



**WE GLORIFY CHRIST BY MAKING DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS**  
**Philippians 3:10; Matthew 28:18-20; Psalm 67:1-2**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Exodus 33. I mentioned, for those of you who were here last week, that we were going to do something a little different tonight. We're going to come aside from a time, instead of spending intensive time studying a particular text of Scripture, we're going to spend some time thinking through how what we've seen in Scripture affects us as a faith family. The reason I have you in Exodus 33...it's a text we actually started in a couple of weeks ago, if you were at Secret Church on that particular Friday night. If you missed Secret Church, you missed out on some interesting moments. For those who did have the opportunity to be there, just ask them about coconuts and kiwis and bananas, and how that relates to a solid theology of the Holy Spirit, and you'll find some interesting things.

But we started that night in Exodus 33. It's actually the text that we studied together as a faith family back in January. I had a whole series of sermons planned for this year; and in the beginning of the year, God just turned that upside down. And this is the text He used to turn that upside down in my own life, and then, I believe, in the direction we've gone over the last year in God's Word. It's a chapter about what it means to be desperate for the fullness of the presence of God. And I want to draw your attention, in particular, to starting in verse 14, just a couple of verses.

The context in Exodus 33 is, in the previous chapter, the people of Israel built and worshiped a golden calf. God tells His people at the beginning of Exodus 33 that He's going to give them the Promised Land, but He's not going to go with them into the Promised Land. So, they can have the land, but they will miss out on God and the presence of God. And what happens is Moses, in the middle part of this chapter, pleads for God to go with them and intercedes on behalf of the people of God. And that's what he's doing in verse 12 and 13; he's pleading: "Remember, this nation is your people. Lead us." And then in verse 14, "The LORD replied..." This is how God responded. He said, "*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*" Then Moses said to him, "*If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.*"

Now, when you read verses 14 and 15, it almost seems like there's a little bit of a disconnect there, because God said to Moses, "*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*" (Exodus 33:14) And Moses said to Him, "*If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.*" (Exodus 33:15) Seems like Moses kind of checked out and missed what God had just said to him. But the reality is Moses was listening very closely to what God had said to him. And some of you may have a note in your Bible from when we studied this passage, but in verse 14, when it says, "*The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you...'*" that word "you", the pronoun there is not plural; it's singular. In other words, God said, "My Presence will go with you, Moses. and I will give you," singular, "rest. I'm going to give you rest." So, this was a promise to Moses, not to the people of God, but to Moses.

So, Moses replies, says to God, *"If Your Presence does not go with..."* Who? *"...with us..."* Plural, *"...do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"* (Exodus 33:16) And the picture we've got here is something we see all over Scripture. There's no question in Scripture that God in His mercy and His compassion and His love and His grace is extremely personal in our lives. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows every single detail in your life better than you know those details in your lives. He is extremely merciful toward you, not just the person beside you or in front of you or behind you, but you, right where you're sitting. He is gracious toward you, merciful toward you. He's extremely personal.

At the same time, what we see all throughout Scripture is this personal love, grace, and mercy balanced with a picture of corporate love, grace, and mercy. God is not just in the business of blessing individuals. He's in the business of blessing a people. It's why, throughout the Old Testament, we have the people of God, the people of Israel; and you get in the New Testament, you've got the church, you got the community of faith that is the locus, the point of God's blessing. And so, what we've got is a picture that we're reminded here in Exodus 33, that it's not just about us as individuals; it's about us as a people.

Now, that's important; because over the last few months, really since Easter of this year, we've been diving into Scripture and what Scripture teaches about the gospel. We have seen how the gospel is more than just a prayer you pray, and you move on with your life, and you're going to heaven now. The gospel is the means of our salvation, but not just our salvation, but our transformation. The gospel transforms us. And our glorification: The gospel secures us for all of eternity. And then, we have begun to look at how the gospel affects everything. The gospel is not just one class in Christianity, so to speak, that you move on from. The gospel is the building in which all the other classes are contained. The gospel infiltrates every facet of our lives.

We looked at how the gospel affects our families, how the gospel affects our relationships with each other, marriage, and parenting, and singleness; how the gospel affects the way we look at significant issues in our culture today, like divorce and homosexuality. We looked at how the gospel is something that we have the privilege and opportunity to sew threads of day in and day out, as we have the opportunity to share it with other people. We looked in August at how the gospel affects the way we suffer, and we heard stories from this faith family about brothers and sisters who have seen the sufficiency of Christ and the gospel in the middle of their suffering. And then over the last couple of months, we have looked at the radical implications of the gospel for how we live our lives in terms of those who are lost and those who are poor around us.

