

Global Gospel

One Life with a Global Gospel

Dr. David Platt

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ONE LIFE WITH A GLOBAL GOSPEL Galatians 6:14

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Galatians 6. This morning we're going to do something a little different than our usually intensive study in a text of Scripture. Actually, we're going to do something that's become somewhat of a yearly routine around this time. As we prepare to close out this year and go into another year together as a faith family I want to share my heart with you as a pastor in this faith family, and what I see when I look at where we are and where we've been and where we're going. And in particular I want to share with you this morning and next week some things that elders and leadership of this body have been praying through when it comes to where we are going as a faith family.

But I want to start by reading a letter to you that I received this week. Actually, it's addressed to you and me, so we're together on this one. Here goes.

"To Dr. David Platt and the faith family of the Church of Brook Hills, I assume based on what others have said about you and the faith family at Brook Hills that you are accustomed to receiving complimentary letters. I hope that you will indulge me as I write to you from a different perspective. My letter could be considered more of a complaint or a warning."

Okay, now remember, you're with me on this one. I'm not sharing this one alone.

He writes:

It is intended to enlighten you as to how your radical actions and teachings related to the Word have been destroying my life, and probably the lives of others like me. Let me explain. I was raised un-churched by loving parents who were perfectly discontent with their lives. The worldly perspective I grew up with allowed me to see the hypocrisy in the lives of the few church-going families to which I had been exposed.

Thus as I grew into a worldly man I found myself on the path to the American Dream. This path, as far as I could see, did not go through or even near a church. I went to college, and then grad school; married a kind and beautiful woman; got a decent, respectable job which allowed me to ultimately buy a house, or at least make payments on a mortgage and make maximum contributions to a 401k.

My wife and I eventually had a family with two beautiful daughters and a couple of dogs. I was living the middle-class version of the American Dream. I was a kind, decent family man who was grounded in the realities of the world. I was perfectly content to devote myself to working hard to provide the financial resources my family would need: 401k retirement plan, 529 college savings plan, a general savings account, and a vacation savings account.

I also worked to provide the necessities of life, such as a flat-screen TV. My charitable giving can be described as minimal at best. I loved my family and loved spending time with them, but I was constantly distracted by the financial realities and needs of our life. I looked to my balance statements for a sense of security. Like many good, worldly men, devoted to getting ahead in this world, I would find moments of joy when the quarterly 401k statement showed a profit.

I also experienced pronounced periods of stress, disappointment, and anger when the 401k dropped or when we had to take money out of savings to pay the bills. However, I accepted these ups and downs as the realities of life, and overall we were doing okay. Then one day my wife, who I thought loved me, told me that she would like to raise our daughters in a church, and requested that we start visiting local churches.

Up to this point in my life, I'd done a good job of avoiding churches and the hypocritical Christians who attended them. I'd always felt uncomfortable around faith-professing Christians, because I lacked biblical knowledge and assumed they would look down upon me. Now in order to make my wife happy, I was going to have to attend a church and interact with those people on their turf. I reluctantly agreed, and added church to my list of dreaded weekend chores.

Initially, our trial run at visiting churches proved relatively painless. The people were nice, but the watered-down version of the Word which they were serving had little impact and left me with no desire for more. My wife, who was also unimpressed by these experiences, suggested we try Brook Hills because she had heard good things about this church. Well, if attending a regular church was bad, I was sure attending a mega-church would be worse.

However, as usual, my wife convinced me, and we attended your church for the first time last fall. That day was the start of a process in which you and your faith family have been progressively destroying my life in this world. The Word you served up that day was strong and pure – not like the watered-down versions I had received in the past. It had an immediate impact on me, and like the most addictive drugs, left me wanting more.

We started to attend fairly regularly on Sundays, but soon that was not enough to satisfy my growing need for more of this Word. I started buying CDs of previous sermons so that I could get my fix on the way to and from work each day. I started to interact more with members of this faith family, who were not only consuming the Word, but also appeared to be living it as well. This only fueled my desire for more.

Soon we were attending a small group on Sundays in addition to the service, and were occasionally attending a Wednesday-night Bible study. You and this faith family seemed all too happy to encourage and support my habit. As I got deeper and deeper into this addiction, a side effect known as faith began to grow inside of me. As my faith grew I felt a greater need for fellowship with others suffering with the same faith.

