of preaching, but the overwhelming majority recognized the biblical basis for expository preaching.

The survey also revealed the partner respondents unanimously affirmed their belief that I take the responsibility to preach God's Word very seriously. The overwhelming support for rearranging my work schedule, responsibilities, and employing disciplines for prioritizing preaching is appreciated. The adjustments were initially challenging, but church leadership affirmed devotion to putting things in order. I can now devote the beginning of each week to sermon preparation. However, it is necessary to maintain flexibility as necessitated by emergencies, holidays, or other occasions.

A few partners did not agree with some of the changes. When families with children and middle school students learned the ministries offered on Sunday mornings were supplemental and not alternatives to the main worship gathering, one family questioned this decision and eventually left the church. LHC leadership knew encouraging children to attend the services would be challenging and likely mean dealing with more distractions during the services. There was effort to lead and disciple families through this change. While not intended to be enforced, the departing family seemed to receive the communication as legalistic and controlling. Likely, this was not the ultimate reason the family left LHC. However, the family did not offer an alternative explanation for their departure, and the leaders remain convicted it is God's calling for LHC to proceed in efforts to prioritizing preaching.

The intentional efforts to plan and communicate the sermon calendar and provide additional resources helped the congregation prepare for the preaching. It has been fruitful in emphasizing the importance of the preaching event. Overall, accomplishing this goal has been a unifying endeavor for LHC.

## **Goal 2: Develop and Preach a Sermon Series on the Importance of Preaching**

The second goal of this project was to develop and preach an eight-week sermon series emphasizing the role and importance of preaching for a local church.

Accompanying discipleship material and small group curriculum were provided throughout the series. The initial plan was six weeks in duration. However, I was providentially at Exodus 19 leading up to the week of the launch of the sermon series. It was clear that sermon needed to be included in the series. After prayerful consideration of all the biblical texts promoting preaching's priority for the local church, it was difficult to limit the series of passages to six. One was added and then another to expand the series to eight sermons. Each of the eight passages, including Exodus 19, offered a unique and necessary aspect to the overall goal of preaching a series of sermons which communicated preaching's importance for the local church.

The series may have felt redundant to those with less affinity for the canon of Scripture. However, offering sermons with texts from various genres and both Testaments, was nothing of the sort. The congregation gave encouragement and supportive feedback throughout the sermon series. The sermon from Nehemiah 8 seemed to be the most impactful. LHC's elders, staff, and ministry leaders affirmed the sermon series was well-received and fruitful toward accomplishing the project's overall purpose.

This sermon series was the overflow of all the reading, studying, and praying implemented leading up to its preaching. It was a rewarding endeavor. The impact on myself, as the preacher, was perhaps the most significant.

Another outcome connected with this goal was launching the Men2Ministry discipleship group. This group comprises men who expressed a vocational call to pastor and preach. Since the group's inception, a few have enrolled and begun seminary classes at SBTS. I anticipate experiencing continued growth with these men.

### **Goal 3: Assess and Implement Strategic Ministry Efforts to Further Prioritize Preaching**

The project's third goal was to assess the impact of the sermon series and the initial implementation of efforts to better prioritize preaching on the partners of LHC.



The survey attempted to quantify the church's general understanding of and commitment to faithful stewardship of preaching as the primary vehicle for inspiring church-wide sanctification, fully equipping believers for the mission of Jesus Christ. Before the survey's implementation, the goal was to receive at least 100 responses. However, more than 200, about 50 percent of LHC's overall partnership, participated in the survey.

The results of the survey were highly favorable. They revealed an overwhelming affirmation regarding preaching's importance for a local church. While assessing the virtually unanimous responses, it is necessary to acknowledge the likelihood some partners responded how they thought was expected or with bias due to their close personal relationship with me. There may have been more disparity in the survey if distributed to all who attend LHC services rather than partners only.

#### **Goal 4: Develop and Implement a Church-Wide Ministry Plan That Further Prioritizes Preaching**

The fourth and final goal of the project was to lead in the development and implementation of a 2024 church-wide ministry plan that clearly demonstrates a commitment to prioritizing preaching. The elder team approved a church-wide plan for the congregation with affirmation. The challenge will be maintaining the commitments and changes outlined in the plan. However, the survey revealed a unanimous conviction that LHC remains committed to preaching's priority. As the 2024 LHC S.E.E.K. plan is engaged and additional changes implemented over the next year, significant growth and impact in God-guided ministry is anticipated.

#### **Strengths of the Project**

The greatest strength of this project was its biblical basis. While the initial conviction came about through prayer, study of Scripture revealed the church needed to better prioritize preaching. LHC already was committed to the authority of Scripture; there was no need for debate. Any pushback or hesitation throughout the project

implementation came from those I consider to be spiritually immature or, potentially, unconverted.

The project was an aligning experience for our church. LHC grew quickly after planting twelve years ago, and many ministries were operating somewhat independently and with narrow focus. However, the project strengthened church-wide emphasis and strategically aligned hearts.

Another strength of this project was its direct correlation with the calling and primary responsibilities of the Lead Pastor of LHC. The project and ongoing pastoral work were never in conflict nor hindered the other. Everything was related and complementary. The various books read, relationships garnered, and discussions engaged in, all connected to the role of a pastor and my responsibility to preach. The project directly benefited LHC and me, as its Lead Pastor.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One weakness of this project was the challenge of measuring spiritual results in tangible ways. While there are signs the project was impactful, the potential benefits cannot be fully quantified. Another weakness was there was no baseline to the project. Before the project's implementation, many discussions occurred, prayers were prayed, and efforts were initiated to prioritize preaching at LHC. While these activities made LHC more receptive to the project's accomplishments, it created even more challenges to quantifying and assessing a specific, quantifiable change.

Another weakness of the project was the overall positive bias of responses. Because our partners generally love their pastor, it is possible that affinity affected their responses to some degree. Finally, as LHC's Lead Pastor, it was challenging to navigate the demands of the pastoral position while not neglecting family responsibilities or meeting the deadlines and implementing the project's goals and purpose. During the

duration of the project, major changes, both positive and challenging, occurred within my family, as well as within the church and the larger community.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

There are no significant changes I would have made other than the possible bias the survey revealed. A pre- and post-sermon series survey to compare the responses would have been beneficial. However, the most significant benefit of this project was its pre-planning and implementing strategy. Another helpful change would have been to utilize qualified partners to evaluate each of the series' sermons in real time and who could comment on the possible influence on the project's purpose.

It took a significant amount of time to implement this project. However, there was always a plan to preach a sermon series. Initially, the project was contemplated as maintaining or facilitating unity through preaching; unity is ultimately what only the Spirit can accomplish. As Jesus clarifies in John 3:8, the Spirit, like the wind, blows where he wishes.

### **Theological Reflections**

Although preaching should be prioritized, it is not everything. While God does speak through preaching, preaching is not the only way God speaks and works. Also, there are many fruitful endeavors to facilitate spiritual growth aside from preaching. Small groups, discipleship relationships, mission trips, and mercy ministry are other activities appropriate for a church. However, those activities should not be engaged in at the expense of prioritizing preaching.

### **Personal Reflections**

I am so thankful to be nearing the completion of this journey. While it has required much, it has been a worthy investment. The project has required faith and stretched me in significant ways. It has been a very sanctifying experience.

LHC is positioned to navigate and endure the spiritual obstacles and opposition Jesus predicted. I feel encouraged and more resolved than ever to obediently feed the flock entrusted to me for the glory of God while leading in the prioritization of preaching. I feel blessed by the opportunity and great sense of accomplishment for completing it.

### **Conclusion**

LHC must prioritize preaching to prevail against the gates of hell and stand firm through the enemy's schemes until Christ's return. There is no comparable alternative nourishment for a church than faithful, expository preaching of God's Word. This project has positioned LHC to continue prioritizing what it must. I pray the impact and legacy of this project will be an enduring preaching ministry.

APPENDIX 1  
SERMON OUTLINES

8 Week Sermon Series: **Prioritizing Preaching**

**Sermon 1: Exodus 19: The Meeting at the Mountain**

Video Link of Exodus 19 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/eUwYU4T3G-c>)

- A promised commitment to heed God’s voice. vs. 1–8
- A prepared congregation to heed God’s voice. vs. 9–17
- A powerful confirmation to fear God’s voice. vs 18–25

**Sermon 2: Deuteronomy 18:15–22: Listen Up!**

Video Link to Deuteronomy 18:15–22 Sermon : (<https://youtu.be/pTeNOODvLt>)

- God speaks through expository preaching!
  - You have the opportunity to listen to him! vs. 15–18
  - You have the responsibility to listen to him! vs. 19–20
  - You have the necessity to listen to him! vs. 21–22

**Sermon 3: Nehemiah 8:1–12: God’s Powerful Protection**

Video Link to Nehemiah 8:1–12 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/pk2D1Sb--N8>)

- The people of God are powerfully protected when . . .
  - Their priority is the Word of God. vs. 1–3
  - Their posture is to worship God. vs. 4–6
  - Their purpose is to walk with God. 7–8
- God’s powerful protection vs. 9–12

#### **Sermon 4: John 21:15–19 Do You Love Jesus?**

Video Link of John 21:15–19 Sermon ([https://youtu.be/EOKwka3\\_0Cs](https://youtu.be/EOKwka3_0Cs))

- The mission of Jesus Christ is continued. vs. 15
- The motivation of Jesus Christ is conveyed. vs. 16–17
- The model of Jesus Christ is commanded. vs. 18–19

#### **Sermon 5: Romans 10:8–17: Preaching is Beautiful!**

Video Link of Romans 10:8–17 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/bS4p8oPujk0>)

- Preaching is Beautiful! vs. 15b
  - You are near God’s Word through preaching! vs. 8–13
  - You can hear God’s Word through preaching! vs 14–15
  - You can heed God’s Word through preaching! vs. 15–17

#### **Sermon 6: Acts 20:17–28: A Model Ministry Mindset**

Video Link of Acts 20:17–28 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/elbj8jLse-E>)

- A Model Ministry Mindset involves . . .
  - vs. 17
  - great commitment to God’s cause. vs. 18–24
    - (Will you be committed to God’s Cause?)
  - great care for God’s church. vs 25–31
    - (Will you care for God’s church?)
  - great confidence in God’s completion. vs 32–35
    - (Will you be confident in God’s completion?)
  - vs. 36–38

#### **Sermon 7: 3/19/23 2 Timothy 4:1–8: Preach the Word!**

Video Link of 2 Timothy 4:1–8 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/-Wc-EhdUli8>)

- Preach the Word!
  - The sacred responsibility of preaching the Word. vs. 1–2
  - The sad reality for many people in our world. vs 3–4
  - The sure reward for persevering in your work. vs. 5–8

## **Sermon 8: 3/26/23 Ephesians 4:11–16: The Prevailing Plan of Jesus for His Church**

Video Link of Ephesians 4:11–16 Sermon (<https://youtu.be/81E6HeIkdOc>)

- Jesus is Building His Church!
  - Jesus provides to fully equip us for the work of ministry. vs. 11–12
  - Jesus provides to fully establish all of us in the faith and knowledge of him. vs. 13–14
  - Jesus provides to fully engage every one of us in his life and in his love. vs. 15–16

APPENDIX 2  
SERMON 1 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Exodus  
February 5, 2023

Exodus

Exodus 19

Please remain standing and turn in your Bibles to Exodus, chapter 19. Just to remind you, church, why we stand. It's not in a ritualistic way and not in a rote way, but it's really to communicate reverence for God's Holy Word, so let's read together the entire chapter of Exodus, chapter 19. Moses wrote recording the history of Israel but more importantly continuing to reveal God. That's what Exodus is all about (revealing God). Moses wrote:

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do.' And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.'

When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their



garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”

“And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.”

So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.”

And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.

O, Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word today? O, Lord, would you give us, your people, ears to hear and eyes to see? Even more than that, Lord, give us faith to respond in obedience to that which you speak today through your Holy Word, the preaching and proclaiming of your Holy Word. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Please be seated. In this passage, the three things I want to highlight. There are so many things, and literally I’m going to have to do my best to restrain myself and not get carried away, because there is so much, but in summary, I’d like for you to see this passage divided up in three parts. The first is a *promised commitment to heed the Word of*

*God. Then, we see a prepared congregation to hear the voice of God. Lastly, we see a powerful confirmation to fear the voice of God.*

This is a momentous moment at the mountain for Israel. Israel had known about God. They had believed in God. God parted the waters for them. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. They had no doubt that all the earth belonged to God or to Yahweh. They knew about him, but they did not yet know him.

What we see in Exodus 19 is the people of God encountering the voice of God in a way that was undeniable and in a way that was unforgettable. It was a very profound moment in the history of Israel, and what I want you to understand today, brothers and sisters, is that what is recorded here in Exodus 19 is a very profound moment that has very profound implications upon us today.

This encounter points forward to what we're doing at this moment and to the preaching of the Word of God to the assembled congregation, and one of the things I've really been stirred to in this year as I continue to pray as the lead pastor and shepherd called by God to lead this congregation is how to continue making disciples and how to do our best to be ready for when Jesus returns and to prevent casualties and rather prepare champions to stand firm in these dark times.

I've shared with many of you this past year and last year that we're about to celebrate our eleventh anniversary, but when we were celebrating our tenth anniversary. . . . Anniversaries are a time to reflect and look back and consider all of the things you've been through and you're experiencing, and as you look forward, to maybe remember to hold fast to certain things or change certain things.

One of the things that just really burdened my heart as we looked at pictures over the years was how some people who were here who were front and center and a part of everything are nowhere to be found. For many of those people, there are good reasons like they got a job transfer or they were only here in Delaware for a certain amount of

time and they went back to where they had been before they actually came to Delaware, but many of those people unfortunately are casualties, and I'm burdened about that, so what can we do?

There are a million things we could do. There are a million strategies and programs we can participate in, but what the Lord has really called me to do and what the Lord is stirring my heart and, I believe, our church to do is to really prioritize preaching. Paul charged Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, when he was about to die. He was passing the torch of ministry to his son in the faith.

If you remember, he could have charged Timothy to do a lot of things, but he solemnly charged him before God specifically to preach the Word in season and out of season, to exhort, rebuke, and admonish. "Don't hold back in any way, shape, or form, Timothy. Preach the Word. People need the Word of God, and they need you to proclaim it as a pastor and as a shepherd to them when they are assembled together." What we see here first is . . .

1. *A promised commitment to heed the Word of God.* We see a promised commitment by the people of Israel as they gathered there at the foot of the mountain waiting to encounter God. God had invited them to encounter him there at the mountain, and they showed up, all of them together. Beforehand they promised to commit to heed the voice of God, and they were prepared.

They didn't just show up in a flippant manner. They didn't just meander in when they were ready on their time if they felt like it. No. Everybody (the entire congregation) is at the foot of the mountain. They were consecrated. They had prepared. For three days they had washed their garments.

They were prepared to encounter God and to hear the voice of God, and we see that it was God. It wasn't just Moses giving what he thought or his two cents, but there is a powerful confirmation that it was God's voice they were hearing, and they were to fear

God's voice, for God is holy. There was nothing casual about this encounter at all. There was nothing flippant or arbitrary about this encounter. There was intentionality, there was instruction, and there was humility as the people of God came together.

Brothers and sisters, as we prepare to dig into this, I just want you to consider this morning. There are differences. This is 2,000 years ago under the old covenant, and we are under the new covenant today through Jesus Christ. Really, we have so much more opportunity to encounter God than they ever did, but I want you to consider this morning why you're here today and how you have come today. Just search your own heart.

Many of us hear the stories about the families that are arguing all of the way here, and maybe you were in bed just thinking, "Should I go? Should I not go?" and maybe, "Why not go?" but I really want the Spirit of God to give you ears to hear today and to see how Israel gathered to hear the voice of God and how it may apply to your life today and, perhaps, your life tomorrow and in the days ahead.

In this first section in verses 1 through 8, I specifically see a promised commitment to heed the voice of God. God reminds them who he was and what he had done for them. Really, that was the reason. Before God had even spoken and specifically given them the details on what they should do and where they should go, they committed. They said, "Yes." Their yes was on the table.

I've shared before about many years ago a very profound moment in my own life specifically at Hampton Roads, Virginia. I remember going to hear an evangelist preach for the first time. In the introduction of his sermon, he actually began with a moment of prayer and specifically invited us.

He said, "Listen. I have done my best to pray. I have done my best to prepare. I have studied for this moment." He said, "It is my heart to preach not my word but God's Holy Word, to exposit the Scriptures." He said, "Who here would be willing to say,

‘Yes,’ right now if God were to speak to him or to her? If God were to allow someone to hear his voice today to give specific instruction to someone today, who here would say, ‘Yes,’ and put their yes on the table right now and surrender now and commit now to whatever God would speak?”

As I considered what he was saying. . . . Yeah. I mean, if we believe God’s Word is true. . . . This guy seemed very sincere. He seemed very legit. If I discerned as he was preaching the sermon that he wasn’t and he was preaching something other than God’s Word, I wouldn’t respond to that, but I said, “Yeah. Lord, if you speak, here I am. Send me. Lord, I will do that which you tell me to do. If you show me and if you reveal yourself to me in any way, I will respond in obedience. I commit to do that now by faith,” and I did.

Even before I heard anything, it was a very emotional time in my heart, because it was a time of surrender where I had to let go of pride. So often in our culture we want to hear God speak. We want to know what God has to say, but when we hear that preached, when we see that, and when we read that, we then consider whether or not we want to obey it or not.

That’s not appropriate. If we really believe God is who he says he is and that his Word is true and if we believe what we claim to believe, then our yes should be on the table. Is your yes on the table? Verse 1: **“On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt . . .”**

This is basically just saying on the third new moon of the third month after the people had gone out of Egypt. Actually, if you compute, there are some translation challenges here, but this is actually 50 days, and very profoundly, not by coincidence in any way, this is 50 days after that Passover where they killed the lamb and put the blood on their doorpost so the angel of death would pass over from them and everyone in their

house was safe when all the firstborn of Egypt died (every animal and even the Pharaoh's son).

This was 50 days after that event, and if you do the math, 50 days after the Passover of the new covenant when Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples was when the church was born, when the Spirit of God fell. That's not coincidence. It's very intentional. Fifty days after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day.

Moses wants everyone to know this is a very specific time. There is nothing arbitrary about this. They are very intentional. On that day when the calculation is 50 days. Well, this is actually 47 days, because we'll see three days transpire throughout this passage, so 47 days after they came out of Egypt, **“they came into the wilderness of Sinai.”**

Again, this wasn't a direct route to the Promised Land. God had promised that land flowing with milk and honey, but God did not take them that direct route. We'll see why specifically in a moment. Not only was he preparing them and sanctifying them for even greater reason, but **“on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.”**

Verse 2: **“They set out from Rephidim”** where they had that battle and God delivered them from the Amalekites. **“and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness.”** The people of God are encamped there. They set up their tents there. They were going to hang out there in the wilderness.

**“There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God.”** I don't know if you remember. This is a full-circle moment for Moses. Back in Exodus, chapter 3, verse 12, when God commissioned and called Moses to go back to Egypt to deliver his people out of Egypt, Moses said, “You have the wrong guy. Who am I, Lord, to do that?” God said, “No. I will be with you.”

If you remember in Exodus, chapter 3, verse 12, he said, **“and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve.”** That’s another word for worship. Serving and worship go hand in hand: **“you shall serve God on this mountain.”** That’s exactly where they are in Exodus, chapter 19. We saw them there in Exodus, chapter 18, as well, so this is not necessarily a chronological moment, but they’re at the same place that promise is fulfilled.

Israel encamped before the mountain, and Moses went up to God. **“The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel.’”** This is like a very formal statement. **“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel.”** It’s the same people. God is telling them. This is like me talking to my children and saying their full name and their middle name, not their nickname. This is a very formal.

He’s about to say, “I want you to say something very intentional to my people, Moses. Tell the people of Israel.” This is personal. “You yourselves . . .” He’s reminding them. “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians.” It’s like, “You saw with your own eyes. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You didn’t do anything to the Egyptians. I did it to the Egyptians. You saw me deliver you. You saw me destroy them, setting you free.”

He said, **“and how I bore you on eagles’ wings.”** If you can picture an eagle flying, they soar. They glide on the wind. He carried them. “You saw how I carried you on eagles’ wings out of slavery. I carried you out. I parted the waters for you so you could walk through on dry ground.” They didn’t work and do all of this effort. The Lord literally carried them out of slavery.

**“And brought you to myself.”** That’s what this was all about. This was about relationship. Their salvation was about relationship. Right? The same is true for us. God

doesn't just deliver us from slavery of sin and then set us on our merry way. No. We're adopted into his family. We become a part of his family. It's about relationship, and that's what is being communicated here to the people of Israel.

“You yourselves have seen. You know who I am. You know now that there is none like me in all the earth. You know that all the earth belongs to me. It doesn't belong to the Egyptians even though they claim they owned a lot of things and they were a lot of things. I shut them down! You saw how I destroyed. You saw what I did in Egypt.

Think about Rephidim and Marah and Meribah and all of those things and how I provided for you manna morning by morning. You've seen the glory of the Lord. You know that I am real, that I'm good, and that I love you. In bringing you here to this mountain, I brought you to myself, because I want you to not just know about me; I want you to know me.”

Brothers and sisters, when you consider your salvation, consider who God is to you and what he has done for you. He has brought you to himself, almighty God. Who are we that he is even mindful of us? He has brought us to himself in salvation and adopted us. He literally placed us into his family.

This is the same language of basically Ephesians, chapter 1, when he talks about how we are chosen. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. There is nothing arbitrary, coincidental, or happenstance about that, that we should be holy and blameless before him. We have redemption. We have obtained an inheritance. I mean, we are a part of the family of God when we are saved.

Remember, the exodus and their deliverance from slavery in Egypt points forward to our salvation from sin and sinfulness. He has brought us through Christ unto himself, and it's only through Christ. Remember, Jesus says in John 14:6, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**



Through Christ we are part of the family of God. He brings us into himself. That's what he did for Israel. It was about relationship. He wasn't just this far removed, arms stretched out king who couldn't care less about his people. No. They were a part of his family, and he further reinforces that.

He was in covenant with them. He had made a covenant with their patriarchal father, Abraham, in the Abrahamic covenant, and it was unconditional. God had made promises that weren't based upon who they were but were based upon who God was, and God had promised them a land, and God had promised them descendants, and God had promised them blessings and even redemption.

That redemption is fulfilled in the son of Abraham, which was Jesus Christ. He promised them all of those things, but here we're about to see a conditional covenant. It's an, "If you do this," covenant connected to that unconditional Abrahamic covenant. He says, "**Now therefore.**" "In light of who I am and who you have found me to be and seen me bringing you to myself and delivering you from slavery and bringing you here to this mountain," the Lord said, "Tell these things to the people."

**"If you will indeed obey my voice . . . ."** The Hebrew word there for voice is my message or my Word. **"If you will indeed obey my [word] and keep my covenant . . . ."** That is, to be obedient or heed. **"You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine."** "All the earth is my possession. All the peoples are my possession, but you shall be my treasured possession (my special possession)."

In verse 6, **"and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** The Lord said to Moses, "These are the very words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." There is this communication. "I want you to speak word for word these words to the people of Israel (my people). I want them to hear my message, Moses."

If you remember, in thinking about the priority and talking about the priority of preaching, in Exodus 18, when Moses was overwhelmed and they appointed the leaders

there and they divided the people up into thousands because Moses was just overwhelmed by all of the needs and all of the problems represented by all of those people, Jethro gave him advice to do that.

He said specifically, “Moses, the one thing you are going to do. . . . You’re not going to be distracted by these other important things that you’re going to appoint other people to do, but you are appointed by God to do this. You shall warn them, the people, about the statutes and the laws of God to make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.”

That’s what this is reinforcing here. God is telling them. They need to know what they should do and how they should walk. In other words, how they should live their lives and not just take a stroll around the block but how they should walk day in and day out. “They need to know my Word and my message. They need to hear and obey my voice. This is important. They will be my treasured possession.”

Listen. This is not necessarily as much about a title as much as it is about an experience. They were already under the Abrahamic covenant, which was unconditional, but this is the Mosaic covenant that has conditions. “I’m going to tell you what you need to do so you can experience the abundant life that I have for you and so you can experience the blessings of walking in fellowship with me just like Adam and Eve did back in the garden of Eden before sin even entered the picture. Sin messed everything up, but it’s so you can be my treasured possession and a kingdom of priests.”

They understand the priests were the only ones allowed so far when it came to the worship, but they’re going to be a kingdom of priests. “Everyone not just a special chosen few can come, but the kingdom . . . all of you . . . can come. All of you can share the gospel. All of you can serve me. All of you can shine the light of Christ. You shall be a holy nation set apart for me. From among everyone, people shall see you, and they will know you are different. My blessings are upon you. You’ll be blessed to be a blessing.”

He says, “These are the words.” One thing I want you to consider. Before we do that, verse 7: **“So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them.”** Literally, placed before them. He didn’t sugarcoat anything. He placed it before their faces. That’s the literal translation. He laid it all down.

This is why expository preaching is so important. He laid it all down. He set before them the voice of God and the message of God. **“All these words that the LORD had commanded him.”** Verse 8 is beautiful. Remember, a promised commitment to heed the voice of God. Before the people of God even heard the specifics of that voice and what that message or word was, they all said, “Yes.”

They knew God was good. He had delivered them from slavery. They knew God was good. He graciously carried them and bore them on eagles’ wings and brought them to himself, not to enslave them again. No, because he wanted the best for them so they could be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation set apart from everyone in the whole earth.

Because they understood that, verse 8: **“All the people answered together.”** So often within our world we have such an individualized idea about Christianity. I talk about the importance. Here we have a burden. I have a burden for the church to be the church like we see in Acts, chapter 2, where everyone is bearing one another’s burdens.

I talked about it last week, how there was connection and unity and no one had need because everyone loved one another so much in tangible ways. Just like we talked about Gary Heil, the whole church did that, and there is this corporate identity. They were called out of the world but also together in Christ. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*.

These people answered together. Men, women, and children (all of them) answered together **“and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do.’”** It’s like, “We’re in for all of it. Our yes is on the table right now.” In response to what God had

invited them to do in this conditional covenant, they humbly promised to heed or to obey the voice of God.

Again, consider why you have come today and how you have come today. I want to encourage you. If you didn't come today, come next Sunday with your yes on the table. Come in light of and aware of the community of faith that we should be and the gathering and the assembly that we are to be together so that we can all proclaim and declare the truths of God together.

We say, "Yes," to stand firm together so that we can endure. If we're in Revelation. . . . All through the book of Revelation and that series we talked about the need for Christian community and how we can encourage one another all the more as the day draws near fanning the flames and the gifts God has given to each of us and lock arm-in-arm and fulfill the purpose God has called us to fulfill.

How do you come? I encourage you to come with your yes on the table with the idea to not just be this isolated individual who just sits whether it's beside someone but in your heart isolated. No. Come together to gather with your family in Christ. We are called together. We see this undeniable promised commitment to heed the voice of God.

Again, because of who God is and what he's done, we see that all throughout the New Testament. In Romans 12:1, in light of who God is and what he has done, Paul says, "**I urge you . . . to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.**" Hold nothing back. Be all in. How have you come? Are you prepared and consecrated? The next thing we see is . . .

2. *An undeniably prepared congregation.* It's a ready congregation to hear the voice of God. Oftentimes, we hear our worship pastor, Rob, say, "Bring your worship." That's what this is talking about. Don't come without expectations of doing anything. You just ride the wave. No. Come prepared. Pray. Perhaps read the passage you know is

going to be preached so that you can maybe be even more familiar. Perhaps even study it. Dig into it before you even come. Come prepared.

We see the prepared congregation in here when Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, that they were all in, this is what we see. **“the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.’”** There are two days added to the 47, **“and let them wash their garments and be ready.”**

Again, they’re not just going to stroll in flippantly. Listen. I don’t want to get legalistic about this. Some people could read this verse and think everybody has to dress up. No. There is this idea of, “Come as you are.” I’m really talking about the heart when I’m talking about being consecrated and prepared. Here it was about the outer. Now, it’s about the heart when the Lord said to Moses and he knew they were humbly willing and when their yes was on the table.

He said, **“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day.”** On day 50 or the third day **“the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai.”** Yahweh, the God who had parted the waters for them...

Remember, God had brought them to himself. He didn’t want them to just know about him. He wanted them to know him in an undeniable way. He wanted them to encounter him, so he will come down. He said he promised he would on Mount Sinai **“in the sight of all the people.”** They wouldn’t have to take Moses’ word for it. They would be able to see for themselves.

He says in verse 12, **“And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it.’”** God is a holy God, and he’s dangerous. He’s a consuming fire, so he’s saying, **“And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to . . . touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.’”**

If they do that, don't go running after them. Verse 13: **“No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man.”** Because this is holy ground. **“When the trumpet sounds a long blast . . . .”** “That’s the time. That’s me summoning them.” **“They shall come up to the mountain.”** “Specifically, to meet me and to hear my voice and to heed my voice.”

Verse 14: **“So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people.”** He prepared them and set them apart. They all washed their garments, and they were ready. **“And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.’”** This is really pointing to purity.

Be pure. Don't just go sin. Should we sin so that grace may abound? No! Be ready. Know that you are going to meet a holy, righteous God. You don't just wander into his presence. You come through Christ today, but they were to wash their garments and to cleanse themselves and be ready to worship, to hear, and to heed.

Then, in verse 16, **“On the morning of the third day.”** This is day 50. Again, think about Pentecost in Acts, chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit of God fell. All of those believers were gathered in that upper room praying. They didn't know what was going to happen, but God showed up on day 50. The Holy Spirit fell in an undeniable way. That's what is taking place in verse 16.

**“There were thunders and lightnings.”** There were undeniable, arresting sounds and profound, powerful sounds. **“On the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp.”** It was not just the leaders and not just a select few. He brought everybody, all of the people, out of the camp **“to meet God.”** God Almighty, Creator, and sustainer of the universe, their deliverer, their provider.

**“To meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.”** They didn't press snooze on the thunder and the lightning like we do on our alarm clocks. They

didn't lie there in bed and consider, "Maybe I should. Maybe I shouldn't." No. When that trumpet blast and blew, they assembled at the foot of the mountain.

They trembled when they heard that, because they saw the power of God. They saw what God had done to the Egyptians, how he had destroyed the Egyptians, so they didn't just wander into his presence. No. They prepared themselves. We see a prepared congregation to hear the voice of God.

They had already said, "We are committing and promising to heed the voice of God," but now they are wanting to hear but not just so it could go in one ear and out the other but so they could respond in obedience. They stood together at the foot of the mountain. It's a beautiful thing. This is what Hebrews 10 talks about, how we are not supposed to forsake the assembling.

Interestingly enough, the book of Hebrews is actually a sermon in and of itself. It's a word of exhortation. It says at the end of the book of Hebrews it literally was a manuscript of a sermon to be preached to a congregation, and to that congregation the preacher preached, "Do not forsake the assembling, but all the more gather, assemble, and stir one another up to love and good works as you gather, but first and foremost to heed and hear the voice of a holy and righteous God and to hear the truth in a world filled with lies."

The people consecrated and prepared themselves to hear that. It was intentional. They came ready. They washed themselves. Brothers and sisters, don't let anyone think you shouldn't come and that you're not ready, because if you are in Christ, you are ready. In John, chapter 3, we are told that Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless you are born again of the Spirit you cannot even see the kingdom of God." You don't have eyes to see or ears to hear for that matter, but the Spirit of God gives us eyes to see when we are born again and ears to hear.

Listen. No matter where we have been in sin and sinfulness and whatever we had been enslaved to, 1 Corinthians 6:11 says to believers and to the church after listing a whole bunch of sins like homosexuality, murder, theft, and all of these different things, “You need to know and understand that may be who you were, but you were washed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of Jesus Christ. You have been consecrated, so gather.”

Believers are to gather and assemble. We’ve been called out of the world to gather in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we need to hear the Word of God. That’s why Paul told Timothy, “Preach the Word.” In 2 Timothy 3:16, this is the voice of God, the same God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Do you want to be able to stand? Second Timothy says, **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** They’ll be complete. They’ll have everything they need to be who God is calling them to be.

They will know how to walk in these dark days instead of being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Instead of believing convincing lies from the Enemy who is a deceiver. He has been doing it for a long time. They’ll be equipped. They’ll be ready, because they’ll know the truth. It’s a big deal. This is a huge deal.

Brothers and sisters, how do you come? Why do you come? Why do you gather on a Sunday morning? Do you come with your yes on the table and a promised commitment to heed the Word of God no matter how hard it is? Listen. It is. The Word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Sometimes the Word of God is a hard pill to swallow. It is countercultural, so yeah, all week we’re in the world and we’re living and working. We go to school and all of these different things and we hear these things and we see these things, and the Word



of God does not match with these things, but God does heart surgery and reveals the truth to us so that we need not be deceived. The truth sets us free; the Word of God.

Oh, brothers and sisters, put your yes on the table when you come, and do come not just here and then and now and then. Come on a regular basis. Assemble on the first day of the week. That points back to the fact that Jesus rose on the first day. That's what they did. The church gathered. They assembled on the first day of the week, first and foremost to hear the voice of God.

There was a lot in Acts, chapter 6, when the church was growing and expanding. It's the same principle that happened with Moses when there were so many people, so many burdens, and so many needs. The apostles who had been appointed to preach the Word of God were overwhelmed, and some of the people who had needs were falling through the cracks (the Hellenistic widows, specifically), so the church got together.

The elders decided to appoint other people like deacons to take care of those widows so they could focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. That is the voice of God. We need to hear the Word of God preached. Listen. Yes, we can read it. Absolutely, you should read it in your quiet time every day of the week. The Word of God was then and always will be a light unto our path. It shows us where to go, but Paul told Timothy also to preach the Word to the assembled congregation.

As the Word is preached, the same Word we can read, he exhorts, and he admonishes, and he rebukes, and the Word cuts. Brothers and sisters, we should prioritize the preaching of this. I'm not talking about prioritizing the preacher but, rather, the preaching of the Holy Word of God, and I exhort you, brothers and sisters, to come with your yes on the table and with a promise of commitment to heed and obey the Word of God.

Remember what Jesus says. “If you love me, you will obey me.” Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 7, along the same lines of this, “Listen. Whoever hears my word and obeys my word will be like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The storms of life will come, but that house will continue to stand. It will endure, but those who don’t hear my word and don’t obey my word, that house will fall. It will crash. It will be a disaster.”

Brothers and sisters, we all need to hear the Word of God and heed the Word of God. We see this beautiful picture of this congregation of men, women, and children all there at the foot of the mountain specifically with the intention to hear and to heed the voice of their God, almighty God . . . not just Moses. We see, lastly, this powerful confirmation that it wasn’t Moses’ voice or word they heard but God’s Word and God’s voice. We see, lastly . . .

3. *A powerful confirmation to fear God’s voice.* Isaiah 66:2 says this is the one. God says, **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”** Verse 18: **“Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke.”** This is the glory of the Lord and God showing up in an undeniable way because the people showed up in a humble way.

Hebrews 11 says that, without faith, it is impossible to please God, but God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. They come prepared and consecrated and ready to hear. That’s what we see here. God’s glory showed up. The mountain **“was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln.”**

That was a familiar picture to them in that day, because they made bricks in Egypt when they were slaves. **“And the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.”** The people heard. **“The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of**

**the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD.’”**

This is holy ground. This isn't something they should just consider flippantly. **“Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves.”** Then, he said, “The people cannot come up.” Moses said, “Yeah, that's what you warned us.” In verse 24, **“And the LORD said to him, ‘Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them.”**

It's powerful confirmation. Fear God's voice. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom when people come humbly and worshipfully in the presence of the Lord. I think of 2 Chronicles, chapter 7, when after they built the temple the people gathered. They assembled there, and they worshipped the Lord. They offered burnt offerings, acknowledging their sin and sinfulness and were desiring a relationship. We are told that fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering, and the smoke filled the temple. It was the glory of the Lord, and the people worshiped.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we seek. If we want to hear the voice of God and if we want to be moved, we gather in this way with a promise together. It's not just one person. We gather together with a promised commitment to heed the voice of God. We gather consecrated and prepared to hear the voice of God, knowing we are to fear God and his Word. We are to tremble at his Word. It may cut, but it is good, and we need to obey it, especially when we think of what lies in the balance (heaven and hell and eternity and blessing and abundant life).