So, we've seen over and over and over again how the gospel affects our lives individually, our families. But what I want us to do is I want us to step back tonight, and I want us to think about how the gospel affects the way we do church. And what we're going to do is you've got some notes there, front and back, that I want to walk through. And I'll be honest: There's really not a lot of new information, if you've been around Brook Hills a while, on there, but I think it's important for us to pause for a minute and really think about how the gospel affects us as a church, where we are, and where we're going. If you are a visitor, if you're a guest tonight, maybe not a part of this faith family, hopefully, it'll give you a glimpse into what we believe the Scripture teaches about the church. If you are a member of this faith family, this is a good reminder to us of what we've seen in the Word, not just this last year, but over the last few years, and how the Word is directing us, leading us and guiding us as a church.

So, what you've got on the very front page there is really an overview. These are the things that elders of this church, the staff, and, now, deacons are constantly looking through. That first page is almost like a quiz sheet among the elders, staff, and deacons. This is something, if you've summed up in one page, "What is the church of Brook Hills is about? What is this church about, based on the Word?", this would be it.

And so, what I want to do is I want to run down this. I'm going to try to run down it pretty quickly. I'm going to try to resist preaching, like, fifty sermons along the way, because there's that many here, but I want us just to think, briefly, about an overview, and then, on the back, we're going to think through, "Okay, well, practically, how does that look? How does that affect the way we do church?"

## **The Church at Brook Hills**

So, we'll start at the top there: The Church at Brook Hills. One statement that really sums up who we are as a body of believers in this community of faith is, "We glorify Christ by making disciples of all nations." If you had to sum it up in one sentence, as simply as possible, that would be it; and in that statement is our vision, our mission, and our goal. Our vision to glorify Christ, our mission to make disciples, and our goal to do it in all nations.

### **Our Vision**

So, thinking about those three facets: Our vision is to glorify Christ. Philippians 3:10, "*I want to know Christ,*" Paul says. It's the same picture in Matthew 4:19, when Jesus says, "Follow me; fix your eyes on me. Fix your gaze, your attention, your affections on me, and I will make you fishers of men. But fix your eyes on me." Christ is the vision of every Christian in every church. It's just pre-written. It's not up for us to negotiate.

Now, I think we have a dangerous tendency to miss this. I hear pastors sometimes talk about a vision for the church, and many times, people will say, "Well, our vision is to have this many services." Or, "Our vision is to have this many people, or this many buildings, or this kind of budget." And when we say things like that, we show that somewhere along the way, we have lost our pursuit of Christ in our pursuit of stuff. We don't want more services or buildings or stuff. We want Christ. We want His glory. We want to know Him. We want to become like Him. We want to be conformed into His image. We want His glory to be our supreme aim. We want to fix our eyes on His glory, because if we don't, then everything else will get blurry very quickly. The only way to see things correctly is through the lens of glorifying Christ. And so, that's what we mean when we say, "Our vision is to glorify Christ." He's our everything. We want Christ.

### **Our Mission**

Now, how do we glorify Christ? By making disciples. John 15, "*If you love me, obey my commands.*" (John 15:10) We've got this command that is central at the end of Jesus' time here on earth. As you go, make disciples of all nations. And this picture of disciple-making, and the reality that, in the church, we are always tempted to do everything except for what Jesus has told us to do here. Jesus never told us to build buildings, but we've got plenty of buildings, not just here, but around the city and around the country. Jesus never told us to start Sunday School or other programs. We've got plenty of those. Jesus never told us to build colleges, universities, or seminaries. We have those, as well.

Now, does it mean that all of those things are bad? No, but He did tell us to make disciples in every part of the world. And what that means is these things are good only inasmuch as

they help us to do this right over here. The reality is every follower of Christ, without exception, is not called to make disciples; every follower of Christ is commanded to make disciples. This is the mission of our lives. It's why we have breath.

Now, the reality is, if we were to do a survey across the room and say, "Okay, what is disciple-making? How do you make disciples?" We would probably get all kinds of different answers, some biblical, maybe not so biblical and probably, a little bit of confusion along the way. And so, what we did as a faith family is we went through and looked at the Great Commission, and we looked at John 17. What is disciple-making? What did Jesus do with His disciples, and how can we follow His lead?