All along, I was gradually losing my grips on the realities of this world, which had been my foundation, and I came to Christ. I cannot believe what the

Word and this growing faith have done to my life over the last year. I used to avoid church altogether. Now we attend the corporate worship services on Sunday and have joined a small group which meets for three to five hours each week at a neighbor's house.

I attend a class on how to study the Bible and have recently joined a men's accountability small group. I used to avoid Christians who professed their faith, and now I have become one. I now find myself seeking opportunities to share the Word and discuss my growing faith with others. I stopped saving for the flat-screen TV, which is just as well, since I don't have much time for TV any more. I've reduced my 401k contributions and stopped looking at the quarterly statements.

I have gone from trying to save as much money as I could to trying to find ways to give some of our savings away in addition to regular contributions to the church. Strangely enough, this brings me greater joy than I ever experienced with a quarterly 401k statement showing a profit. What is wrong with me? It's lunacy! What have you done to me? The worldly man I was a year ago would not recognize the man I am becoming.

I was a man believing in the realities of this world, living the American Dream, saving up riches for a comfortable future, and looking for security in a strong bottom line. Now I believe in, pray to, and seek a relationship with a God I cannot see. I find salvation in Christ, who I cannot see. I long for eternity in an unseen future Creation. I now look for security in my faith. All this would've sounded like foolishness to the man I was a year ago.

However, the man I was a year ago and the worldly life I knew are being destroyed. This has obviously had an impact on me, but it has also impacted my family, whom I pray with now daily. I wanted you and the faith family at Brook Hills to be aware of the role you have played in destroying my worldly life. I also feel the need to warn you that if you persist in teaching and living out the Word as you are doing currently, then you will likely have a similar impact on the worldly lives of others like me.

I hope you realize that you may have to live with the knowledge of your actions and their effects on the lives of others for all eternity. I will be there to remind you of what you have done.

A New Dream...

The American Dream...

Complain on! When I look at the work of God in the people called the Church of Brook Hills, I see a people possessed by a new dream. A people who live in a culture dominated by an American Dream. James Truslow Adams is the first person who coined that phrase back in the 1930s, and he talked about a dream, quote, "in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of what they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are. The American Dream: we can do anything we set our minds to accomplish. We can achieve any goal, climb any ladder, attain any prize. And the mantra is 'trust in yourself.' Hard work, ingenuity, innovation, imagination – you have it in you to do it, so use it to the fullest stature. And ultimately," Adams said, "you will make much of

yourself." Trust in yourself and you will make much of yourself. To use Adams words, "We will be recognized by others for what we are."

You can have it all. A nice, comfortable life, and family, and career, and retirement. This is the beauty of the American Dream.

A Gospel Dream...

But the gospel has radically different priorities, and we are being conquered by a gospel dream, realizing that the last thing the gospel tells us to do is trust in ourselves, look into ourselves, believe in ourselves. The gospel says, "Crucify yourself." Crucify yourself. We follow a Savior who said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."

How's that for the power of positive thinking? "You can do nothing apart from me. Crucify yourself. Lay down yourself. Lay aside all your dreams and your plans and your ambitions and your desires. Put them all down before me. Crucify them all." Deny yourselves, because the reality is – don't miss this – as long as we are trusting in, believing in, looking into ourselves, then anything we accomplish will be done to the credit of ourselves.

The gospel reorients everything around crucifying ourselves so that Christ is in us, and now anything that is accomplished credits Christ. And the gospel dream says crucify yourself and live not to make much of yourself. Live to make much of God. That's the goal of the gospel – to make much of God.

That's a weird way to live in this world. This is a weird dream. I asked this brother if I could share this letter – anonymously, of course – with you this morning. And as we were talking, he was sharing. This is a man who a year ago, totally un-churched, has come to Christ, is fully plugged into the work of Christ in this family. And he said, "What I don't understand, Pastor, is why people keep coming." And I said, "I don't either, man. This is so different. But by God's grace, He's adding to this faith family and He is raising up doctors who are selling their homes and giving to the poor and moving overseas, business leaders who are mobilizing their companies to help the hurting.

He's raising up young couples who are selling their homes and moving into the inner city to live out the gospel. He's raising up senior adults and stay-at-home moms and college students and teenagers who are radically reorienting their lives around the gospel, about radical obedience to Jesus. And this is what Galatians 6:14 is all about.