As we bring the service to a close, I want to encourage you to bow your heads right now and again consider maybe the past year or your whole life up to this point. Why

do you come? I often think people come to be entertained or impressed. That's not the reason to come. I often think people come only thinking about themselves. That's not the way to come.

First Peter 2:9, employing back to Moses and the Lord and the conversation there in Exodus 19, says, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.”**

You are not alone. You are a part of a family, a congregation, so brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to come with that in mind. Come to gather with your family in Christ, not with outstretched arms and not without a desire to connect and to bear witness and encourage one another just thinking about yourself.

No. Come and be a part of the family that you have been called to and placed into, the family of God, and revere the Word of God. Tremble at his Word. His Word is truth. His Word is eternal. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Word, the voice, and the message of God will never pass away. These words are words we need to hear, and he by his Spirit has given us ears to hear, and he gives faith to be obedient. He helps us do what we need to do.

How do you come? Why do you come? If you do not come and if you have not been coming with your yes on the table with that promised commitment to obey and with an eagerness to hear and listen not so that it will go in one ear and out the other, think about Revelation. This calls for wisdom. If we are going to stand, we need to hear, so we come to hear the Word and the message of God.

Picture Moses setting before those elders all the words, word for word. That's what we do here with expository preaching so there is no confusion. There are all kinds of things we could talk about, but we want to preach the Word. Paul told Timothy,

“Preach the Word, for the Word is God-breathed and is useful and profitable that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.

There are a lot of people who have a lot of good things to say, but none of it compares to the voice and to the Word of God. Moses was probably a wise man at this point. He could have said a lot of things, but God told him, “Say what I’m telling you word for word, Moses.” There is in this passage a powerful confirmation to fear God’s voice.

Do you fear? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Do you tremble at his Word? Remember what God says in Isaiah. **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”** Do you fear the Word, the voice of God, the message of God, the gospel? It is the power of God for salvation.

Do you understand? Do you believe that the wages of sin is death? Do you believe and understand that he who sows seeds to the flesh and who sins shall of the flesh reap corruption? There are ramifications. There is blessing in obedience. “Ye shall be my treasured possession. Ye shall be a holy nation. You’ll live the abundant life I’ve made available through Jesus Christ, but if you disobey me, you’re not going to experience the blessing.”

You may not lose your salvation, but don’t expect God to bless you. Don’t expect God to reveal more to you if you’re not being obedient to what he has already revealed to you. As we respond today, I encourage you from this point forward to come and gather on a regular basis with your yes on the table and with the promised commitment to heed the voice of God and to obey it. God will give you the strength necessary to do that.

Come to worship with your church family and to hear together the Word of God with everyone in position. Picture Israel standing at the foot of the mountain. They

were where they were supposed to be when they were supposed to be there, all of them gathered together in reverence and holy wonder, and when they gathered in that way, remember God showed up.

God's glory filled the mountain. Smoke and fire filled the place in an undeniable way. The people encountered their God, and they did not have to take someone else's word for it. They all saw together. Their children saw. The wives and the husband all saw. The old and the young all saw together.

They all encountered God together and could remind one another about that day of assembly when they gathered at the mountain of God and for the first time encountered their God, Yahweh. Brothers and sisters, let us gather in this way. With heads bowed and eyes closed, I encourage you to respond now. Commit to do what you need to commit and what the Spirit of God is leading you to do. Repent of what you need to repent of and come next week in a different way.

Before we have a song of invitation to invite people to come forward, I also want to address those of you here who have not yet placed your faith and trust in Christ. He is the way. What we've been reading about in Exodus is a people under the old covenant and under the law. God was about to give them his Law to show them how they were to walk, and all of it pointed forward to the new covenant made available through Christ and initiated by his blood.

We believe in him. We are saved not from slavery in Egypt but from slavery from sin. The wages of sin is death, and not just from death but to life, and to that relationship God brings us in salvation to himself so that we don't have to know just about him but we can know and have a relationship with him.

If you're here today and you're ready to place your faith and trust in Christ so that you can stand before a holy, righteous God and worship him and hear from him and

see him and know him and even upon your physical death on earth live in eternity with him forever, I want to invite you to pray this prayer humbly.

Say, “Lord, I know I am a sinner in need of a Savior, and, Jesus, I believe you are that Savior, so the best I know how I place my faith and trust in you, and I ask you to forgive my sins. Right now, I repent, and I ask you to save me. Please help me from this point forward. I pray this all in Jesus’s name.”

With heads bowed and eyes closed, if you prayed that prayer just now, I want to ask you to be so bold to testify so that I can pray with you. Just acknowledge that you prayed that prayer of salvation by lifting your hand to testify. If you prayed that prayer just now and asked the Lord to save you, would you just acknowledge that? No one else is looking, but I’m looking. God is looking. Who here would say, “Mark, I prayed that prayer with you just now”? Is there anyone? Amen.

Father, we thank you. I do pray that your Spirit would lead our congregation and help us to understand and know the opportunity we have every Sunday to gather with our church family. I pray we would come and gather reverently, not flippantly and not arbitrarily, but when we have the opportunity we will come and we will be in position ready to hear your voice and to respond to it reverently and obediently by faith, with our eyes on the table humbly to worship you and to acknowledge that you are God and that your Word is true. I thank you that we can do that today in and through Christ. I pray these things in his name, amen.

APPENDIX 3  
SERMON 2 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Exodus  
February 12, 2023

God Speaks Through Expository Preaching

Deuteronomy 18:15–22

I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. We've been journeying verse by verse through the book of Exodus. We finished last week in Exodus 19. You can fold over that page, because we'll make our way back and circle back around to where we left off in a couple of weeks as we really dig a little deeper into what we saw in Exodus 19, so this isn't a new journey but, rather, just digging a little deeper into what we saw in Exodus 19.

That was when Moses proclaimed God's Word, and the people of God encountered God at the foot of the mountain. They called it the *day of the assembly*. Deuteronomy, chapter 18. I'm going to read starting in verse 15. Deuteronomy, chapter 18, verse 15. This is 40 years later after what we saw in Exodus, chapter 19. In Deuteronomy, chapter 18, starting in verse 15, Moses says, "**The LORD your God.**" He's talking to the people of God, the Israelites.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb." This is pointing back to Exodus 19 and Mount Sinai. "Gust as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'



And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’

And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

God speaks. Almighty God, Jehovah, our provider, our omnipotent and everlasting God, the one true God. Three in one (Father, Son, and Spirit). God speaks through expository preaching. What I mean by *expository preaching* is the exposing or the uncovering of God’s Word. Preaching and laying it before the people.

If you’ll remember, in Exodus, chapter 19, Moses specifically set before the people the Word of God, as in almost like setting a table or a feast that they were to sit down at and eat. That’s expository preaching. It’s preaching God’s Word, what God says. God speaks through expository preaching.

Moses was telling the people that they had the *opportunity to listen to him*, the *responsibility to listen to him*, and the *necessity to listen to him*. We’re going to make our way to the New Testament in a minute, but brothers and sisters, you need to know and understand in an even greater way because of Jesus Christ that you have . . .

1. *The opportunity to listen to God*. God speaks through expository preaching today as his Word is proclaimed. As it is set before you this morning, you have the opportunity to hear not necessarily from me but from God as I speak his Words, not my words. You have the opportunity to listen to him. You have the responsibility, brothers and sisters in Christ saved by grace, to listen to him, his words, and his voice. Lastly, you have the necessity of listening to him.

Again, Deuteronomy is 40 years after what we saw in Exodus, chapter 19. That was the first time the people of God heard the voice of God. If you remember, Moses as a leader was overwhelmed. There were so many needs among the millions of people who were the people of God as they were making their way to the Promised Land.

If you'll remember, God had brought them unto himself. This was about relationship. He didn't want to just save them and leave them to go on their way. He brought them unto himself. He had a covenant relationship with them, and he told them, if you remember in Exodus, chapter 19, "If you will listen to my voice, my message, and my word. . . . If you will listen, as in heed and not just hear but obey and receive and accept my voice, my word, and my message that I preach through Moses and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession."

God promised that. "You will be a kingdom of priests. You will be a holy nation. You will be completely different and set apart from all of the other nations." All the earth belonged to him. All of the people belonged to him, but they will be his treasured possession. I believe that promise is more about an experience rather than the title of treasured possession.

In the same way, we are promised the abundant life in Jesus Christ when we obey him. Obedience to God's Word comes with blessing. That was under the old covenant, and that's under the new covenant as well. Moses was not about to go into the Promised Land with them. The book of Deuteronomy is a book of sermons.

This is essentially Moses' last words to the people of God. They had been wandering in the wilderness. Even though they had committed to obey the Lord in Exodus, chapter 19, they didn't. They didn't trust the Lord. When God took them to the Promised Land the first time, if you'll remember, they in fear refused to enter in, so God basically let them suffer the consequences of that, and that was them wandering in the

wilderness for 40 years, and everyone who had refused to obey was not permitted to go in. Moses himself was not permitted to go in. All of them passed. This is 40 years later.

Now there is another generation that are about to go into the Promised Land, and Moses tells them, “Look! You still need to know and understand God’s Word. You still need to hear the voice of God. You still need to know God’s will for your life and how he wants you to live and how he wants you to walk. That is, how to live your life day in and day out. As the ramifications of God’s Word and living in obedience to him, the blessing associated with that does not just affect you, but it affects your children and your children’s children, so this is a big deal.”

Moses is basically telling them, “I’m not going into the Promised Land with you, but you need to continue to heed and listen to the voice of God.” Moses even says in the end of Deuteronomy, chapter 30, “This is such a big deal it’s a matter of life and death. The ramifications that play out to your obedience to listening to the voice of God do not just affect you but your children’s children.”

If you’re going to experience what it means to live in relationship with God and in covenant with God and if you’re going to be that treasured possession and experience what that means to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, you need to heed the voice of God. You need to listen to God. They’re saying, “Well, how are we going to do that, because, Moses, you’re not going in with us?” Moses says . . . this is a promise. This is God’s provision. They had the opportunity to continue listening to the voice of God.

He says in verse 15 to the people of God, “Yahweh, the Lord your God who saved you. . . . Remember, you were slaves in Egypt. He saw you. He remembered his covenant that he had made with your forefathers, and he redeemed you. He raised up Moses. You walked out. He parted the waters for you, and he brought you to the

mountain, and you had an encounter with him there at the foot of the mountain. You saw the glory of God in an undeniable way.”

He says, “I’m not going with you, but the Lord will provide for you.” This is how faithful God is. **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.”** Now, I want to talk about what a prophet is for a second, just generally speaking, because I know a lot of people have different ideas and experiences about what they think a prophet is.

Old Testament prophets, generally speaking, are messengers of God proclaiming the Word of God to the people of God. They’re not suggesting the Word of God. They’re proclaiming the Word of God. They are herald. They are not permitted to add to God’s Word or take away from God’s Word but to speak exactly the words of God to the people of God. They are to lay it down and set it before them.

This is what expository preaching is (laying down before the people, explaining, and breaking down the Word of God). It’s not adding and not taking away from the Word of God but laying down the Word of God. Moses told the people, **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brothers.”**

Now, ultimately, this is pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we’ll get there. In the new covenant, God provides a prophet. God provides and speaks through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we’ll get there in a moment, but in the meantime, there are other prophets God raises up for the people of God so they will know God’s will for them and so they will know how to live and what God’s will is. Ezekiel and Elijah and Elisha, just to name a few.

God raises up prophets so the people will know the voice and hear and have the opportunity to heed the voice of God. Listen. There is blessing with obedience. It is profitable to hear the Word of God, but ultimately because of who God is, we should give

ear. They should give ear to who he is. Right? He saved them. He redeemed them really in spite of who they were. They complained. It didn't take long for them to complain. They did not trust God as God promised. He had them at the brink of the Promised Land. They were right there, but they refused.

Even though God had destroyed the Egyptians and destroyed Pharaoh and put an end to all of the pantheon of the Egyptian gods, they refused to trust God and go into the Promised Land, but God continued to show grace with them. He continued speaking and giving them the opportunity to know his will and show them how to live so they could experience what it meant to be his treasured possession and to live in covenant with him.

The Lord promised to raise up a prophet like Moses from among their brothers. He said, **“It is to him you shall listen.”** Again, it's not just to consider, going in one ear and out the other, but listen as in heed and as in receive his Word. Who do you listen to this morning, brothers and sisters? Consider that for a moment. Who do you listen to?

We live in a world filled with a lot of people proclaiming a lot of things. Everyone is an expert these days. You don't need a degree. All you need is a social media page and you're an expert, and you proclaim, and there is no apology. There is no humility. Everyone is an expert, and everyone screams different messages and conflicting messages and contradictory messages to the voice of God and the Word of God.

We are to listen to God. The people of God, as they were going into the Promised Land. Just look at the paragraph right before what we started in verse 15. He says, **“When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations**

The people who were there worshiped other gods. They are listening to other voices. “Don't learn from them. Don't follow them. Don't make the same mistakes they

are making. They have not had the opportunity you have. You can listen to God. God is raising up a prophet to speak his voice so you can hear. Don't listen to them!"

He says, **"There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering."** They would worship in those other lands, offering as a sacrifice their children. He says, "Don't do that!" **"Anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD."**

"Why would you listen to them when you can listen to me?" God says. "Don't listen to them. It's an abomination. It's detestable. Is not my voice good enough? Listen to me. I'm raising up a prophet for you. Listen to the Lord." He says, **"And because of these abominations."** Because of these detestable things like fortune-tellers, necromancers, mediums, and charmers,

**"The LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you."** "That's not who you're going to listen to. You're going to listen to the prophet I raise up who speaks my Word. You're going to obey the word I speak. You're going to hear, and you are going to heed, and you are going to be blessed as you do it not just for your sake but for your children's sake. You have the opportunity to listen to the voice of God."

Brothers and sisters, who do you listen to? In verse 16, Moses goes on to say, **"just as you desired."** He points back to that Exodus, chapter 19, amazing experience when the glory of God fell upon the mountain. Fire was there, smoke was there, undeniably communicating and showing and demonstrating that God was there to speak so the people would believe Moses not just on that day but continually. They desired it back in Exodus 19.

**“Of the LORD your God at Horeb [Mount Sinai] on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’”** They were just so overwhelmed by the glory that was there they couldn’t take it. They were overwhelmed.

**“And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers.’”** Again, God raises them up. There are so many people in this day who raise themselves up. Right? There are so many people who step up. Again, they give themselves a title.

Did you know you can just pay \$100 and get your doctorate online or a PhD? You can become a pastor online. That’s not God raising people up. It is such a beautiful thing when God raises up his leaders from within. Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will raise you up. I think about the many leaders over the course of the 11 years, and I am in awe.

Some of my favorite things to do are to see God take humble people who are willing to obey and listen to the Word of God and heed the Word of God and humble themselves and submit to the Word of God. God raises them up to do things they never thought they would do. Case in point, I never thought I would be a preacher.

By the grace of God, it amazes me. I am in awe that the Lord is allowing me to do and be a part of what he’s doing here at LifeHouse and preach his Holy Word. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God promised to raise up a prophet from their brothers. He says, **“And I will put my words in his mouth.”**

“He doesn’t have to come up with his own words. I’m going to give him what to speak. You need to hear from me. You don’t need to hear from him.” **“And I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”**

First, we saw they had the opportunity to listen to God. God did not leave them hanging. Even though Moses was not going, God would provide another prophet and prophets and raise them up, and ultimately, Jesus. Secondly, we see here that everyone who had the opportunity also had . . .

2. *The responsibility to listen to God.* Right? Verse 19: **“And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”** You are responsible. James 4:17 says, **“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”** Who do you listen to? Do you give ear? Do you lean in and listen to the Word of God?

“Whoever will not listen to my words the prophet or the expository preacher speaks in my name, I myself will require it of him.” You are responsible for a holy, righteous God, you who have the opportunity to hear the voice of God. Verse 20: **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name.”** There are a lot of “prophets” just like there are a lot of “pastors” who claim the name but do not know the name and who do not have a relationship with God.

So often, even in our day and it was the same in Moses’ day and throughout the Old Testament, people claim to speak for God, but they were not speaking for God. I can’t tell you how many times I hear in this day, “God told me,” or “God said,” and I’m like, “Did God really say?” Listen. If he didn’t say, and you say that, that is blasphemy for you to claim God said something.

It may be something good. It may be something profound. It may be something exciting, but be humble when you use those words and you throw those words out there. Do not claim to speak for God unless God really is speaking. **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”** That’s blasphemy. Then, in verse 21, not only do you have the responsibility but they had . . .



3. *The necessity to listen to God.* This is a big deal. **“And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’”** How are we going to discern and decipher what is of you and what is not of you? In verse 22, Moses says, **“...when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken.”** Just end of story.

Isaiah 55:11 says, “My word, when it is sent forth, will not return void. It will always accomplish that which I intended to accomplish.” So many people prophesy and it doesn’t come to pass. That’s a lie that is not from God. **“The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”**

The implication is there. You need not be afraid of him, but you need to be afraid of God. You need to fear the Lord. You need to fear and tremble at his Word. You have the opportunity to listen to him, you have the responsibility to listen to him, and you have the necessity to listen to him.

Now, ultimately this prophet who Moses points to is Jesus Christ. John, chapter 1: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** In Hebrews, chapter 1, verses 1 through 2, we are told, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God [Almighty God, Yahweh, Jehovah] spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”**

He did long ago, **“but in these last days [under the new covenant] he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.”** Brothers and sisters, who do you listen to? Do you know and understand that you have the opportunity to listen to God, for Jesus spoke God’s words?

I think about Peter. When Peter and the disciples were following Jesus and Jesus was performing miracles, they were really understanding and knowing that there was something more to who this Jesus was. Jesus had fed the 5,000, and the disciples

were amazed by that, but he was teaching some things that were a hard pill for many of the disciples to swallow, so many of them walked away. In John, chapter 6, they turned their backs on Jesus, the Son of God, and they walked away.

**Jesus** looked at Peter and the rest of the disciples and said, “Do you guys want to go away as well? Do you want to turn your back on me and walk away as well?” Do you remember what Peter said? He said, “No.” Basically, he said, “Jesus, we have come to know and believe and understand that you are the Holy One of God, and you have the words of eternal life.”

Basically, what Peter was saying was, “Where else would we go? Where else would we hear what we are hearing from you? You have the words of eternal life.” It’s a matter of life or death. Jesus said in John, chapter 8, “**You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” With the words Jesus speaks (the Word of God), God wants freedom for us, deliverance, and salvation.

The gospel is good news. It’s the truth. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it. We have the opportunity to listen to God. The gospel is God’s Word. It’s God’s good news. This is not made up. I’m declaring to you a word from the Lord. I’m setting before you the gospel. You have the opportunity to be saved.

Saved from what? From the wrath of God and from your sin and sinfulness. Brothers and sisters, have you responded to that opportunity? Do you listen? Should we not give ear? Do we believe what we claim to believe? Is he almighty? Is he omniscient? Does he know everything? Do we believe what we claim to believe? He’s going to speak the truth. We need to listen.

We have the opportunity. Why would we not listen to him? Why would we want to listen to anyone else? Why would we call 1–800–Fortune Teller when we have

the Word of a holy, righteous God who speaks the truth and who is not playing games with us and dangling carrots? He wants us to know the truth.

He wants us to live the abundant life. He wants us to experience peace that passes understanding. He wants the fruit of the Spirit to abound in and through our lives. He wants our lives and the way we walk and live our lives to be a testimony boldly declaring his truth. He wants us not to make excuses but to persevere and endure, and the only way we can do that is by living according to his Word.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Brothers and sisters, you have the opportunity to listen to him. We have the Word of God. Do you listen to him? Do you listen to Jesus? He has the words of eternal life, and he makes clear. . . . Actually, the Muslims actually believe, and they say the prophet Moses was talking about is Muhammad.

Again, blasphemy! Do you know there is a guy in New York City right now who is claiming to be Jesus? It's a lie. In Matthew 17, verse 5, God made it very clear that Jesus was his Son and that he was the prophet by saying, "**This is my beloved Son. . . listen to him.**" John the Baptist said. . . . Remember, everyone loved John the Baptist.

He was charismatic, but he said, "No, I'm not the prophet." They were waiting for the prophet. God had been silent for 400 years leading up to the New Testament. The people were desperate to hear a word from God. They were walking in darkness. That's when Jesus shined his light. He is the Light of the World. Whoever listens to him and follows him doesn't have to walk in darkness anymore. He has the words that lead to the Light of life.

Brothers and sisters, you need not remain in darkness. Follow Jesus. He is the prophet. Listen to Jesus. Don't just let it go in one ear and out the other. Listen to Jesus. You have the opportunity to listen to Jesus. Furthermore, you have the responsibility to

listen to Jesus. Just like Moses, God told Moses that prophet he promised. “I will put my words in his mouth.” Jesus spoke God’s Word. Jesus’ agenda was God’s agenda.

“He shall speak to them all that I have commanded him.” Jesus finished his work. In John, chapter 17, “All you have commanded me to do I have done. I have spoken the words you want me to speak.” Verse 19 says you have the responsibility to listen to him. **“Whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name I will require it of him.”**

Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 25. . . . The book of Hebrews is a manuscript of a sermon. It is an example of a sermon that was preached to a congregation or an assembly of believers, and as the preacher was preaching, if you look at the wording, he was communicating in such a way that it was God speaking in the present tense.

In Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 25, he tells the assembled congregation, **“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.”** That is, he is referring to God. See that you do not reject the Word of God that is set before you. Rather, respond to it, because God will require it of you. God will hold you accountable.

In Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 29, these are heavy words. This is the truth, and we can learn from the Israelites’ example, because they were not obedient, and because they did not go into the Promised Land, they were destined to wander for 40 years, and they never got to experience that rest and peace that was promised in that land flowing with milk and honey.

In Hebrews, chapter 10, referring to that specifically in verse 28, the preacher says, **“Anyone who has set aside”** as in, “No, I’m not going to eat it.” Picture setting the table full of food and you’re just going to set that aside. “No, I’m not eating that. I’m not going to receive that.” **“Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses.”**

That is what Moses preached as a prophet of God speaking the voice of God. **“Dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.”** He says in verse 29,

**“How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”**

If you think it was bad to reject Moses’ words, what the preacher of Hebrews is saying is, “How much worse is it to reject the words of Jesus Christ?” Think about it. Philippians, chapter 2: **“Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.”**

He came and proclaimed the gospel. He came preaching repentance for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He came to make a way for us when there was no way for us. We have the opportunity to listen. How horrible to reject that message and to trample underfoot that message!

You have the responsibility to listen to him. Again, James 4:17: **“To whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”** Hebrews 12:25: **“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.”** In Matthew, chapter 10, remember when Jesus commissioned his disciples to do what he had been doing.

In Matthew, chapter 9, it says that Jesus came and saw the people. They were like sheep that were scattered without a shepherd. They were helpless and hopeless basically. He was burdened for them, so he said, “Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers,” in Matthew, chapter 9, but in Matthew, chapter 10, he sends out workers.

What are those workers to do? They are to preach. He says, specifically, “When you go to a house and they will not listen to you because they don’t want to hear the good news you have that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and they have the opportunity to be saved . . .” Do you remember what he told the disciples?

He said, “What you need to do is wipe the dust off of your feet. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah.” Do you remember Sodom and Gomorrah, that wicked city? “. . . than it will be for those who reject the message of good news that you are bringing to them. Wipe the dust off your feet.” It was a sign of a judgment.

We have the responsibility to listen to him. Have you listened to him? Have you responded first and foremost to the gospel? That’s where it starts. Apart from Christ you cannot hear. You don’t have ears to hear. I think about what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John, chapter 3. “Unless you are born again, you can’t see the kingdom of God.”

Spiritually dead people cannot hear spiritual things. It’s the same thing with sight and the same thing with ears. God gives us ears to hear by his Spirit, but it starts with salvation and responding to the gospel, repenting of our sins, and placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. He gives us ears to hear and eyes to see.

Do you have those ears? Do you have those eyes? If not, you need to simply repent from your sin. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans, chapter 10: “But how can they believe in that which they have never heard and how can they hear without someone preaching?”

Faith comes from hearing, but you first must respond to the gospel. You have the responsibility to listen to him. We are saved by grace through faith, but you have a responsibility. Man has a responsibility to respond and to say, “Yes,” and to receive and to listen, to hear and heed the voice of God, which is the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it. How terrible to not accept that good news! You have the responsibility, but you also have the necessity.

He says, “I will require it of those who do not listen and who have the opportunity to hear the words of God and the voice of God. The prophet who presumes to speak my word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak and who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”

God is a jealous God. I think of Joshua 24. **“Choose this day whom you will serve.”** You can’t serve God and money. God wants you to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. He doesn’t want you to listen to the world. **“Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** (James, chapter 4). God is not okay with you listening to the world and listening to him.

Brothers and sisters, there are a lot of confused Christians these days, and part of it is because there are so many voices screaming so loudly, and we are exposing ourselves. We are allowing our children to be exposed to these loud voices that speak emphatically as experts. They claim to know the truth. They claim to speak the truth, but they are lies.

Brothers and sisters, God is not going to change his mind. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and God is not going to speak something that would contradict something he has already spoken. I can’t tell you how many times. . . . This burdens me. Brothers and sisters, we need not be confused.

Where in God’s Word does he give the opportunity for us to make excuses for being obedient to what he tells us to do? Again, the Great Commission. . . . It is not the great suggestion. It’s a commission. It’s a command. It’s a charge. Brothers and sisters, life or death lies in the balance. The ramifications are not only bearing upon you but those who follow after you (your children and your children’s children). You have the responsibility and you have the necessity to listen to him.

Remember what Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 7, after he preaches the Sermon on the Mount. He’s really pointing back. He’s saying, “I’m like Moses.” Just like Moses went up on the mountain to prophesy and preach the Word of God, Jesus went on the mount to preach the Sermon on the Mount.

After he was finishing that amazing sermon, the most amazing sermon ever preached, he said in Matthew, chapter 7, verse 26, “Whoever hears my word and obeys

my word and whoever listens to me will be like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. Though the winds and storms and rain may come and beat on that house, whoever hears and obeys my word will be like a wise man because that house will endure. That house will persevere through the storms, but whoever hears my word and does not obey my word and who rejects it. . . . I'm going to require it of him. That house will come crashing down."

Brothers and sisters, you have the opportunity, you have the responsibility, and you have the necessity not just for yourself but also for your family, for those who see you, for your neighbors. Faith comes from hearing the gospel. It's a matter of life and death. Eternity lies in the balance. We need to hear the Word of God.

There is one way. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved. Brothers and sisters, we must. . . . We have the necessity and the need to listen to the voice of God, first of all, because he deserves to be listened to, but there is blessing that comes with obedience. We don't listen so we can then consider. We listen so we can obey and experience the blessing that comes with obedience.

Sometimes those words are hard words, absolutely. In Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12, "**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.**" Sometimes it cuts, but in connection with that exhortation to hear and heed the Word of God that is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, he says, "Don't be like the Israelites who failed to enter that rest. Don't be like them who never got to enter that Promised Land even though they were right there."

They didn't trust God enough. They didn't hear and heed his voice, so they were prone to wander. They never got to experience that. He says, "See that you're not



like them. See that you do not fail to enter the rest, the abundant life, the peace that passes understanding that is found in Jesus Christ.”

Listen, hear, and heed the voice of God. Who do you listen to? Why listen to anyone else when you have the opportunity to listen to him? Why not listen knowing the responsibility that he will require those who listen to him? It won't go well for you if you do not listen to him and if you refuse to listen to him and if you reject listening to him. You have a necessity to listen to him.

Brothers, as we bring it to a close, what is this all about? Why are we taking this veer off of Exodus, chapter 19? As I consider this past year celebrating 10 years and going into 11 years, I'm so burdened, because in testimony after testimony I see casualty after casualty. Now, there are a lot of champions.

There are a lot of people who persevere and endure, and it blesses my socks off when people are continuing to be obedient even when it's hard and even when it doesn't make sense from a worldly standpoint and even when people who are set and placed in a worldly and secular environments still shine the light, and light shines brighter in the darkness, so I'm blessed in so many ways.

Truly, where there was not a people there is a people. God has created a people, and I can't help but think of Christmas. When we all gathered on December 25, it was inconvenient from a worldly standpoint, but we wanted everyone to know who it is that we love and why it is that we celebrate Christmas, that Jesus is the reason for the season and that we are a people who worship him and who honor him and who want to listen to him, but, brothers and sisters, I think we can step it up a couple of notches at least.

We can prioritize what I believe God wants us to prioritize. Listen. Moses' last words to the people of God knowing that he would not continue with them were, “Keep listening to the voice of God proclaimed by the messenger of God to you, the people of

God.” Remember what Jesus’ last words were in John, chapter 21, to Peter, who was one of the apostles.

“Feed my sheep. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word.” When he told Peter, “Feed my sheep,” he was saying, “Preach the Word to my people.” As they continue as the church, he knew the church was right on the horizon, and they were going to need to hear the Word of God proclaimed. “Feed my sheep,” he told him three times.

Paul at the end of the New Testament. . . . Do you remember what he told Timothy when he was about to die? His last words to Timothy, after telling him that the Word of God is God-breathed. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable that the man of God or the woman of God may be complete, lacking nothing.” In other words, so that they can be and so that you can be who God has called you to be so that you can do what God has called you to do without excuse.

He said, “In light of that reality, Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God.” These are strong words. “I want you to know and understand that this is so serious, Timothy. I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, the judge of the living and the dead, preach the Word.” He didn’t say to teach the Word. He said to preach the Word. He didn’t say to read the Word.

He said, “Preach the Word, and as you do so, exhort. You need to admonish.” There is value. I don’t want to take away from the necessity for us to read the Word of God on a daily basis. We have access. We have the Bible, and we should read. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to God’s Word.” We should dig. We should study, and I don’t want to distract you from that, but what I do want to do is elevate the opportunity and help us understand the opportunity we have as a people gathering on Sunday morning.

We should be a people who come because we love God just even showing up in a worshipful way, just like in Exodus 19 with our yes already on the table because we

believe God is who he reveals himself to be, that he speaks the truth, and that he knows everything, and that he is able, so we come submitting to him saying, “Yes,” to him before we even know what he’s going to speak as the Word of God is proclaimed.

The people came consecrated. They were ready to worship, and God showed up. The glory filled that mountain. They saw fire. They were overwhelmed, but through Christ, we can draw near in a way they could not. We need not fear. We need not fear the lies. I don’t care how loudly people are screaming if it contradicts God’s Word. He says, “Do not fear those prophets and those people who speak and those people who preach lies.”

Do not fear them. You need not fear them. Who you need to fear is God Almighty, for he is a consuming fire, and he will require those who do not listen to him. Those who know the truth have the opportunity to hear the truth, so make the most of the opportunity. Gather and assemble whenever you can for the glory of God and be ready. Lean in and listen, because they are words of life.

Picture Peter. “Where else would we go?” When we have the opportunity to hear words of life. . . . Again, there are a lot of things to listen to and a lot of people to listen to. Why would we go anywhere else, Jesus? You are the Holy One of God. Your Word is true. In a world filled with lies, you have the words of eternal life. Brothers and sisters, who do you listen to?

Remember, God is a jealous God. He’s not okay with you listening to Harry, Dick, Sally, and him. Listen to him. Obey him, and don’t make excuses. Don’t be a casualty; be a conqueror. Think about the book of Revelation as we close. Clearly, there is a lot of tribulation to expect. Great tribulation, Jesus says, such has never been seen before.

Hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Obey. Repent of sin. Don’t make excuses. Don’t compromise. Don’t concede. Stand firm in who he has called you to be.

Ephesians, chapter 6, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities.” The battle is real. The battle is raging, and there are all kinds of defensive things like the shield of faith and the belt of truth, but the one offensive thing we have is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

How are we going to take back the ground that the Enemy has stolen? By the Word of God. Think about Acts. As those apostles were dedicated to preaching the Word of God, remember they even appointed deacons so they wouldn’t be distracted from serving widows even though that’s a good thing to do. James says, “True religion is caring for the orphaned and the widowed.”

He wanted them to do that, but the apostles said, “We need to be dedicated to prayer and to the ministry of the Word,” and they preached the Word. How was it described as the church grew and spread? The Word of God prevailed and increased mightily. Brothers and sisters, can you imagine?

Picture what it would like for the Word of God to increase and prevail mightily in Middletown, Odessa, and Townsend, Delaware. What would it look like for the Word of God to prevail and to increase mightily? Not halfway but mightily in a powerful way and fill the halls of our public schools and fill the streets of our neighborhoods?

Think about what Jesus said in Matthew, chapter 9. When he saw the people, he was so burdened because they were scattered like sheep without a shepherd. When I look around, that’s what we live in, the world we live in, and probably even worse, but we have the Word of God, and when Jesus preached, it gathered the people together.

Brothers and sisters, let’s gather. Let’s assemble. Let’s do like in Exodus, chapter 19. Let’s come ready to hear and not just to hear but also to heed with our eyes on the table. Let’s get rid of any distractions that would hinder us from hearing the Word of God. That means repenting of sin beforehand. That means coming with a pure heart. That means coming prayed up.

Like Rob says, that means bringing your worship and coming to sit and to hear in a worshipful way and to encourage one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and to hold one another accountable and to bear one another's burdens as a family and to listen together and to hear together and to rejoice together and to lift up and magnify together and to make much of Jesus together and to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light together.

Brothers and sisters, we have the opportunity to hear from him. We have the responsibility. Think not that you have not responsibility. He will require it of you. He who knows the right thing to do but does it not, to him it is a sin. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking (God who is speaking).

You have the necessity. Listen. If not for you, for your children. If not for you, for those who follow you and who know you and your family. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is life. Moses was so burdened. The book of Deuteronomy is sermon after sermon after sermon equipping them to be ready.

"I know I'm not going to be able to go in, but you still need to live according to God's Word. To experience the blessing of God and to be that treasured possession and to enjoy the benefits of being that treasured possession, you need to be obedient and walk according to his ways. Not your ways. Your feelings can lie to you. Don't go with your feelings."

Brothers and sisters, I can't tell you how many conversations I have. "I feel this," and it totally contradicts God's Word. Your feelings can lie to you. The flesh is part of the equation. Don't listen to the flesh. Listen to him. Faith comes from hearing. Brothers and sisters, listen up. Lean in and listen.

As we close, consider your life. Consider how you come and why you come. I just want to charge you to really ask the Lord to reveal to you the importance of preaching. Again, it's not the preacher but the preaching event, the relationship, and the

relationships associated with the preaching event. Where there was not a people, there is a people.

Let's prioritize preaching. Let's honor God and show up to hear what he has to say and respond to what he has to say for his glory but also for our good. Let's bow our heads and pray and respond. Brothers and sisters, let him who has an ear to hear hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches today. Do not refuse him who is speaking.

How might the Spirit of God lead you to respond to the Word we read and the Word that was set before you that clearly elevated the importance of hearing the voice of God and that highlighted the opportunity we have to listen to him and that clearly communicated the responsibility we have to listen to him and the necessity we have to listen to him? We need not fear other voices, but we need to fear him. We need to tremble at his Word. He is holy. He is righteous. Let him who has an ear, let him hear.

O God, give us faith to respond in a worshipful way. O Lord, that we would endure, that we would persevere, that we would not compromise, and that we would not cower but that we would stand firm, that we would not align ourselves and try to listen to the ways of the world and the voices the world speaks so loudly and emphatically on social media and on television and in entertainment, but that we would fix our eyes and our hearts and our minds and our ears on you, because we love you and because we really believe what we claim to believe.

O Lord, give us faith, and as we gather here at LifeHouse prioritizing preaching, I pray you would be honored and blessed, and in the way that your glory filled the mountain your glory would fill our hearts and this place. Make your presence known in an undeniable way. We want to encounter you.

We want to draw near knowing that you reward those who diligently seek you. Give us ears to hear, Lord, to lay aside our pride and to lay aside our fear and social

anxiety and let us draw near and together not just on occasion but regularly and faithfully, because we have the opportunity to hear you speak.

With heads bowed and eyes closed, brothers and sisters, right now in your heart respond. Commit to do what the Spirit of God would lead you to commit to do. In a moment, we're going to have a song of invitation, and I'll invite you to come. I encourage you to come, but before we do that, I also want to address those here who do not yet have the ability to hear because they do not have the Spirit of God in their hearts. Unless you are born again, you cannot hear. Unless you are born again, and that is born of the Spirit, you cannot see.