### **Four Components of Our Mission**

And we identified four primary components in disciple-making. We share the Word, which is introducing people to Christ. We show the Word; we model the character of Christ. We teach the Word; each one of us has the opportunity to take this Word and pass it on to others, not just teaching in large group. Maybe it's teaching children. Maybe it's teaching your spouse. Maybe it's teaching your friends, the people you work with, the people you live with. We're constantly looking for opportunities to pass this Word on, and we serve the world. We don't just tell people what the Word says; we show them what the Word says with the way we get our hands dirty serving the people around us.

The reality is, what Scripture teaches, is that every single follower of Christ in this room has this mission at the heart of our lives. We've all got different skills, gifts and passions. We work in different domains. We live in different places, but the mission that unites us all is we are making disciples. Jesus said this is the command that's going to be at the center of the church. I'm convinced we have taken that command. We've farmed it out to para-church organizations; and, as a result, we've done all kinds of things in the local church, but we have left disciple-making out of the picture.

### **Our Goal**

So, how do we glorify Christ? By making disciples, and we're going to do that in all nations. Now, this is where I want to remind you, whether or not you're a member of Brook Hills or not, if you are a follower of Christ, if Christ is in your heart, I am convinced, based on the authority of Scripture, that your life was created to impact nations for the glory of Christ. You were created with a global purpose in mind. You were not just created with a global purpose in mind, but you were saved with a global purpose in mind.

Now, I know many would count that as idealistic. "Oh, okay, so I'm supposed to change the world? Sounds a little idealistic. Come back to earth." Well, it's not idealistic, because it's biblical. Psalm 67, "*May God be gracious to us, bless us, and make his face shine upon us...*" Why? Why would God bless us? "*...so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.*" (Psalm 67:1-2) From the very beginning of the picture of the Old Testament in Genesis 12, God blesses His people so that they would be a blessing to all nations. That's the whole purpose from cover to cover in Scripture. It's why Paul said in Galatians 1:15-16, when he described how he came to faith in Christ. He said, "*God was pleased to reveal Christ to me, so that I might preach him among the nations.*" Why did God reveal Christ to you, Paul? "So that I would preach Him to other people." That's the whole picture here. It's biblical, and we have said those who say it can't be done should get out of the way of those who are doing it. This is not idealistic. We believe what Scripture says here, and so, we're going to give ourselves to it.

Now, this is that point where some say, "Well, I think Brook Hills has just become a missions church; that's all they do is missions." This is the way, I'll be honest, I grew up

thinking of missions as this compartmentalized program in the church over here for a faithful few, who are really good at that or who really liked that, are really weird enough to go overseas. That's kind of the picture we have: This optional program over here. And so the thought is, "Well, obviously, we're just taking this one program over here, and we're just making it more dominant than all the other programs."

What happens, though, when we realize that this is not intended to be a program at all in Scripture? That every single thing we do is intended to be done in the context of mission? This whole book is written in the context of mission, that every facet of our lives is created for the context of mission? What if we realize we have breath right now, and we are not in heaven seeing His glory because He's left us here for a reason, and we have a purpose behind everything we talk about.

When we looked at things like sin in the camp, like we did earlier this year, and we talked about being honest about sin in our lives and being holy and pursuing Christ, why do we do that? Why do we fight the battle with sin and live pure and holy lives? Well, we do that, yes, so we can experience Christ and be conformed to the image of Christ and experience the satisfaction of Christ, but also, so that people in Birmingham, people that we work with and live with, people in all nations can see our lives and see a picture of Christ. It's why we're here.

We talked about this when we looked at our families. Why should husbands in this room love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her? Why? For their wives' good? Well, yeah, that's a good move. For your good? Yes, it makes things a lot better in the home when you love your wife like that. God's designed this, yes, for your good, but not just for your good. What does Ephesians 5 say? "Husbands, love your wives like that, because that's how Christ loves the church." And you're going to show the world who Christ is by the way you love your wife. So, husbands, be faithful to your wife, because you need to show the world that Christ is faithful to His people. Marriage is intended for mission. Every single facet of the Christian life intended to make the glory of Christ known in all nations.