We studied this almost a year ago when we were walking through Galatians. Galatians 6:14, "*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*" Paul says we boast in one thing – the place where we died to our sin, and where we died to ourselves, and where we find new life in Christ. He said earlier in the book, "I no longer live." He said, "Christ lives in me, and as a result this world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Paul just said this world has nothing for us. We do not live for worldly things. We are dead to the world. We don't live according to the standards of this world. We don't place our confidence in the comforts of this world. We don't value what the world values. This world is not our source of life and satisfaction and joy. We don't even belong here, Hebrews says – we're aliens and strangers here. This world is not our home, and so we don't live running after the things of this world like this is our home.

It's not our home. We live for the world to come, and we don't try to find our safety and security and comfort and satisfaction in this world. Because our safety and security and

comfort and satisfaction are eternally sealed in the world to come. And that radically changes the way we live here. We are being swallowed up by the love and the mercy and the satisfaction and the joy of Christ, and in the process, being weaned off of dependence on and desire for the things of this world.

And we're saying we're not going to waste our lives on this world. We're not going to waste our lives in this world. We want our lives here to count for the glory of Christ in the world. So where does that leave us? Where do we go from here?

And that's where this morning I want us to talk about a Radical Experiment. Now we started using this terminology a couple of months ago when we were walking through James; when we spent time in James 1:27 and saw God's concern for orphans and widows.

And we said one way that could play out is in caring for children in our county. And there are families across this faith family that are going to three hours of class every week right now in order to make sure that the kids in our county are provided for through this church and the gospel. And then the next week we looked at James 2, and we saw that we cannot be a gospel-believing people and look at the dire needs around us in the world and turn a blind eye to them.

And so we took a sizeable gift and said, "We want to go to some communities in the poorest country in the world, where kids are starving and dying because they have no food." And we're going to partner together with 21 churches all across the country, and we're going to make sure they're provided for. So that's where we started using this terminology, Radical Experiment.

What I want to do today is I want us to take Radical Experiment to a new level, a broader level. A level that doesn't just address the way we spend our money, but addresses every facet of our lives. Regardless of who we are. You know one of the dangers from a message like last week in particular is that people might walk away – and I'm guessing some did. People might walk away thinking, "Well, if I'm not moving overseas to take the gospel to an unreached people group, then I'm not really a devoted Christian." And that is the last thing I want anyone to think. I don't think Scripture causes us to think that way.

I try to be intentional and very specific in wording, even in our response time last week, to say the key is – and this is what I do believe Scripture calls for, commands for all of us in this room – is total surrender. A blank check is the terminology used last week. Total surrender that says, "Okay, God, here's a blank check with my life and my family. And if you want us to move our lives into an unreached context in the world, then we will do it – period."

And until we pray that, until we pray that, we're not fully surrendered. So to say that – but then to realize without surrender that it's likely that God will take many of us and leave us right here in Birmingham as a base for making disciples of all nations. And so this is going to look different in every single one of our lives, however God leads us. But the key is however you want me to accomplish the Great Commission in my life, in my family, I put it on the table.

And so the question that I and the elders, the leadership's been praying through is how can we best shepherd people in Birmingham, Alabama, to live for the glory of Christ here and in all nations. With every single one of our lives; the different gifts and skills and positions and talents and resources and families that are represented around this room. Is there something that we can do together?

And what I want us to look at this morning is an idea for this next year about what it would look like for each of us as individuals and families in this faith family to give of ourselves radically to the glory of Christ in all nations with the lives that God has given us here in Birmingham.

So what I want to put before you – this Radical Experiment – are five components that I want to challenge us to give ourselves to over the next year.

Now next year, 2010, I know that that's a – that kind of goes against conventional wisdom. I get flyers and letters and notes and gimmicks on my desk every single week that talk about how people need short-term commitments today. And so keep everything in four, six, at the most eight-week commitments. Don't do a year commitment. I'm glad Christian history has not always operated on this philosophy.

David Brainerd spent years in loneliness, depression, pain, and suffering before he saw one Native American in the northeastern United States come to Christ in his ministry. William Carey spent seven years before he saw one convert in India. I wonder – I wonder if long-term benefits in the Kingdom are sometimes reserved for long-term commitments. So what I want us to do is I want us to think about one year.

A Radical Experiment...

And I want to put before you a picture of five different components that we're going to call the Radical Experiment. And think about how every member of this faith family can give ourselves to these five components. So here they are.

To Pray for the Entire World

Number one: To pray for the entire world. That simple. 6.8 billion people – pray for them all. That's a good start, huh? Here's the deal. There are 6.8 billion people in the world. We know at least 4 ½ billion people in the world who are without Christ. And over a billion and a half of those have never even heard the gospel, so there is great need.