Maybe you have been frustrated because you haven't been hearing anything. Have you repented of your sins? Have you called on the name of Jesus to save you? Have you forsaken the voices of the world so that you can listen to the gospel, the good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, to save you? Jesus came and went to Jerusalem and went to the cross, and there he was nailed to the cross in Jerusalem, and his blood was shed there to wash away our sins, for without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins.

Everyone who calls upon his name shall be saved. Will you do that today? Will you believe on Jesus and repent of your sins and be saved today? If so, I want to invite you to pray this prayer with me right where you are sitting. Pray it to God. I'll lead you and guide you with these words, but sincerely pray it to God in your heart.

Say, "Lord, I need you. I know and understand that I am a sinner in need of a Savior and that you, Jesus, are that Savior. I place my faith and trust in you the best I know how, I repent of my sins, and I turn to you. Please, give me ears to hear and show me from this point forward where to go and what to do so that I can live for you and honor you. Please, save me."

With heads bowed and eyes closed, if that's you today, and if you prayed that prayer in your heart and you meant it, would you be so bold as to acknowledge that by lifting your hand to testify? No one else is looking around. I see your hand. Praise God! A few hands. Be bold. Don't worry about who is sitting beside you. No one else is looking but express in a tangible way what God is doing in your heart. Did you pray that prayer today calling upon the name of Jesus for salvation? Amen. You can put your hands down. Thank you.

Father, I trust and pray that you who began a good work will be faithful to complete it.

What I want you to know today if you prayed that prayer is that it's just the beginning of a relationship. It's the beginning of a journey and the beginning of hearing and seeing more. Always more in him. I'm excited for you. Allow us to come alongside and help you on this journey.

We thank you, Lord, for who you are. Amen.

Church, let's stand and sing. The altar is open, and I encourage you to come. I encourage you to kneel. Surrender your life, your all, to him. Put your yes on the table.



APPENDIX 4  
SERMON 3 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
February 19, 2023

God's Powerful Protection

Nehemiah 8:1–12

Church, be encouraged and know that your prayers, your serving, and your giving all play a role, and God uses it in working in people's lives to bring them to saving faith as evidenced in that video. I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah, chapter 8.

I'll give a couple more moments before we stand and read together, because it's a harder book to find in the middle of the Old Testament, but just to remind you, we had been preaching verse by verse through the book of Exodus in the Old Testament. We made our way to Exodus, chapter 19, where we see the people of God gather to hear the voice of God at the base of the mountain.

They encounter God in an undeniable and unforgettable way. Really, that begins and we see throughout the whole Bible from that point expressed the importance of the people of God gathering to hear and heed the voice of God proclaimed with authority even to the end in 2 Timothy where Paul charges his son in the faith, "Preach the Word."

It's just so important especially given the dark days within which we live. We need to hear from God. We're taking a pause through that Exodus journey and really just

looking throughout Scripture at the many passages that point to the importance of preaching and prioritizing preaching as a congregation.

Remember, it's not prioritizing the preacher but, rather, the preaching and the people coming to hear and heed the voice of God together regularly. There are many passages that could be preached to solidify and reinforce that truth, but we've picked out six. This is a six-week sermon series that really reinforces that, so today we are in Nehemiah, chapter 8.

What's going on? If you remember, we started in Exodus, chapter 19, where Moses preaches to the people of God. He tells them after delivering them from slavery, "You need to know how to live your lives. Even though God saved you, that's just the beginning. He has taken you to the Promised Land, and you need to know what God wants and God's will and how to walk."

Moses is the guy who God speaks through to deliver his Word to them, and the people of God commit to be obedient. They love God. God showed that he was the one, true God by delivering them from Egypt from slavery, so they're all about obeying and hearing from and heeding the voice of God.

Well, it wasn't long before they disobeyed the voice of God, and because of that, they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. They sinned, and they suffered the consequences thereof, and an entire generation of people passed and never got to see that land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised.

Well, in Deuteronomy, they are coming back to the Promised Land. God is leading them back. All of those other people had passed, but that next generation was coming up, and Moses had been preaching for 40 years letting them know what God wants (his will, his way) by authoritatively preaching the Word of God to them.

He's not going to be able to go into the Promised Land with them, but he tells them, "Listen! Even though there is going to be a land flowing with milk and honey and

you're going to be blessed there, you still need to be obedient. In your affluence and in your abundance, don't forget who God is. Don't forget what God wants."

He exhorts them and tells them, "God is going to raise up another prophet like me to preach the Word of God. Listen to him." He tells them that. Well, they went into the Promised Land, and for many years everything goes well. They build a city. Jerusalem is amazing. They built a temple, and they built a wall around the city, and they are stronger than ever.

God did exceedingly, abundantly above and beyond for them than they would ever have imagined. It was amazing, but it didn't take long in their prosperity for them to start forgetting their need for God. "We're doing good! We're all good here! Our pantry is full. We have a big wall around the city. No one can mess with us. We have a strong army. We have a strong defenses. We're good!"

God said, "Prophets, no, you're not good! You still need me. Don't put your faith and your trust in the wall or the city or in your pantry or the people who are around you. Your hope and your faith needs to be in me, and you need to be obedient to my Word. It's a matter of life and death." God sent prophets to warn them, but they did not heed.

They did not listen, and soon enough despite God's warning, they were taken away into exile. All of the people. They had become millions of people. Their city was leveled. That wall was leveled. Everything they had hoped in and found comfort and security in was leveled to the ground, and they were as a people of God.

Many of them died, but a remnant of them were taken away as slaves into Babylon in Persia for 70 years. After 70 years, God brought a remnant of them back, and they came to find their city leveled and ruined. For many of the people, the joy and the life that had been there was no longer there, and they are broken. They are sobered.

They know the reason the city was the way it was and what they had experienced was because they did not hear and listen to and heed the Word of God. They had forgotten God and turned their backs on God, and they knew what they had experienced was the result of their sin and their disobedience, so they're back and they're thankful God brought them back, but they are ready to hear.

They are ready to listen. That's what we see in Nehemiah, chapter 8. You may think, "What does that have to do with us?" Brothers and sisters, so much of what they were experiencing in the consequences of their sin points forward to what we experience in our sin and sinfulness and the corruption and devastation associated with not being obedient to God.

As we think about our one nation under God and the things we are having conversations about and the things that our children are exposed to and that we are exposing ourselves to, there are churches and the people of God today who are supposed to proclaim the Word of God who are preaching anything and everything but the Word of God. They are preaching and proclaiming things that contradict the Word of God in the name of God, and it is sobering.

How much lower do we need to go or how much darker can it get? Are we going to hear and heed the warnings that God has given us in his Word or will we suffer the same fate? Will our families and will our children suffer the same fate and be enslaved and exiled? Brothers and sisters, we need revival. We need to wake up. We need God to do what only he can do.

So many of us have become so callused because we've been in it for so long, and we don't see. We're not alarmed by the things we should be alarmed by. We're not sobered by the things we need to be sobered by. Our hearts are not broken by the things they need to be broken by. Our God is not only forgotten, but he is dishonored in our one nation under God.

People of God and people of the Word of God, we need revival. What we see in Nehemiah, chapter 8, is basically what I would say is the fire. It's all of the wood stacked up ready for revival. Listen. Only God can give revival when his Spirit is poured out. We're hearing about something happening in Kentucky.

I don't know too much about it. I think it's a legit thing, but what we see him do in Scripture when his Spirit is poured out and what he has done, oh, that he would do it again here and now! What is your faith, your hope, and your trust in? These are the points of the sermon that I want us to see.

The people of God are powerfully protected when they *prioritize the Word of God*, when they *posture themselves to worship God*, and when they *purpose to walk with God*. What is your priority? What is your posture? What is your purpose? Let's stand and read Nehemiah, chapter 8, verses 1 through 12 together remembering that the people of God are powerfully protected when their priority is the Word of God, when their posture is to worship God, and when their purpose is to walk with God.

Verse 1: **“And all the people.”** Now, there had been millions of people 70 years prior but only a remnant of about 50,000 were left, and all of that 50,000 **“gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate.”** This is in that city of Jerusalem that had been leveled with those 50,000 people.

...they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand.

And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand.”

There were 13 men (13 leaders) there with Ezra. In verse 5, “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the

people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads...” All of them (the men, the women, and all who could understand) bowed.

“...and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept...” They were so convicted. They were so sobered. They were so brokenhearted by what God had revealed to them in his Holy Word that they “...wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions...” “Today is a day of celebration.” He said,

“...send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.’ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way...” They were realizing from that moment that the joy of the Lord was their strength. They “...went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

The people of God are powerfully protected when their priority is the Word of God, when their posture is to worship God, and when their purpose is to walk with God. What is your priority? What is your posture? What is your purpose? How have you come today? Why have you come today?

In Nehemiah, chapter 8, verse 1, we are told... Let’s listen. This is the kindling. This is what begins a revival amongst the people of God. They had been devastated. They came home. Where there were millions of people there were only now 50,000 people. Many of their loved ones and their forefathers were dead as the consequences of their sin.

Their city that was so teeming with life, an overflowing and flourishing city, was the envy of everyone around. They had the biggest wall. They had the biggest temple. Everyone was amazed by Jerusalem the city, but these people came, and what was once there was no longer there. It was leveled to the ground.

It was clear that God had graciously and mercifully allowed that remnant to return, and God's hand was upon them. If you remember, Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer to the king, was a servant or a slave. God showed him favor, and King Artaxerxes actually provided for Nehemiah to come back for the building of the wall of the city and the building of the temple.

He actually funded it. They built the wall in 52 days because everybody worked so hard. Everyone labored and contributed to the building of the wall, so God had done a miracle. Clearly, his hand was on them, so they were encouraged, but they did not ever want to happen again what had happened.

There was still a lot of work to do as they were not what they had been, and they didn't want to ever make the same mistakes their forefathers had made. They didn't want their children to experience the devastation and the slavery that they had experienced. They didn't want their children to be exiled.

They knew they needed to hear the voice of God and heed the voice of God, so all of the people gathered as one man. Nehemiah, chapter 8, verse 1. Picture that. There is a picture being painted. As one man... With no division and everyone's pride laid aside, no anger, and no bitterness.

Despite the fact there were a lot of people and a lot of problems and a lot of needs in the mix, everyone laid their pride aside. There was no anger. There was no bitterness. They gathered as one man and one body united in solidarity. They all knew what they needed together. Pride was not in the mix. They gathered together **"...as one man into the square before the Water Gate."**

There is so much symbolism as they were gathering before the Water Gate. We don't have time to get into that, but they told Ezra to see that and hear that. Ezra didn't tell them what they needed. They knew what they needed. **"And they told Ezra the**

**scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses...**” They didn’t ask just anyone to come. They asked Ezra to come.

Ezra had a reputation. In Ezra, the book before Nehemiah, chapter 7, verse 10, **“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”** They knew who they needed to consult. They, the people, the men, and the women who gathered as one man looked to Ezra. They said, “Ezra, bring the Book.” They knew what they needed.

They didn’t say, “Ezra, come tell us what you want to tell us.” They said, “Come and bring us the Book. We need to know what the Book says.” The Book was the Book of God, the Book of the Law of Moses, and the commands that Moses and scribes had written down so as the people went into the Promised Land they would not have to wonder. “Bring the Book, Ezra.” They knew what they needed. They initiated.

So often within Christianity everyone thinks, “We just have to do what the pastor says. We have to do what the pastor wants.” No. We need to know what God wants. We need to hear his Word. When we come to church and when we gather as one man for the glory of Christ, because a house divided cannot stand, according to Jesus, and we’re fighting a battle and we’re wrestling not against flesh and blood but against principalities, we need to come together as one man or one body in Christ, and we need to know what God says so we can endure.

The book of Revelation in talking about the great tribulation says, “This calls for wisdom and understanding.” If you’re going to make it, if you’re going to persevere, if you’re going to endure instead of compromise and cower, this calls for wisdom and understanding. These people knew that if they were going to continue and if they were going to stop themselves and their families from making the same mistakes they had made, they needed to hear and heed the Word of God.



“Ezra, bring the Book.” They gathered as one man. Verse 2: **“So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women...”** Hear this. **“...and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month.”** That means the children, too. I want to pause there for a moment.

Listen. I don't want this to come across in a legalistic way in any way. I know there is so much different about our culture than there was in this culture, but ultimately, we have a heart not just for moms and dads to come and hear the Word of God proclaimed but also all of those who can understand. That means children, too.

I want to dispel any potential confusion out there, because there is confusion. We do offer not alternative but supplemental opportunities for teenagers and for children on Sunday mornings, but understand and know they are meant to intentionally be supplemental opportunities and not alternative opportunities to gathering as one man in the sanctuary to hear the Word of God proclaimed as one body.

The men needed to hear the Word of God. The women needed to hear the Word of God. The children needed to hear the Word of God proclaimed. Listen. I don't want to minimize what takes place in these supplemental opportunities that we have. They are amazing. We have the most amazing teen ministry and the most amazing youth ministry.

There is a lot of love. There is worship going on in those spaces, and we want you to send your children to those spaces, and we want them to learn, and we want them to be loved, and we want them to grow, but I'm telling you it's my deep conviction that your children... You need as a parent to do your best to, as soon as possible, when you think they can understand, bring them here.

There is never going to be a right time. It is going to be uncomfortable. We provide resources out there to help you, but I want you to hear me. The one distraction that never bothers me is when there are children in the mix and when a baby cries.

Sometimes, parents get so stressed out when their baby cries. Our hearts feel for that parent, but I want you to know it's a beautiful sound.

Honestly, before the Lord I praise God that parent did not let the fact that they had a baby or a child keep them from coming. In fact, they brought them, because they have a heart for their children to know what they know. Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that you get a get-out-of-jail-free card.

If there is a distraction, we're just going to love you, and we're going to pray for you. We want you to come, and we want your children to come, so, please, bring them not just to dessert. Listen. Again, I say that not meaning to minimize what takes place in teen ministry and in TeamKID. They are awesome.

We have the most amazing children's and teens' ministry around, but they are intended to be supplemental opportunities. Bring and get your children here if they can understand. They need to understand sooner than later. Come up with a strategy to do that. That's what we see here. This is the kindling for revival (the men, women, and all who could understand what they heard on the first day of the seventh month).

Verse 3: **“And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate...”** He faced the people **“...from early morning...”** That is, from the break of dawn **“...until midday...”** so from about 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. For six hours, all of the men, the women, and all who could understand were there in their presence.

**“And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”** There is no Hebrew word for *attentive*. Really, a more literal translation is that everybody who was there had their ears to the Book. Their ears were not to Ezra. They didn't want to hear what Ezra had to say. They wanted to hear what God had to say. They needed to hear the voice of God.

They did not want to make the same mistakes. They were living in dark days. They were surrounded with devastation. They felt vulnerable. Although they had built the

wall, it wasn't what it used to be, and there were a lot of people and a lot of other nations that probably had their eyes on them that thought they needed slaves, and they didn't want to go away to slavery. They felt vulnerable, so clearly we see in Nehemiah, chapter 8, in these first three verses...

1. *Their priority was to hear the Word of God.* Because they knew that's when the people of God were powerfully protected, the priority was the Word of God. They gathered as one man, and our priority should be the same. Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy, chapter 4, who was a pastor of the church in Ephesus, "**Timothy, devote...**"

Not just commit. If you devote to something, it's at the expense of committing to other things. You can commit to many things. He said to Timothy, "**...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation...**" As in preaching. "**...to teaching.**" He says to Timothy in verse 15, "**Practice these things, immerse yourself in them...**" Be all about these things.

He says, "**Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.**" Men, women, and all of those who can understand. Saved from what? The wrath of God. Saved from what? The consequences of sin, from corruption, from devastation.

We need to know and understand the way to walk, because we live in a world filled with lies. We live in a world where there are so many voices screaming at us things that absolutely contradict what God has shown us (the truth that leads to life) and instead lead to sin and lead to death. We need to prioritize the Word of God like they did in Ezra, chapter 8, verses 1 through 3

We need to come and hear the Word proclaimed with a posture of worship.

2. *Their posture was to worship God.* Verse 4... Picture it in your mind. Ezra, this man who had established himself as faithful and had set his heart to study and to

teach the Word of God so the people could go to life instead of death, **“...stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.”**

“Ezra, you bring the Book. You bring the Word of God. We’re going to make a platform for you. We’ll take care of that.” There is preparation here. They were eager. They were ready. They wanted everyone to be able to hear and everyone to be able to see. There are 50,000 people. They need to make accommodations so that everyone could hear the Book, the Word.

**“And beside him...”** This is beautiful See this posture. **“And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema...”** I’m not going to go through those names. On his left were 13 men. There are a lot of commentaries and a lot of speculation as to who those men specifically were. Some people believe they were priests.

I just believe they were leaders, lay leaders, well-respected men who were coming and standing beside Ezra for no other purpose than to give affirmation and support. At this point, they weren’t accomplishing anything other than to say, “We believe this, too.” They were looking out at their families.

They were standing with Ezra facing all of the people. Their children were watching. Their wives were watching along with their neighbors and co-workers, and by standing with Ezra beside Ezra, as he boldly and authoritatively read the Word of God, all of them were saying, “This is what we believe. Listen to this.”

So often in our culture it’s... I don’t want to get legalistic about this, but you guys know the term or the phrase *back-row Baptist*. So often, we come to church, and we want to sit in a strategic place so we can make a quick exit or so we can stay far removed and just kick back. That’s not what these men or these leaders did.

They actually came up on the platform. They stood beside Ezra, the man who had set himself apart as one who knew the Word of God, and they wanted people by their standing on the right and on the left to know, “This is what we believe. This is what we

need.” Brothers and sisters, I want to challenge you not in a legalistic way to think about where you sit and why you sit there.

Is it all about making the quick escape, or have you come to hear the Word of God? Have you come so that your wife and your children and those who can understand can hear the Word of God and heed the Word of God? You need to come and sit strategically for that worshipful purpose.

They came. They had a posture of worship. That’s when the people of God are powerfully protected, when their posture is to worship God. See those men. Verse 5: **“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people...”** This is symbolic. “We are opening what has been shut and where dust has collected, and we know the consequences we have suffered because we did not hear this before. We did not pay attention to the Word of God, so we’re opening the Book. We know this is what we need. This is why we have come, to listen to Ezra bring the Book.”

Verse 5 says, **“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood.”** This is reverence. This isn’t legalism. That’s why we stand here. This is a nod to exactly what we see. We stand to say, “This is what we believe.” We stand in reverence not in rote ritual.

The men, the women, and all who could understand, when Ezra lifted up that Book and they knew they were about to hear it, they all stood. Their posture was worshipful. Verse 6: **“And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God...”** It’s not just any old god and not just a god but the great God, the one true God, the eternal God, the God whom they were about to hear from as his Word is proclaimed. **“...and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen...’”**

It’s not just, “Amen,” but double amen, like, “We believe this!” All the people (the men, the women, and the children) **“...lifting up their hands.”** Basically, their

posture was saying, “Lord, we need what you’re going to give. If you’re giving it, we’ll receive it. We want it. Lord, give us. Fill our hands. Fill our hearts. Fill our minds. We need what you have to say. We need to know what you want to walk in your ways,” so they lifted up their hands to symbolize that. That was the way or the posture of prayer back in the day.

What is your heart posture when you pray? They were saying, “Lord, give us your Word.” **“And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”** They did this to express their humility before God. They were not coming to consider what God might want them to do. They were coming to hear what God wanted them to do, and their yes was on the table. Their hands were open to receive. They weren’t going to sit back and think, “Let me see what I want to pick from.”

No. They all had their hands open. They all had their heads bowed. Their posture was worshipful. It was expressing, “Lord, we believe you. Lord, we trust you. We fear you. We fear not anyone else. We have come to know and realize the mistakes we have made by not listening and by disobeying. We don’t want to make those mistakes again. Lord, show us mercy.”

I think about the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that Jesus shares in the Gospels. Jesus says to his disciples... The Pharisees were the religious guys. They could quote all of the Scripture. They wore all of the religious regalia. They were the respected guys, the ones who were supposed to be in the know when it came to having a relationship with God.

Jesus said this Pharisee went into the temple to pray, and he stood with his head held high and his chest held high, and he prayed, “I thank you, God, that I am not like this pitiful tax collector. I thank you that I am able to give what I am able to give, and I am thankful that I’m able to do all of the things and serve in the way... I’m such a good guy. Thank you, God, for helping me be such a good guy.”

I'm paraphrasing, obviously. Then, Jesus said the tax collector came in a completely different way. His head was bowed to the floor. He did not and could not even look up because he was so humbled. He knew he deserved condemnation as a sinner, but he came to the merciful God, because he knew God's mercies were new every morning, and he begged God for mercy.

He pleaded for mercy as one who did not deserve mercy, and he said, "O God, show me mercy," and Jesus said, "Which one of the two men do you think went down to their house justified?" In other words, which prayer did God hear and which prayer did God answer? Clearly, it was not the Pharisee.

How do you come? How have you come? Why do you come? See what I believe is the wood stacked in preparation for revival, for the fire of God, and for the Spirit of God to be poured out. These people were postured to worship God. God is looking for those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. These people are coming to hear.

Think about the Philippian jailer in Acts, chapter 16, when God worked when Paul and Silas were in prison, and all of the jail opened up, and this jailer thought he was going to be killed. Paul said, "You don't need to worry. We're all still here." This jailer was so overwhelmed. He thought he was a goner because, as a jailer, he would have been responsible.

They would have put him to death. This jailer realized the situation, and he said without hesitation, "Tell me what I must do to be saved. I'm listening." That's the way these people came. This man, the jailer, was desperate. He knew there was something to this God, the God who Paul and Silas prayed to. He said, "Tell me what I must do to be saved."

That's how these people came. They were ready to hear. They had their eyes on the table. "You tell me! I'm in!" Their arms were opened. Their heads were bowed to the

ground. They were all there saying, “Amen and amen.” Their posture was to worship God. Their priority was the Word of God. Lastly...

3. *Their purpose was to walk with God.* It wasn't just so they could hear and consider. They were far from God. They felt so far from God. They wanted to feel near God. Remember what Moses told the people that God had told him. “If you hear my voice and obey my voice and keep my covenant, like walk in fellowship with me, then you will be my treasured possession. You will be like a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. You'll experience the blessing of being in close relationship with me.”

These people were not experiencing that blessing. In disobedience, they had been exiled, so they felt the darkness. They felt so far away from God. They thought maybe God had forsaken them and maybe God had forgotten them, so they're coming and seeking, because they wanted to be back in right relationship. They wanted to be that treasured possession. They realized the wall did not do for them what only God could do for them. They realized their pantries and their big bank accounts could not do for them what only God could do for them, so they came.

Their purpose was to walk with God and to understand so they could obey. In verse 7, these other men...I'm not going to say their names...were Levites. They helped the people to understand. They did not just listen. They wanted to understand and know so they could obey. The Levites helped them do that.

They took care and they were diligent to do that. That was the purpose of the gathering, not just to hear but to understand and obey, and that's what our purpose is as we preach and as we expose and exposit the Word of God. In fact, it's interesting. Back in Exodus, chapter 18, verse 20, if you remember when Jethro saw Moses so overwhelmed because millions of people were coming to him with problems, he said, “Moses, this is not good. You cannot continue doing this.”



He told him to appoint leaders and elders to help the people with their problems. He said specifically in I think it's 18:20, "What you need to do is warn the people of the statutes of God. That needs to be your priority, Moses." That word *warn*...some translations translate it as *teach*...is really a much stronger word, maybe perhaps *admonish*, but more literally the word means to shine and not just shine but shine brightly as in expose.

"Moses, your priority needs to be to expose to the people the Word, the will, and ways of God so they will know the way in which they are to walk and to please God. They will know what leads to life and pleases him." That's what expository preaching does. That's what these people are doing.

They're exposing or uncovering and making sure people not just heard but that they understood while the people remained in their places. The minute the last song was sung they weren't rushing out. They weren't watching their watch the whole time because they knew something was happening later in the day. No. They remained in their places. Their ears were to the Book.

Then, after that the Levites (the priests) broke it all down. Specifically in verse 8, "**They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly...**" As in distinctly meaning that every jot and every tittle is important. Every word is important, so they made sure every word was understood word by word.

"**...and they gave the sense...**" In other words, they even further made the application. God's Word or voice at the mountain had been given long before. Moses had preached his Deuteronomy sermons way long before, so they're probably thinking, "Does this really apply to us today? We've been exiled. What do we have to do with the people who are standing at the foot of the mountain?"

Listen. The truth is there is always one meaning to the Word of God, but there are many applications. The Word of God is always relevant. It was relevant, it is relevant,

and it will be relevant. It does not go void. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, so in giving it the sense the priests helped them understand how to apply the Word of God to themselves in that day in their circumstances, and that is our heart to do today as we preach the Word.

They did so **“...so that the people understood the reading.”** Their purpose was to walk with God and to be in right relationship with God. Their priority was the Word of God, their posture was to worship God, and their purpose was to walk with God. What’s your priority, what’s your posture, and what’s your purpose?

In verse 9, as we bring it to a close, **“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest...”** We see these people’s response to what they understood. Basically, their hearts dropped. Their hearts were convicted. Their hearts were broken because they saw the truth. Their sin was exposed.

Hebrews 4:12 says, **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”** It cut them. The Word of God, the truth, and the reality made known to them pierced their hearts, and they realized their actions had offended a holy, righteous God, and they feared God. They were brokenhearted. They wept.

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites who taught the people said, **““This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.”** They wept because they were so convicted that their hearts were broken. Do you care? You have sinned against a holy God. When the Word of God cuts you, do you weep and then just go on about your way, or do you change? These people repented. We see them repent. We’ll see that in a moment.

Second Corinthians 7:10: **“For godly sorrow produces a repentance...”** A lot of people feel guilty. They’re sorry for their circumstances. They’re sorry when the corruption the Word of God tells us they’ll experience from their sin plays out, and they’re affected, and their children are affected, and there is corruption all around them,

so they're sorry. Maybe they'll come to church because they want to get out of the pit they are in, but it doesn't work like that.

These people were convicted, and they were brokenhearted because they had offended a holy, righteous God who loved them and was faithful to them, a God who shows grace and mercy, so the people were mourning and weeping, and the leaders said, "No. Today is a day of celebration."

This was the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets where the people of God were to do what we did earlier in the service and express their thanksgiving to God for his provision. They truly did have a lot to be thankful for. I mean, they built that wall in 52 days. God's hand was on them. They had been exiled, but they were home, and even though it wasn't what it used to be, God's hand was clearly on them. He had not forsaken them. He had not forgotten them, so they're saying, "Yes, you should mourn and weep."

James 4 says, "**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. [...] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.**" In doing so, "**Humble yourselves before the Lord...**" knowing he will not leave you there but he will raise you up.

He gives grace to the humble. He opposes the proud. These people were humble. They wept. They were convicted, but what the leaders say is, "**Go your way.**" "You need to celebrate because God loves you. God has provided for you. God still has not forsaken you even though he should have forgotten you a long time ago."

This is the Feast of Weeks. It's a day of celebration. He says, "**Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine...**" Which is what they did. "Be generous, because God has been generous to you." "**...and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.**"

Think about that for a moment. We're going to come back as we bring it to a close (that moment and that statement). **“So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people...”**They did. They thought about who God was and what he had done for them. They knew they had a lot to be thankful for and celebrate. They **“...went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”**

**“And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”** The joy of the Lord is your strength. Think about these people. They were coming back to a city that had been devastated. They did not have what they once had. Maybe their grandfathers had told them about the mighty, amazing temple and the formidable wall that surrounded it and all of the abundance and the vineyards and the flourishing that was once there.

Well, none of it was there, and these people, even though they had a little wall that they built in 52 days, still felt very vulnerable. They did not have an army, so, perhaps, they were like, “We put ourselves in this place. I can't believe we have gotten here. Will we just end up going back into captivity again? How are we going to stop from going back? We're still vulnerable.”

This is why Nehemiah, the governor, Ezra, and all of the priests said, “Don't be grieved. The joy of the Lord is your strength.” In other words, the joy that flows from being in right relationship with a holy, righteous God is your strength. That word for strength means mountain or fortress or strong tower.

You need to know, people of God, yes, you had walked away from God. You had forgotten God, but he has brought you back, and your strength and your comfort should not be in any wall or in any city or in any filled pantry or in any amount of wealth or even in one another. The joy of the Lord...

Walking in right relationship with a holy, righteous God whose steadfast love endures forever, who delivers, who protects, who speaks and gives his Word and tells you how you should walk and sends even prophets and preachers to preach the Word of God to admonish and warn us and shine brightly and expose the Word of God so that you can actually understand and not only you but also your wives and also your children, because they need to hear it. You need to hear it. Your wife needs to hear it. Everyone needs to hear it.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. God will give you as your strong tower and as your provider and as your mountain in a time of trouble everything you need to endure. He'll give you the wisdom and the understanding to endure even the great tribulation. He is faithful. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Brothers and sisters, is the joy of the Lord your strength? Our world today even within the church has so many people dealing with and overwhelmed by anxiety and fear. I can't tell you how many times I hear this. I know it's a real thing. Feelings are real, and I don't want to disparage or minimize anyone's situation when it comes to anxiety, but God does not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-control, so maybe do not minimize your fear, but I want to make much of God, the one who gives you strength.

The truth is you need not fear. You've been listening to too many lies. Even your flesh lies. The Enemy lies, and it causes you to be afraid, but you need to fear not, because he is with you, and he will never leave you or forsake you, and if the Word of God is your priority and your posture is to worship him and your purpose is to walk with him, then he will never leave you.

He will never forsake you even to the end of the age. He's the friend that sticks closer than a brother. He is with you, so you need not fear. Know who you are. Know even more who he is. This is what the Word of God does. This is why you need to make it a priority and your children need to make it a priority.

Fear. Depression. Anger. Bitterness. Licentiousness. Materialism. Confusion. Brothers and sisters, we need not be confused. He gives us wisdom and understanding. We need not be afraid. How could we stake our flag in anger? Yet so many of us stake our flags in anger. We who have been forgiven, in what world does it make sense for us to withhold forgiving someone else when our God has forgiven us? When we know the battle is real and, as Jesus said, “A house divided cannot stand,” why for one minute would we allow there to be division in the house?

Be not confused. The people of God are powerfully protected. In other words, the joy of the Lord is their strength when the Word of God is their priority. Not their wall. Not their bank account. Not their sports team. When the Word of God is their priority and when their posture is worshipful and when they know God is their provider and they know they deserve hell and they deserve condemnation, but in and through Christ God has shown them mercy, truly there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We come humbly. We never forget who he is and who we are and what we actually deserve, and we thank him for the grace and the mercy, and we receive the grace and the mercy. Do you come to worship him? They came with a worshipful posture. Brothers and sisters, their priority was the Word of God, their posture was worshipful, and their purpose was to walk with God.

They knew they needed to hear the Word of God so they could walk with God and be in a right relationship with him so they could experience the joy that nothing else could give them and the peace that nothing else could give them. That was their strength. Brothers and sisters, if we are going to endure, if we are going to stand in these dark days, if we are going to persevere...

Not just me but your children, your wife, your family, and your grandchildren. The battle is real. Can we get much lower than we are as a nation? Literally, I cannot

believe the things we are celebrating all around us and the things that we as Christians are allowing in our homes and watching and allowing our children to just consume.

Brothers and sisters, the Word of God must be a priority, and our posture must be worshipful. We need to know who we are. We are in desperate need of God. We are in desperate need of his Spirit. We are in desperate need of revival. This is not one nation under God. God is faithful, and he has not forgotten us, but we need him to come. We need him to bless. We need him to pour out his Spirit and do what only he can do.

We must make the Word of God a priority and humble ourselves before him, and we must seek to walk with him. Not just come on Sundays but every day. We must live according to his Word. Yes, when convicted, repent. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and if we are going to endure, if you're going to endure, and if your children are going to endure and make it, and if they're going to be protected...

The people of God are powerfully protected when the Word of God is their priority, when their posture is to worship God, and when their purpose is to walk with God. I want to close with Psalm 61. David, a man after God's own heart, said... Let's bow our heads and pray. This is a prayer. It's David's prayer. This was a man who had walked with God.

He said, **“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth...”** In other words, “Lord, I feel so far from you. I feel like I could not be further from you.” **“...listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.”** “My heart is broken. I'm desperate. I'm discouraged. I'm depressed. I'm afraid.” **“...I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!”**

“You are my strength. The joy of the Lord is my strength, O Lord. I want to be in right relationship with you so I repent of my sin and sinfulness. I turn away from the

lies of the world and making my priority your Word and your truth, which is a light unto my path. I need wisdom and understanding, O Lord. Give me wisdom and understanding so that I can heed and obey and walk and lead my family in truth so that we can endure for your glory.”

**“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!”**

We need you, Lord. We need your joy. We need your strength. We need your peace today, O Lord. Knit our hearts together. Spirit of God, fall on this place. Reveal in a way that only you can reveal. Convict of sin, righteousness and judgment. Sober us to the realities of sin and sinfulness. The wages of sin is death. He who sows seeds in the flesh of the flesh reaps corruption.

He who knows the right thing to do but does it not, to him it is a sin. God, you hate sin. When we sin, we have offended you. We have sinned against you, the God who died for our sins. Jesus, you shed your blood for our sins. O God, may we be sobered by the reality of what sin is and what sin does not only to us but also to others!

O God, break our hearts with the things that break your heart. We draw near to you by faith, Lord, knowing that what we deserve is condemnation, but in our time of need, O God, we cry out to you for help. We need your help. Be our refuge today. Be our strength and our mountain in these days of trouble.

O God, we need you. Our church needs you. These families need you. These men, these women, and these children need you. We need you today, O God. Shine light in darkness. Take that which is dead, O Lord, and make it alive. I pray for revival. Revive us again. David prayed in Psalm 119:8, **“O God, give me understanding that I might keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Revive me in your ways, O God.”**



I pray that you would do that. Revive us today in your ways. Where we have wandered far from you, show us where we have wandered far. Revive us in your ways. Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Try us and know our minds. Find the wicked ways in us and lead us in your righteousness. Give us faith to that which you reveal to us so that we can be obedient for your glory. I pray for revival in Jesus' name. Spirit of God, fall on this place. Take hearts of stone and make them hearts of flesh.

Give us ears to hear, O God, and faith to obediently respond and worshipfully respond. Oh, that we would be a people that prioritize your Word, that posture ourselves for worship, and that purpose in our hearts to walk in your ways and rest in the fact that, because of that, we are powerfully protected and that your joy (joy in you) is our strength and that, because of that, no weapon formed against us shall prosper and nothing shall separate us from your love.

May we believe like Paul and be persuaded that you are able to keep that which we have committed until that day come rain, shine, hell, or high water, no matter how hard it gets and no matter how dark it gets and no matter how wicked it gets and no matter how abominable it gets, Lord, may we be set apart from all of that, your treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation for your glory.

APPENDIX 5  
SERMON 4 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
February 26, 2023

John 21:15–19

Turn in your Bibles to John, chapter 21. We're going to read verses 15 through 19 together here in a moment. I just want to prepare you. It's a familiar passage, and oftentimes I think people see Peter, but it's not about Peter. This is about Jesus. Let's read together. In verse 15 we are told, **“When they [the disciples] had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’”** “I love you, Lord.” “Peter, do you love me more than these?”

“He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’

Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

Please be seated. In this passage, see Jesus. Focus on Jesus. See Peter but as a secondary observation. See the restoration of Peter, yes. So many of us are encouraged by

the fact and we relate to Peter in that he had denied Christ three times. Yet, we see him here with Jesus, and there is restoration.

So often we can relate to Peter in our lives, but see Jesus. These are the three points. See the mission of Jesus Christ continue. It's not over. Jesus died, Jesus rose again and conquered sin, death, and hell, and he ascended into heaven, but Jesus' ministry or his mission continued. See in this passage the motivation of Jesus, which we know is love.

“Greater love has no one than this than someone lay down his life.” The motivation of Jesus continues. It is conveyed here to Peter. “Peter, I want you to continue the mission, and not just you but the disciples and the church. I want you to continue building my church, but I want you to make sure that your motivation is love as my motivation is love.” Three times, he asks him, “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me more than these?”