### **Our Values**

Now, what we did a couple of Falls ago is we looked at Acts 2:42-47, and we looked at what was important in the early church, what made the early church different, so to speak. And if you were here during that time, just out of curiosity, how many of you were here two Falls ago at Brook Hills? Okay, all right. I appreciate you raising your hand. I'm going to give you a quiz now, because we memorized, at that time, Acts 2:42. And so, those of you who were not here, then, of course, you're excused from the quiz tonight. But those of you who were here, Acts 2:42, let's see if you remember it. No looking. Don't look and find it real quick. No, okay, here we go. Are you ready? "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...*" Okay, all right. That was close. Like, three people, okay. "*...to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*" We need to pray. Okay.

This is what was important in the early church. They devoted themselves to these four things: The apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and to prayer. What we did is we walked through those things, and we saw that they devoted themselves to biblical proclamation; this Word was the center of what they were doing. They were devoted to it. They devoted themselves to sacrificial care for one another. That picture of fellowship, the way they loved and served one another. To the breaking of bread, this picture of wholehearted worship as they celebrated communion together and identified with a crucified Christ, and then, they devoted themselves to prayer, desperate prayer. And then it says in Acts 2:47, that when they devoted themselves to those things, "*The Lord added to their*

*number daily those who were being saved.*" I love the picture there. It's God giving growth to the church. Man is not having to manufacture church growth. God gives it when we give ourselves to what God says is important.

### **Our Strategy**

Now, that leads to this picture of strategy, which we're going to look at on the back, practically. The six components are biblical, simple, intentional, reproducible and cross-cultural. We're going to add another one tonight, radical.

### **The Win: Impact the World**

But I want you to look at the win down there at the bottom. The win: Impact the world. What we're saying as elders, staff, deacons, leaders in the church all across this faith family, based on what we've seen in this Word, is a church with this vision, mission, and goal, values and strategy will produce world-impacting disciple-makers. That's what the whole picture is after.

What happens when every single person in this room, every single person in this faith family, no matter how old or young, no matter how gifted or not so gifted, no matter how blessed with financial resources or no matter how low on financial resources, actually believes that their lives are created to impact nations for the glory of Christ? They can do that by giving themselves to the plan of Christ and making disciples. What happens is you've got a faith family full of people who really believe their lives can count for the glory of Christ in the world, and you've got a group of people who really believe that this church can shape the nations for His glory. That's the win.

## **Strategic Non-Negotiables**

So, with that picture in our minds and our hearts, and that overview based on what we've seen in Scripture, I want to invite you turn over to the back there, and I want us to think, "Okay, I hear what we're saying there, but how does this look practically? How does this look in children's ministry? How does this look in small groups? And what do we do here or there? What does this look like for us as in the context of a church as a whole?" And that's what I want us to think about, these six words that really inform the way we move forward, practically, and the way we plan, practically. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to walk through each of these and, in bold, I've got the word and then kind of a definition for that word, and then, we're going to camp out on a couple of them and really think through some practical examples of how that has looked in the past, how that looks now, or maybe how that might look in the future.

### **Biblical ... We align all of our plans with the Word of God.**

So, we'll start with the first one: Biblical. When we say we want to be biblical, top of the list, why? Because we want to align all of our plans with the Word of God. We are not creating plans and asking God to bless them. We are aligning with the plans He has already promised to bless. Big difference between creating and aligning. If you have been around church for very long, you know there is a very strong temptation in the church for us to create plans, come up with the ingenious ideas that we have, and if we give ourselves to this idea that we come up with, we have good motives behind it. We think that if we come up with good plans, with good, God-glorifying motives, then maybe God will bless that. But the reality is nowhere in Scripture does God promise to bless us based solely on our motives.

Now, don't miss it. I'm not saying Scripture doesn't teach that motives are important. They are. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God, but God doesn't promise to bless us based solely on our motives. Just because we come up with a plan, and we've got good motives behind it doesn't mean we're guaranteed anything. But He has, all throughout Scripture, promised and guaranteed to bless one thing, and that's His plan. And so, what we're saying when we say we want to be biblical is this Word tells us a path to walk on that, when we walk on it, we are guaranteed the blessing of God. So, we're going to give ourselves to that.

Now, we might begin to think we've got some ingenious idea and, thankfully, we came along in the twenty-first century and helped out God by thinking something about something that He never planned. But I think we're foolish to think we can come up with something better when the God of the universe says, "Here's my plan. Give yourself to it. Obey it." This is huge all across the board. We've talked about this over and over again. Do we believe this book?