And you remember, we studied – Jesus says in Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest is plentiful." In other words, there are people who are waiting to hear the gospel "But the workers are" what? "Few." How can there be few workers when billions of people are headed to an eternity in hell? Jesus says right after that, "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field." That passage has to struck me this last year, because I'm convinced the only explanation for why there are so few workers when there is so much need is because we're not praying. We are not being serious about asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field. We need to pray.

I told you before – it was a while ago – about a colleague of mine when I was teaching in seminary who had gone to South Korea. And he had gone to bed late one night, and about 4:00 in the morning he was awoken by a sound outside his room. And he goes over and he opens the curtains and he looks out the window. And across the street from the hotel where he is staying is a massive stadium, and there's this roar coming from the stadium.

And he starts thinking, "What kind of sport do South Koreans play at 4:00 in the morning? This is absurd!" So he's frustrated. Goes back to the bed, lays down, tries to go back to sleep, but the noise is so loud. So then in the morning he gets up and he goes down and he asks the hotel manager, "What kind of sports do you guys play at 4:00 in the morning?"

And the hotel manager's response was, "Oh, sir, that was not a sporting event. That was the church who had gathered together to pray."

And so amidst a culture where we gather together with great zeal in stadiums to sing our praises and to shout our praises for teams, I want to call a faith family to fall on our knees and pray with more zeal than that. And call out for God's great name to be hallowed among the nations.

Now how do you pray for the whole world? And this is where I want to point us to a book that I've referenced before that I want to put before us in the next year called *Operation World*. And this is a book, and you can get a copy, or it's online for free. And it's a book that contains every nation, people in the world. Prayer requests for every nation and people in the world. News about what God is doing there. How we can be praying for the work of the gospel there. And so what this book contains is there's a guide that if you spend a couple of moments each day in your time with the Lord just looking at these prayer requests, there's a guide that from January to December you will pray for literally the entire world.

This book, *Operation World*, has revolutionized my prayer life more than any other book outside of the Bible, because it changes everything when our eyes are seeing what God sees on a daily basis around the world. It changes everything about how we live here. And think of it – just this is so cool – your life can impact nations for the glory of Christ from your prayer closet! Like you have, we have, the opportunity to be a part of what our God is doing to make his glory known in every corner of the world through prayer. So why would we not give ourselves to that? That just makes sense.

And so what would happen if we as a faith family spent 2010 intentionally, as individuals and then as we come together in different emphases as a faith family, intentionally praying, "God, hallowed be your name. Make your name known as holy in all the world." That's the first part; to pray for the entire world over the next year. Okay, that's number one.

To Read Through the Entire Word

Number two: to read through the entire Word. And by that I mean just that. For each of us individually and all of us together to read through the entire Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, and all 31,101 verses in between over the course of next year.

We have brothers and sisters around the world who gather together at the risk of their lives to know and learn and study God's Word. And if we're going to join them in radical obedience to Christ, it's going to happen with our Bibles open and our minds engaged.

For far too long, we have settled for a Bible light in our individual Christian lives and in our churches. We have grown content with a little devotional word from God for the day, supplemented by sermons in churches on how to live a better life and be a better person. And our greatest need is to know God well. And the purpose of this Word, it is anointed, blessed by the Holy Spirit to conform us more into the image of Christ. That's the purpose of the Word. It does the work.

I was just so struck by this. We were doing Secret Church a couple weeks ago. We are in a battle. There is a battle that is waging for marriages around this church. And for children and teenagers across this church. For purity and for holiness across this church. There's a battle waging for souls around this community. There is a God over this world – a true God over this world who desires people to bow at the feet of a loving Savior.

And there is a false god in this world that desires people in this community to burn in hell. And we cannot fight this battle with little trite words from God for the day, or little trite opinions from preachers. We need the Word of God saturating our minds and our hearts. We need to be filled with it, overflowing with it. It is where strength and power in battle are found. And so I want to invite us over the next year to really dive in; read through the entire Word.

First, as individuals, to read through the entire Word. What I want to do is provide us with a daily Bible reading plan that walks us through the story of Scripture. There's a lot of different ways you can read through the Word. You can read, just start on page one and go to the end. You can do this or that. I think one of our greatest needs today is to see the story of Scripture, and to see the picture of redemptive history.

And so there's a Bible-reading plan that we have been working on, working with someone on, about – that takes – okay, we'll start in Genesis 1, and in the beginning we're basically going book by book. But you get into the Kings, for example, and what happens is on different days when you're reading different things in the Kings, you'll also have readings from the Prophets who were prophesying during the time period of the Kings.