We also see the model of Jesus Christ commanded. It's not suggested. He didn't say, “Think about following me.” He said, “Follow me.” Christians follow Christ. We walk according to the way that Jesus walked. We live our lives according to his Word and, as such, we follow him. We don't do our own thing when we want when we feel like it. We follow him. We obey him because we love him. We follow him.

See the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ continue in this passage. Be encouraged by that and the motivation of Jesus Christ conveyed. As you remember and as you reflect on his love, love him back. We love him because he first loved us. Then, see the model of Jesus Christ commanded. It's not suggested. It's commanded. Starting in verse 15...

1. *The mission of Jesus Christ continued.* This is amazing. “**When they had finished breakfast...**” Now, leading up to this point, some of the disciples were out fishing. They weren't catching anything. Then, Jesus shows up on the shore. Many of you

know the testimony. They put in their nets, and they pulled up exactly 153 fish. Large fish. Not just little fish but large fish.

Their nets were full, and they realized it was Jesus. This is after Jesus rose from the grave. Peter couldn't wait. Jesus had told them to go to Galilee, and they were waiting for Jesus. Well, Jesus showed up. It says Jesus was cooking them breakfast. Think about that for a moment. Jesus, the Son of God, fed them bread. He fed them fish and loaves. They had breakfast together. They finished breakfast.

Think about what has led up to this point. This is the last chapter in the book of John. In John, chapter 20, verse 31, John said, "All of these things that are written in the gospel of John (every miracle recorded, everything I recorded that Jesus said, Jesus dying on the cross and raising from the grave) that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and by believing in him, you might have life in his name."

John's purpose is to present Jesus. He wants you to see Jesus. Not Peter. Peter was with Jesus. He wants you to see Jesus. He wants you to know Jesus. He wants you to have life in Jesus. Jesus came and did for us what no one else could do for us. He made a way. His blood was shed on the cross to pay the price that we could not pay to wash away our sins.

What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. He has come that we might have eternal life and abundant life in him. John wants us to know and wants us to believe in Jesus as he has believed in Jesus and wants us to experience the eternal life, the salvation, the hope, and the freedom that he has found in Jesus Christ.

Yet, then we have John, chapter 21, after that. This is like a conclusion to what has already been said. He should have just stopped right there at chapter 20, verse 31, unless he had an intention or a purpose, and it wasn't for you to see Peter. It was for us to know and be encouraged that the ministry doesn't stop. It is continuing.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “...**I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**” He says at the end of the gospel of Matthew, “**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...**” He doesn’t stop there. “...**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**”

We often think of the Great Commission as this missions thing that it’s only for missions. We go. We send missionaries across to the ends of the world. No. It’s to make disciples. Do go. Send laborers out into the harvest, because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Go. It is the Great Commission. “...**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**”

Mark puts it this way at the end of his gospel. “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel.**” You could say “Teach them to observe everything that I have commanded you with authority,” like Jesus said in Matthew 28. Well, this is the Great Commission of John’s gospel. “**Feed my sheep.**”

First of all, all throughout the Old Testament there are so many things we could talk about. The prophets of God were those who were to proclaim the voice of God or the Word of God or the message of God so that the people would know how to walk and how to live their lives so they could be obedient to God. God sent prophets to them, and they were considered shepherds. They were called *shepherds*.

In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 34, the shepherds are called out because they are not feeding the sheep. They are not giving the people the Word of God that they need to hear so they can live by it. In Jeremiah, again, “Woe to the shepherds of Israel,” because they are not feeding the sheep. Then, God promises in Jeremiah, chapter 3, verse 15,

“I’m going to give you a shepherd because these shepherds are no good. They’re not preaching the Word of God. They’re not proclaiming my Word to you, so I will give you a shepherd after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. He’ll give you what you need so you can be who I want you to be and so you can find life instead of death. The wages of sin is death. You need to know what sin is. You need to know what not to do. You need to know what to do so that it will go well with you, and not just you but also your family.”

The prophets of God were considered shepherds and the people of God sheep. If you remember when Jesus, in Matthew, chapter 9, saw the crowds and the multitudes of people, it says that he had compassion on them. He was burdened for them seeing them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

They were harassed and helpless. They were scattered. They weren’t following anybody. They were doing their own thing. They were hoping for the best, and as such, they were harassed, and they were helpless like sheep without a shepherd, so Jesus, then, in Matthew, chapter 10, says, “Send out laborers into the vineyard.”

He sends his 12 apostles (the disciples) who he had been preaching to and teaching. He told them, “You need to go and preach and teach and proclaim what I have been proclaiming.” He sent them out two by two. The people who did not listen to them... Remember, “Wipe the dust off of your feet.” They were to preach the Word of God and people were to listen to what they were preaching. Jesus’ ministry was preaching. It was his mission. “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

What we see in John, chapter 21, is Jesus passing the torch not just to Peter but to all of us. “Follow me,” in the same way that Paul passed the torch to Timothy. “Preach the Word. They need Scripture. Scripture is God-breathed. It is useful and profitable that the men and women of God might be equipped for every good work so they can do what

I'm calling them to do and be who I'm calling them to be. Timothy, I charge you in the presence of a holy and righteous God who judges the living and the dead, preach the Word."

In the same way that Moses told the people of God before they were going into the Promised Land and he wasn't going into the Promised Land with them, remember Deuteronomy. "I will raise up a prophet." They were all worried. "Who is going to tell us what to do? We're going to be like sheep without a shepherd. We need the Word of God to keep us gathered and assembled so we won't be harassed and helpless." Moses said, "Listen to the Word of God. He's going to raise up a prophet to preach to you and to proclaim the Word of God for you. Listen to him."

That's what Jesus is doing here. He's saying, "This is to comfort us." The disciples were thinking, "How are we going to know? We've been listening to Jesus." In John, chapter 6, remember what Peter said to Jesus. "You have the words of eternal life. We have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Where else would we go? We're going to follow you. We're going to listen to you because you are giving us what we need to know in a way that no one else can give us what we need to know."

"Peter, now you're going to do that." The apostles are going to do that. We know this is what Peter was picking up, because we don't see Peter... They just finished breakfast. Jesus just made them breakfast, so does Peter need to make breakfast for people and feed them in that way? That's not what we see Peter do through the book of Acts, is it?

We see Peter preaching. In Acts, chapter 2, the first thing we see Peter do is preach the Word of God and preach the gospel of God. Then, as the church explodes and expands, remember what the apostles say in Acts, chapter 6. Peter is part of the apostles. The Hellenistic widows were worried because they were getting overlooked. No one was ministering to them.

The outreach ministry was fraud, and they were upset, so everyone got together, and they appointed deacons, and the apostles, Peter included, said, “It’s not right that we should serve tables at the expense of preaching the Word of God.” They prioritized preaching. That’s why I believe this passage is important in this sermon series about prioritizing preaching.

Again, it’s not to disparage the other ministries or the other activities that should be a part of the church. True religion is caring for the orphans and the widows. We should go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples and baptize people, and we should teach and have children’s ministries strategically and women’s ministries and men’s ministries.

We should do all of these things, but preaching is really what fuels. The proclamation of God’s Word is what fuels. We love God because he first loved us. As such, we should love what he loves. We should be a part of his mission. Paul said, “I am a servant of Christ.” We are servants of Christ. We follow Christ.

His mission is continuing, and if you think about what has led up to this... They finished breakfast. Jesus made them breakfast. **“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’”** Who are *these*? Is he referring to the other disciples who were there (James and John and Thomas and the rest)? “Peter, do you love me more than James and John and Thomas love me?”

Some commentators say he is saying, “Peter, do you love me more than you love James, John, and Thomas?” Some commentators say it is referring back to those 153 fish that he had caught. His nets were full. Peter had been a fisherman. “Peter, do you love me more than worldly wealth and success?”

You can put whatever you want in there. “Do you love me more than [blank]?” “I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice...” We are to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. As hard as it may seem, yes, husbands, you are to love the Lord more



than you love your wife. Moms and dads, you are to love the Lord more than you love your children.

You may say, “Well, that’s offensive.” Can I tell you the truth is that if you love the Lord more than you love your wife and, parents, if you love the Lord more than you love your children you will love your wife way more than you loved your wife and you will love your children in a more holy and righteous way than you would have ever loved your children?

Loving the Lord first is not at the expense of loving your wife or your children any less than you would otherwise. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free, and as you love him, he increases your capacity to love. When Jesus is the center of any relationship, it’s a better relationship. Let me tell you!

The mission of Jesus Christ is continued. He calls Peter *Simon, the son of John*. This is serious. This isn’t just, “Yo, bro!” This is Simon, the son of John. Like, Mark Anthony Lashey. This is the full name there. This is formal, like, “Listen up! Look into my eyes, Peter. Do you love me more than these?”

Now, Jesus knew his heart. Jesus saw his heart. God sees the heart, but this was for Peter to reflect. Jesus is trying to accomplish something. “Do you love me more than these?” His mission is motivated by love. We’ll get to that point in a moment, but the mission of Jesus Christ is continued, and that’s amazing. Thankfully, it is continued. Thankfully, by the grace of God, today is the day of salvation. Do not receive this grace of God in vain. Glory to God that the mission continues!

Brothers and sisters, there are a lot of people and a lot of sheep who are still harassed and helpless. The truth is, even within the church (the body of Christ) you look around and the people are scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Why is that? They should not be. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We are the flock of God. We are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

The mission of Jesus Christ continues, so the truth is, as believers, we may be harassed because we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities. The battle is real, but we need not be helpless, because no one weapon formed against us shall prosper. Nothing shall separate us from his love.

We have everything we need to be who he has called us to be, one of that being the grace of God and being the body of Christ, because we assemble. We don't forsake the assembling. We gather. We assemble even more as the day draws near. We stir up one another to love and good works. We're not helpless. We are harassed, but there are a lot of people who are harassed and helpless.

There are even believers who are harassed and helpless, and it should not be. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Jesus has come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. The Holy Spirit is borne in our hearts. We are born again. We have the helper in us so we are not helpless by the blood of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we are not in Christ harassed and helpless. We are the body of Christ. We are sheep with a shepherd. We have the Word of God. It is a light unto our path. If any of us lack wisdom, we can ask for wisdom. We can endure all things through Christ who gives us strength. Praise God that the mission continues!

Praise God for the people who are harassed and helpless around us! They need to hear the Word of God, the gospel, proclaimed. There is still hope for them. Should not we make the most of the opportunity and be all about the mission that continues by the grace of God? Should we not proclaim the gospel not just here but to the ends of the earth?

Should we not gather and assemble and worship the Lord in the way they did? Jesus said, "I will build my church." He's still building his church. Are we a part of his church? Let's come and be the church and let our works show for the glory of God that

people would give glory and shine for him. We are the light of the world as he shines through us like a city set on a hill.

The mission of Jesus Christ continues. This isn't about Peter. This is about Jesus passing the torch to Peter and saying, "Be blessed. Don't worry. I'm with you always even to the ends of the earth. Keep teaching everything that I have commanded. Preach the gospel. Preach the Word. Feed my sheep. Give my sheep knowledge and understanding so they will know what to do, where to go, and who to be. Feed my lambs." Secondly, we see...

2. *The motivation of Jesus Christ conveyed.* Jesus has already asked, "Do you love me more than these, Peter?" **"He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'"** In verse 16, **"He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'"**

This is reinforcement. "Be encouraged. Look into my eyes. The party is not over. I'm still building my church. Those people who are still harassed and helpless, some of them are going to come and be a part of the fold." In John, chapter 10, "My sheep know my voice. They hear my voice."

He says in John, chapter 10, verse 16, **"And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."** There are people (your children, your friends, your neighbors, your spouse) you know who you should be burdened for who by the grace of God the mission continues. We should do everything we can in love to reach them. "Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep."

There are lots of commentaries that say there is something to the fact that different Greek verbs like *agape* love and *phileo* love are used interchangeably throughout

here. He doesn't say just, "Feed my sheep." No. He says lambs and sheep and then little sheep, like, "My beloved sheep." I really think that points to diversity.

Really, I think people make too much about that. We are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all people...red, yellow, black, and white. It's not just for adults. It's for children, too. So often, we push children aside. Jesus got indignant when his disciples forbid the children from coming to him. He said, "Let the little children come unto me."

Last week when we preached from the book of Nehemiah, remember that we talked about it wasn't just the adults who were there. It wasn't just the adults who needed to hear the Word of God. It wasn't just the adults who needed to know how to live their lives. The children and everyone who could understand gathered there.

All of them gathered together ready with arms lifted like, "Lord, give us what we need," and heads bowed in humility like, "We are ready to respond." All of the ears of the men, the women, and those who could understand were attentive to the Book. They were listening not to Ezra but to God, to his voice, and to his Word proclaimed with authority and with boldness.

"Feed my lambs. Tend to my sheep. Feed my sheep. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word..." Prioritize preaching. These are words of eternal life. The mission of Jesus Christ is continued. The motivation of Jesus Christ is conveyed. Everything that Jesus Christ did was because of love. The motivation is love.

Why do we do what we do? Is it to fill our coffers with money or our bank accounts with money? No. Are we looking for attention? Are looking to be lauded and applauded? No. Jesus came because he loved. Jesus went to the cross because he loved. One of my favorite pictures of Jesus in my mind that I love to meditate on is in Mark, chapters 9 and 10, where Jesus is walking up to Jerusalem.

Three times he told his disciples exactly what would happen to him when they got to Jerusalem. It wasn't going to go well. He was going to suffer. He told them, "I'm going to die in Jerusalem. They're going to spit on me. They're going to beat me. They are going to flog me." None of us have ever been flogged. None of us ever want to be flogged.

Jesus was walking ahead of his disciples. That is the picture that is painted. Why? Because he knew what needed to happen in Jerusalem. He wasn't looking forward to suffering. He was looking forward to paying the price that needed to be paid to set men free and do for men what men could not do for themselves. He was going to Jerusalem to save.

This is what he was born to do. This is why he came. Though he was in the form of God he thought not equality with God as a thing to cling to. He didn't come on a vacation to the earth. He humbled himself. He came not just down to earth, but he came way down, born in the likeness of men, which is called the humiliation or his incarnation when he was born in the flesh.

He didn't stop there. He went to the cross. They didn't trick him and nail him to the cross. He went to the cross. He was motivated by God's great love. We love him because he first loved us. Shouldn't we love what he loves? Shouldn't we want to eat what God who loves us so much wants to give us?

The motivation of Jesus Christ is love. Is that your motivation, brothers and sisters? Do you gather because you love Jesus? Again, we've been talking about why we come. How do we come? Are we here to check off our religious to-do list because we feel guilty? Are we here because our wives are making us come or our moms and dads are making us come?

Isaiah, chapter 1, shows us how the people of God were coming to gather just to check off their religious to-do list. They were singing all of the right songs and giving

offerings and doing everything they were supposed to be doing, but their hearts were far from God, and God tells them,

“Stop! Stop gathering. Stop giving. Stop singing. What you are doing is actually making me sick. I don’t need your offering. I don’t need you to sing songs to me. I don’t need you to gather. I want you to want me. I love you. I want you to know how much I love you. I want to have a relationship with you. I want you to understand how great my love is for you, and in understanding, I want you to love me back. I want you to know me.”

The truth is to know him is to love him and to know and understand who he is. His great love... The book of Ephesians... None of this is arbitrary. Ephesians 1:5: **“In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ...”** We aren’t just some charity case. In love, he adopted us and placed us into his family. He doesn’t just save us and say, “Good luck, buddy!” No. “Walk with me. Follow me.”

Ephesians 2 is amazing. Just so you know, we were **“...by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...”** Even when we were sinful and even when we were far from him and separated from him in our trespasses and as such at enmity with God and even as we were offensive to him...

He is a holy God. He hates sin. Even as we were in that state, he loved us and showed us mercy in that he withheld from us what we deserved, which is condemnation and hell, and he placed us into his family, and he saved us and made us alive together in Christ. The motivation of Christ is conveyed to Peter.

He prays in Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 18, one of my favorite prayers, for the church in Ephesus. Paul prays, knowing they were going to experience persecution and suffering, wanting them to endure and stand firm and persevere and be who God was

calling them to be. He says, “...**may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...**”

“You think you know God loves you, but I want God to take you deeper and further, because the way he loves you will blow your mind. You can’t even comprehend it in reality because you’re finite and he is infinite in his perfect love. You can’t even relate to that kind of love, but I’m praying that God will reveal just more as you follow him, that he’ll show you more and more how much he loves you.”

As he does that, Paul knows they’re going to love him back. To know God is to love him. Jesus just doesn’t want people to know *about* him. He didn’t come to be lauded and applauded. He came to lovingly seek and save the lost. The motivation of Jesus is conveyed, and I do think these three times refer back to those three times when Peter denied Christ.

Peter was the one who said, “I will never deny you. I will die for you, Jesus.” Then, we see right after... Remember, Jesus told him, “Before the rooster crows, you’re going to deny me three times.” Peter said, “No way! I love you.” In his heart, he did love Christ, but he denied Christ. We see restoration here. When we think about who God is and what he has done for us and how much he loves us, it elicits within our hearts love for him. “Peter, do you love me? Do you love me?”

I remember when I was in kindergarten at 5 or 6 years old. I can’t remember the exact age, but I was in kindergarten. Someone invited my family to a vacation Bible school. I remember. I’ve told you guys that I was sitting on that pew, and they told me there was a God in heaven, and that he didn’t just know who I was but he loved me. I couldn’t believe that. I was amazed.

I didn’t get saved at that point, but I thought about that as I continued to live my life. I believed that, but when I got into college, the Lord graciously revealed to me

my sin and the depths of my depravity but not in a way that beat me down, because at the same time that he revealed the truth of my sin and sinfulness and that I deserved condemnation he was standing there with open arms saying, “Come unto me. Let me deal with that for you because I love you.”

It made me love him more. What’s amazing is the more I grow in Christ, the more I learn, the more I see, and the more I’m in God’s Word and eat the Word, my sin and sinfulness and the depths of my depravity... Just as I understand the love of God more and more I understand my sinfulness is much more offensive and much more terrible, and it makes me love him more.

This is why we do what we do. This is why we have a church. This is why we gather. This is why we have an early childhood center. At the end of the day, it’s why we have a café. It’s why we spend every penny and greet every person in Jesus’ name and for his glory. The motivation is to be loved.

Jesus’ motivation was clearly love. There was no doubt about it. There was no confusion there. Let it be of us. Let it be said of us. So many of us are confused. We sing, “I love you, Lord.” We wear the tee-shirt, but do we mean what we sing? “Do you love me more than these?” “I could never love you more than my kids.”

I’m telling you, if you love Jesus first and more than your kids, you will love your kids more than you do, and in a greater way, because you will not be hindered by your sin and sinfulness and your pride. Jesus is not okay with us worshiping idols. The Lord is not okay with us loving anything more than him.

Jesus is the one who made your kids. God is the one who gave you your kids. They’re not your kids. They are his kids. Everything you have is his. All things are from him, through him, and to him. God forbid that we love anything more than him! We don’t love the creation; we love the Creator first. Brothers and sisters, the motivation should be love. The mission should continue. The motivation should continue. Paul says in 2



Corinthians 5:14, in talking about why he does what he does, **“For the love of Christ controls us...”**

“I am constrained and I am compelled to go to places that I’ve never been before to people I’ve never met before, people not like me in any way, shape, or form, because of the love of Christ

Jesus came down, so I need to go there to express my love for him. I want people to love what I love. I want people to love who Jesus loves. I want them to know, so I’m going to be a bridge for that. I’m going to be the hands and the feet of Jesus. I’m controlled by that. I’m obsessed with being that.”

That should be our motivation. **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** Then, Jesus said in John 15:14, **“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”** The mission of Jesus Christ is continued. The motivation of Jesus Christ is conveyed.

3. *The model of Jesus Christ is commanded.* “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Feed man lambs. Tend to my sheep. Feed my sheep.” Peter was grieved and cut to the heart because Jesus asked him a third time. There was conviction there, but it wasn’t time to grieve. Then, Jesus says in verse 18, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”**

Now, I can’t be too emphatic about it, but the early church fathers understood this as a euphemism for crucifixion. “Peter, you’re going to be crucified.” It says here and John actually puts in the footnote, **“(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)”** History and tradition say that Peter was crucified upside down even, and as such, he glorified God.

Why? Because he didn't bow out. Because he didn't concede. Because he didn't compromise. Because he fed Jesus' sheep. Because he shepherded the sheep Jesus loved. Because he was all about building the church of God in a way that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. God had never and did not ever forget him or forsake him.

No. He glorified God. His death witnessed and testified. We are celebrating the fact that this was a faithful servant who God remained faithful to and gave grace to to be able to die in such a way that he would not concede or compromise. Let it be said of us! Peter did not make excuses. Peter did not justify. Peter obeyed because he was compelled and constrained by love.

We don't see Peter in the book of Acts making fish and cooking bread. We see Peter preaching boldly, and even he did not deny Christ indwelt with the Holy Spirit, because he was not harassed and helpless. He had help. He had the Holy Spirit. He was harassed, but he was not helpless, and he was arrested and thrown in prison for preaching.

They demanded, "Do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Do you remember what he and John said? "We cannot help but speak of that which we have seen and heard. You take it up with God. We're going to be obedient to him. We're going to feed his sheep. There are still so many harassed and helpless people."

Some of you are harassed and helpless, and you don't need to be harassed or helpless. You have a helper. You have the grace of God and the Word of God. It's a light unto your path. You have the church of God, which is a grace of God, and the body of Christ. When we come together, we lock arm in arm and we stand. We come together in solidarity, and we receive together, and we worship together, and we stir up one another to love and good works for his glory, because his mission continues.

The love of Christ controls us. Does it control you? "Do you love me more than these?" Do you love him at all? If you don't love him... Listen. I say this humbly, because I grew up in church. We were there every Sunday and every Wednesday night.

We had a church that had all kinds of activities. We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of relationship. I wasn't saved.

I thought I was. If you would have asked me, "Mark, do you love Jesus?" I would say, "Absolutely!" I sang songs about him, but, really, I didn't love him, and I wasn't being a hypocrite. I just really didn't know what love was. I didn't really comprehend what sin was. I could say, "The wages of sin is death," and "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and I'm a sinner before a holy and righteous God," but I didn't even comprehend that.

The Spirit of God had to awaken my understanding and open my blind eyes so that I could see what I did not see before, and I'm telling you to know Jesus is to love Jesus. To know and understand that you deserve condemnation and hell as a sinner even with your hair parted to the side and even when you don't look like that murderer on TV, but because you deal with pride and because you deal with selfishness and because you love other things more than he who deserves to be loved, it is offensive to him who is holy and righteous.

You get it. When the Spirit of God opens your eyes, you understand and know that you deserve condemnation, and when he shows you mercy and withholds and actually lets you breathe another breath, you're like, "Thank you, God! Thank you for loving me and showing me grace upon grace upon grace!" We love him because he first loved us.

Oh, that you would know the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth. Oh, that you would know that nothing can separate you. You may be harassed, but you are not helpless. Nothing can separate you from his love. No height, no depth, nor anything in all creation will separate you from his love. No weapon formed against you shall prosper. You are not helpless, you who have the helper.

The motivation of Jesus Christ is conveyed, the mission of Jesus Christ is continued, and the model of Jesus Christ is commanded. “Peter, follow me. Take up your cross and follow me. Peter, you heard me say that I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, so build my church. Peter, you heard me. You saw me preaching the Word of God to helpless and harassed people, so feed those people who are like sheep without a shepherd. Follow me. Peter, it’s not okay for you to do what you want to do when you feel like it. Follow me.”

Jesus said, “Whoever does not assemble or gather with me scatters.” In other words, opposes. Jesus was about gathering people together, harassed and helpless sheep together. Jesus is about building his church, and so many confused Christians are doing their own thing when they want in the way that they want, but Christians are Christ followers. Are you a Christ follower? Do you love him?

Again, what we see throughout Scripture are clearly these leaders like Peter preaching the Word of God and the people of God gathering together and assembling for the glory of God. We do it humbly in love like Jesus said. “Follow me.” In Mark, chapter 10, verse 35, he wasn’t about being lauded and applauded. He came not to be served but to serve.

In John, chapter 13, we see Jesus washing people’s feet. He went low. He was humble. He went all of the way down, and that’s the way we are to serve and even preach. This isn’t about me. Again, prioritizing preaching is not about prioritizing the preacher. It’s not unto us but unto him be all the glory. He is the one who is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. He is the one who is worthy of not just feelings but of worship. How do we worship? We express our love for him and our faith in him. “Whoever loves me obeys me,” Jesus said.

Brothers and sisters, as we bring it to a close, again, my heart is for you to see... Keep in mind. This is in conjunction with this *Prioritizing Preaching* series. I

know you're all here today. I'm preaching to the choir. We all have a priority. We believe that preaching is an important thing. Preaching the Word of God in expository preaching is uncovering that which the Scriptures say in a way that people understand and can apply it to their lives, but could we perhaps go deeper and further?

I think we can. I know I can. We are so easily distracted. "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it." All we like sheep have gone astray. Maybe we need to come together. Maybe the Enemy is trying to harass us and scatter us a bit. Maybe there are some who are supposed to be here among us and gathered among us who are lost.

Maybe the one is out there. Maybe you're watching online today, and you're that one. You belong here with us. Come home. Again, it's not a suggestion. **"Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Stop spinning your wheels and getting nowhere. Eat the Word. Come and gather.

The model of Jesus Christ is not a suggestion. It's a command. Again, consider where this is at the end of the gospel. "All these things I have written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing him you might have life in his name." After that, we see this testimony. The torch is being passed. This is not about Peter. This is about Jesus.

This is about what Jesus wants. He wanted people to eat. He wanted people to feed the people so they could eat, and he didn't want them to feed them just fish and bread, but he wanted them to feed them the Word of God. **"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word..."** He wanted the Word to be given in an authoritative way to a people who are ready to receive it because they believe it with their yes on the table.

They are not people who come to consider what Jesus suggested. They are people who are coming ready to obey what Jesus commanded, knowing that they can in the power of the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, listen. "Do you love me more than these?" As we close, apathy really pervades.

Even within the church and even today, are we really together? Are we really gathered? Are we really assembled? I believe churches are filled with harassed and helpless people who are like sheep without a shepherd, and what I'm saying is our elders here want to be shepherds who feed the sheep of God what Jesus wants us to feed the sheep.

Our hope and heart is not so that we can be lauded and applauded and not so people can bow down to us but so we can see people who would otherwise be harassed and helpless not be and that people would have and receive and eat up what they need to eat up so that not just they but their children would not be harassed and helpless, but that we would all be helped, and that we would together be able to stand firm and endure and persevere for the glory of God instead of being casualties.

I'm seeing too many casualties in our world today. We're called to be champions, brothers and sisters. We are called to rise up. We are called to persevere. We are not called to make excuses. We're not called to listen to any other voices. We are called to listen to Jesus' voice in the Word of God. He is what we need to hear. He is who we need to obey. He is who we need to follow, so let's do it. Right? Let's do it. Let's not be harassed and helpless.

We're going to be harassed, but we have what we need to stand firm for the glory of God, and we're not afraid, because God doesn't give us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of self-control, so even though the Devil may want to wrestle against us...we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities...he is real.

Even though there is a thief who has come to steal, kill, and destroy, Jesus has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly, so we're going to live that abundant life, and we're going to receive the peace that passes understanding and the joy God makes available in his power for his glory.

We're not helpless. We have everything. Listen to me. No excuses and no justifications. We'll bring it to a close. No more excuses. We have literally everything we need. My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory. We have everything we need. Let's take advantage of it. Brothers and sisters, let's take advantage of it.

It's not just you. Think about your kids and your neighbors. There are a lot of harassed and helpless sheep. Show them the way. Bring them to eat with us. Bring them, because the mission of Jesus continues. The motivation? Bring them because you love them. The motivation of Jesus is conveyed, and the model is clear. There is no confusion about it. Jesus didn't mince words. He said, "Follow me." It's in there. "I will build my church," so church, let's follow him for his glory.

Let's bow our heads and pray and respond. I first want to address those who are not yet a part of the fold. With heads bowed and eyes closed, I'm talking to non-believers or, perhaps, those who claim to believe but who are still harassed and helpless and who do not have the Holy Spirit in their hearts who maybe know about Jesus but who do not have a relationship with Jesus.

I'm telling you that Jesus does not want you to know about him; he wants you to know him. He wants to give you life. Understand and know today that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is that Savior, and he came for you, and though you are far from the Lord in sin and sinfulness and though you do deserve condemnation...

The wages of sin is death. You deserve condemnation. All of us as sinners deserve the wrath of God, but he came to pay the price you could not pay. Jesus came and died for you. The Son of God came for you because he loves you. He didn't go halfway. He went all of the way for you, and his arms are open wide to you today because his mission continues by his grace.

He says to you, “Come unto me. Repent of your sins and come to me.” He wants to give you rest. He wants to save you. He wants to begin a relationship with you, and if you are willing to repent of your sins and call upon his name, what the Bible says is, “You shall be saved,” and thereby begin that relationship. If that’s you today, you can pray this prayer with me. Say it in your heart to God.

“Lord, I need you. I want you. I understand that I am a sinner in need of a Savior, and I believe you are that Savior, *the* Savior, so the best I know how I repent of my sin and sinfulness and I turn to you right now, and I ask you, Lord, from this point forward to show me where to go and what to do. Lead me. Save me from my sin and sinfulness, Lord.”

With heads bowed and eyes closed, as simple as a prayer as that may be, if you prayed that prayer just now and you meant it, would you just acknowledge that by lifting your hand so that we can pray for you in our leadership? Amen. Praise God. Anyone else? Praise God. There are several hands. Thank you, Lord.

You can put your hands down and know that God sees you. He knows your name. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows where you’ve been and what you’ve done and where you’re going, and he wants to lead you. Follow him. Let him be your shepherd, and though he may lead you through the valley of the shadow of death, you have nothing to fear (no evil), for he is with you.

You have all you need. Understand and know that today, if you prayed that prayer and you meant it, it begins not just a time of knowing about Jesus but about having a relationship with him and walking with him and following him. Today is the beginning of life in him, and I praise God for that.

With heads bowed and eyes closed, church, do you love him? What’s getting in the way? What may be distracting you from loving him first? What idol perhaps do you need to lay at the feet of Jesus? I’ll confess, my firstborn daughter, Abby. There was



a time when she was an idol to me. I loved her more than I loved Jesus, and it did not go well for her or for me.

I'm so thankful that the Lord was so patient with me and gave me the ability to surrender her to him. I tell you what. I love her way more than I did before. Love Jesus first. Love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Think about who he is and what he has done for you, the depths that he came for you, the grace he has shown to you, the provisions he has made, and that he with you always in spite of who you are. In spite of your faithlessness, he is faithful always.

His steadfast love endures forever. He suffered and died for you. They spat on him. They placed a crown of thorns on his head for you. What are you willing to do for him? Don't do it to check a box. He doesn't need that. Don't do it to pay your dues. Do it to express back to him how much you love him and trust him. Worship him.

Brothers and sisters, love what he loves. Be not harassed and helpless. Gather. Assemble as a part of the fold regularly and faithfully with your yes on the table. Love what he loves. Be about the feeding of the sheep of God. What perhaps do you need to repent of today? What do you need to surrender today? What do you need to commit to do today?

Listen. Sometimes these things are easier said than done, but if Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, know and understand that he doesn't expect us to do those things on our own. He gives us the ability to do it. He helps us do it. We're not helpless, so if you don't love the church, the bride of Christ and the body of Christ that Jesus is the head of, ask him to give you that love. Maybe ask him to show you what is hindering you.

Maybe you're believing lies of the Enemy. People believe lies of the Enemy. He is a liar, the Father of Lies. He lies, and people listen. Don't listen to him. Love what

Jesus loves (the church). Be a part of it. Don't be on your own doing your own thing.  
That's not good for you. That's not good for anyone. What do you need to do today?

APPENDIX 6  
SERMON 5 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
March 5, 2023

Preaching Is Beautiful

Romans 10:8–17

Turn in your Bibles to Romans, chapter 10. We're going to read verses 8 through 17 in a moment, but as we prepare to read this text that talks about preaching, remember we are in a sermon series called *Prioritizing Preaching*. We'll make our way through it, but as I really studied and prayed through and meditated on this text, I really do feel as though there is a challenge for us here today in America where we are so wealthy in relation to the rest of the world.

In general, I know there are many needs and many burdens represented in this room that are intense and that are great, and there are many people in this room in this sanctuary who are desperate to hear from God and to hear an encouraging word from God and to hear a word of hope from God.

I do think as a people, though, it is a challenge for us to consider this text and perhaps the weight of this text and what it means (what preaching and proclaiming the Word of God means to people who desperately need a word from God). I want you to consider, I guess, personally your individual needs, whatever those needs are.

Maybe it's a marital need. Maybe it's a financial need. Maybe it's a relationship need that you have. Maybe you have a loved one who is estranged from you

or estranged from God, they're a prodigal. How amazing would it be if you received word that they were on their way home? If it's a financial need, how encouraging would it be for you specifically if you knew that check you had been waiting for or maybe a check you didn't know about was on its way that would meet and satisfy more than the needs you have and more than the bills you have stacked up on your desk?

Perhaps there is repentance where there is division in maybe a broken relationship. Someone sinned against you, but they have come to realize and to know and to understand that they were wrong and they were in error and in sin, and they have come to their senses, and they are on their way to ask for your forgiveness. You long for that relationship to be restored.

Think of it on an individual level, but as a people think about the fact that we live in a world that is filled with lies. Satan is the Father of Lies, and there is a lot of lying going on and a lot of deception going on, and so many people you love are buying up what the Enemy is selling. They're just eating it up.

On social media, there are a lot of experts who proclaim a lot of things. They are the wrong things, and they contradict the Word of God. These lies are pervasive. We live in a world that is filled with sin and suffering, and it is dark, and I guess what I'm trying to say is I think we forget how dark it is. This is where we live, so we have become accustomed to the dark, and maybe we're not as desperate as we should be to hear from God and as desperate as we should be for light to shine in the darkness and for God to reveal his power.

Just think about our world and the sin and the lies and how awesome it would be and how amazing it would be and how much we need to hear truth and how much this world needs truth from God, words of life, words of hope, words of salvation. This preaching points to those words.

The apostle Paul was able to proclaim those words to a lost and dying world, and he knew all too well the reality of sin and suffering and that the world needed to hear these words, so that's why he is excited about the preaching of God's Holy Word. I know I'm preaching to the choir. You all are here, so you all to some degree prioritize preaching, but I'm just praying through this series that the Lord will give us a greater affection and a deeper love for what Paul loved and for what God loves and that is his Word to be proclaimed to a lost and dying world.

Would you read this passage? Consider those realities. Paul is celebrating the truth. He says, **“But what does it say?”** There he is referring to the righteousness that comes by faith, the righteousness God talks about, being right with God as opposed to being at enmity with God in sin and sinfulness. **“But what does it say? The word is near you...”** The Word of God is near you. It's not far from you. It's not unattainable. It's not unreachable. The word that you need to hear and that a lost and dying world needs to hear is near you.

Believers, it is **“...in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...”** This is what we preach. **“...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified...”** That is, before a holy and righteous God.

...and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

Please be seated. We see in this passage clearly that Paul believes it is implicit that preaching is a beautiful thing. It's the main point. That's the thesis of this sermon: preaching is beautiful. It doesn't really matter what we think. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but preaching to a holy, righteous God, when it is done in a worshipful way...

That's what I want us to see (the preaching event as an opportunity to worship). It's not just for the preacher to worship in obediently preaching the Word of God but for the people to come with their eyes on the table ready to hear. In fact, it's not just a one-way thing. The end of this text gets to that.

The conversation and the interaction that takes place is not just from the preacher but also those who are listening or hearing. They refer to the sermon as the hearing and not just the proclaiming. The hearing is a beautiful thing, and to listen in a worshipful way is a beautiful thing. That is, when you're not just hearing to maybe consider or maybe hearing in a casual way so it can go in one ear and out the other, but you are listening, and you are hearing so that you can heed by faith that God will give you the Word that he makes available.

It's a beautiful thing. Preaching is a beautiful thing and, specifically, there are three points today. Believers, it is beautiful because *you are near God's Word through preaching*. You are near. When preaching is expository preaching and it is set before you like maybe when your mama used to set the table and place the food on the table so you could eat it, you enjoy the feast with your family. It's near to you. That's what expository preaching is to accomplish. It's to set before the people of God.