Even the last couple of months, when we have looked at this Radical series and looked at these tough truths from Jesus about selling everything you have and giving it to the poor, we need to ask ourselves, "Why are they tough truths?" They're tough truths because there's part of us that doesn't believe them. There's a pull in us that says, "No, I don't need to give away things to the poor. That's not what's best." And we have this pull in us toward trusting ourselves instead of trusting Christ, because the reality is, if it's in His Word and we give ourselves to it, we know we have a Father who's calling us to that which is best for us and best for His glory, and we can trust Him in that. So, as a church, how can we best trust His plan and give ourselves to His plan? We want to be biblical.

### **Intentional ... We purposefully equip people to make disciples of all nations.**

Second, intentional. We're going to camp out here a little bit. This sentence right there that defines intentional, what we mean by intentional is huge. We purposely equip people to make disciples of all nations; we purposely equip people to make disciples of all nations. Now, this is where we're going to begin to see that the plan that we see in Scripture actually may lead us away from the plans we see in church growth methodology today. I just want to warn you. We're going to veer off in just a minute from what a lot of people would say helps grow the church today, but let's see if maybe the Word has something to inform us with here. The success of the church is not dependent on creating the best programs; the success of the church is dependent on building the best people. Not creating the best programs, but building the best people.

You think about contemporary church growth kind of picture. "How do you grow the church today? Here's how you grow the church today." I see this every day on my desk in things I get in the mail. I hear it all the time. "Here's what you do. You get the best place with the best performance, and you draw the crowds to the place with performance. And then, once they're there, you give the best programs to keep them there. And this is how you grow the church: Best place, best performance, best programs, put it together." And I would even add one more "P" just for fun. You bring in the best professionals to make that happen. And so, in order to grow the church, you need big buildings, a big staff, a lot of programs. This is how it's going to happen.

What's missing there is the people of God. What we've done is we have made the growth of the church dependent on the performance most often with the charismatic communicator and good music and programs to keep people once they come, and along the way, we have taken the people of God out of the picture and made it dependent on a few people, a few professionals to do this. And I'm saying this is the way we, as church leaders, have done

this. I include myself in this. We've almost taken an attitude of ministry that says, "We're professionals at this. We know what we're doing. You don't need to try this at home. In fact, it'll probably be better if you don't try it at home. Just leave it to us. Bring your people to hear me. Bring your people to see what we produce, and this is going to be best. So, you don't try to like lead them to Christ. You don't try to do ministry. Let the paid professionals do this instead." We are creating the best programs instead of building the best people.

This is the whole point of Ephesians 4. What does Ephesians 4 say? "Christ has entrusted leaders to the church to build up the body of Christ, so that every part may do its work." So that every facet of the body of Christ is active in honoring Christ with their lives and the gifts and the skills that are passions that He has spread out across the church. They can't be limited to a certain place, because we are the place. We don't have to make a place to do ministry; your life is the place of ministry. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are the church. We gather together here. We scatter out, and we take the place of ministry all across the city.

Therefore, church leaders are equippers, not event planners. This is big; this is big. There's a big difference between church leaders being equippers and event planners, when church leaders give themselves to equipping people instead of planning events. Think about this with the way we looked, even in that "Gospel" series: "Attachment: The Gospel and Our Families". We talked about children's or student ministry and how we have created this picture where the church is responsible for creating programs to help disciple children, and along the way, parents, not all parents, but many parents have.

And it's a result of what we've done. We have abdicated their responsibility to make disciples in their home with their children and expected the youth minister or the children's minister or this person or that person to do that, instead of church leaders in the church equipping parents to do what, from the very beginning of the Old Testament, God has designed parents to do. To make disciples in their home and to be the primary spiritual influences in the life of their children, and to equip them to do that. This changes the table; it changes the picture. Instead of planning events, how do we build up great parents who know how to do disciple-making in their home? Now, that's a different way to think through things; different way to look at things.

Church leaders are equippers, not event planners, and church leaders do not exist to provide services. They exist to serve people. Think about pastoral care on this one. There's a couple of pastoral care staff people here at Brook Hills. Jim Houston does a lot of counseling, premarital counseling, marital counseling, grief counseling, those sorts of things. Don Stevens does a good bit of that as well, including a few other people.

Well, what if everybody on staff, fifty people, were doing counseling? Do you think that would be enough to do counseling for 4,000 people? Absolutely not, but what if the people you were sitting next to in a small group, when you walk through a struggle in your marriage, what if they were equipped to help you know how to walk through this struggle in your marriage? What if the people in your small group sitting next to you were equipped to be leaders in the church, to help you when you struggle through grief or you struggle through this temptation or this struggle? What if we were a body equipped to share life with each other and spur one another on toward Christ?