And so we'll bring all Old Testament into the picture of redemptive history. And then when you get to the New Testament, when we're reading through the book of Acts we'll bring the letters in at the time in the book of Acts when those letters were written. That sort of thing.

So a Bible-reading plan where we can, from the beginning of next year to the end of next year, walk through the entire story of Scripture. And we're working to provide commentary just each day. Just a little guide that'll help us understand what we're reading. So that's an individual.

But then even deeper, second, as a family. Now if you're a single, you can do this with a small group of friends, but I want us as a faith family and as families within this church to experience worship together as families. Family worship. Now I'm guessing that many if not most of us have little idea about what does family worship mean? Or we may even have very skewed ideas about what family worship means.

When you hear family worship, you may picture the Dad behind a lectern with a tie on leading music and delivering a sermon. Like let me relieve your fears. This is not family worship. I mean if that works for you, then go for it; but it's not family worship. I'm talking about Moms and Dads and kids in their homes, gathering together; maybe every day or maybe just once a week, to worship together in our homes.

This is without question one of the highlights of my day, when Heather and Joshua and Caleb and I get together. We do it before they go to bed, and we just spend some time reading a Bible story together, and praying together, and sing a song together. He's my Rock, my Sword, my Shield, the Hub in the middle of the wheel – like it's a new up-and-coming worship song. And my kids know it, and we have this time together where we worship together. And what I want to do is I want us to help one another in the next year experience worship as families.

Now I know that that seems daunting to many, and what we're working to do is provide every week a guide that will provide help—tips—for what does family worship look like? How can you bring in preschoolers or children or students? How does this work as a family? But I want to call the leaders of families all across this church to rise up and take responsibility

for leading your home spiritually. There's a way to do that as families, and us doing it together. So we're reading through the Bible individually and then as families.

And then third, as a faith family. What we're going to do is every week I or someone else is going to preach on a passage from what we've been studying that week. I think it'll bring the Word to life in entirely new ways, because we'll have been reading through this during the week, hearing from the Holy Spirit of God during the week. Bring some understanding of what we've been reading and then we will have a small group discussion guide that in small groups can take all that we're reading individually, family, as a faith family, studying and looking at and think through, "All right, what does this look like in our lives?"

So that's the picture. How does that sound? Read through the entire Word. Now the point is not just to have biblical knowledge. The point is not just to do activity. The point is to know God, and to be conformed into the likeness of Christ. I guarantee you, reading through – guarantee you, reading through the entire Word as individuals, families, and a faith family, over the next year, we – by the power of the Holy Spirit under the grace of Christ – will look more like Christ this time next year than we do now. It's what the Word does.

To Sacrifice our Money for a Specific Purpose

So do we want that? Pray for the entire world. Read through the entire Word. Okay. Third component: to sacrifice our money for a specific purpose. Now this is basically what we have already talked about when it comes to the Radical Experiment. It's what we're doing as a faith family right now. What we're encouraging one another to do.

Over the last month, leadership in the church has been working on a budget that basically tries to bring it down to how low can we get and free up as much as possible. There's fixed costs – a lot of fixed costs in there. But as best as we can, free up as much as possible for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world. And two weeks from now, that budget will come out.

But the challenge is here in the Radical Experiment, is for us to do the same thing in our individual lives and our families for one year – one year of our Christian life. In this culture to say, "We're going to minimize luxuries, and we're going to sacrifice as much as we possibly can to free up as much as we possibly can for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world for one year."

Basically how that plays out – set a cap on our lifestyles, as low as we can. Draw the line and say, "This is enough. We're going to live here. We're going to simplify as best as we can. We're going to live at this line so that anything God gives above that, we're free to give away."

Now I know – I want to be very careful here, because I know there are brothers and sisters who are struggling greatly financially right now in this faith family. And you're finding yourself in a position where there is no surplus, and you are living on necessities by necessity. And what we're saying is we're going to join one another there. We're not all going to wait for the economy to bring us there. We're going to go there voluntarily for the sake of the glory of Christ in the world.

And so that's the picture. To set a cap on our lifestyles, and then anything above that – no matter how small or large – we're going to spend our money for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world. And we've already set up a Radical Experiment website. It's kind of been growing a little bit, and it's going to grow a little more until it's full-scale in

2010. But there's already ideas that different people have submitted about how to save and sacrifice. RadicalExperiment.org – how to save, how to sacrifice.