Remember, Jesus told Peter...we looked at it last week in John 21, the Great Commission of John's gospel..."**Feed my sheep.**" You don't have to go to the other side of town to get what God wants you to eat up. With gospel preaching and with expository preaching, you are near God's Holy Word, his eternal Word, his living Word through preaching.

Secondly, *you can hear God's Word through preaching*. Who are we that he is even mindful of us? Who are we that he would give us ears to hear? Who are we that he would have anything to say to us except for, "I condemn you," because we are sinners who deserve condemnation, but he is not only mindful of us, but he loves us. He gives us ears to hear, and through the preaching of his Holy Word, we can hear. You can hear God's Word through preaching.

Lastly, *you can heed God's Word through preaching*. God gives us faith. God gives us the ability to be obedient to that which we hear. He doesn't say, "Here's the Word. Here's what you need to do. Good luck!" No. He gives us everything we need. My God shall supply all of his riches according to your need. He gives us what we need, and we can heed and obey in a worshipful way what he wants us to do through preaching.

Preaching is beautiful. It's a beautiful thing. We'll talk about that more in a moment. In verse 8, **"But what does it say?"** This is righteousness based on faith. Not righteousness according to the law. He has been talking about righteousness according to the law, being right with a holy and righteous God, and being right with him by being obedient to all of the commands we see throughout the Old Testament, all of the rules, and all of the regulations and stipulations.

That was the Jewish mindset. "We have to obey the law. We have to do every single thing all of the time at all times so that we can be right with God. Otherwise, we are not right with God." It's like this impossible task. It's a burden. The law was intentionally revealed to us and given to us to reveal our need for him.

That's one of the things that is such a struggle for us in our comfortable world of America. With evangelical Christianity in America, we are so comfortable. We know we need God, but we don't really understand how desperately we need God until we grow in our faith more and more. As I grow in my faith... Tammy and I talk about this all of the time. As we realize how much he loves us, we also realize how much more we

need him than we did the day before. We need him more than we could even comprehend. We need his Word.

1. *Through preaching, his Word is near to us.* The righteousness based on faith is the righteousness based on Christ. Second Corinthians 5:21 says... This is amazing. This is the gospel. God made him (Jesus Christ) who knew no sin, who was righteous, who is righteous, and who will always be righteous....

God made him, that guy, the Son of God, who, though he was in the form of God thought not equality with God a thing to be clung to. Instead, he emptied himself and was born in the likeness of man, and he didn't stop there. He became obedient even to the point of death on a cross. He was righteous, is righteous, and always will be righteous. God made him become sin on our behalf so that we who sin might become and consider the righteousness of God in him.

Our righteousness is based on Christ. First Corinthians 1:30: "Because of his doing (God's doing) we have become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus." He is our righteousness, and our righteousness is because we believe in him. Our faith is in who he is and in what he did. We believe.

This is the Word, the word of faith, that Paul preaches. This is the word of faith that Paul was so blessed to take to the uttermost parts of the earth, to places he never thought he would ever have gone before, to people he had never met before, and he is declaring to this church in Rome to these Gentiles...not the Jews but the Gentiles...that the word of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ is near you. It is not far.

You don't have to go on some quest like he had talked about earlier leading up to this passage. You don't have to go to the highest heavens on this quest to find the message or the news or information or truth that can save you. You don't need to go where Jesus went after he died, to the depths of hell, to be saved. No. Jesus rose from the grave. He conquered sin, death, and hell. He ascended into heaven. He came and did for



mankind what we could not do for ourselves. He accomplished it; therefore, we place our faith and trust in him.

He said on the cross, “It is finished.” His blood was shed that washes our sins away when we believe in him. This is what he celebrates. This is the word of faith. He is so burdened leading up to this passage. He talks about his own people, as a Jew, who were so burdened by the laws and living according to the law.

So many of them were unwilling to accept the gospel message and believe in Jesus. They had been waiting for the Messiah God had promised, and because Jesus did not look the way he wanted him to look... John, chapter 1, says, **“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”** They would not believe. They were unwilling to submit themselves to him.

They wanted to be saved from the Romans. They weren't thinking about being saved from their sin and sinfulness, a much greater salvation, so they rejected him. They would not believe him. Paul was burdened about that. He was one of them. They were his family. He was saying, “No. The righteousness based on faith?”

It says, “The word is near you.” Like, placed before you. Romans 1:16, that Paul celebrates. At the beginning of this letter he says, **“...it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** This is the Word you need to hear. This is the Word. The gospel is what you need. We are saved (Ephesians 2:8–9) by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not by works lest any man should boast. The Word, the saving Word, is near you. It is set before you.

This points all of the way back to the beginning of preaching, if you remember in this sermon series, to Exodus, chapters 18 and 19, when Moses preached that first sermon at the foot of the mountain where God invites the people to come and hear his voice. He says, “We are in covenant together, but if you heed my voice and if you hear and if you listen to my message, the word I will proclaim through Moses, you will be my

treasured possession if you walk according to my ways,” and they did. They gathered at the foot of the mountain.

It was a beautiful sight. God brought them unto himself to that mountain and delivered them from slavery, but it says he bore them on wings like eagles. That’s his grace. They didn’t find their way to the mountain and go on this quest to find God. God brought them. He led them unto himself. Who are we that he is even mindful of us? This is what he does to us and for us. We are saved by grace through faith.

Then, beyond that, he doesn’t say, “I saved you from slavery. Good luck! Go on your way.” No. He says, “I’ll take you to the Promised Land, but you need to walk according to my ways. I want you to experience life. The wages of sin is death. I don’t want death for you. I didn’t save you so you could just die after I save you. No. I’m taking you into the Promised Land so you can live and thrive.”

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” We are to live in abundance, not necessarily financially but spiritually with peace and joy. The fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, thankfulness... He gives us everything we need, but God tells his people, if you remember, “Listen to me. Obey me, and it will go well with you,” and they were all in.

“We’ll listen to you. We’ll obey you. We’re going to do exactly what you tell us to do.” Then, he tells them to go into the Promised Land, but they didn’t go into the Promised Land. Remember, they got scared. They saw some obstacles or some people in the Promised Land who they were afraid might overcome them in battle.

Forget the fact that God had just destroyed the Egyptians completely and had parted the waters for them. All that went out the window. Forget their commitment to obey and heed the voice of the Lord and to listen to his voice. God revealed himself in an undeniable way there at the foot of the mountain where they were all assembled and

submitted to him when they said, “We’re all in,” but when God said to go into the Promised Land, they were too afraid.

They wouldn’t do it, so they were destined to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and a whole generation was forbidden to actually go into the Promised Land. Moses himself was not permitted to go into the Promised Land, so after their wilderness wanderings when God continued to be faithful to them and reveal himself to them and speak to them through his prophet, Moses, he brings them once again to the Promised Land 40 years later, and he says...

If you remember, the book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ sermons. One sermon after another. It is a sermon series. He’s basically telling them, “I’m not going into the Promised Land with you. I’m forbidden to go, but that doesn’t change the fact that you still need to obey God’s Word. You still need to walk according to his ways. You still need to know what he feels about sin and sinfulness, and you need to honor him and worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Moses even warns them. “When it goes well for you and you flourish in the Promised Land, be sure to make sure that you don’t forget God and that you don’t turn your back on God and that you continue to listen to his words.” That’s what Deuteronomy is. It’s a sermon series preparing them to go into the Promised Land.

He tells them in Deuteronomy, chapter 4, referring back to that Mount Sinai experience where they heard that first sermon, **“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?”**

What other nation doesn’t have to guess? They can know exactly what their God, the one true God, wants. “That’s what we have,” Moses is saying. “Let’s make the

most of it. Let's give ear and listen to what he has to say." He says, "Remember that time you heard the first sermon at Mount Sinai."

Moses said, **"Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so." And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain...**" Then, in Deuteronomy, chapter 30, the closing of this sermon series, Moses says,

"The commandments you need to know are not too hard for you. They're not far off. They are not beyond your reach. It's not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring the word that we need to know down so that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us to bring it to us that we may hear and do it?'"

No. God's Word that you need to know is very near you. It's not just near you but it's very near you. It is set before you, and as such, it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it, and in doing so and in being so," Moses says, "I'm setting before you life and death." That's what is on the table.

Obedience to the Word means life. Disobedience to the Word means death. The wages of sin is death. You need to listen. You need to take advantage of the Word of a holy, righteous God, an omniscient and omnipresent God who knows all and who sees all. His Word is near you. Paul is saying, "This gospel that is righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ is near you. You don't need to do anything else. You just need to believe it. You need to accept it. Jesus paid it all. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works lest any man should boast."

Paul says, "This is the word of faith that we are preaching to you and that I have the blessing to proclaim in his name to you and for you." This is the beauty of the gospel. He says simply in verse 9, **"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is**

**Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead...**” If you will confess that he is Lord. If you believe God raised him from the dead. These go together. **“...you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified...”**

What does *justified* mean? It means at peace with God. Apart from him in our sin and sinfulness, we are not justified. We have a rap sheet. The wages of sin is death. There is a price to pay, but Jesus paid it all on the cross, so when we call upon his name and believe in him, he pays it all, and our sins are washed away. We are justified before a holy, righteous God, and there is nothing we need to fear.

For we who are deserving of condemnation, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). **“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”**

Because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Saved from what? The wrath of God. The price and the penalty of sin and sinfulness. All men fall short of the glory of God. All men have sinned. The wages of sin is death. We are saved from his wrath that will be poured out. He promises he will pour out his wrath on sin, but we who believe in Jesus are saved from that.

He says in verse 11, **“For the Scripture says...”** All Scripture is God-breathed. Paul is saying, “These are not my words. These are God’s words.” **“Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”** They are not going to be disappointed on the last day. They don’t need to hope for the best. They can have assurance that God is who he says he is and that he has done what he said he would do. There is nothing else to be done. It is finished. They will not be at the end of the day left hanging.

Brothers and sisters, you can be assured that when you believe in Christ you will not be put to shame. So many people, well-intentioned people, genuine and sincere

people who have been lied to and who have been deceived will be put to shame. People who think they have to work their way and earn their way to be saved will be put to shame because Jesus paid it all, and to think we have to do something else in addition to what Jesus says minimizes what Jesus did. His blood is more than sufficient. Jesus paid it all.

We believe in him. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. Verse 12: **“For there is no distinction...”** God didn’t just love the Jews. That blew the minds of the Jews like Paul when he was a Pharisee, who thought, “In what universe would God’s love extend beyond them?” despite the fact that all through the Old Testament God told them, “You’re blessed to be a blessing.”

This passage that says, **“...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,”** is from Joel, chapter 2, verse 32, in the Old Testament. *Everyone* means everyone, not just the Jews. Jesus clarified this in John 3:16. **“...God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.”**

Everyone who believes in him would not be put to shame, for there is no partiality. **“...between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.”** In verse 13, he says it again, rejoices again, and proclaims and preaches it again. **“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”**

This is the message. What joy it was to Paul to preach this message! Paul, who had been a teacher of the law, was a Pharisee. He knew the law inside and out, and he labored at teaching the law for so long, but he realized all it was doing was helping people spin their wheels and literally getting nowhere when it came to God.

Jesus says in John 14:6, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father [a holy, righteous God] except through me.”** Peter came to

understand this and know this. In Acts 4:12 he says there is salvation from the wrath of God that will be poured out on all sin and sinfulness. **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

This is the message. Paul, who had believed the lie and misunderstood, was by the grace of God set right. He knew the truth, and he was so about making sure and doing everything he could to preach the truth so that others could benefit from the salvation God had so graciously afforded him, and he was setting it before. Paul was going places he had never been before, to the ends of the earth, in the minds of that day to bring the Word of God near through preaching.

Can you imagine the people who thought they were too far? The Jews thought there were a lot of people who were way too far from God. Maybe there are people here today who think, “You don’t know my life. You don’t know where I’ve been and what I’ve done.” You think you’re too far. People make you think you’re too far. Satan is lying to you, making you think you’re beyond God’s reach and that you are beyond the grace of God.

Listen. If you are here today, the Word of God through preaching is near you. All you need to do is receive it and accept it and believe it wholeheartedly. Kick the lies. Kick the liar to the curb and receive the Word that is set before you. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it, to the Jew and also to the Greek, which basically means everybody. Do you believe this message? This is the word of faith that Paul was so blessed to preach. Then, beyond that...

2. *Through preaching, you can hear God’s Word.* He is celebrating the gospel, that it’s not by works lest any man should boast. “Don’t believe that lie. You don’t need to go on some quest. It’s near you. It’s literally set before you with my preaching, with the gospel message.” Then, he says in verse 14, talking about the beauty of preaching and

why it is so beautiful, **“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?”**

If all they have to do is believe, how are they going to know that? Those people who are too far... Listen. There are unreached people groups. We talk about it all of the time. There are people who exist in our world today, let alone in Paul's day but even in our world today, who have never heard about Jesus Christ. They don't know all they need to do is call upon the name of somebody, let alone Jesus Christ, so they can be saved, so we must be about and have the heart to hear this word of faith proclaimed to them.

**“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”** Many people have never even heard of the name of Jesus. **“And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”** Again, I'm not suggesting. Paul wasn't in the ministry of suggesting. Paul was a herald. Paul was not suggesting or even declaring his own word. He was declaring and he was heralding and preaching with authority the Word of God.

He was obeying the Great Commission from Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20. I love that Jesus said, **“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 [through preaching] all that I have commanded...”** Not suggested but commanded.

This is the word of faith. **“And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”** How will they know the truth without someone preaching? How will they in a world filled with lies know the truth without someone preaching? Verse 15: **“And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written...”** We'll come back to that word *sent* if you want to circle it in your Bible.



**“As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”** Exclamation point. Preaching is beautiful. Why? Because people can hear the Word of God through preaching. **“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”** You might be thinking, “Well, I’m not a feet person. Does the apostle Paul have a foot fetish? I mean no disrespect, but what is he talking about? No one in our culture likes feet.”

What he’s talking about is actually referring to a passage in the Old Testament where Isaiah prophesied of what Paul is doing at this time, but it was actually a dual fulfillment. The people of God remember when Moses preached way back in Deuteronomy telling them, “You need to make sure that you don’t forget God. You need to make sure that you listen to his Word and that you hear his Word. Don’t turn your back on God.”

Well, guess what. They turned their backs on God, so God raised up Isaiah to prophesy and tell them, “Repent of your sin or it is not going to go well with you. There are going to be consequences to you not walking according to God’s ways,” and they were in that land flowing with milk and honey, and they became very prosperous, and they turned their backs on God, and Isaiah rose up and said, “Don’t do this! Listen to the Word of God. Repent,” but they would not repent, so they got taken away into captivity.

They got taken away into slavery, and even that was the grace of God. God actually ordained that happening. God brought the Babylonians to come and to destroy all of the things that his people were falsely putting their faith and trust in. No tower, no temple, no wall was going to save them. Only God could save them.

They were distracted in their prosperity and in their abundance. They had forgotten the one true God who would never forget them, so he sent graciously (loving them too much to leave them the way they were) and faithfully the Babylonians to take them away into captivity, and it was devastating.

I'm telling you it was the consequences God gave them. "See how your tower works for you, people. See how your wall works for you." They were taken away into captivity. That wall, their temple, and the palace were all leveled to the ground. Hezekiah actually allowed the rulers and leaders of Babylon to come and look at his treasury, because he was bragging. He was filled with pride. "Look at all of my jewels. Look at my crowns. Look at all of our gold," Hezekiah said.

"You wait. One day, all of your jewels and all of your crowns are all going to be taken away into captivity to Babylon with you." All of that gold didn't save them. God is the one who saved them. Isaiah told them, "You're going away into captivity," and that's exactly what happened. All of them (many people) died.

The city was leveled to the ground, and Isaiah prophesied, "God is not going to forget you. In his perfect timing, he's going to bring you back. In his perfect timing..." It actually was 70 years. They were in captivity for 70 years. A whole generation passed. Many of the people who had been there and a part of that abundance and flourishing were no longer there.

Whether it was just through death in the battle or through old age, many of them were no longer there, and 70 years later, they got to go back home. We looked at that last week in Ezra and Nehemiah when they rebuilt the city. God redeemed them, but Isaiah prophesied this picture in Isaiah, chapter 52.

He paints this picture. He sees this picture. God gave him this picture to tell and encourage the people with. He says specifically that he sees this herald or this proclaimer going around urging all of the scattered people who were in captivity telling them, "It's time to come home! Captivity is over! God has redeemed you. You are oppressed. You are discouraged. You are depressed, but you can come home. God has redeemed you, and he's going to restore you as a people and rebuild you. He has not forgotten you."

Isaiah sees the picture of this herald running on the mountain, so he's talking about that. He can see it because he knows the message that is being delivered. He sees the people in this vision that the messenger is delivering the message to. He's saying, "This is a beautiful sight." They were his people. He was burdened for the people he was seeing in this vision.

They were his people, and he knew this messenger was coming and telling those people exactly what they wanted to hear, and to him that was a beautiful sight, because he could see those feet running, because this person wasn't like, "I'm just going to go over there, and when I make it to that city, I'll tell them salvation is possible."

No. This messenger could not wait to tell the people exactly what they needed to hear. "You who seem to be hopeless and you who are in a situation that seems to be hopeless, there is hope for you. God is at work, and he's going to bring you home. How beautiful are those feet that I see in this vision!" It points forward even to the gospel, because in Isaiah 52, right after that, we see the suffering servant pictured. "He was pierced for our transgressions."

He's pointing forward to Jesus, so Isaiah even sees, I believe, the apostle Paul and those who preach under the new covenant going to these places that Paul went to, even to the ends of the earth, to a city like Rome in the Jewish mind proclaiming the Word and bringing the Word and the gospel message near to a people who would be otherwise hopeless before a holy and righteous God. You can hear the Word of God through preaching. **"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"** They are sent.

Back up to verse 15. They didn't just decide on their own to go. God sent them. God commissioned them. God dispatched them to these places. God raises up preachers to preach the good news. It's not their own good news and not their own word but his Word. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the message of God and the

Word of God! You can hear God's Word through preaching. God's Word is near to you through preaching.

Lastly, I know oftentimes people have this concept that Christianity is just a bunch of rules and regulations and is too hard. "I can never be good enough. I can never be perfect." Remember what the word of faith says to you. You don't need to be perfect. You need to believe. You need to trust in Christ. Call upon the name of the Lord. Jesus is the one who saves you.

You don't need to give a ton of money. We give not to be saved, but we give because we are saved. We don't serve to be saved. We serve because we are saved. We work because faith without works is dead. We confess with our mouths. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Because we love, we cannot help but speak of that which we have seen and heard and know. You can hear God's Word through preaching, but...

3. *Through preaching, you can heed God's Word.* Unfortunately, not everyone does, and it is mind boggling. In verse 16, it was mind boggling to Isaiah. He even said in verse 16 where he quotes Isaiah, chapter 52, after he said there is a beautiful message and he can see the feet running up on the mountains all the way over to everyone and anyone and that any one of his people can come home and their nation is going to be restored and that God would once again raise them up and be with them and bless them.

Isaiah said, "Who has believed our report?" At first, not everybody came home. First, Ezra brought some people home, but not everybody responded right away. Not everyone was quick to respond. Some people drug their feet. Some people never came home at all. They remained. They had become comfortable in captivity, and they never came home when they had the opportunity to come home.

Jesus came to his own, but his own would not receive him. They did not believe the report. They refused to hear. Jesus was performing miracles before them and

doing what no one else had done before, but they refused to see and acknowledge what no one had ever done before. They refused to bow before him and obey the gospel. **“But they have not all obeyed the gospel.”**

The gospel is not a suggestion. Jesus saying, “Come unto me,” is not a suggestion. It is a command to be obeyed. Not everyone obeys the gospel. **“For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’”** That word *obeyis* actually a play on the word here in the Greek. It’s *hypakouō* here. “Who hears to obey with the intention of obeying the gospel?” Not everybody does that.

**“For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’”** Here’s the beautiful thing in verse 17. You can heed God’s Word through preaching. **“So faith...”** That is, the faith that comes about by believing in Jesus Christ. Saving faith. Faith in Jesus Christ. **“...comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”**

Now, that’s a challenging verse to translate from the original Greek, but the word *hearing* that is presented as a verb is actually in the Greek a noun. A more literal way to translate this is, “So faith comes from the hearing.” The sermon, more literally. From the preached message. And the preached message or the hearing, again, is not a verb. It’s a noun. “Hearing the preached message or the sermon through the word of Christ. By the command of Christ.”

This is all the grace of God. Who are we that he is even mindful of us? In all this preaching, Paul was where he was by the command of Christ. The Great Commission. “Feed my sheep, Peter. Go into all the world, my disciples, and teach them to observe everything I have commanded you.” In Mark’s gospel, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Preach the Word of God.”

All of this... The hearing, the ability to obey... God’s Word, faith, believing... Saving faith comes from the hearing, the sermon, or the message that is preached, and it

is preached through the Word of Christ in obedience to the command of Christ. It is beautiful. Why is it beautiful? Because it's worship.

When the preachers preach what they are supposed to preach... Not their word. Not a pretty, flowery word. Not tickling words but expository preaching breaking down and setting before the people so the Word of God and not their word could be brought near to them so they could eat what God wants to feed them.

Jesus told Peter, "**Feed my sheep.**" Peter knew exactly what Jesus wanted him to feed them. "Teach them all that I command." He gives them the faith and the ability to be obedient. God doesn't leave us hanging. He's not playing games. He's not dangling carrots in front of us. When he tells us to do something, he gives us the ability.

The Holy Spirit is called our helper. We're not just harassed and helpless. We may be harassed, but we're not helpless, because we have the Holy Spirit, our helper, who indwells our hearts and who equips us for every good work. Paul says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory." He gives us.

Jesus told his disciples, "Ask, seek, and knock." Ask and seek knowing that your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. He will give you the encouragement you need to endure and to persevere. Faith is a gift from God. Faith isn't something you just pull up your bootstraps and have faith.

No. God gives you faith when you listen to the Word and when you hear the Word of God. That's the thing I want to get across to you. It's not just the preaching. It's not a one-way street when it comes to preaching. In our culture, all we do in our minds is think of preaching as this one-way activity where I'm just spitting out and spewing the words of God, but here Paul brings attention that it's not just that.

In the beginning, he said, "This is the word of faith that we proclaim to you," yes, but here at the end, he says, "Faith comes from the hearing. Faith comes from the

people of God gathering together with their eyes on the table ready to hear and receive the Word of God. Faith comes from the hearing.”

The sermon is called the hearing, and it’s a beautiful thing. It’s a worshipful thing when people gather in that way, humbly, not coming with their arms crossed thinking, “Let me hear. Maybe I’ll consider what God might have to say. I might not be in the mood. I’m not feeling it today.” No. We come because we need to hear the Word of God.

We come because we are told not to forsake the assembling. We are called to assemble and to stir up one another to love and good works. We are called to gather at the foot of the mountain, so to speak, so we can receive the information we need to hear so that the Word of God can be set near us so that we don’t have to wander as we navigate these dark days.

Brothers and sisters, preaching is a beautiful thing. It is a worshipful thing. God is Spirit. He is seeking those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. As I was thinking about this, beauty really is in the eye of the beholder, but in Mark, chapter 16, I believe it is, we see the testimony of a woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with oil.

Jesus’ disciples were annoyed with this woman. They said, “Tell her to stop doing that. She could have spent her money on so many more profitable things.” Everyone was annoyed with this woman. They were indignant with this woman, but Jesus said, “Leave her alone, for she has done a beautiful thing to me.”

In Jesus’ eyes, because he saw her heart, he knew what she was doing. He knew what she was feeling. “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” **“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”** I get it. There is a lot of confusion within our world today in American Christianity about what preaching is, and a lot of us don’t really have an appetite for preaching, but we need to come humbly, and we need to ask the Lord to give us eyes to see what he sees and give us a heart to love what he loves.

We need to come to hear from him and to not settle for anything less than God's Word and understand and know this is his grace so that his people... Once there was not a people, but now there is a people, and this people he has brought together who are to proclaim the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light are going to need to know how to navigate living in a dark world filled with lies and controlled by the father of lies. They're going to need to know the truth, so Jesus sends preachers.

He commanded preachers, "Teach them to observe everything I have commanded. Peter, feed my sheep. My sheep need to be fed. You need to bring those people in that unreached people group the Word. The Word of God is far from them, but it needs to be near to them, because I love the whole world. Every tribe, tongue, and nation I want up in heaven worshiping God. I want representation from everywhere. God shows no partiality. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek and Gentile or anyone else. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to wash everyone's sins away, so the Word of God needs to be near them. Jesus commissions, "Go, church, go into all the world and preach and proclaim the gospel." Preaching is a beautiful thing. It is a thing to be celebrated. We should consider it as worship. Not just the singing. Not just the giving. We want to give in a way that worships God and sing in a way that worships God, but we want to preach in a way that worships God and hear in a way that worships God for the glory of God. Preaching is a beautiful thing.

You are near. Think about that for a minute as we close. Consider and throw your idea of what preaching is out the window and ask the Lord to give you eyes by his Spirit to see and understand and know what his preaching is. I'm praying the same thing for myself as one who preaches. The people of God are near the Word of God through preaching. The Word of God is set before them (the Word of a holy, righteous God).



Who are we that he is even mindful of us? Yet, he loves us enough to give us his Word to show us the way we should walk. His Word is a light unto our path. They are words of life and words of hope, and we can hear the Word of God. Not Mark's words. Not some crazy preacher's words but the Word of God through preaching when it is expository preaching.

Give us ears to hear. You who made the ear, give us ears to hear. We can hear your voice, Lord, through preaching, and we can heed, Lord. Not just do you give us ears to hear, but you give us the ability to obey and the faith to obey you through preaching. Give us faith, Lord. As you give us wisdom and knowledge and understanding about the truth and that the truth will set us free, give us faith to be obedient and respond to that for your glory.

You can heed the Word of God through preaching, you can hear the Word of God through preaching, and you can be near the Word of God through preaching. Preaching is beautiful. It is commissioned by Jesus himself. It is through the Word of Christ. Faith comes from the hearing of the preaching with ears to hear the message in response to the command of Christ for your good. Brothers and sisters, let's bow our heads and pray and in our hearts respond.

Lord, give us the heart to love the things you love. Help us feel about this world and everything in this world the way you feel about it. Lord, help us to hate sin in the way you hate sin and sinfulness. Help us to love the gracious blessings that you provide for us (your Word, for one, and the preaching of your Word) in the Great Commission and the opportunity.

Lord, I pray that we would truly appreciate and love the preaching of your Word and that we would come not to hear the sermon but for the hearing, not just the declaring but the hearing. We are ready to hear. Let us hear in a worshipful way and

bring about faith so that we can trust you in these dark days, Lord. We need you. We need your Word.

Maybe you're here today and you for the first time have realized all you need to do is call upon the name of Jesus Christ and you can be saved. Maybe today you will understand. Maybe you have felt so far or maybe you have felt too far. Maybe people have told you that and lied to you. Maybe the Enemy has lied to you and made you feel that you are just too far, but what I'm telling you today, no matter who you are and no matter where you have been and what you have done, you're not too far.

If you were here today and you heard the gospel proclaimed and that all you need to do is believe in Jesus, the Word of God is near you. You need not go anywhere else. You need not do anything else but believe. Repent of your sins and believe this message. It, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it. That includes you. You are not too far. The Word has been brought near to you by God's grace today. If you'll listen, if you'll really lean into and listen to that message and that command, because it is not a suggestion... There is no other way for you to be saved. This is it. Jesus says to you, "Come unto me. Repent of your sins and come to me."

If you obey that message and if you respond and heed that message, you can be saved this morning. You can walk out of this sanctuary differently than the way you walked in. If that's you, I want to pray a prayer right now and lead you in this prayer. I'm telling you. No matter how far you think you are, you're not. You need only believe. If that's you and you are ready to be saved from your sin and sinfulness and begin a relationship with a holy, righteous God who you had been far from and you can be near through Christ, I invite you to pray this prayer.

"Jesus, I need you. I understand and know that I am a sinner in need of a Savior. I have sinned against you. Sin is a part of my life, and I know that it separates me

from you, so please forgive my sin and my sinfulness. Wash my sins away in the blood you shed on the cross, Jesus. I place my faith and trust in you, and I call upon your name for salvation.”

With heads bowed and eyes closed, if you prayed that prayer just now and you meant it, would you just acknowledge that by lifting your hand to testify? No one else is looking around, but I see your hands. Praise God. Praise God. Anyone else? It’s just an opportunity for you. Don’t be ashamed. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall not be put to shame. You have nothing to be ashamed of. You won’t be disappointed. I’m telling you. Be bold this morning. Did anyone else pray that prayer with me just now? Praise God. You can put your hands down.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you.

For everyone else in church, where are you at when it comes to being a part of the body of Christ and gathering to assemble in worship? You may be here filling a seat and maybe even on the front row but a hundred miles away in your heart. That’s not the way to come. We come to the foot of the mountain, and we come together. We come even in our brokenness and even in our imperfection. We come as those who have been washed by the blood of Christ. We come humbly to hear what our God who loves us will say knowing he will give us the faith to obey.

Brothers and sisters in Christ’s church, what might you need to do today? How might you need to respond? What might you need to repent of? Maybe you’re filled with bitterness and anger and unforgiveness. I’m telling you that’s not going to do well for hearing. That’s not going to do well for gathering near. That’s an obstacle that needs to be dealt with. Let the Lord deal with it. Surrender that anger and that bitterness. Lay it aside.

If fear is in the way, that’s not going to do well for drawing near to the foot of the mountain. No. We need to come all of the way. We need to come. God did his part.

Let's do ours. Let's repent. Fear is a lack of faith. Let's come to hear and let's trust God to give us the Word that we need to come so that we can overcome the fear that we have that is an obstacle in our lives.

If there is sin and sinfulness, sin separates. Repent of sin. Sin affects your hearing, 100 percent. Maybe you need to repent of sin this morning. I encourage you to come and kneel at the altar. You don't need to kneel at the altar, but there is something powerful about expressing in a tangible way what God is doing in your heart, so lay your pride aside. Come and kneel at the altar and look to Jesus. Let's do it together. Church, let's stand and sing and respond. The altar is open.

APPENDIX 7  
SERMON 6 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
March 12, 2023

A Model Ministry Mindset

Acts 20:17–38

Turn in your Bibles to Acts, chapter 20, where we're going to read starting in verse 17 in a moment. The Holy Word of God where we see the words of a man who believed that God was worthy and that Jesus was worthy, a man who did not live a life that was confusing but that was sincere. He was committed, all in, more than committed. He was devoted and greatly committed to the cause of Christ because he loved God and because God was worthy of nothing less...he knew that...than his full commitment.

In verse 17, we're told that he wrote or called or summoned the leaders from the church he had been a part of planting. He was a pastor and had been a pastor there for three years. From the very beginning, he was a part of the planting of that church and served on the frontlines of ministry for over three years.

There were many obstacles and much opposition, and it had gotten to the point where some were literally out to kill him. They hated him, so not because he was afraid but because the Spirit was leading him on, he was leaving, but he wanted to address the leaders of that church as he left them behind (the people he loved).

He loved these people, so he summoned the leaders from Miletus, which was close to the city of Ephesus, where this church was located. From about 30 miles Paul

sent to Ephesus. He called the elders of the church there in Ephesus to come to him, and when they came to him, he said these words to them that were recorded.

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming [preaching] the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Then, he says to them in verse 28,

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard [laboring and sweating] in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

The apostle Paul was the real deal. In this passage in his words to this church that he was charging these people who he loved... I do want to draw your attention to

specifically that last paragraph starting in verse 33 to the end. It's established. There is nothing but love here between Paul and them.

They weren't glad Paul was going. They were weeping. They were doing the ugly cry. They were not glad to see Paul go. They knew Paul was going where the Spirit of God was leading him to go, so they were in support of that. This was a gospel goodbye for the cause of Christ, and they were weeping.

You need to know that with every word Paul says it's motivated by love for God and love for these people in this church (these men and these women). He was all about giving. They didn't pay him. It wasn't like he found another job and another church in Jerusalem was going to pay him more money.

No. He knew imprisonment awaited him and suffering and afflictions awaited him, but he was going for the cause of Christ. This church loved him, and he loved them. They were weeping, and he was encouraging them how blessed it was for him to be with them. **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** For three years that was all Paul had been doing.

He had been giving. He had been pouring himself out, and he had not been left wanting. He was testifying and saying, "I don't regret a thing," wanting them to know that it was more blessed to give than to receive. "In pouring myself out in giving my time, talents, and treasure in every way, God has filled me up. I'm the one who is blessed. I'm the one who is thankful. It has been my joy to serve you over these three years. I have been so blessed pouring myself out. It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul was sincere. He was genuine. He loved them. They loved him. Paul was consistent. We see in this passage the three points. He's the model. He said, "Follow me as I follow Christ," in his letters to the Corinthians. "Follow me. Do what I have done." He wasn't being boastful or proud. He knew that apart from Christ he could do nothing. He knew that if it wasn't for Christ he would be nothing. He would be condemned. The

reason he did everything he did was because he loved Jesus Christ because Jesus first loved him.

In Acts, we see how Paul had initially been an opposer of the gospel. It's not just that he didn't care about the gospel or didn't want to hear the gospel, but he was against the gospel, but Jesus graciously revealed himself to Paul, and Paul saw the truth and understood the truth. His blind eyes were opened.

What we see take place in the book of Acts and what we see him do and what we hear him say, as he writes these words, is because he loved God. He served God, and everyone knew exactly who it was that Paul loved and what it was that he believed. We see him express and live out...this is the first point...a *great commitment to God's cause*.

Not to his cause. He wasn't on his mission. He was on God's mission, Jesus' mission. It wasn't just a half-hearted commitment either. It was understandably a great commitment. Even more than a commitment, it was a devotion. We see that great commitment expressed here. He modeled it. He lived it not just sometimes on occasion but all of the time.

Secondly, we see a *great care for God's church*. What are your thoughts about the church? So many people in our culture specifically today love Jesus, but they'll even boast, "I don't like his church." Well, should we not love that which God and Jesus loved? Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Jesus said, "Whoever does not gather with me scatters." The church is the bride of Christ. It is the body of Christ. Jesus loved it. Paul loved what Jesus loved and cared for the church that Jesus cared for. This church wasn't Paul's church. It was Jesus' church. This church, LifeHouse Church, is not Mark's church. It's not anybody's. It is Jesus' church. Jesus is the head of the church. We should love the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. We see that in here.



Finally, we see a *great confidence in God's completion*. Paul knew, although he labored and sweated, he gave. He poured himself out. He knew the success of this church was not based upon him. His confidence was not in himself. His confidence was in God and in the Word of God that God graciously gave him the opportunity to proclaim.

A great commitment to God's cause, a great care for God's church, and a great confidence in God's completion. He always finishes what he starts. "He who began a good work will be faithful to complete it." Paul knew in leaving them that God would see his church through to the end. Another point that is not specifically in this text is through the life of Paul we also see a great consistency.

Consider your own life as we begin this morning, because I know you know there are ups and down. There are good times and bad times, roses and rainbows, and then there are times in dark valleys. Paul, come rain, shine, hell, or high water... Everybody makes fun of me for saying that, but basically no matter what, Paul was consistent all of the time.

It's amazing. We see him live out and serve the Lord Jesus in the book of Acts, but many of the churches he served he wrote letters to, and everything he wrote even years later down the road to these churches that we see him plant did not change. Nothing changed. The context changed. The circumstances changed, but the truth that Paul preached and we see him talk about in Acts, chapter 20, was the same truth he expressed so boldly and uncompromisingly to the churches he loved.

Understand. We see weeping. We see Paul weeping. He loved these people. He didn't share the truth of God to burden people or to weigh them down but to set them free. Remember what Jesus says. "You will know the truth. I'm here to tell you the truth, and the truth will set you free." Paul knew that. Paul believed what he really claimed to

believe, and he lived out consistently day in and day out. He expresses that. We see a consistent commitment, a consistent care, and a consistent confidence.

1. *A great commitment to the cause of Christ.* In verse 17, he summoned those elders from Miletus. It was a thirty-mile journey. This is a day when there weren't planes, trains, and automobiles, cell phones, or Zoom. He summoned these guys. He couldn't go back to Ephesus because they wanted to kill him in Ephesus, but he took advantage of the opportunity he had 30 miles away.

I want to ask you this morning, brothers and sisters called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and to be a part of the Great Commission of Christ, do you make the most of the opportunities you have? Paul was passing through, and he made the most of the opportunity to summon those elders so he could have this conversation with them.