Stewardship team put together 50 ways – easy, first-step ways to begin saving and sacrificing. Now key word here is sacrifice. This is not just giving what it's easy to give. This is giving until it hurts; giving beyond what we're able to give.

So the challenge is for one year in this American Dream-dominated culture to say, "I'm going to free up as much as I possibly can for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world." That is not an easy process, obviously. It's something Heather and I are still diving into. I feel like we've been diving into it, and there's still more and more and more to uncover. So this is a process, but I'm convinced it's a process by which we are sanctified as we think and we pray for these kind of things. So that's the third component – sacrifice our money for a specific purpose in 2010.

To Spend our Time in Another Context

Fourth, to spend our time in another context. Pray for the entire world. Read through the entire Word. Sacrifice our money for a specific purpose. And spend our time in another context. Now this is important. When we look at urgent spiritual and physical need around the world, it would be easy for us to say, "Well, there's so much need. I'm just going to send my money."

And I want us to be careful when we even start to make that step, because yes – yes, it's important. We're seeing this all over Scripture – to spend our resources for the sake of the glory of God in the world. But if we only send or spend our money, then we will miss part of the point of global mission.

Shared with you before about when this hit home for me was in Sudan – a \$3,000.00 trip to go to Sudan for two weeks. I was thinking, "Okay, that's a lot of money." And someone came to me in the church – I was in New Orleans at the time; this was back in 2004 – and said, "Why are you going to spend \$3,000.00 on a trip when you could just send \$3,000.00 and it'd go a lot farther than you spending two weeks there?" And I wrestled with that until I got to the Sudan. Spent time encouraging our brothers and sisters there in their persecution with the Word, and one brother looks back at me and he says, "David, over the last 20 years of persecution" – which was his entire life – he said, "Many different organizations have sent resources to us, and we are extremely thankful." But he said, "Do you want to know how we can tell who a true brother is?" And I said, "How?" He said, "A true brother comes to be with you in your deepest time of need." And he said, "I want to thank you for being a true brother." And in that moment, I walk away from that conversation, and it hits me – this is the essence of the gospel. When God chose to bring salvation to you and me, He did not send gold or silver, cash or check. He sent Himself.

So how will we ever show this gospel to the world if all we send is our money? We give and we go, to spend time in another context. Now this is something we have talked about a bit each year for the last few years. And the challenge is to spend – follow this – 98% of our time spreading the gospel throughout Birmingham. God has us here in this city for a reason, and it's to make the gospel known throughout this city.

We spend the majority of our days here, so without a doubt the overwhelming majority of our time is spent making disciples right here in Birmingham. And you are doing this. And so the goal is that every small group in this faith family is sharing and showing the gospel in Birmingham, and you're doing it. This last week we were talking about how in this Radical

Experiment we're going to impact urgent spiritual and physical need right here in Birmingham, and thinking through ideas that we'll be sharing in the next couple weeks.

But when we were talking, Keith, our local disciple-making pastor, was sharing just, "Okay, here's where we are right now," and listen to this picture. Quote exactly:

Most of our small groups and community groups are now partnering with a ministry that is focused on the physical, social and spiritual needs of the most under-reached and poorest people in Birmingham in order to make disciples. These ministries are focused on the poor, the homeless, prison inmates, ex-prisoners, families in crisis, single moms, teenagers, the neglected, the abused, the addicted, the abandoned, etc. Ministries such as Jimmie Hale, Jessie's Place, M-Power, Restoration Academy, Cornerstone School, The Lovelady Center, Brother Bryan, The Firehouse Shelter, King's Ranch, First Light, Pathway, Sav-A-Life, King's Kid Club, Fight4Life, Daniel Cason Ministry, The Community Kitchen, The Foundry, Northstar Youth Ministry, Shepherd's Fold, Family Worship and Life Center (which is where part of our worship team is today), The East Park Center, Olivia's House, the homeless at Lynn Park, UAB Townhouses for cancer patients, UAB Hospitality House, Lifeline in Pell City, Family Connections, etc., all have our small groups partnering with them and spreading the gospel in Birmingham.

That's good, huh?

So you are doing this all over the place, in so many different ways. Ninety-eight percent of our time spreading the gospel throughout Birmingham. Praise God! You're showing that the Great Commission is indeed not an either/or proposition. We don't have to choose if we're going to impact our city or the nations for the glory of Christ. We impact our city and nations for the glory of Christ. The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest where? At home, and it's shining.

So 98% of our time spreading the gospel throughout Birmingham. So we keep doing that, and then the challenge is to then spend 2% of our time spreading the gospel beyond Birmingham. Going starts where we live, but it doesn't have to stop there. If there are a billion people who have never heard the gospel, and billions of people who are without Christ, and the overwhelming majority of them are outside of Birmingham, then it makes sense for a people who want the glory of God in all nations to pray through how can we go to other contexts to spread the gospel there?

Doesn't mean we stop going here. Doesn't mean our going here is not important. Our going here is extremely important. We're going to spend 98% of our time doing that. But the challenge here is to work to try to spend 2% - which is about a week of our lives - taking the gospel somewhere outside of Birmingham. Instead of may be doing vacation for a week or a week-long or a weekend trip for leisure.

To say, "Okay, I want to be intentional at some point in the next year to take the gospel to another context." Maybe it's difficult for you to travel, and so maybe it's going somewhere else in Alabama. There are some very urgent spiritual and physical needs not far from here; not far at all from here. Maybe it's going to driving distance or flying distance somewhere in the United States. Maybe it is going beyond, to Latin America or Africa or Asia.

The challenge is to spend 2% of our time in another context making the gospel known. And the promise is it'll radically transform the 98% of your life that you live here. And so trying to put "both" "and" together.

I want you to imagine something with me for a second, and look at this on the screen. I want you to see a building on fire. And I want you to imagine a scene. You come up to this building, and there are people inside of that building who need to be rescued.

And you have what it takes to rescue them. So imagine you come to the 1st floor, and there on the 1st floor you find 150 people trapped. There are more people there than you can even possibly begin to rescue. You're not going to be able to get to all of those people, but you start rescuing as many of them as you possibly can.

While you're doing that, somebody tells you, one of them tells you that there are people on other floors as well. They tell you that up on the 5th floor there are 30 people who need to be rescued. And then they tell you if you go to the 10th floor, there's a group of 4 people that need to be rescued. And then they say way up at the top, on the 20th floor, there's two people who need to be rescued.

So this is what you've got. You've got more people on the first floor than you can even begin to rescue. And then you've got other people, smaller groups of people that are all the way up. Here's the question I want to ask you: is there any reason why you would leave the first floor at any point to go up to these other floors and try to rescue people from there?

Logically, it would not make sense to do that, because the time you spend and the energy you spend trying to go up there is time and energy that could be spent on saving more people from the first floor. And so naturally you spend all of your time and your energy saving as many people on the first floor.

What if they even tell you – just take it a little step deeper – what if the people there tell you that those people on the 10th and the 20th floor actually don't even want to be rescued? And if you go up to them, you're likely going to face some resistance from them? They want to stay trapped. Now is there any reason you would go up to the 10th and to the 20th floor? The only reason you would leave the first floor is if your commander had told you, "You've got to get somebody from every one of these floors." That's the only reason. Otherwise it would make no sense.

Now in this picture I want you to see an illustration – it's not a perfect illustration; it breaks down at a variety of levels – but I want you to see an illustration of the church's contemporary approach to missions. We are surrounded by need right in front of us, and the reality is we can spend all of our time and all of our resources trying to meet the need right in front of us, and we will not exhaust all the need.

And so as a result people have said, "Well, why would we spend time and energy and resources trying to go to these other places? Especially when some of these other places don't even want us there? Wouldn't that time and energy and resources be better spent on meeting the need right here?" And that makes logical sense, but what trumps the whole picture is we have a King – this is the point of last week – we have a King who has told us to get somebody from every floor.

We have a King who has specifically told us there's other people groups, and they need to hear the gospel. And you are commissioned to go to them. And so when we think about mission, this is why we cannot limit it just to what is in front of us. We need to give

ourselves – the majority of our... As long as God has you and me in Birmingham, yes – making disciples all throughout Birmingham. But we also have a responsibility, a commission before us, to make sure to go to the other places.

And so that's where this challenge comes in. Now the biggest breakdown in that whole illustration is the fact that none of us is alone in this rescue mission. We're a part of a church that's doing this together. So it's not one of us going to every single nation; it's us together doing that.

To Commit our Lives to a Multiplying Community

Which leads to the fifth part of the Radical Experiment here. The fifth part: to commit our lives to a multiplying community. To commit our lives to a multiplying community.