What opportunity might you need to take advantage of today? He summoned them. He called the elders of the church to come to him, and they did. It was 30 miles. It wasn't easy, but they still did it. **“And when they came to him, he said to them...”** “You yourselves, all of you, each one of you, all of you leaders, you elders of the church of Ephesus, you know firsthand. You saw with your own eyes. You heard with your own ears...”

**“...how I lived among you the whole time...”** “Not some of the time. Not on Sundays. Not when I was on the mountaintops but the whole time.” **“...from the first day that I set foot in Asia...”** He didn't wait. He got about the King's business. We see in Acts, chapter 18, when he went to Ephesus for the first time that he went right to the Jewish synagogues.

He told them the truth about Jesus Christ, and he reasoned with the Jews, and at first, they were all about hearing more. They actually wanted Paul to stay, but at that time, Paul was going on. He had more things to do to encourage the disciples in the

region of Galatia and other areas. They wanted it. They wanted the truth that Paul was laying down.

From the first day that he set foot there he was about the gospel message, the Word of God, the truth of God, because he knew they would know the truth and the truth would set them free if they would believe it. It says in verse 19, “**...from the first day that I set foot in Asia serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews...**”

All humility. It’s kind of a prideful statement, isn’t it? “I was so humble. I’ve been serving you with the utmost humility.” The truth is there is no pride in this at all. Paul was following the footsteps of Christ. Jesus was humble. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus washed feet. Jesus came all of the way down.

Though he was in the form of God and found equality with God, he did not grasp or keep that position, but he emptied himself all of the way. He came all of the way down and was obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross, and he had a humble heart and a humble mind. Paul said, “I was just living out my faith in the same way. I was following Jesus.”

This is exactly what he encourages not just some believers and not just the elders but all believers in Philippi to do, to have the mind of Christ specifically with all humility (Philippians, chapter 2). Then, in Ephesians 4, he says to this church later on... He writes this church, and he tells them...

Not just the leaders and not just the elders and not just the elite echelon or the superhero Christians but all of them. He said, “You need to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with all humility.” He uses that same word. In other words, just be like Jesus. Follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus didn't tell us to do things that he wasn't willing to do himself, nor does Paul. He says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." He was just humbly saying, "You know how I have lived among you from the first day until the last. I want you to consider my example as I'm leaving, because I'm not going to be here anymore to be an example for you, so remember. Three years you've watched me, and it has not been easy." He acknowledges, "I've cried. Tears have been shed. It has been hard."

We even know some of the reasons those tears had been brought about earlier in the book of Acts. There had been trials. This has not been a walk in the park. Jesus told his disciples, "In this world, you will have tribulation," and he wasn't telling his disciples that so they could consider whether or not they were in or out with following him.

He told them so they would be prepared. It's not a matter of if. It's a matter of when, and if you live in this world and if you are a part of this sin-cursed world, you will experience tribulation, but he says, "Take heart, for I have overcome the world." Then, he goes on in the gospel of Matthew and charges the disciples to go and teach everything that he had commanded.

He said, "Take heart. I am with you always. I'll be with you always even to the end of the age." Paul acknowledges those trials. Those Jews who at first said, "He was a Jew." That was his people, and he went to them. He shared the gospel. He was so burdened. He loved them. He wanted them to know the truth that had set him free. He wanted them to be set free.

At first, they were all ears. They reasoned with him, but then it started getting uncomfortable because some of the people actually believed the gospel he was proclaiming, and as the church was starting to be formed in Ephesus, they were out to get him. With the plots of the Jews, they wanted to kill him. They didn't just hate him. They wanted to kill him.

He tells these believers, “You saw how I didn’t run and hide. You saw how my message did not change so that it would be more appealing to those Jews, so they would be more comfortable with the message I was proclaiming. I had to proclaim the Word of God. I’ve cried. It has been hard. You know the trials.” He says in verse 20, “You see over these three years from the first day my message has not changed. The Word of God has not changed.”

**“...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** There’s a lot in what he just said. He did not shrink. Don’t you love how that is worded?

“I did not hesitate. I did not sugarcoat in any way, shape, or form the truth of God. I did not diminish the gospel that in and of itself is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it.” Paul knew that to mess with the gospel is not the gospel. He says, “If anyone preaches to you in another letter...” Again, consistency.

“...or another gospel than the specific one I have delivered to you, let them be accursed.” Those were fighting words for Paul. “I did not shrink to tell you...” It was how to live their lives. Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16 to Timothy. He said, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...”**

“I did not shrink to tell you, all people... Not just the Jewish people (my people) but all of the Gentiles, ‘For God so loved the world...’ It was profitable. We need to know. The Word of God is a light unto our path, so even though it may have been uncomfortable at times, even though the Word of God is a double-edged sword, and even though it’s a hard pill to swallow and it does not align with worldly ways and worldly thinking and the road is broad that leads to destruction and the way is narrow that leads to life, I did not shrink from telling you you’re on the wrong way. I did not hesitate. You saw me, you heard me, even though it was hard.”

That word *testifying* there is not just testifying. There is an emphaser there. In other words, “I’ve told you, not just the Jews but also the Greeks and everybody, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in a way that you have everything you need, enough for you to come to the conclusion that you need to come to that this is true. I have not shrunk. I’ve done this in humility.”

He wasn’t mean. He was loving. He spoke the truth in love. He was motivated by love, and these people were rolling their eyes. I think about me as a parent trying to tell my kids the things that I know are profitable for them to hear, but they don’t want to hear it, because what do I know? “What does he know?”

In some ways, Paul was that guy. In Ephesus, it was not popular to tell people they were going the wrong way when they were going the wrong way because they think they’re on the right way, and they loved their sin. Men love their sin. Men love the darkness. “This is the way we’ve been doing it. This is how it works for me. Let me be me. You be you.”

Paul was not about that at all. “I didn’t shrink. I didn’t hesitate. I was that guy. You saw me from the first day. I didn’t wait a year building relationships. I did not shrink.” There was a great commitment to the cause of Christ. Will you be committed to the cause of Christ? The Great Commission is not the great suggestion.

Everyone who calls up on the name of the Lord...remember Romans 10...will be saved, but how are they to believe in someone they’ve never heard, and how are they to hear without someone telling them, and how are they to believe unless someone preaches, and how are they to preach unless someone is sent?

We’re all sent. I’m not just sent. Paul was sent to Ephesus. We’re all sent, and it may be to the other side of the world but at least to across the other side of the room. We’re to share the gospel. Don’t hear me saying that we should just come in like a bull in a China shop. Maybe sometimes we should.

Paul says he did not shrink, and that Greek word is actually used in two ways in the Greek. One is a medical term. I love this, because this goes with our sermon series. Remember from John, chapter 21, when Jesus said to Peter, “If you love me, Peter, feed my sheep,” but it’s a medical term that was used by doctors like, “I didn’t withhold food from the patient. I did not shrink from giving them the food they needed so they could heal and get better.”

Another way it is used in the Greek is for ships. They had no planes, trains, or automobiles, but they did have sailboats. Think about a ship coming into dock. You would hope they would put on the brakes a little bit or at least take the sails down and slow down, but when a sail did not get taken down and it was coming in full force in almost a dangerous way, that’s the term that is used. “They did not shrink. They came in full force.”

Sometimes, that’s the way we’re supposed to come in, like bold and not hesitating at all. We’re supposed to feed the sheep the stuff that is profitable for them, the things they need to hear, the truth so they can be set free, but we can also be strategic in that. I don’t want you to hear me saying that we should just come with a bullhorn everywhere we go.

There might be a time for that. There *is* a time for that. What I’m trying to get across is we’re not to allow fear to keep us or being uncomfortable to keep us or even if it costs us something to keep us from proclaiming the truth and from living out the truth that people need to hear. We need to know and realize and remember what lies in the balance.

Do we believe what we really claim to believe? Are the wages of sin really death? Was Jesus telling a lie, or was he telling the truth? Is Jesus the truth? Is he fake? Is he phony, or is he truly the Lord he claimed to be and the only way to salvation? This is the message. Heaven and hell and eternity lie in the balance.

We should not shrink. We should not allow fear, because God does not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-control, so we don't allow fear to hinder us, but we do use our minds, and we make the most of the opportunities (every opportunity) just like Paul. Think about him summoning those elders. It wasn't convenient to come 30 miles and to walk from Miletus to Ephesus, but he made the most of the opportunity, and so should we. We should not shrink in fear.

Brothers and sisters, consider your own life. Are you committed? Will you be committed to the cause of Christ? Paul was all in. There really is no other way to be. Baptism is a picture of how we are to be (all in and immersed in the cause of Christ). You cannot serve God and money. God is a jealous God. If you wish to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

James says in his letter that God doesn't play. He's not okay with you two-timing him. Either you're all in or likely you're not in. Paul loved Jesus. He who is forgiven much loves much. He was all in. He loved what God loved and felt so blessed to be a part of his cause. Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 39, says this is who we are.

Even in the face of suffering, let alone being uncomfortable when things are inconvenient for us, the writer of Hebrews says, **“But we are not of those who shrink back...”** That's not who we are. **“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith...”** We trust in the one we claim to believe in that he is who he reveals himself to be and that he does what he says he will do always. He is faithful. His steadfast love endures forever.

Paul knew that, and we see him live out his life. Are you committed to the cause of Christ? Do you shrink in fear? My charge to you, church, is to in faith and in boldness strategically make the most of all of the opportunities we have to share this lifesaving, eternity-saving message that he has placed within our care.



Again, Paul, not wanting people to be burdened but to be blessed... Remember what he wrote in Romans, chapter 12, verse 1. He says to his church family in Rome, “I beg you, brothers and sisters in Christ...” Again, not wanting them to be burdened and not wanting them to miss out, he says,

“I beg you. I appeal to you by the mercies of God to offer your bodies, like all of yourself (everything). Not just your Sundays but your Sundays through your Saturdays, your Januarys through your Decembers, year in and year out. I appeal to you to offer your bodies as a sacrifice to God. This is what is reasonable. Be committed. Be all in.” Will you be committed to the cause of Christ? We see, secondly...

2. *A great care for God's church.* Again, continuing with this commitment, he says, **“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit...”** “I’m not going for my own good. I’m not going because I got a better paying job, but I’m a slave.” In essence, “The Spirit of God’s hand is on my back. I’m not going to quench the Spirit. I’m going to go with the Spirit and ride that wave to Jerusalem. The Spirit is leading me to Jerusalem.” **“...not knowing what will happen to me there...”** “I’m going by faith. What I do know is...”

Verse 23: **“...except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.”** Does anyone want to sign up? Does anyone want to go? He knew, just like Jesus knew, exactly what would happen to him in Jerusalem. “They’re going to kill me in Jerusalem.” Remember what Peter said. “Don’t go!” Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan.”

Paul wanted to be obedient, and he knew God had been so faithful. He knew he could endure all things through the Lord Jesus Christ who would give him strength. He knew if he needed wisdom God would give him wisdom. He may have been harassed, but he was not helpless, because he had the helper, the Holy Spirit, who indwelt his heart.

Even though he knew imprisonments and afflictions were awaiting him in Jerusalem, he was going, but he says in verse 24, **“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”**

People (men) in sin and sinfulness can by grace through faith in Jesus be saved. They don't have to achieve or do anything but believe and call upon his name. All they have to do is stop looking to other things and other people who will get them nowhere. All they have to do is believe. That's all I had to do, and I want them to know that's all they have to do.

Paul labored and was all about faithfully proclaiming that message. He didn't care about his life. He didn't care about suffering. He didn't enjoy suffering, but he saw it as an opportunity to trust the Lord. James says, “When you meet trials of various kinds, consider it an opportunity for great joy.” Paul knew that. Remember his thorn in the flesh. “Three times I begged God to remove the thorn, but God didn't remove the thorn. Instead, God's grace was sufficient for me and his power was made perfect in my weakness.”

He goes on to boast about the thorn he had first prayed about. He said, “God, leave the thorn, because through the thorn, through the suffering, through this affliction, and through this trial I am able to see and experience you in a way that I had not been able to experience you. O Lord, thank you for this thorn.”

He was willing to go and to experience God in obedience. As he poured himself out, God filled him up. God was so faithful. He could not actually wait to get to Jerusalem. He had a great care for God's church. That's the second point. He said in verse 25, **“And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.”**

This is a gospel goodbye. He loved these people. Remember, they were weeping because he said this. This is a big deal. He says, **“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”** This is a big deal for Paul. It was so important to him.

He’s referring to Ezekiel who was a prophet or preacher of God in the Old Testament where God told him specifically, “You’re a watchman. You are my watchman for my people. I’m giving you eyes to see the things you need to bring to the attention of my people, and I’m giving you the ability to hear my voice so that you can tell my people what I want for them.” This was after Moses. Remember, God would raise up the other prophets for them so they would know how to go and what to do.

Specifically, God told him, “It’s on you, Ezekiel. If you hear my voice when I tell you to do something or say something to the wicked people who are sinning, then you have an obligation. You have a responsibility to tell them, and if they listen to you, praise God. Good, but if they don’t listen to you but you still told them, you’re innocent of their blood, but if you didn’t tell them, and they still die in their wickedness because the wages of sin is death, their blood is on your hands.”

Then, again, in Ezekiel, chapter 33, he says the same thing. “Ezekiel, you’re the watchman. You’re the one I have raised up. You’re the one I have given the ability to hear and the ability to see, so you have a responsibility. If you don’t tell those wicked people that they are wicked... You tell them they are wicked and their ways of sin are not going to get them anywhere and they are going to reap the consequences of their sin. If you don’t tell them and they still die in their sin, their blood is on your hands, but if you tell them the truth like I have told you to do and they don’t heed your warnings, then it is on them and you are free. You can wash your hands.”

Paul was saying, “I’ve told you everything you need to know. I did not shrink. I did not hesitate. I did not sugarcoat. I did not couch. I gave it to you just like God

wanted me to give it to you, proclaiming and preaching, not suggesting, proclaiming boldly the kingdom from the first day.”

Three years they had been there. He said, “But I testify before the Lord. He knows I have told you everything you need to know, so in light of that...” He says, “**Pay careful attention...**” “This is a big deal. I’m leaving. You have everything. I proclaimed the whole Word of God to you. Not just some of it but the whole Word of God.”

When he first got to Ephesus, there were a lot of people who knew some of the gospel, but they didn’t know all of the gospel. There were some disciples who had been baptized in the baptism of John. They had never heard of the Holy Spirit, so when Paul says, “Let me explain it to you more accurately,” he did that, and they got baptized, and the Holy Spirit showed up. It was amazing!

Remember Apollos. He was this educated, eloquent man from Alexandria. He knew some of the Word of God. He did not know all of it, but Priscilla and Aquilla, who were Paul’s counterparts, explained to him more accurately the things of God, and he came to understand the whole counsel, and the Holy Spirit of God moved in an incredible way. He did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. He says, “**Pay careful attention to yourselves...**” Not just to everybody else. We like to pay attention to everybody else but not ourselves. We don’t like to look in the mirror

He told these leaders, “You need to look in the mirror. As leaders, you need to make sure you are right with God. You need to make sure you are walking in a manner worthy of the gospel before you communicate anything else. You don’t need to discredit the Word that you are to proclaim and that you are to teach by living in contradiction to the Word of God. You have seen how I have walked in alignment with the Word of God for three years from the first day. You need to pay careful attention on yourselves, not in a selfish manner but for the sake of the whole flock.”

Then, he says to pay careful attention “...**to all the flock...**” Not just the old people, but the young people, the men, the women, the wives, the husbands. Everybody. All the flock. Understand the flock is a contained unit. There was a church. He knew and they knew exactly who was a part of that flock, who was in and who was not in.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that I say humbly I’m confused. There are some people who I have no doubt are a part of the flock, and I know they’re all in. I submit to them, and they submit to me. We love each other, and we want to tell each other to hold one another accountable and bear one another’s burdens, but there is a large majority of people who gather and assemble here who consider LifeHouse Church their home church, but I don’t know if they are part of the flock.

If it came to the point for me or someone else on our leadership team to lovingly not shrink in telling them what is profitable for them, they’d be out. “How dare you speak to me in that way?” Brothers and sisters, this is a charge to care for God’s church. We have a responsibility. I have a responsibility as the pastor to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

All of us are to bear one another’s burdens. We have a responsibility. He goes on and says in verse 28, “...**the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...**” These elders and these leaders who Paul summoned didn’t politicize and make themselves elders. God appointed them. He made them. God did it. God builds the church. Jesus said, “I will build my church in such a way that the gates of hell will not prevail against it,” so God appointed elders and leaders, but he doesn’t just do that for leaders. He does that for everybody when you are saved.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, God places you within the body. He makes you a hand. He makes you a foot. He makes you an eye. All of the parts work together. Some of them are elders, preachers, and teachers of the Word of God. Others serve in supportive functions. They fulfill the ministry that the church is supposed to fulfill, but every role,

every part, and every member has a function, and we are to work in conjunction with one another to build. The hand cannot say to the foot, “I have no need of you,” and when one member suffers, all members suffer with it.

We need to understand and undo this idea in our culture that we are on our own. “I love Jesus. I’m a part of the universal church.” There was a flock that this elder team was assigned to and made as their responsibility. They knew exactly who Paul was referring to. It was all of the flock and not just some of the flock. All of the flock. There is great care for God’s church in this passage.

Paul did not shrink. He says, “**Pay careful attention,**” and interestingly enough, in doing that what they were to do specifically was to pay careful attention “**...to care for the church of God...**” That word *care* there interestingly enough in the Greek is the exact same word Jesus used when he told Peter, “Feed my sheep.” Shepherd. *Poimainō* is the Greek word. Feed and lead. “Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep. Give them the Word of God. That’s what they need if they are going to endure, because this is what is going to happen.”

“**...which he obtained with his own blood.**” He loves the church. Christ loves the church. We should have great care for the church. This is not if but when. He says in verse 29, “**I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you...**” Not literal but figurative wolves, like false prophets.

Jesus called false prophets in Matthew 10 *fierce wolves* that will come in and wreak havoc by speaking the lies of the Father of Lies (Satan). He has come to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly, so we are to preach and proclaim his Word without shrinking.

Paul says, “I know the fierce wolves. You need to make sure you care for them and feed them with the Word of God so they are prepared for these fierce wolves and they’ll know the truth and won’t listen to lies. They’re not going to spare the flock.”

Verse 30: “**...and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things...**” It’s not if but when.

Just like Satan does, they’re going to quote Scripture and say, “Did God really say that? Did God really mean that? Well, this is a different time and this is a different place. Our context is completely different, so I know Jesus says that, and I know God says that, but he doesn’t really mean that. It could mean *this*. It could mean *that*.” They diminish and distract from the Word of God that is the truth that is meant to set us free.

Paul says that people are going to come from the church family. That phrase *draw away* in the ESV more literally is to drag away in a violent way. Paul was dramatic in saying this. He had great concern for this church that he loved. He said, “People are going to come in from the church and speak lies, and they are going to drag away your brothers and sisters, the ones you are responsible to oversee and protect, so make sure you feed them and care for them.”

He says, “**...remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.**” He said, “That’s what I did, and that’s what you need to do.” Admonish is not just a casual warning. It is like desperate. He did it with tears. He didn’t just do it on one occasion. He did it all of the time.

The wages of sin is death. He who sows seeds to the flesh of the flesh will reap corruption. Jesus said, “Many on that day will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord. I sang songs for you. I did all of these things.’” Jesus will say, “Depart from me. I never knew you,” and they will be cast into that place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Paul said these things to these people because this is what they needed to hear. This was profitable. He didn’t want people to have a false sense of security, nor do we. We must have great care for God’s church.

He says, “**Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did [this]...**” One thing I want to point out is there are a lot of things Paul says here, but there

is also something very profound that Paul does not say. Clearly, there is an emphasis on the importance of proclaiming and teaching the whole counsel of God and not shrinking and being bold and proclaiming not suggesting but admonishing with the Word of God. Night and day for three years...

If you turn your page in your Bible back to Acts, chapter 19, in this church and among this people it is said that God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched Paul's skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases (those people who were sick) left them, and evil spirits came out of them.

Wouldn't that be exciting? Those people in your family who are sick... All you have to do is take a handkerchief and let Paul touch it, and you can take it home, and they will be set free from that sickness. Paul doesn't say a word about that. That was exciting. The Holy Spirit was all over the place. People were coming to saving faith, but what Paul wanted those elders and those leaders to know and understand was to not seek fireworks and sensational things.

"They need the Word of God. Proclaim the Word of God. Day and night admonish, for years if necessary. Even in trials and tribulations and even when it is hard and you are suffering and crying, still from the first day till now do not hesitate to shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God.

Not some things but everything that is profitable, even when it is uncomfortable and even when it is inconvenient, because there is opportunity and while there is opportunity. They don't need a miracle. They need the Word of God, because the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it."

Let's not fall into the trap of putting all of our stock into the here and now. Yeah, healing is good. If I was sick, I'd want healing, but ultimately what we should need to know and understand more is that eternity is much longer than the 70 or 80 years that



we live in this life, and what is most important is that people hear and that people know the gospel, the Word of God, so we must as a church be about the gospel. He doesn't say one thing about all of those miracles. That's profound. We must take great care for God's church. Lastly, we must have...

3. *A great confidence in God's completion.* Again, Paul knew he wasn't the one who built this church. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." He says, "I know that even though these fierce wolves are coming, and even though these people from among our flock are going to rise up and speak twisted things, I'm okay, because I know God's got us."

I know that he who began a good work will be faithful to complete it. I know when Jesus said, 'I will build my church,' he'll do it in a way that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it and that his church will persevere. Yes, in this world, you will have tribulation, but he said, 'Take heart, for I have overcome the world.' What can separate you from the love of Christ? Nothing! Nothing!" Paul knew that. Paul believed it. He wrote these things.

He says, "I commend you to my God, who is mighty to save and strong to redeem. I commend you to my God, who is the faithful friend that sticks closer than a brother. My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. You may be harassed, but you're not helpless because you have the Holy Spirit that indwells your heart. You have everything you need."

He wrote to them in Ephesians, chapter 6, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, but you have the armor (the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation). You have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, so not only can you withstand the attacks of the Enemy, but you can gain ground that has been stolen

by the Enemy, and the gospel and the Word of God can advance, and the church can continue to be built for his glory.”

Paul had great confidence in God’s completion. Do you? Will you? Or do you live in fear? Do you concede? Do you compromise? Paul did not compromise. He didn’t twist the Word. He was faithful to the Word. He gave them the whole Word, everything that was profitable, and so should we. Our message should not change. This is the Word of God, the living Word.

Remember, Peter didn’t want any other word than the words Jesus would give them. He said, “Where else would we go? You, Jesus, have the words of eternal life.” These are the words that are recorded and placed before us by God’s grace. This is what is profitable, not just for me but for you and for your children and your children’s children should God tarry. This is what we should be about (the whole truth and nothing but the truth).

Let’s be alert and stand firm. **“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”** This is what you need. You don’t need a miracle. You don’t. I love a miracle. I’m not against a miracle. I’d love to be there and see those handkerchiefs. How cool would that be? Paul doesn’t say a word about that. All he talks about is the Word, the gospel, and the whole counsel of God. That’s what is able to build you up. That’s what is able to build your children up.

As we close, consider your life and your mindset when it comes to ministry. Remember what Paul says at the end of this. He says, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** There is some stinking thinking in our culture (a consumer mentality). “What’s in it for me? What will I get? What will my kids get? What’s the payoff? Is there going to be good food or good snacks? How good is the worship leader?” Food is good, good singing is good, but the Word is what we need.

We are to contend for the faith, because if we're going to endure and persevere to the end and not be casualties but rather be champions and if our children are going to be champions, they need the Word of God. Not some of it but all of it. Not sugarcoated. All of it. The whole truth and nothing but the truth.

This is what we today must be committed to, and we must love the church and care for the church, and we must be confident and have faith that that is what we need and operate in that way. As we close, consider your life and your mentality and what you think you need or are looking for in a church.

Maybe this isn't the church that God is calling you to be a part of. We're not the only church. This is Jesus' church. There are a lot of "churches" out there, though. I want to warn you. I want to hold you back. A lot of churches call themselves churches aren't really churches. There are a lot of people who call themselves Christians who aren't really Christians. They will hear on that day, the day that matters, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

Just because someone sings pretty or wears a tee shirt doesn't mean they are a Christian, and I'm not saying that in a condemning way. I'm saying that in a sobering way. I'm saying that you may be one of those people. You need to know and understand. I was one of those people. Pay close attention to yourself first and then to all the flock. Don't be deceived. Don't listen to lies and be destroyed.

Be built up. Be a part of the body of Christ and endure for his glory. It may be hard and you may cry, but you'll be blessed as you pour yourself out, because it's not about what you get. Make sure you get fed the Word of God, but it's not about how you feel. Don't be a consumer. Give. **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

As we close, consider your life and your expectations and what you are desiring and pursuing. Consider how you are when it comes to sharing the gospel. Do

you make the most of the opportunities you have? Maybe you need to go across the room. Maybe you need to go across to the other side of the world.

Maybe God is constraining you in the Spirit, but you have been unlike Paul and, instead, you have been grieving the Spirit. You've been pushing down the Spirit. No. Go with the flow. Go. You will be blessed if you go where God wants you to go. It may be a gospel goodbye, and you may, just like Paul, weep as you say goodbye to your family, but at least you have Zoom and Facetime. He didn't even have that.

You have airplanes, and you can buy a ticket to come home for Easter or vacation. Go and be blessed. Take the lifesaving gospel to people who need to hear the gospel. Don't shrink. Don't hesitate. If he told you to go, go! Not tomorrow. When he tells you to go, go for his glory and be blessed. Do not shrink. Let's be obedient. Let's give. Let's be blessed, church.

In a moment, we're going to stand and sing a song of invitation. I want to encourage you to come. Maybe you need to repent. Paul used that word a lot. That's an ugly word in our culture. "How dare you say to repent?" Paul said, "I said to repent for three years from the first day. I told people, 'You need to stop putting your faith and trust in things that are leading you down that broad road that leads to destruction. You don't need to do that.'" He told them everything that was profitable for them, including that they needed to repent.

Maybe you need to repent. Maybe it's a sin of commission. Sin is sin. The wages of sin is death. There's no sugarcoating it. It is. I don't care how much the culture has changed. The Word of God has not. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the same truth that set people free 2,000 years ago will set you free today, but you have to repent of your sin. God is not okay with sin. He hates sin.

That's why you need to be saved from sin, so repent of your sins of commission but also of omission. He who knows the right thing to do but does it not, to

him it is a sin. Some of you have been shrinking. Even more than that, some of you have been abstaining from doing what you need to do and from going where you need to go and from being who he has called you to be.

Be that ship that doesn't take down the sail when it pulls into the harbor. It may be reckless, but it is beautiful if that is what God is calling you to do. Don't shrink. Be obedient. Let's stand and bow our heads and pray, and let's sing. The altar is going to be open. Be obedient. Repent of your sin and sinfulness and turn to God. Believe that he is who he claimed to be.

Love him because he first loved you, and be committed to his cause, care for the church, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, and trust him. Have confidence in who he is and in his Word. It's the Word you need and the Word your children need. Be committed. Don't be confusing. Be greatly committed. Let's sing. The altar is open.

APPENDIX 8  
SERMON 7 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
March 19, 2023

Preach the Word

2 Timothy 4:1–8

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy, chapter 4. We're going to read verses 1 through 8 together. This is the apostle Paul writing to his son in the faith, Timothy. Paul is at the end of his life in prison. His crime is spreading the gospel. His crime is loving God and loving the people God loved and being obedient to go where God has sent him to go and do exactly what almighty God sent him to do, to preach, to proclaim the truth of the gospel that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it.

He's a repeat offender. He had been in prison before, yet he did not give up. He continued to preach the gospel and to teach the Word of God, the whole counsel of God. Once again, he finds himself in prison, and he knows this time is going to be the last time. Paul knows he is about to be executed for his faith, but interestingly enough, we don't see in this letter he wrote, knowing that was his fate, any regret.

In fact, just the opposite, we see rejoicing, and we see him charge his son in the faith, Timothy, to basically do exactly what he had been doing and in the way he had been doing it, knowing that it could possibly result in Timothy ending up in the same way Paul was ending up, being executed for his faith. With that in mind, let's read together the solemn charge.

Really, the weight of this charge... I don't believe I can do justice at expressing it in words. I'm not an actor. I'm not dramatic, but there are exclamation points all over this. Paul loved Timothy. We need to know, first and foremost, he loved God, so that's behind the charge, but he also loved Timothy so much. He truly was his son in the faith. They had worked together and labored together for the gospel for many, many years. They were on the frontlines of ministry. They had suffered together for the cause of Christ. Paul loved him, and with that in mind, starting in verse 1, he says to Timothy...

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

As you know, we've been preaching through a sermon series called *Prioritizing Preaching* and really making much of the opportunity. It's not prioritizing the preacher but the preaching event where the preacher or the messenger of God or the servant of God proclaims not just what he wants to say but the Word of God.

It's not just a one-way thing, but for the people of God it's the preaching event. Probably even more importantly and more significantly than the preacher proclaiming is also that the people, the body of Christ who are saved by grace through faith in Christ, are hearing and coming ready by faith to receive the Word of God that is proclaimed, and because it's the Word of God and it is true, they are ready to heed and not just hear as in consider but heed as in obey.

They hear so they can obey and so they can walk according to God's way so they can walk and be obedient to what God has called them to do and be who he has created them in Christ Jesus to be. This is a very familiar text. If you've been a part of Christianity or if you've been a part of the church, whether it's LifeHouse or another church, you've heard this admonition or this charge.

"Timothy, preach the Word." You know it is an important charge, so it definitely makes sense that it is a part of this sermon series, and we're going to work our way through it, but my motivation specifically for preaching this text... There are a lot of texts that talk about preaching, but this specific text initially wasn't just that initial, "I charge you, Timothy, as a pastor and as a preacher to preach the Word," but it was really born out of what he says the reasoning is to why Timothy should preach the Word.

Many of you know we've celebrated this past year our eleventh anniversary. We're still young. I used to joke when we were a church plant 11 years ago. We started from a Bible study. It was amazing, and God worked in incredible ways, and I always asked my church-planting friends and other pastors, "When do you actually transition from church plant to legit church?" Like a church plant is something other than.

Where two or more are gathered and when people gather in the name of Jesus Christ and they gather to worship him and to celebrate him and to make much of him and to hear his Word proclaimed, it's a church, so we were a church 11 years ago when we started, but since that time we have been growing together and learning together. Many of you have.

I have learned and grown. I'm in a different place today than I was 11 years ago by his grace, but one of the things I am so burdened by as I reflect on the past 11 years is that some of the people who were with us, the men and the women and the children who gathered and who assembled regularly and sang and served and gave with us and who grew with us, are not here anymore.



Now, for some of them it's for good reason. Some of them moved. Their job transferred them or maybe the Spirit of God led them to use their gifts in a different place, and that's a possible thing, so I'm not talking about those situations, but I'm talking about those people who Paul talks about in verse 3 who basically walked away and it did not go well for them.

I'm not drawing attention to those people because I'm wanting to be high and mighty and laugh and point fingers. No. It breaks my heart. In connection with my calling to preach and to pastor, God has equipped and enabled me to love in a way that I did not love prior to doing and operating in what he has called me to do, and I will say that it hurts when people walk away at any point.

If you think about a family, when someone you love just walks away, you can't be okay with that, but when they walk away not just from you but from God, from the Word, and from truth, especially living in this dark world, and when you hear through the grapevine or see on social media that they start listening to and are celebrating things that actually contradict the Word of God who they gathered and assembled to listen to and they are starting to exercise and operate in ways that completely contradict, and they do so boldly, and it does not go well for them, it's heartbreaking.

As I reflected on the 10 or 11 years that God has allowed us to be a church, "Lord, how can we do more? How can we protect against these things?" The Word of God has always been preached. We're growing, and God is raising up more preachers to preach the Word of God, and that is to be celebrated, but how do we hear?

Maybe this morning you are one of the people who Paul talks about with itching ears. We'll talk about that in a moment, and if that's you, I pray the Spirit of God would open your eyes to see the danger associated with that, and if you're about to step into and follow the path that many who used to gather here have walked away and are following, I pray the Spirit of God will awaken you to that and compel you to repent and

to turn back and, rather than turn away, to lean in and listen to the Word of God and respond to it as uncomfortable as it may be to you.

Yeah, I'm burdened not for just this church either. Our culture and our nation and this world today is a dark world. We live in a fallen world, and the realities associated with that are becoming more and more evident. The boasting and the mocking and the opposition... In many ways, this is not new for other nations, but for our nation, one nation under God, this is becoming real.

I would say that a couple of years ago it was uncomfortable, but it is becoming unbearable almost. It's definitely not the popular thing. It's a sobering reality, because this isn't a game. Brothers and sisters, do we believe what we claim to believe or not? Do we believe the wages of sin is death? Do we believe he is worthy of it all? Because he is.

Really, it matters not whether you believe it or not. He is worthy of it all, and his truth is not relative. His truth is truth, and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is Creator. He is sustainer. No matter how many thrones there are that exist in this world or have throughout history, he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and he is sovereign, and he is Creator. At the end of the day, it matters not what we feel or what we think about what he says. His truth is truth, and by the grace of God, we have access to it.

Who are we that he is even mindful of us? Yet, he is. He has so graciously given his Word, and he has so graciously given us the body where we can be connected, and he has given us gifts of the Spirit to use in conjunction with other believers to be a part of the greatest mission ever. Why would we not want to be a part of that which rescued and delivered us from the depths of hell and condemnation?

Why would we not want to listen to truth that is available to us in a world filled with lies? Moms and dads, grandparents, think beyond yourself. Think about your kids who God entrusted to you. Do we believe what we claim to believe? God gave you those

children. God entrusted those children to you. You are a steward of those children. It is your responsibility, you who know the truth, to make sure they know the truth, and we live in a world... I'm telling you the broad road leads to destruction.

Paul charged Timothy. That is a motivation because of what he talks about in the moment but ultimately because it's God's Word it deserves to be proclaimed and heralded. It deserves to be heard. It needs to be heard. God graciously gives us ears to hear. Why would we not listen? This is what we are talking about (preaching). We want to prioritize preaching.

In this passage, we see preaching is a sacred responsibility. This is a sacred responsibility. What I'm doing and what you are doing here in this sanctuary today is a sacred responsibility. You as the believers and the sheep of his flock have a responsibility to hear the Word that is proclaimed, and not just hear as if it is a suggestion but hear as if it is a command. Truth is truth. It's a sacred responsibility for all of us to engage in.

Secondly, we see and hear the sad reality for many people. Sad doesn't even really scratch the surface, but it's a sad reality. It's the truth. Then, we see the sure reward for perseverance. As we labor in this sacred responsibility of giving and taking and hearing and proclaiming, there is a reward for perseverance and continuing in that.

Paul said to Timothy, **“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...”** Even this just sounds like such formal words. I think many of us in our society and culture just breeze through those words. There is not a lot of weight to those words. It just sounds like this formal charge like they do in a court of law.

When you put your hand on a Bible, they say, “Do you swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?” There was a day when that really meant something. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When Paul was giving this charge to Timothy who feared God, do you fear God? Because he is holy and righteous.

Not just holy, but he is holy, holy, holy. He is infinite. We are finite. Who is man that he is even mindful of us? He is Creator. He is sustainer. When Paul charged Timothy in the presence of God, Timothy was listening. He was tuned in, because these were not just words of formality like, “Put your hand on the Bible and swear.” No. These were weighty words.

“Timothy, my son in the faith whom I love... Timothy, you’ve been walking with me. You know me. You know I’m sincere. You know I don’t just mince words or throw out words. You know I’m the real deal. You know I am one who fears God. I want you to fear God. I have taught you to fear God, so I charge you in the presence of almighty God and of Christ Jesus, our Savior, the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many, Jesus, the image of the invisible God, the one through whom and to whom are all things, and the one who is worthy of it all...

No one else is worthy. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world. That Jesus. Timothy, I charge you in the presence of Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the one to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is in charge. The first and the last is who I charge you in.”

Timothy knew Jesus. He loved Jesus. That was enough, but ultimately you have to hear the love behind this, because Paul loved Timothy. I think about this. When I read this charge, I think about many people here at this church. I think about my own family. I think about my son. I think about my son-in-law and my grandson and my daughters and my wife.

What would I tell them if I were in Paul’s shoes? If I was about to be executed for my faith and, if by the grace of God, I was able to endure and stand firm, I know I couldn’t do it in my own strength, but I would trust that the Lord would give me the grace necessary to endure and persevere. What would I tell them?

Paul loved Timothy. He loved God. He loved Jesus. He knew Timothy loved him, and Timothy loved God, and he loved Jesus, and he feared God, because he knew Jesus was the one. He is the judge. There are a lot of judges, but he is the righteous judge who will judge the living and the dead. It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that comes the judgement. We will all stand before God.

Even believers, those who are alive at the end on that last day when Jesus Christ comes... Revelation 1:7 says, **“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.”** He is coming but not in the same way he came. He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, but he is coming to judge.

He is coming to once and for all time do away with all sin and sinfulness. The wrath of God is going to be poured out upon all sin and sinfulness, and those who are apart from Christ and those who do not believe, Jesus said in John 3:18, are condemned already. They are already on that road. They are already on the broad road that is leading to destruction. He is coming, and he will judge. He will appear. **“...by his appearing [his second coming] and his kingdom...”** Which is an everlasting kingdom.

This could not be a weightier and more serious and solemn charge or admonition or warning. The word there for charge is *diamartyromai*. It's a testimony. It's not just a testimony like, “I'm not just telling you to do this. This isn't a suggestion, Timothy, like if you think about it or if you're feeling like it. Preach the Word.”

No. Again, this is pulling out all of the stops. This is taking it up. “You know the truth. This is what you need to do, Timothy, no matter how you feel.” We know that Timothy was struggling. He was younger. He didn't have the experience Paul did. He wasn't trained like Paul was trained. Timothy's mom was Jewish. His dad was a Greek.

We don't even know whatever happened to his father, but Paul encountered Timothy on his first missionary journey when Timothy was just a young boy, probably

12 years old. Timothy is probably 30 at this point, so he had seen a lot. He had experienced a lot, but he wasn't Paul. All of us are thinking, "That's great for Paul, but we can't be like Paul."

Would we be able to do what Paul has done? Surely, Timothy was saying, "I could never fill Paul's shoes. I could never do what Paul has done. I could never be like you, Paul." Through 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul is just encouraging him. Remember what he says in 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 6, meaning that Timothy was likely feeling anxious about something. He says, "Listen, Timothy." **"...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you..."**

"Don't be afraid. God does not give us a spirit of fear, Timothy, my son in the faith. I don't want you to shrink. I don't want you to hold back. I don't want you to concede or compromise in any way, shape, or form. I want you to do that which God is equipping you to do by his Spirit. Apart from him, you can do nothing anyway, but in him, you can endure all things.

Preach the Word, Timothy. God does not give us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of self-control. I don't want to hear excuses from you. I don't want you to miss out, Timothy. I want you to be used. Like I am pouring myself out, I want you to pour yourself out. Don't shrink in any way, shape, or form. Preach the Word."

1. *This is a sacred responsibility.* "Timothy, you have a responsibility. This is what God has called you to do. This is what God has been preparing you to do. This is the role you are to play within the church. You are to proclaim, as in herald without apology and without sugarcoating. You are to do it all..." They didn't have the canon of Scripture. "...but the whole counsel of God."

Just like Paul did many years earlier...we looked in Acts 20...he preached the whole counsel of God. This is a sacred responsibility. Preach the Word. We know that was what he was talking about right before that in 2 Timothy 3:16. He talks about how all

Scripture is God-breathed. “Timothy, this is God’s Word. This is God’s message. The people need to know God’s ways. They need to know God’s will, so preach it. Herald it boldly (the Word or the *logos* of God).”

That includes the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who would believe it. Everyone who calls upon the name of Jesus shall be saved. This is the first thing. This is the beginning of a relationship with Jesus. When you trust in Jesus, you stop trusting in the other things that you placed your faith and trust in. You stop wandering aimlessly.

You can look to Jesus and trust in Jesus and be saved and then begin a relationship with him or a journey with him as a part of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is born in your hearts, and you use the gifts that the Spirit of God equips you to do and be a part of as a part of the body of Christ. Not everybody is the preacher, but everybody has a gift, and they are to be used in conjunction with one another to further the mission of Christ and to further the gospel.

“Timothy, you have been equipped. You have been called to preach the Word, and not just any word but the Word of God, the *logos* of God. People need to know that Jesus is coming again, that he came and that he is coming. Behold, he comes! You are to be ready to do this, not when it’s convenient and not when it’s comfortable for you.”

**“...be ready in season and out of season...”** *Eukairōs* and *akairōs*. “When the time is right and when the time is wrong, at all times 24/7, 365 days a year, you need to be ready. You need to be eager to preach the Word. Let the abundance of your heart speak. Preach the Word of God and do it boldly.”

**“...reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”**

“Timothy, this is a sacred responsibility.” Reprove means to prove. By using the Word of God, the truth, as the litmus and as the standard, compare and show and reveal, just like

Moses. If you remember, at that first preaching event in Exodus, chapter 18, Jethro assigned the elders to help lead so that Moses could do what God called him to do.

He said, “You need to teach. You need to warn the people how they are to walk. They need to know God’s law and God’s statutes and God’s will so they can walk according to his way and experience life instead of death.” This is what he’s doing. Prove by using the Word of God. Show men that they are sinners.

We all need to know that we are sinners in need of a Savior. We all need to know that we have fallen short of the glory of God. God is holy. We’re not holy. When we compare ourselves to people on TV on the TV shows we especially watch and when we compare ourselves to our world and our society today, we look pretty good.

We can feel pretty good about ourselves, but when we compare ourselves to a holy, righteous God, we don’t just fall a little short; we fall way short. We need Jesus. We quoted Acts 4:12. **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

Jesus is our only hope. We believe in Jesus for salvation. He is the one who was righteous in all his ways. He is the one who knew no sin, but we are sinners, and this is what God’s Word does. It proves to us. It shows us the reality. It shows us the whole truth and nothing but the truth. With reprove, this is with preaching. As we proclaim, it is an authoritative manner. We show the truth.

Then, we rebuke. It’s such an odd word. “How dare you rebuke me?” We don’t do that in our culture. We mind our own business in our culture. Instead of rising up and proclaiming truth, our world tells us to sit down and shut up. No. We are to proclaim. We are to prove. We are to tell the truth. We call sin *sin*, and we rebuke, which is to correct.

We say, “Stop heading down that broad road that leads to destruction. Repent!” This is what Jesus did. Jesus rebuked. Jesus went about preaching, telling people, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. I’m here. You can stop placing



your faith and trust and spinning your wheels getting nowhere in the things that will get you nowhere. You can turn to me now. I am rebuking you. Repent. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. I'm here."

This is what we do. We point people to Jesus. We rebuke, and we exhort. We encourage. We comfort. He provides peace that passes understanding beyond salvation. It's not just the bad news. We're not just beating people over the heads with Bibles. "You sinner! You wicked, rotten sinner!" No. We tell them the truth about what God's Word says.

"We are sinners in need of a Savior, but there is hope. That's the bad news, but there is good news. Jesus' arms are open wide to you. Even you who are at enmity with him in your sin and sinfulness, you can turn to him right now. You can repent. Today is the day of salvation, so you can right now just believe. Call on him."

Beyond that, he doesn't just say, "Okay. You're saved." No. He walks with us always even to the end of the age. He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother. He gives strength. He gives wisdom. He gives us everything we need so we can be who he is calling us to be and do what he is calling us to do without compromising and without conceding, so we persevere. We continue. We don't give up. We don't walk away. We lean in. We listen to the truth, because it is a light unto our path in this dark world.

This is the exhortation. This is encouragement. We need to keep on keeping on. There ain't no time for hiding in a corner sucking your thumb. It's time to rise up. It's time to wake up. It's time to live out your faith boldly, testifying of the glory of God and preaching the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. People need to know the truth. People need to know their problem just like I needed to know my problem. I thought I was good.

We must exhort and not just tell people the bad news and not just point fingers at people. We need to encourage and exhort them to come to the good news. There is

hope in Christ Jesus. Even in seemingly hopeless situations, there is hope, so we reprove as awkward as it may feel or be in season and out of season.

When the time is right and when the time is not right, we reprove, we preach, and we rebuke. We tell people, “Stop going that way. Change your activity.” We exhort them with the good news and the hope that you can do all things through Christ. You can endure all things, and his arms are open wide, and he’s not just leaving you hanging. There is grace. There is mercy. His mercies are new every morning. We exhort them as we preach, and we do it with complete patience and teaching.

He’s acknowledging the sacred responsibility. There is endurance. Work is hard. You have to be patient. You don’t just preach and everybody changes and says, “Okay.” We don’t just exhort, rebuke, and reprove one time. No. We continue doing it week in and week out, day in and day out.

We continue looking to the Word, especially in this world filled with so many lies and other preaching voices preaching at us. We need the truth. We do it over and over again, and we keep doing it just like Paul did and just like Jesus did. We teach people to observe everything Jesus commanded. Not just some things.

We feed Jesus’ sheep not just on one occasion but like breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We keep feeding, and people keep eating, and they keep growing, and they keep learning. This is the process of sanctification. We don’t do it just so that it flies over people’s heads so they can’t understand.

This is what expository preaching is all about. We are exposing and uncovering the truth, because there are some things that are hard to understand in the context of 2,000 years ago, and the Old Testament even more than that, so we need to try to understand how this applies to us today. There are a lot of different applications, but there is one truth, with complete patience and teaching. It is a sacred responsibility.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul told Timothy, his son in the faith, in verse 15, **“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”** Don’t be twisting God’s Word. Don’t be adding or taking away or sugarcoating God’s Word. No. You present God’s Word in the way God has called you to present it. It is a sacred responsibility not just to herald but also to hear and heed.

Remember what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts, chapter 20, about his preaching ministry. He said, “From the first day, you saw how I lived.” He told those elders, “How I did not shrink from declaring everything that was profitable to you. I did not shrink from declaring the gospel that you need to repent and believe in Jesus.” He did not shrink from doing that.

He is referring to Ezekiel 33, where God tells his prophet, the one who is to proclaim God’s Word to his people, “You are the watchman. You are the one I have assigned. You are the one I have ordained. You are the one who has eyes to see and ears to hear, and it’s your sacred responsibility to communicate what I say and what I show you to the people.” God told him, “You’re the watchman. I signed you up. You may not have wanted to sign up, but I signed you up, and I’m equipping you to do this.”

God said, “You need to know, Ezekiel, that if I tell you a word for a wicked person, someone whose sin he is committing is going to lead to death, and you don’t tell that person what I tell you to tell them and if you don’t prove to them that what they are doing is destruction and that I’m not okay with it, that person is going to die, because the wages of sin is death, but your blood is going to be on their hands, Ezekiel.”

As Paul referred to that as a pastor with a sacred responsibility to preach in Ephesus for three years, he labored, and he said, “I’m innocent. I’m not guilty of the blood. My hands are clean. None of your blood is on my hands, because I’ve proclaimed and preached to you. I’ve gone about for three years proclaiming the whole counsel of

God.” It’s a sacred responsibility. In 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul refers to him as a man of God. **“...reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”**

2. *This is a sad reality.* This is my primary and my initial motivation. God is worthy of us being obedient to his call regardless. That is reasonable. He is worthy of it all no matter what, but here’s an extra motivation. This was my initial motivation. **“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching...”**

Brothers and sisters, the time has come. They are not willing to listen or they are not willing to continue hearing healthy and sound, as in the right, teaching. It may not be what they want to hear, but it’s what they need to hear, because the wages of sin is death and because God will not be mocked. God doesn’t play.

He who sows seeds to the flesh will, of the flesh, reap corruption. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. They need to hear the Word of God even though it may be a double-edged sword that hurts and even though it may be a hard pill to swallow and it totally contradicts all of the other preaching we hear from the world. The Word of God is truth.

This is healthy, sound doctrine. He’s talking about believers. He’s talking about brothers and sisters who are part of the family of God. The time is coming when they’re not going to endure. Where they were sitting, they are not going to be sitting. There is an empty place where they sat. They’re not going to keep coming.

They’re not going to endure sound teaching, but instead they have itching ears. In other words, they are longing to hear something or someone who is going to validate and tell them what they want to hear. They love yes men. They’re going to seek, and they don’t have to look far. You just have to Google these days. You just have to get on Facebook. You just have to get on Instagram.

**“...but having itching ears they will accumulate...”** As in heap up or pile up one after the other **“...for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...”** Do you

want to find someone who can validate how you feel? You're going to find it. There are so many voices, and everyone is an expert these days. Everyone is a professional these days. Everyone has authority these days. No one fears God these days. No one fears the Word of God these days.

You just Google and you'll find someone to validate and give you a reasonable argument to validate or substantiate your position or your sin and sinfulness, and in doing this, this day Paul talked about that was going to come is already here. It has been here for a long time. They will find teachers. They will heap them up one after the other (teachers to suit their own passions and people who have written books). Google everything. There are blogs and everything.

In doing that they **"...will turn away from listening to the truth..."** They're going to do the opposite of what we saw in Nehemiah, chapter 8, when the people of God realized what sin had done to them and how it leveled their city and how people had caused death and destruction. They were ready. They leaned into the Book.

If you remember, it was not even to Ezra who was preaching but to the Book and to the words of the Book. They're going to do the opposite. Having itching ears, they're going to find it. All they have to do is Google. All they have to do is find a blog here or there or a book here or there. They're out there (so many experts), and they will listen to that truth, which isn't truth.

They'll turn away, and in doing that, they will **"...wander off into myths."** They're going to be like the dog that returns to his vomit. They're going to be like the sow that has been cleaned up. They're going to go back to the mud and the muck and wallow in the mud. They may still wear the tee shirt, and they may still sing the songs, but they're going to wander off into myths. They could be on the narrow road that leads to life, but they're going to go back on the broad road that leads to destruction. God will not be mocked, brothers and sisters.

In Hebrews, the author of Hebrews says in verse 28 of chapter 10... First of all, rather than being like them, Hebrews, chapter 10, says, **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”** Let’s cling. Regardless of how we feel, let’s cling to what we know.

Let’s remember that God’s Word is true and that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that he does not lie. It says in verse 28, **“Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses...”** Like in the Old Testament when Moses would speak the truth and anyone would set aside a law and anyone who rejects as in set aside and starts listening to other things, they would die **“...without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.”**

Then, he says... This is sobering. **“How much worse...”** In light of that reality of the Old Testament and Moses preaching, **“How much worse...”** Now, under the new covenant with the Holy Spirit and with all of the apostles, the Word of God came in the flesh to speak the Word of God. We have access to the gospel. He says,

**“How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

By not listening to the truth when you have access to the truth, you are rejecting the truth. You are spurning the truth. You are disparaging the gospel and the truth. You are walking in contradiction of the gospel, and it’s not going to go well for you, so don’t go that way. If you have itching ears and if you have been Googling and if you have been reading... If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. You don’t need to be listening to those people or those things. Listen to the truth, the Word of God.

This is the sad reality. Paul said in Acts, chapter 20, that there would be fierce wolves that would come in and there would be men who would come up from even within and among them who would twist the truth, and he told those shepherds and those pastors to guard the flock. “Be aware of that.” Here, he’s talking about people from within the church, his brothers and sisters who are just going to walk away. It’s a sad reality that is not going to go well.

He says in verse 5, “Timothy, don’t be like them. As for you and even though that’s the truth, you still need to preach the Word. You still need to do it in season and out of season, when it’s time and when it’s not time, when it’s convenient and when it’s not convenient. Preach the Word always. Be sober-minded. Be alert, because the Adversary, the Devil, is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. There are always a lot of lies, so don’t just judge a book by its cover. Be sober-minded. Be alert.”

**“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering...”** Because Jesus is worthy of it all. He who called you is faithful. Jesus said, “In this world, you will have tribulation,” but he doesn’t tell us that so we can consider whether we’re in or out. No. He says, “You’re going to suffer, but take heart, because I am with you always even to the end of the age. I’ve overcome the world, so endure suffering. Don’t concede. Don’t compromise. Don’t give up. Rise up and be who I have called you to be. Preach the Word. He is worthy of it all.”

**“...do the work of an evangelist...”** Preach the good news, the gospel. People need to hear it. **“...fulfill your ministry.”** Don’t quit. Don’t bow out on the last lap. Don’t shrink or hold back in any way. You need to do it all, at all times, in all ways, in season and out of season. Do what you have been called to do. Be who I have created you in Christ Jesus to be. You have a sacred responsibility. Don’t follow the sad reality for many people. Don’t make excuses. Trust the sure reward for perseverance.

As we bring it to a close, Paul, again, is not asking Timothy to do anything he wasn't willing to do himself, and it wasn't anything that Jesus wasn't willing to do. Jesus went all of the way to the cross, but Paul said, **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering...”** Like, this is worship.

“Me being here in prison because I was obedient is worship. This is me expressing, witnessing, and testifying that I really believe what I claim to believe. This is my way to express to Jesus and to give back to Jesus and tell him that I really do love him because he first loved me. This is my way to express to him that I trust him and that he's going to give me what I need to continue all of the way to the end. I'm already being poured out. I'm not holding anything back. I'm pouring it all out.”

**“...and the time of my departure has come.”** That is a euphemism for saying, “My ship is about to sail.” He knows it. **“I have fought the good fight...”** Christianity is not roses and rainbows. Don't be listening to anyone who names and claims that you can be who God wants you to be (healthy, wealthy, and wise). No. He wants you to live an abundant life, but that may or not be with anything in your bank account.

He has come to give you peace that passes understanding and joy unspeakable regardless of your situation or circumstances. Paul knows that. He fought the good fight. He has finished the race. He is crossing it. **“...I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** Remember what he said in Acts, chapter 20. He said, “If only I may finish the course.” That was many years prior, and here he is having finished the course and remaining faithful. He kept the faith.

Remember what he says to Timothy at the beginning of this. “Timothy, I know in whom I have believed. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. God has not let me down. God has not forgotten me. God has not forsaken me. He knows exactly where I am. He knows exactly what is about to happen to me, and he is glorified in that, and people are



watching, and they're going to see that I really do believe what I claim to believe, and I'm not ashamed. I know in whom I have believed."

Do you? Do you know that nothing can separate you from his love? Do you know that he knows the number of hairs on your head and that he really is the friend that sticks closer than a brother? People in this world will forsake you. People in this world will let you down. God will not let you down.

He may not give you what you want, but he will give you what you need when you need it so that you don't have to give excuses. Don't compromise, concede, or give up or make excuses because of God. No. You are the one. God is faithful. Paul is testifying, "I have kept the faith." Because of that, he says, "**Henceforth there is laid up for me...**"

"Right now, it's coming," because on that day when Jesus will judge the living and the dead, Paul himself would stand before Jesus, and he will be rewarded. He's not being judged whether he is saved. He knows that. "**...the crown of righteousness...**" The fact that he is righteous. Remember, he said in Romans, "O, wicked man that I am!"

Paul knows he's a sinner, but he also told the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him (Jesus) who knew no sin to become sin on my behalf so that I, a sinner, might become the righteousness of God in him." That righteousness that Paul is longing for would finally one day...this is the reward...be realized. He crossed all of the way to the finish line.

**"...which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me..."** This isn't just for Paul and Timothy. "**...but also to all who have loved his appearing.**" Everyone who is ready for Jesus to come back and who is ready because in Christ Jesus there is therefore now no condemnation, so we having nothing to fear. Perfect love casts out fear, so instead of being condemned like we deserve, we want

him to come, because we know we can sing, “He is worthy of it all,” just like we sang with the angels in heaven in a way that we cannot even imagine.

3. *This is a sure reward.* It’s not because of us but because of him. He gives us what we need to endure. Brothers and sisters, as we bring it to a close, think about your own life. Maybe you have not been, for whatever reason, leaning in and listening to the Word proclaimed ready to receive and respond in obedience, coming ready to worship the Lord and ready to lift his name up and ready to hear what you may not necessarily want to hear but you know you need to hear.

When you hear it, your yes is already on the table, and you’re going to do that which the Spirit of God is leading you to do. You’re not going to fight. You’re not going to consider. You’re going to obey. He’s going to give you the strength and the wisdom and whatever is necessary for you to obey. This is how we are to lean in and listen.

A time is coming...brothers and sisters, it’s here now...when people are not going to do that. They are not going to endure sound teaching and healthy teaching. They’re going to turn away. They’re going to Google and find some commentary or even a Christian book that tells them and validates where they are in their sinful experience, and they’re going to wander off into myths.

God forbid that would be any of you! If you’ve been here for any time, you probably know and are thinking in your mind, like I have and I’m so burdened by and that it haunts me, that there are many casualties, people who were here and people who were singing and people who were leaning in and listening and people who were walking and experiencing abundant life that is found in Jesus Christ, but now they are casualties, and not only them but their families. It is destruction all around.

That word we have in Galatians, chapter 6, that he who sows seeds to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. Guess what. It’s true. God will not be mocked. If your

right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. These are Jesus' words. Jesus is the one who said,

“Whoever hears my words and obeys them will be like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. The storms are going to come, but that house is going to endure, because it has been founded on the rock. Whoever hears my words and does not obey them, the rains, the floods, and the winds are going to come and beat on that house, and that house is going to come crashing down.”

God will not be mocked, so I say this in love. This is why we must prioritize preaching. Not the preacher but the hearing and the giving and the taking of the Word of God and the obeying and the worshiping in response to the Word of God and the celebrating and the lifting up of the Word of God, because this is how we are going to endure.

This is how our children are going to endure. Living in a dark world, this is how they are going to persevere. We want them to be rewarded. We want them to receive a crown of righteousness. We don't want them to wander off into myths. Brothers and sisters, if you have itching ears today, hear the Word of the Lord, the healing and sound doctrine. Refuse and repent of your sin and come and hear and come under with your yes on the table week in and week out for the glory of God.

Brothers and sisters, let's celebrate. It's not simply preaching on the platform on Sunday morning. We proclaim his name day in and day out, in season and out of season, in public and from house to house and in our workplaces. We proclaim. We preach the Word of God. We preach the truth. We don't compromise. We don't concede. We don't give up or make excuses and justify sinful behavior. We stand firm, and we endure, and we persevere, and in doing that, we testify and we proclaim.

Let's rise up. Let's not be casualties. God forbid any more casualties of our children and the people we love. Let's be champions for Christ. Let's rise up and endure

even through the tribulation and even in if it means that our ship will sail. Let's fight the good fight and contend for the faith. Let's run the race and the course that God has set before us with our eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith. Let's not give up the last lap. Let's cross the finish line for the glory of God and watch him work.

Let's bow our heads and pray and respond right now. Brothers and sisters in the church, this Word is for all of us. Don't think that just because you're not a preacher or because you're not a pastor called to preach that this Word isn't for you and this doesn't apply. Remember the body of Christ.

As 1 Corinthians 12 says, a manifestation of the Spirit or a gift of the Spirit was given to everyone who believes for the common good, so we all come together, and we all work together, and we all serve together. Ephesians 4 says that God has given specifically the church pastors, teachers, apostles, and prophets to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

In preaching, when the proclaiming of God's Holy Word is heralded day in and day out and received day in and day out, it only strengthens the church so that it builds itself up in love for the glory of God. Let's be all in. Paul told Timothy, "Immerse yourself in these things. Don't be half in. Be all in. There is only one way to be."

Father God and Spirit of God, bind us. Knit our hearts together. Help us be the church that you are calling and that you are building. Bear fruit in and through our faithfulness to preach the Word and to hear the Word and to heed the Word for your glory. Sanctify us week in and week out with the preaching of your Word as that double-edged sword cuts. Give us faith. Give us wisdom. Give us understanding. Give us ears to hear and the faith to respond in obedience, for your glory.

With heads bowed and eyes closed, brothers and sisters, respond in your heart. Repent. Commit. Be compelled. Be reproved, rebuked, and exhorted. With heads bowed and eyes closed, I also want to address those of you here today who are not yet a part of

the body of Christ. There is one way to have a relationship with a holy, righteous God. There is one way to truly be a part of the body of Christ, and that is through Jesus Christ.

We're all sinners. Men have sinned, and we fall short of the glory of God. We are disqualified. We are at enmity with God in our sin and sinfulness. God is not okay with our sin in any way, shape, or form. That's why he sent Jesus. That's why Jesus came, to shed his blood and to pay the price for us so that when we look to him and when we believe in him and when we call upon his name, the blood he shed on the cross will wash away our sins, and the Spirit of God is born in our hearts, and we are born again to life in Christ.

From that point, we begin a relationship with God as a part of the body of Christ, and we worship him in spirit and in truth. If you're here today and you're ready to take that step of faith, you understand your need as a sinner and you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that Savior and you're ready to turn to him and look to him for salvation, I want to invite you to pray this prayer with me right now.

Say, "Jesus, I need you. Please forgive my sin and sinfulness right now. I repent, and I turn to you calling upon your name for salvation. Please, from this point forward, Jesus, show me where to go and what to do so that I can live for you. Please save me." With heads bowed and eyes closed, if you prayed that prayer just now and you meant it, I want to ask you to be so bold to just acknowledge that by lifting your hand by way of testimony.

Who here would say, "Mark, that's me. I prayed that prayer just now"? Amen. Praise God. Anyone else?

Who here called upon the name of Jesus for salvation? Amen. Thank you, Lord. You can put your hands down. We believe that, if you prayed that prayer, he who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. He will be with you, so come to

him. Keep coming to him, listening to him, and following him. We invite you to do so with us here at LifeHouse.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

APPENDIX 9  
SERMON 8 TRANSCRIPT

LifeHouse Church  
Mark Lashey  
Series: Prioritizing Preaching  
March 26, 2023

The Prevailing Plan of Jesus for His Church

Ephesians 4:11–16

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 4, Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. Just to give some context, it is the same church that, if you remember from a few weeks ago, we saw Paul charge the elders and the leaders of this church as he was leaving. He had been there for three years, and there was a lot of persecution and many obstacles, but he had been a part of planting that church and had led them and had labored there for three years, and they loved him, and he loved them.

When he left, because it was in a day that there were no planes, trains, automobiles, or Facetime, they wept knowing they would never see his face again, but he had commended them and entrusted them to God and to the Word of God that he had labored for three years to teach and to preach to them.

This is the same church a few years later. He had said he was going to Jerusalem, and the Spirit had told him in every city that imprisonment awaited him, so he was arrested and eventually led to Rome and from prison in Rome wrote this letter to this church. It was a letter of encouragement. It *is* a letter of encouragement.

It does not diminish the reality of spiritual warfare. The battle was still real then. It still is real today. They wrestled not against flesh and blood but against

principalities (Ephesians, chapter 6) and we do today, but Paul wanted to encourage them, and he said specifically leading up to Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 11 that we'll read in a minute, the purpose of the church and the body of Christ...

He said this privilege and this divine purpose that God had given to the church, and they were a church and we are a church, was that **"...the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."** That God's Word and God's truth in a world filled with lies would be made known or revealed.

Then, to this church knowing they might suffer and knowing they might struggle, he prays, "I bow my knees before the Father and before God." He's praying for them, that they would know what is the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of God's amazing love that surpasses knowledge. Paul wanted them to be blessed. Paul did not want them to miss out on anything. He did not want them to be burdened. He wanted them to be blessed.

In the same way he wanted Timothy to fan into flame what God had placed within him, that's what Paul had a heart for this church to be and for this church to do (to not make excuses and to not cower and to not compromise and to not concede in light of the struggles they would face but, rather, to rise up and without excuse and without justifying literally be who God had created them to be).

In the same way God provided for them, he has provided and provides for us. Church, Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, **"...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."** Jesus, by his grace, is continuing to build his church. That's the first point I want you to see. What we see in Ephesians, chapter 4, is Jesus' prevailing plan for his church (for us).

Let's read starting in verse 11. In light of God's plan and provision, he gives us everything we need to be who has created us to be as individuals and as a church. It says



in verse 11, “**And he...**” That is the Lord Jesus Christ who promised to build his church in a way that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. That’s who gave.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

O Lord, would you bless the reading of your Holy Word? Amen.

Jesus will build his church, and anything Jesus does... He is righteous in all his ways. He doesn’t make mistakes. He doesn’t do it in a way that is halfhearted. No. Jesus in a perfect way builds his church in a way that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We see that his plan according to these verses is that every member of the church he builds be fully equipped, fully established, and fully engaged.

It’s not just equipped and not just established and not just engaged but that each and every member, all members, every man, woman, boy, and girl saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ be fully equipped, fully established, and fully engaged. Again, he doesn’t want to burden people.

Paul is burdened about the people he loves. He knew these people. Remember, picture him saying goodbye to them a couple of years prior knowing he would never see their faces and they would never see his face again. They wept. They did the ugly cry. Remember, he loved them. They loved him.

Paul was burdened because he knew the battle was real. This leads to Ephesians, chapter 6. The battle is real. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities. There is a thief who has come to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

Yet, in light of that, Jesus has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. God does not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-control. We're not to be afraid. We're not to make excuses. We're not to run and hide. We're to stand firm.

Paul says to the Philippian church, **"My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory,"** and he's not talking about money. He's talking about everything. "My God, the God I serve, the God who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you will give you everything and will supply all your needs. Not just some of your needs and not just half of your needs, but he will give you everything you need. Maybe not everything you want but literally everything you need."

Paul said, "I can endure all things through Christ who gives me strength." James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask for wisdom, but let him ask in faith, and God will give you wisdom. He gives generously." We have the Holy Spirit who is our helper who guides us. We have the Word of God that is a light unto our path.

When Jesus saw the multitudes and the crowds of people in Matthew, chapter 9, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were harassed and helpless, but that's not who we are, church. We have a helper. Jesus said, "It is to your advantage that I go, because I will send a helper."

We have one another. We have the church, the body of Christ. It is a grace. It is a provision of God and, as the church, we are to bear one another's burdens. We're not on our own. We're not scattered. He has gathered us. He has assembled us, and we are a force in him to be reckoned with. We can stand. We can endure. We can persevere. Come rain, shine, hell, or high water, we can endure for the glory of God. You can. Your children can in these dark days and even if the days get darker.

Jesus told his disciples, "In this world, you will have tribulation," but he didn't tell them that so they could figure out whether or not they were going to be in or out. No.

He told them so they would be prepared. He said, “Take heart. Be encouraged, because I have overcome the world.” Paul said, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper,” in Romans. “What can separate you from the love of Christ? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. You have nothing to fear. Jesus is with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This is his plan. Do you take advantage of it, church? I think so often of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 1. He tells the people, “Do not receive the grace of God in vain.” God has given you the opportunity to be saved. Make the most of the opportunity. Who are we that he is even mindful of us? Yet, he is. He has made a way. Should we not take advantage of that way? There is no other way. Jesus is the only way.

Do not receive this grace of God in vain. Today is the day of salvation, so be saved is the message there in 2 Corinthians. The grace of God is unmerited favor like God giving us what we don't deserve, and he gives us in the church, the body of Christ, in his work and in his assembling us together what we don't deserve. It is his provision for us. His Word is his provision. From his fulness we have all received grace upon grace. He's so good. He's so good. He provides. Here are the three points.

First, he provides for us to fully equip us for the work of ministry. Not just the pastors or those who are serving in vocational ministry but for us, church. Every member and every believer. He wants every one of us to be fully equipped for the work of ministry to labor in furthering the kingdom. Not our kingdom but his kingdom.

Secondly, he provides to fully establish all of us in the faith and the knowledge of him so that we don't have to be a casualty and so your children do not have to be casualties. My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory so that you can persevere and so that you can endure. Even in being overcome by the Enemy, you can overcome. You can be fully established. We can be fully established in the faith and in the knowledge of him.

Lastly, Jesus provides to fully engage every one of us in his life and in his love. Fully engaged. I know it's hard. I know people in the mix are problems in the mix. So often, there are fears to overcome and social anxieties to overcome and logistics to overcome and crazy schedules to overcome, but his prevailing plan so that you and your family can prevail and can endure and can persevere instead of being a casualty is that you be fully engaged in his life and in his love.

It's not a burden. It's a blessing. Oh, you may think or have this idea that it's a burden, but it's a blessing. It's not what you need to do. I'm telling you it is what you need to do, but you will want to do it. I'm telling you. Your children need you to do it. Be fully engaged. He gave. That is, Jesus. He himself is in the original Greek.

1. *He fully equips us for the work of ministry.* Verse 11: “**And he...**” In providing to fully equip all of us for the work of ministry, he himself assigned, commissioned, and graciously “**...gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...**” Those who handle the Word of God and who, hopefully, for the glory of God obediently and rightly divide the Word of truth. His Word, again, is a light unto our path. We need his Word.

As Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful and is profitable for training and reproof in righteousness that the man of God may be complete not lacking in any way, shape, or form, and is perfect for every good work so that woman and that man can be who God has created them to be so they can fulfill and not give excuses.”

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers to equip the saints. That is, all who believe. It's not the special, elite few but all of the saints for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ. Jesus is building his church. Should not our agenda be his agenda?

Should we not love? Should we not desire and have a heart for the things he has a heart for? We who have been forgiven and we who have been shown grace and mercy, should we not look for opportunities to express our love for him and our faith and our trust in him? If we know him, we love him.

That's why Paul prayed, "Oh, that you would know what is the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of his amazing love!" He was wanting to pray that not just so they could have an experience but so that they would love him back. Oh, it's infinite love because he is an infinite God.

It's perfect love, and we are an imperfect people, so we can even go deeper and further in our understanding of that which we already know. It's his love. He who is forgiven much loves much, and we look for opportunities to express our hearts for him. We don't do the work of ministry to be saved. We work and we labor because we are saved. It's an opportunity to worship.

It is not like this thing for this select few of vocational ministers like Paul and the apostles and the 12 disciples. No. It is the body of Christ. We are all to labor, and we do it together, and it's not a burden. It is a joy. It is such a joy! Listen. He gave. This is the whole idea of why preaching and the proclamation of God's Holy Word is so important and why it should be central within the life of the church. It is the grace of God.

He gave the apostles (those messengers). First, the apostles. Jesus spoke the Word of God. The apostles heard. Remember what Peter said. "Who else are we going to go to, Jesus? You have the words of eternal life." Peter heard those words, and God spoke his words through Jesus to the apostles. He even gave signs. The apostles and Jesus were able to perform miracles to validate that they were not just speaking off the cuff or were some crazy people but they were commissioned by God and they were men of God speaking the Word of God.

He gave the prophets. They spoke the Word of God. It wasn't the suggestions of God but the commands of God that the people, because they were God's words and God's Word is truth, were to respond to in obedience not just to be burdened but for their blessing so they would know how to walk and how to live and how to honor God.

God graciously gave the evangelists. We have good news to share. Yeah, there is bad news involved, but there is good news that overshadows. Where there is the reality and the truth that the wages of sin is death and God's wrath will be poured out once and for all on all sin and sinfulness, God's grace is that today is the day of salvation. It is good news. God graciously gives and sends and commissions evangelists to go out and to proclaim the gospel for his glory.

He gave them. He himself gave them, and he gave the shepherds. That is, the pastors and the teachers. In other words, the preachers like Timothy were to proclaim the Word of God so that the men, the women, the children, the fathers, the mothers, the sisters, the brothers would know where to go and we would know what to do and how to live our lives and we would know what God wants and what God's will is and we would know what his agenda is.

God gave the shepherds and the teachers and the preachers to equip. I love how the King James version translates the word *equip*. They have translated it as *to perfect*, to enable, or to prepare all of the saints...not just a select few and not just the pastors and the teachers but all of the saints...for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ.

Everyone has a role and a part to play. It may not have a title connected to it, and it may not be a time slot that you're assigned to, but you have a role. Earlier in this chapter, Paul in explaining to them, says in verse 7, **“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, “Everyone is given a manifestation of the Spirit of God for the common good.” In other words, everyone is given a spiritual gift, and that spiritual gift is not to be hoarded. Specifically in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 8, it says for the common good we are to come together and we are to use those gifts we have been given as an individual in conjunction with others to do the work of ministry. There is strength in numbers. We can accomplish more together.

Paul goes on to describe the beauty of what the church is. He says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, that it’s like a human body. Think about a human body and the creation that it is and how all of the different systems like the nervous system and the blood and the veins and the eyes and the hands and the feet and the head all work together. There are many different parts (fingers, toes, head, and shoulders). All of it works together as different parts, but it’s one body. Paul says that is what the church is like.