And I saved this for last because I think this is where the other four converge together. Because the reality is we pray for the entire world, but we don't pray alone. We don't pray "my Father in heaven." We pray "our Father in heaven." Prayer is something we do as a part of a community. We don't just read through the Word alone. We need each other to understand, to know, to apply this Word.

We sacrifice our money for a specific purpose, spend our time in another context, but we're not Lone Rangers trying to accomplish the purpose of God. Our giving and our going are tied to multiplication of the gospel through the church.

So fundamentally this involves two things I'm going to put before us: a commitment to the local church. A commitment to the local church. You know we have talked about how the adversary is attacking this kind of commitment from all sides. Now the adversary is promoting a rampant individualism among Christians that says there's no need to be involved in a church, be committed as a member, a part of a body of Christ. And the adversary is attacking from the other side, even among those who "go to church" by immersing us in a consumer-driven church-hopping and shopping culture. Where we jump from one to the next, and where if our preferences aren't met here, we go to the next, to the next, to the next.

And the adversary is doing that. We spent much of this year talking about what it means to be a member of the body of Christ, and I praise God – I want to thank you for the individuals across this room and families across this room that this year have said, "Okay, I'm not going to sit on the sidelines. I'm going to join a church. I'm going to become committed to a local church." And so many of you did that, especially during the beginning of the year when we had that concentrated emphasis. And then every time we have the Starting Point workshop it's full with people. So you are doing that.

And then there are others of you who have been here a long time, and especially over the last three and a half years, you have put up with the ups and downs of a young pastor who is certainly learning his way. And you have resisted temptation that might be there to jump according to preference or desire, so I want to thank you for how that's being displayed.

If you are not committed to a local church, it's not even about Brook Hills. Get involved in some local body of believers, and commit yourself there, and stay there. Unless they stop following the Word of God, then commit yourself to that local church in 2010. Be committed to a local church, and then take it a little step deeper – a commitment to a small group. And this is especially important in a church this size, although I think it's the case all across the board.

If we're going to make disciples of all nations – if we're going to pray, study, and give, and go with our lives, we're going to need a handful of brothers and sisters to lock arms with as we walk this journey together. We can't do it alone, and we can't even do it in a group of 4,000 people. We need brothers and sisters who are involved in our lives, that we're sharing life with, that we're experiencing growth in Christ with.

We're helping them to grow in Christ and they are helping us to grow in Christ. We need to humble ourselves and realize our need for each other here. So the goal is for every member of Church of Brook Hills to be involved in that kind of group of believers. A small group of believers that's doing disciple-making together during 2010. The challenge is connecting, and we want to help you make that possibility. But to find a band of disciples that is running after Christ together.

And when we lock arms with one another and give ourselves to the mission of God in Scripture, the very gates of hell cannot prevail against us. The gates of hell cannot prevail against us. So commitment to a local church and commitment to a small group. Commit your life to a multiplying community; a community that is multiplying the gospel.

A Continual Prayer...

All that leads to a prayer, a continual prayer based on Galatians 6:14.

And here's the deal. What I wanted to do this morning is to put this picture before you. Five components. To spend 2010 all across this church praying for the entire world, reading through the entire Word, sacrificing our money for a specific purpose, spending our time in another context, and then committing our life to a multiplying community. Just think with me for a second what this next year would look like if we were doing these things.

And we were giving ourselves to God and prayer and to his Word and to the world and to the people right around us in Birmingham, all together, very intentionally. Obviously, there's not a place in Scripture where I can say, "In 2010 you should do the Radical Experiment." And so I in no way want to put that kind of weight with this. This is not something that if you did not do or want to be a part of that it would make you any less of a Christian or disobedient to God. I hope these things are based on Scripture, and they're an attempt by the pastors and elders of this church to help guide us through application of the Word in our day.

But what I want to invite you to do over the next week is to pray, in your life and your family, about giving yourself to these five components. And next week in our worship gathering we're going to have a time where we will worship together by saying, "Okay, we're going to lock arms in this picture together."

We'll have an opportunity to respond. But I didn't want us to do that today. I really want us to have some time to pray through, because this is pretty big deal. And in the process, our continual prayer will be:

God, help us to die to the ways of the world so that we might live for your glory throughout the world. God, wean us off the American Dream, and help us to live for another dream. The gospel dream, where we are falling on our faces on behalf of your glory in the world. Where we are diving into your Word and knowing you deeply. Where we are sacrificing our

money and spending our time to make your gospel known here and in other places, and doing it all in the context of the church that you have promised to bless for your purposes.

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