He says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, that God has arranged it. God is the one who composes the body, and he gives specific gifts to certain men, and just like a human body is to work together with all of the parts working together, he even says, “The hand cannot say to the foot, ‘I have no need of you,’ or the head to the foot, ‘I have no need of you...’”

All of the different parts work together, and that’s the way we are to do and accomplish the work of ministry. We do it together, and the saints are equipped as in prepared through the ministry of the Word through preaching and through the teaching. This is the primary means of sanctification for the body of Christ and for the work of ministry so that the church would be built up.

Listen. Our heart is not to be built or to fill seats just to grow in numbers just for the sake of numbers. This is growing in maturity. This is being strengthened so that

when the rains, the storms, and the winds come we can endure instead of being a casualty. That's the building up he's talking about.

Literally, the word is *construction*. It's so the church can be fortified and a force to be reckoned with. This is his church, and he doesn't build things halfway. It is through the ministry of the Word and through the preaching of the Word by shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ.

This is his gracious provision. Jesus provides to fully equip each and every one of us for the work of ministry. Ask yourself what your role is today. It's not rocket science. Don't make it rocket science. We have a heart here at LifeHouse Church to create pathways for everyone to be involved, and we do have slots to fill, again, but you don't need to be assigned a slot.

Just rise up and be who he has created you to be. Ask the Spirit of God to give you wisdom. He's not playing games. It's not a riddle. God wants you to know who he has created you to be. Don't quench the Spirit. If you have trouble, ask a brother or sister in Christ what they sense and what they see, and take a step of faith and try it. Take a test drive. You will know. Fulfill your role.

Remember what Paul told Timothy. "Fulfill your ministry. Even if you're going to be persecuted and even if it means you end up in prison and your head is going to be chopped off just like my head is going to be chopped off, Timothy, fulfill your ministry. You be who you have been created to be."

Every member within the body of Christ is equipped and prepared perfectly under the preaching of the Holy Word of God. We have even the Canon of Scripture, so we can go beyond Sundays. We have Sunday school classes and even children's classes where the Word of God is taught. By the grace of God, we don't want to just babysit kids. We want our kids to be prepared. We want them to be perfected and equipped for



the work of ministry. We're all a part of the body of Christ. This is God's grace. Do not receive this grace of God in vain. In verse 13, he says, "**...until we all...**" Not just some of us. "**...until we all...**"

2. *He fully establishes us for the work of the ministry.* This is grace (no one left behind). We are family. All of us in "**...the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God...**" Do you know him? Not just do you know about him but do you know him? Think about what Paul says in Philippians 3.

Paul had a lot, but he said in chapter 3, verse 8, "**...I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.**" I don't just know about him. I don't just read about him. I don't just sing songs about him. I have a relationship with him, and in light of that relationship, that real relationship, everything in this world, everything that I have and everything that I hold, I count as loss compared to knowing that relationship. There is nothing greater.

Do you know him? He says, "Because I know I him, I've suffered many things, but I have done it so that I may gain Christ and be found in him. I want more of him." He's infinite. He's like the treasure or the gift that keeps on giving. You can go deeper and further with him. There is always more. He says in verse 10, "I do all things. I go where I go and I do what I do and I fulfill my ministry that I may know him and the power of his resurrection."

Do you know his power? His power is available to you. Paul's God is your God. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. He wants you to be equipped. He says this is for every member. This isn't just for this elite, select few who serve him vocationally or who have a title of pastor or elder. This is every member of the body. He says, "**...until we all...**"

It's not till some or not till just a select few but "**...until we all attain...**" As in reach. Until we all arrive and until we all cross the finish line of "**...the unity of the**

**faith...**” What’s that? Until we are all on the same page that Paul is on when it comes to Jesus. Until we all treasure him. Remember what Jesus’ prayer was in John, chapter 17. Remember the context of John 17.

This is in the garden of Gethsemane. He’s praying. He is praying his last prayer to God before he is crucified, basically, the high priestly prayer, and he said, “I’ve given them the words. They have what they need. They know the truth. I have given them the whole counsel of God. I pray that you will make them one so that the world may believe and that they would all be unified in the faith.”

Specifically, “**...and of the knowledge of the Son of God...**” There would be no confusion. Not one of them would think Jesus is just a prophet or just a teacher or just a man who existed but they would know he is the Son of God and that every member of the body of Christ would know that he is the one way and that he is the Alpha and the Omega and that he’s coming again.

He’s praying that we would not all just know about him. That word *knowledge* is not just knowledge but *epignōsis*. It’s extra knowledge. It is experiential knowledge, like firsthand knowledge. It’s not like you have to hear from him or her and base your knowledge on what they say, but you can have firsthand knowledge.

You can have fellowship like John said in 1 John, chapter 1, verse 3. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. We follow Jesus. Jesus provides. He makes a way. He wants you to know him. He says, “**Come unto me...**” He doesn’t say, “Go unto the church,” but “Come unto me. Place your faith and trust in me. Believe in me.”

Jesus provides to fully establish all of us in the faith and in the knowledge of him. When we have that kind of knowledge and that kind of unity in the faith, guess what. We can persevere. When we know him like that and count all things as loss except

for knowing him, we're not going to bow out. We're not going to concede. We're not going to compromise.

We love him. When we know what is the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of his amazing love that surpasses knowledge and when we have been forgiven much, we will love him much, and you aren't going to talk us out of standing firm for him because we want to honor him and because we want to worship him. We want to know more about him, and we want to keep digging so we're going to grow and we're going to mature in our faith.

Listen. Salvation is a journey. So many people have this wrong idea of salvation. "I have to reach this destination and get saved. Then, check." No. Guess what. It is just the beginning. You are born again like born literally. You start. That's day one that you live a life and you grow. You're not to stay a baby. You're not to keep sucking your thumb.

You need to become a mature man. When I thought about the measure of growing up I thought of going to the amusement parks. When you'd go and the first time you went, they had all of these different rides, but you were just little, so you could only go on so many rides because they had that little measure thing.

You'd stand there. You'd stand on your tiptoes, and they'd measure how high you were going to be. The next year, you got to go on more rides, because you grew over the course of the year. You grew. You had growing pains in your legs, and your mom rubbed your legs and all of those different things.

It wasn't necessarily a comfortable process, but you grew, and you got to ride more rides and experience more things. Guess what. When you reached the top line and it was all access and you could go on every single ride, there was nothing you could not do. You could go on every ride. That was an amazing day. Right?

We're to keep growing so that we can do more, so that we can be more, and so that we can persevere. When the storms come... Guess what. They're not just little storms but big storms. We can stand firm in our faith. Who is the measure? Jesus. It's not me. It's not Reuben. It's not Sally, Sue, or Billy Bob. It's Jesus. He's perfect. He is righteous in all his ways.

None of us are going to fully arrive and be perfect here on this earth, but we strive to grow and to be stronger in him and to go deeper and further with him. He's infinite, and he's the gift that keeps on giving, so guess what. You will not be disappointed. The more you seek the more you will find. Keep growing. Keep learning. Keep experiencing. Keep accomplishing for his glory.

So many people in this room can tell you as they have followed Christ and as they stepped out in faith that he has taken them. Some of you could testify, "God has taken me places I never thought I would go to do things I never thought I would do, and I've loved it! It has been scary. It has been uncomfortable. I've shed tears. I've sweated, but praise his name!"

Through those experiencing stepping out in faith, they have experienced God. Through the trials and tribulations and struggles associated with work of ministry... This is why James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." Guess what. Because it's an opportunity for you to experience God and Jesus in a way that you would not have experienced him otherwise.

This is why all Paul wanted to do was the work of ministry, but he had that thorn in the flesh. Remember? He said, "I begged God three times to remove that thorn, but God said, 'My grace is sufficient for you.'" Like, "I'm going to give you what you need. That thorn is not going to be an excuse. You can't use that thorn to justify not going where I tell you to go," and Paul just trusted the Lord. He said, "God showed up. God's

grace was sufficient. I got to a point where I praised God for that thorn because God's power was made perfect in my weakness."

Brothers and sisters, he's not leaving us hanging. He has equipped us. He has enabled each and every one of us. We play a role within the body of Christ, and all of us are to attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of him. Not secondhand knowledge but firsthand, experiential knowledge. **"...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."**

Christ is the measure. Here's the purpose, brothers and sisters. This is the burden. This is the burden Paul had for the Ephesians. This is my burden for you to be established. Verse 14: **"...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."**

There are a lot of people, our brothers and sisters, even right now and some who you know who claim the name of Christ who are being tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about against their will by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Who is the schemer?

It's the Enemy. We know that from Ephesians, chapter 6, by his deceitful schemes. This is who is scheming. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. He is the father of lies. We live in a world filled with lies, but God wants us to be established in the truth so we don't fall prey to the lies and so we are not deceived and so we know the truth.

We have knowledge of Jesus. We know who Jesus is. You don't need to tell me that your Jesus is another Jesus. The Jesus who is revealed through Scripture is the way, the truth, and the life. Salvation is found in no one else but him. He is the one who I know. He is the one who I serve. He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, and he is coming again.

He's the Alpha and the Omega. He holds the keys and opens the doors that no one else shuts and shuts the doors that no one else opens. He is sovereign. All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to him. He is not just a prophet. Don't tell me he's just a prophet. He's not just a teacher or a man who walked the earth. He is Jesus, and I know him! Greater is he who lives in me than he that is in the world.

You can lie all you want, but I know the truth, and I'm standing firm on the solid Rock of Jesus Christ. There is no other foundation which has been laid that can be laid other than Jesus Christ, so we can endure and so we can persevere when the tribulation and the trials come. God does not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-control.

I was thinking about people being tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Many of you have been to the beach. Right? You guys know how that undertow can happen. If you're not careful and if you're not keeping a close on your kids or even yourself, you can end up within a span of minutes somewhere far away from where you began. You had no idea that tow was carrying you, so you have to be intentional and fight against that tow or that current. Tossed to and fro...

Tammy and I went on a whitewater rafting trip right after we got married. I'm an adventurer. That day I hit that mark on the roller coaster ride, I was on every ride. Tammy, maybe not so much. I signed us up. I had been on many different whitewater rafting trips in youth group over the years, so I signed us up on level five. Go big or go home. Right?

Well, she had never been, and I really didn't understand how big a deal it was, but we got to the top of the mountain where there is a point of no return, and they say, "Everybody has done this before. Right?" Tammy looks at me. They were actually upset Tammy was doing it. It was dangerous, but we were keeping a close eye on Tammy.

They gave us all paddles, like we could really steer those level-five rapids. We were carried about and tossed to and fro by the waves. It was out of our control. I don't even know why they actually gave us the paddles, but I guess the guy knew what he was doing. I was having a great time. I'm laughing at Tammy.

All of a sudden, I found myself under the boat. I fell out. I got sucked down under the boat, and the boat was pinned up against a rock. Literally, the current of the water was so strong the only way I could go was up, but the boat was there. My life flashed before my eyes. I was literally praying under the water, "Lord, is this how it ends?"

It's a picture of people thinking they are having a good time and laughing it up, but they're being deceived. Sin is a slippery slope. The wages of sin is death. He who sows seeds to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. It's real. This isn't a game. We're not to be like little children who are tossed to and fro. No. We are to be planted firm and established and firmly rooted so when the storms come we can endure, and we won't be carried about like babies.

Do you know believers who are carried about like a little baby? We are to walk. We are to grow. Sometimes we fall, but we rise up, and we keep walking, and we endure. We persevere. We get up. In fact, we don't just walk. We run the race that is set before us, just like the apostle Paul, and we fight the good fight, and we contend for the faith, and we don't give up. We don't bow out. We just continue bowing down.

We don't compromise. We're champions. We are overcomers. We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. The Enemy is not going to carry us away, because greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory, in good times and in bad times, in valleys and on mountaintops, so brothers and sisters, let's not make excuses. Let's not justify. Let's

be obedient. Let's be established. Jesus provides so that we can be established. Jesus provides so that we can be fully equipped. Lastly...

3. *He fully engages us in the work of the ministry.* Despite the Enemy's schemes... A divided house cannot stand. Jesus said it. A divided house cannot stand.

There isn't any time for division. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul testifies and talks about how the Jews and the Gentiles came together, and where there was a dividing wall of hostility...

It's hard for us to even understand because we live in a melting pot in America where people come from all over. There are a lot of different colors of skin even in this room, but in that day in that context in the Jewish mind, everyone else was defiling. If they were to touch someone from another race, they were defiled, so these Jewish Christians were coming together with these Roman Christians (these Gentiles), and that was a hard mix. They were different in every way, but Jesus celebrates the fact that they were one church together.

If they can come together, then we can come together. There are a lot of reasons.... When you put people in the mix, you put problems in the mix. The battle is real. I get it. There are anxieties, and there are fears, and there are social challenges. There are all of these different things, but we are to be fully engaged.

The hand cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of you." We are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. We are not to forsake the assembling, but we are to assemble and stir one another up to love and good works. We are to be fully engaged, and Jesus provides for that. God is the one who composes the body, arranges the body, and says, "Don't believe the lie and don't be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Don't be carried about by every wind of doctrine and by the lies and deceitful schemes of the Enemy."



Verse 15: **“Rather...”** This is Paul saying, **“Rather, speaking the truth in love...”** “In reality, I’m telling you the truth because I want you to be blessed. We as in all of us and not just some of us.” **“...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”** Jesus provides to fully engage everyone of us in his life and in his love, but we are to be all in.

**“...we are to grow up in every way...”** If you have a compartmentalized concept of your faith... Like, if that is something you do on Sundays or on Christmas or on Easter or here and there and now and then, that’s a wrong concept. When you hear this, you may think this sounds legalistic, but the way I read this is either you are in or you’re not in.

**“...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”** You’re to be all in. We are to be fully engaged. He makes a way. Guess what. We don’t join ourselves together. As hard as it may be for Jews and Gentiles to come together or whatever colors of skin to come together or rich or poor to come together or young or old to come together, he’s the one.

**“...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped...”** Remember what Jesus says in Mark, chapter 10, about marriage. It’s the same word (*joined*). “What God has joined together let not man separate.” He has provided. He joins you together.

He hasn’t just joined you together, but he holds you ongoing together. He knits hearts together as we labor and work in ministry and use the different gifts God has given us and different backgrounds and experiences we’ve had coming together for the cause and glory of Christ. We’re joined and we’re held together and even more tightly so for his glory. **“...by every joint...”**

It’s not just some of the joints. **“...for every joint with which it is equipped...”** The word translated there is *provided for*. This is his provision. When each

part (every single part and not just the preaching parts or the pastoral or vocational ministry parts) and every part is working properly or when every part is working in measure, doing what they are supposed to be doing where they are supposed to be doing it and how they are supposed to be doing it... When each part is working properly, guess what it does.

It makes the body of Christ, that is, grow and increase. It makes the body of Christ go deeper. It makes the body of Christ experience more of that unity of faith. It makes the body of Christ experience the knowledge of Jesus Christ more and more. It's increased "**...so that it builds itself up in love.**" In other words, it strengthens itself in love. It fortifies itself in love.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we need in these dark days, because we wrestle not against flesh and blood and because the Enemy is real and because the wrath of God is coming and because tribulation is real, and many of you know that firsthand right now. If you're going to endure and if your family and your children and your grandchildren are going to endure, we need to take advantage and not receive the grace of God in vain but, rather, receive it wholeheartedly.

He gave apostles, teachers, prophets, pastors, and preachers for the equipping of the saints for ministry so that we can all be fully established for the work of ministry and be blessed in doing so. He has established and made a way so that instead of falling prey to the lies of the Enemy or your kids falling prey to the lies of the Enemy they can be established instead of being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and carried away.

He has made a way for us. As odd as you may feel and as far as you may feel and as unrelatable as you may feel and as ungifted as you may feel, he has joined you together, and he holds you together with a family. "This is how you will know my disciples: by their love." This is why we take these steps of faith, as scary as it may be

and as hard as it may be, because he doesn't lie and because he tells us the truth and because he doesn't do things halfway. He says, "It builds itself up in love when each part is working properly and when you do what you are called to do in the way you are supposed to do it all in all of the time, fully engaged."

In other words, you're not going to be burdened. You're going to be blessed. You're going to experience the height, the depth, and the breadth of his amazing love. While you pour yourself out, guess what he's going to do. He's going to fill you up in such an energizing and fortifying way so that you can stand firm with your family.

Honestly, as we close, you might be saying, "Mark, you're a pastor. You planted this church. I see your agenda." I'm telling you my burden is that we do all we can to safeguard our family from being a casualty. This world is filled with lies. The Enemy has been working overtime. These days are dark.

This is the last sermon of the sermon series *Prioritizing Preaching*, and I'm telling you I am humbled. I am so thankful the Lord is allowing me to serve him in this way. I don't feel qualified. I don't feel capable. I don't feel equipped, but I'm trusting him. He promises that he gives us what we need. I'm telling you it is a joy to serve and to labor for his glory.

The church is the grace of God, and this is not a perfect church. I'm not a perfect pastor, but I have a heart to be obedient. There are a lot of self-help books out there and a lot of things to read specifically on how to build a church and how to grow a church and how to unite a church. This is Jesus' prevailing plan. It's in black and white.

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We are to be fully equipped. We are to be fully established. He doesn't want us to be tossed to and fro and carried away and kidnapped by the Enemy. You belong here. You have a family here. You are to be fully

engaged in his life. We are to grow up in every way into him and in his love. Don't miss out. Don't miss out.

A lot of people are missing out. As we close, think about your own life and your experience and your connection or lack thereof to the church, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. Church, let's make the most of it. Each and every one of us, let's make the most of it for his glory. Let's bow our heads and pray and respond.

Lord, we need you, each and every one of us. Apart from you we can do nothing. Nothing. We need you. We want you. We want to know you more. We want to know you in the way the apostle Paul knew you in such a way that he counted everything else as loss compared to knowing you.

Lord, I pray all of our prayers as a church family would be the prayer that Jesus prayed, that we would desire what he desired, that we the church, the body of Christ, would be one, that we would have an experience as we labor and work, that we would experience the unity of the faith (all of us), that we would all grow, and that we would all get to experience so that no one would have to sit on the bench while the rest of us ride the roller coaster.

No. I pray that we would all be on this adventure together, all having surpassed the little kiddie rides, that we would stand firm and we would get to fight the good fight together and serve together for your glory, that we would grow to mature manhood and that we would not be little babies who suck their thumbs, carried about, buying up every lie that the Enemy places before us.

I pray that we would be way smarter than that, that we would have knowledge, and that we would have wisdom from you so that we would not even be enticed in the smallest, shortest way by the Enemy and his schemes, and that our children would know the truth. Fortify us so we can persevere and endure and stand firm, not receiving your grace in vain but, rather, making the most of it.

Jesus, you said you would build your church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Do that here. O Lord, may we not have a false sense of security. May we know the battle is real and take what you say in Ephesians, chapter 4, seriously, not just for our sakes but for the sake of our children and our families and for the church family you have placed us among.

May each and every one of us do our part and work properly for your glory, and as we do that, build us up in love. Equip us. Establish us. Provide for us so that we can be fully engaged and not divided in any way. Knit our hearts together. Join us together. Hold us together. What God has joined together let not man separate.

Even if we don't like where you have placed us and even though it may be uncomfortable where you have placed us and who you have placed us among, may we do all we can to honor you and to serve you even when it's uncomfortable and even when it doesn't make sense to us and trust that you know better than we do. Lord, we need you. Jesus, build your church. Build your church. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

APPENDIX 10  
SEEK MINISTRY PLAN DOCUMENT



SEEK

MINISTRY PLANNING

Seek Teams,

Thank you for serving Jesus and LifeHouse Church through our 2024 ministry planning process.

Pastor Mark has stated in years past, “Essentially, this process is primarily a corporate prayer journey. It is a commitment to **LISTEN** and **WORSHIPFULLY** respond to the One to whom we belong.”

As we start our 2024 ministry planning process, we lean not on man’s wisdom but on the Holy Spirit’s knowledge, power, and guidance. Remember, the ministry of LifeHouse Church isn’t built with human hands but rather through the promise that Jesus is building His church (Matthew 16:18). Christ is building his church; we are his servants.

I charge you to S.E.E.K. the Lord! Scripture says, *“You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.”* (Psalm 27:8) Those who seek the Lord will find Him. So, will you S.E.E.K. Him?

S.E.E.K. the Lord not merely for answers on what to do but to know Him deeper. As leaders of LifeHouse Church, your strategy is only as effective as your proximity to the Lord’s heart. I urge you to lead the way in pursuing Christ during “S.E.E.K.” and throughout the year. Your example can change the trajectory of LifeHouse Church. Remember, people are watching your actions. What model will you leave to those around you?

Lastly, worship through the process! S.E.E.K. is a significant task for every team and individual. Sometimes, it will require more time, energy, and effort. Therefore, aim to worship as you plan, budget, and develop your ministry. Jesus is worthy of our best!

I leave you with this promise from the Scriptures:

*“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”*

*(Galatians 6:9)*

Fight the good fight,

In Christ,

Pastor Danny Ford

### **S.E.E.K. PROCESS OVERVIEW**

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By way of reminder, this is an overview of the four steps of the process that are represented in the acronym S.E.E.K.

Matt 6:33 “...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

**Surrender:** While common sense might tell us that many of the ministry plans and events we have engaged in even for years-are worthy of continued investment, we believe that a key element to experiencing a *supernatural* ministry is laying those plans on the altar every year. What if God were to change direction, minimize scope, or explode the size of your vision? We simply **MUST** know God is with us, leading the way, anointing the effort. Therefore, we ask you, foremost, to completely set aside all previous thoughts, plans, and dreams and position yourselves in the Word and in prayer to hear God’s heart for how your ministry should be carried out.



**Important note:** The SURRENDER step is never complete! Even after moving into the subsequent portions of the process, it is imperative that we continue to pray and ask God to reveal and bless along the way!

Exodus 33:15 “...If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.”

**Engage:** This step includes 1.) The engagement of a team of three to five lay people to seek God with you and provide their expertise to build the ministry plan. 2.) The engagement of that team in the weekly outreach of our church to the lost in our community. 3.) The engagement of that team in writing out the ministry plan based on the pattern provided in this book.

Proverbs 15:22 “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.”

**Embrace:** In this step, each ministry team will present the plans to the other Ministry SEEK Teams. Because we are praying to the One and Only God, we expect to see deep connectivity and congruence between plans demonstrated in the presentations.

Acts 2:1–2 “They were all with one accord, in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind.”

**Keep Checking /Seeking:** This step requires each SEEK Team to continually measure and manage the implementation of your ministry plan. This step will continually call for the following questions to be asked, “Are you getting the support you need from leadership to complete the task?”, “Are you doing all you can do so the plan can reach its full potential?”, Are you maintaining closeness and connectivity to the others involved necessary for building bridges for success?”, and most importantly, “Are you and your

team intimately communicating with God along the way and receiving his blessing to move forward?”

Proverbs 2:1–5 “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.”

## YOUR COMMITMENTS

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- To prioritize and nurture our relationship with God first and then, in everything, honor him with our planning process and decisions.
- To maintain and grow right relationships with our families. Your family is your priority, and we support that reality.
- To maintain the right relationships with everyone directly and indirectly impacted by our ministry planning and decisions. To be ONE HEART-beating in rhythm. We agree that people are our most valuable resource. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that everyone who participates formally in the project properly understands and, more importantly, represents that “right relationships” are even a higher priority than the very important financial and scheduling concerns of the projects.
- To consider the impact (benefits and/or detriments) that every one of our proposals has on every other ministry of the church.
- To be certain that all available options have been thoroughly researched before a proposal is added to your ministry plan.
- To acknowledge and embrace the principle of pastoral authority and delegated authority to ultimate decision-making.
- To constantly evaluate the financial impact of every decision against a three-question test based on 2 Corinthians 8:20–22. “Taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; we have regard for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men.”
  1. Are we honoring God?
  2. Are we providing for vital ministry?
  3. Are we avoiding legitimate criticism?

- To completely trust and actively engage our faith that the Lord will provide all the financial resources that every ministry needs to accomplish its God-given task. Our task is to be the best stewards possible with every ministry dollar God has provided. Therefore, in the financial portion of your ministry plan, make sure that you thoroughly explain the reason for the investment of financial resources-especially when there is a proposed increase in ministry dollars invested.
- To commit to “blur the lines.” The people that make up our ministry teams are representatives of the body of Christ. We must invite the participation and input of everyone who will be impacted by our ministry plan.
- To be recognized in word and deed...in everything from our mission statements to our calendar... as “one church” to the church family and community. Therefore, our ministry planning must,
  1. Connect with other ministry teams that provide valuable resources to enhance the effectiveness of the ministry. The goal is for no ministry department to feel like they needed to contribute to another ministry’s plan and didn’t have the opportunity provided and/or make the effort to contribute.
  2. Represent integration of your ministry into other appropriate ministries.
- To be sensitive to the calendar’s impact on our church family. We must ensure that our individual ministry planning, combined with the church-wide planning in which we all participate, does not place an inappropriate burden on families. What can your ministry do to team up with other ministries? Is there an event or multiple events you can collaborate on? Make it your goal to align yourself with at least one other ministry in 2024.
- To recognize that there are financial and ministerial boundaries that are necessary to consider in any given year. We expect understanding and cooperation from all SEEK Teams. While our heart’s desire might be to support every initiative presented, the Elder Team must be the final word on the boundaries of possibility and practicality.

#### GUIDELINES:

- **Prioritize Preaching** – Sunday Morning Gathering – Resources.
- **Sunday Morning** – is Family Time Culture (not outreach).
- **Stewardship** – No Casualties!
- **LECC Connection** – Every ministry is to serve in some capacity with LECC (at least once in 2024).
- **Protect the Calendar** – Don’t overbook the church calendar. Prioritize what matters!

- **Partner with Other Ministries** – Not every service, outreach, or event should be done in isolation. Utilize one another!
- **Alignment** – All ministry activities must align with the overall vision, mission, and purpose statements of LifeHouse Church.
- **Verbiage Matters** – Be intentional with what you communicate as a ministry. Make sure it’s aligned with the mission of LifeHouse Church.
- **Template** – All ministries must use the calendar and budget template provided in this packet.
- **Biblical Precedence**- Every event, service, and outreach should have a verse(s) that shows the biblical precedence for “why” a ministry is doing what they are doing.

## YOUR MINISTRY PLAN DOCUMENT

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### Create a Ministry Pathway

#### What is a ministry pathway?

A ministry pathway comprises your ministry statement, vision, budget, and calendar as building blocks that get you from where you are to where God ultimately wants you to be as a ministry.

**This year, think differently! Think long-term!** Develop a three-year plan that builds year upon year.

**Note:** You aren’t being asked to budget, schedule events, or find a curriculum for the next three years. You are being asked to figure out the long-term vision for your ministry. Seek the Lord and ask him to give you a vision beyond 2024. The goal is to create a ministry pathway that leads you from where you are currently to where God wants you to be by 2026.

## **Track:**

To do what God is calling you to do as a ministry, what needs to happen in year 1, year 2, and year 3? \*Make a pathway you can track.

## **Three Year Vision**

Year 1:

Year 2:

Year 3:

Plan year one with the mindset that not everything must happen immediately. Space out your ministry pathway. What needs to take place now to lay the foundation for where you want to be in the future?

Remember, a full calendar doesn't necessarily mean an effective ministry. Strategically plan what you are doing with a long-term focus in place. Sometimes having fewer events on the calendar may equate to greater long-term success for your ministry.

It's not about how much your ministry is "*doing*." A ministry pathway is about the quality of the ministry that is produced. Take those under your leadership on a journey with the understanding that spiritual development takes time, intentionality, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Embrace the vision God gives you!

## **Ministry Tasks to Complete**

### **1. Plan a Three-Year Ministry Pathway**

## 2. Ministry Vision

**After** a time of **surrender in prayer to the Lord** and a time of **transparency in discussion with each other**, make a clear and concise statement that reflects what you believe is God’s vision for your ministry area(s) for the next 3 years. The statement must match and align with the church as a whole and will be a “touchstone” throughout the process for your team. Compare your ministry vision to the ministry statement and core values of LifeHouse Church.

### **LIFEHOUSE CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT**

To build the Kingdom of God by facilitating opportunities for people:

- to **CONNECT** with God through Jesus Christ (salvation)
- to **GROW** in their relationship with GOD and other believers
- and to **SERVE** others in his name and for his glory

### **CORE VALUES**

- **God’s Word:** We Believe ALL of It, We Obey All of It, We Study All of It, and We Teach All of It!
- **Prayer:** We Pray First, and We Pray Always!
- **Multiplication:** Every Disciple, Every Ministry, Every Church Multiplies!
- **Gospel-Centered:** Rescuing ALL People in ALL Places with the gospel!
- **Community Focus:** We Love Our Neighbors to Jesus; By Loving Our Neighbors like Jesus!
- **Worship:** All of Us, Responding to All of Him, All the Time!
- **Unity:** We are ONE Body so that the World may Believe!
- **Legacy:** Always Investing in the Next Generation!

### 3. Ministry Objectives/Measurable Returns Details

The specific ministry objectives and the corresponding measurable returns of your ministry plan are listed in detailed statements.

- A. **Ministry Objectives:** In each of these statements, you will tell us the “**what**” you will do and the “**how**” you will do it.
- B. **Measurable Returns:** Here, you will state for each Ministry Objective what your expected result/return will be.

#### **What are we to measure?**

This is a measurement of faithfulness and obedience by those within your ministry, not a guess at numerical growth or a measurement of what our Lord will do through OUR obedience in faithfully carrying out our part of the plan. It will be necessary for the team to remind each other often that we are to be the “faithful farmers” while God is the “Lord of the Harvest.” We measure the intent and activity of our farming (turning the soil, planting the seed, and watering the seed). There should be a Measurable Return for every one of your Ministry Objectives.

#### **How do we measure?**

Please apply the following definition and challenge to each of your Ministry Objectives. It is likely that your first attempt at stating an objective will need to be rethought after you apply this test of its measurement. While your stated objective may be worthwhile and appropriate...it may not yet be measurable. If “what gets measured gets done” is true for your ministry plan, then an “inability to measure” our objectives may result in a lack of attainment. We all agree that this will be an unacceptable condition for our ministry.

So here goes...

**“Measurable”**—means **“able to be measured with dimensions or quantity for the best of comparison and/or qualification to established limits and/or expectations”**.

The **“Challenge”** you should apply to each of your submitted objectives is... **“What is THE question that can be asked by our Elder Team and answered by you as a ministry team which will verify in measurable terms whether you have actually accomplished this ministry objective just one year from now?”**

#### *4. Timothy Plan*

Every ministry leader should have a Timothy plan. Paul trained Timothy, and God used Timothy in a mighty way to advance the gospel and encourage the church. Who are you pouring into and replacing yourself with? If something was to happen to you, who would lead? Identify new men and women to raise up as you forecast your new ministry pathway. Develop a plan for training new leader(s) in your ministry.

Example: How often will they teach/preach? How will you teach planning/scheduling details to them? Etc.

Don't just rely on the same people you've always used. A major component of leadership is raising up new leaders.

#### **5. Simplification Plan - Find ways to simplify your events.**

##### **(Practical Tips)**

- Don't require too many hours from volunteers.
- Utilize resources already found in the building.
- Do away with a “*go big or go home*” mentality.
- Join other ministries in doing events.
- Plan strategically around ongoing church-wide events.
- Protect the gathering on Sundays.
- Do not plan big weekend events on off weekends.

**Note:** There may be building construction in 2024. Less space will mean all ministries must work with one another. At times, certain areas may be off-limits.



## 6. Communication Plan

- Plan how often you will communicate: (weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly).
- Determine the methods you use to communicate important details: (email, text, phone calls, letters, handouts, videos, etc.).
  - Consistently keep others up to date with ministry details.

## 7. Budget

- Create a budget that helps achieve the measurable objectives and returns.
- Provide amounts needed and frequency.
- Please indicate the estimated month that you will begin purchases for each need.

## YOUR MINISTRY PLAN TIMELINE

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**Develop your 2024 S.E.E.K. Team: Start date July 11<sup>th</sup>.**

**Submit Core SEEK Team Roster to pastor Danny by Monday, July 31<sup>st</sup>. Email:**

**[Danny@lifehousede.com](mailto:Danny@lifehousede.com)**

**EVENT: Monday, 8/21/23, 6:30 to 8:00 pm @ Gathering Place** - Official SEEK Launch and Prayer Meeting. (Dessert and Light Fare will be provided)

**Due Monday, 10/2/23 - a rough draft** of your initial ministry plan for 2024 with proposed dates, budgets, and facility needs. We will compile and share these drafts with our staff, elders, and financial teams to give feedback and suggestions, identify conflicts, etc. **Submit plans to [Danny@lifehousede.com](mailto:Danny@lifehousede.com)**

**\*Each Ministry Plan will include the following:**

1. Ministry Pathway
2. Ministry Vision Statement
3. Ministry Objectives (the What and the How) and Measurable Return (hoped for results) Details.
4. The Itemized Budget Dollars
5. Ministry Calendar: Event, Times, Building needs, Ministry objectives (Please provide changes your team made to eliminate overloading the church calendar).

**Due Monday, 10/30/23- The final draft** of your ministry plan is due. Submit plans to **Danny@LifeHousede.com**

**EVENT: Monday 11/6/23 - 6:00 to 8:00 pm @ Gathering Place S.E.E.K.**

Commission and prayer night. We will gather to pray over each ministry and commission the ministries into 2024.





# MINISTRY PLANNING

AT LIFEHOUSE CHURCH


EVENT DATE	FREQUENCY	DESCRIPTION	PER EVENT	TOTAL COST

<b>SIGNATURE</b>

**GRAND TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 11

LIFEHOUSE CHURCH SURVEY ON THE  
IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your current understanding and commitment to prioritizing preaching as a primary means of encouraging spiritual growth for a local church. This research is being conducted by Mark Lashey at LifeHouse Church in Townsend, Delaware for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project under the direction of the Professional Doctoral Studies office at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] I agree to participate [ ] I do not agree to participate

**Directions:** Answer the following questions by placing a checkmark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, U = Uncertain, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

#	Question	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	The Bible is God's Holy Word, and as such, is divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant.					
2	God is sovereign.					
3	God speaks to His people today through the preaching of His Word.					
4	Expository preaching is the best kind of preaching.					
5	Preaching is of paramount importance for my church.					
6	My pastor has a responsibility to preach the Word of God.					

#	Question	SD	D	U	A	SA
7	My pastor takes his responsibility to preach the Word of God seriously.					
8	I have a responsibility to hear the preaching of the Word of God.					
9	I have responsibility to obey the Word of God.					
10	My understanding of the importance of preaching has increased this year (2023).					
11	In general, my church has better prioritized preaching this year (2023).					
12	I believe my church benefits when preaching is prioritized.					
13	I believe the other ministries of my church (Children's, Teen, Young Adult, Men's, Women's, Missions/Outreach, etc.) benefit when the preaching of God's Word in the main gathering is prioritized.					
14	I believe that LifeHouse Church should remain committed to prioritizing the preaching of God's Word.					

**Directions:** Please provide a written response to the following questions:

1. Please comment on the preaching ministry at LifeHouse Church...

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## ABSTRACT

### PRIORITIZING PREACHING AS A PRIMARY MEANS OF ENCOURAGING SPIRITUAL GROWTH AMONG THE BODY OF BELIEVERS AT LIFEHOUSE CHURCH IN TOWNSEND, DELAWARE

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This project seeks to guide the LifeHouse Church congregation in Townsend, Delaware, towards a greater emphasis on preaching as a primary avenue for spiritual growth. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the ministry context at LHC, along with the rationale and various objectives of the project. Chapter 2 delves into the Biblical and Theological foundations supporting the central role of preaching within the local church. Chapter 3 explores the theoretical considerations surrounding authentic biblical preaching within a local church setting, addresses practical aspects of preaching in a local church context, and examines historical instances of churches and individuals emphasizing preaching. Chapter 4 details the project itself, including the prelude to its official initiation, the execution of an eight-week sermon series, and the implementation of initiatives aimed at prioritizing preaching, such as the church-wide planning process called S.E.E.K. Chapter 5 assesses the project's effectiveness by evaluating the achievement of its objectives. This section includes the findings of a church-wide survey conducted upon the project's completion, revealing that 88.4 percent of respondents agreed that LHC had better-prioritized preaching in 2023.

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