And, again, people, we start thinking, "Well, that's idealistic. I mean, really, can we really help each other out like that? Don't we need to go to professionals for that?" And I'm not discounting what a pastoral care staffer might do at Brook Hills. I'm not discounting what a professional counselor might do, even outside the local church, but the Spirit of God is in us.

The Word of God is in us, and we have the privilege, by the power of the Spirit of God, of spurring one another on toward Christ and helping each other, being involved in each others' lives as we share life together. This is the picture of people. Instead of thinking the best way is to bring all the people either to a certain place or to certain people, what if we were going out equipped to do ministry and to do this disciple-making thing?

Real quickly, we see that the success of our mission rises and falls on leadership development. And here's what I mean by that: We talk a lot about small groups here at Brook Hills. How many of you, just by chance, are small group leaders? Raise your hand if you're a small group leader. These folks that have just raised their hand, I'm convinced, are the front lines of what God is doing at Brook Hills. I'm convinced that the success of this mission rises and falls on those folks who raised their hands, and others who God will raise up all across this faith family, who will lead small groups, that are doing disciple-making. Because if it happens there, then it's going to multiply. If it's not happening there, then we'll continue to come to a performance and have programs that miss the point.

This rises and falls on leadership development. That's why we are talking about how can we develop a training center at Brook Hills where we are equipping this body of Christ biblically, theologically to minister each other and to serve each other, to care for each other, to counsel with each other. Those sorts of things, where it's not just reserved for a few over here, but a body of Christ equipped to do this together. Intentional: We purposefully equip people to make disciples of all nations. Now, obviously, that takes time and resources to equip people that is now pulled away from planning events. We want to be intentional about equipping people.

### **Reproducible ... We organize our ministries and maximize our resources for rapid multiplication of the Gospel.**

Third, reproducible: We organize our ministries and maximize our resources for rapid multiplication of the gospel. Here's the question I want to ask at this point: What if God chose to add 10,000 people to the kingdom this year in Birmingham? Not even just in this city, but even just this proximity, right here around Brook Hills. What would happen if God chose to add 10,000 people to the kingdom in a short amount of time? Would that be a good thing? Hello, like that was the moment where a hearty "Amen" just would've erupted out of your gut. "Yes, of course, we want 10,000 people to come to Christ."

So, I'm going to pretend like we are starting over. What would happen if 10,000 people would come to Christ in a short period of time? Would that be a good thing? Okay, all right, like we want people to come to Christ. We want the Spirit to do this. We want the Spirit to do that which is unexplainable in our culture today. Yes, but here's the question. What if He did? What would we do? We don't have enough buildings for them to be in; and we don't have enough classes to put them in. And how are we going to have programs for everybody? And how are going to get that many staff members to handle 10,000 more people?

So, at this point we realize that we're not looking for the Spirit of God to do that. We're not planning for the Spirit of God to do that. We are organized for routine addition. We're organized to take a few more and a few more and a few more, and I'm convinced, based on the New Testament picture of the church, that we must be organized for rapid multiplication.

The illustration I would point to are house churches in Asia. I had the opportunity to be there this week. I remember the first time I had the privilege of being a house church in Asia and spending time studying the Word with these believers, and there are two houses

churches that I was with there. I came back six months later, and they had quadrupled into eight house churches; they had quadrupled in six months' time. Can you imagine?

What if every small group at Brook Hills, over the next six months, quadrupled? What an incredible picture. How did that happen? They didn't have any buildings, no organized programs, no performances, have to meet in secret late at night at the risk of their lives. You know what it was? It was people. It was people actually believing that their lives were created to multiply the gospel, and they were doing it. I was with them that six months later and spent some time with them walking through how to begin to disciple people as they come to faith in Christ, and I got an email a month later from my contact over there, and he says, "They've led a hundred people to Christ since you left. They don't know what to do." What a great problem!

What do you do when a hundred people come to faith in Christ? You weren't ready for this. Yes, yes, yes, this is the picture. We have handicapped that kind of multiplication of the gospel with the stuff that we have surrounded ourselves with. We want to be reproducible, saying, "We want to organize our ministries and maximize our resources from rapid multiplication of the gospel."

This is where we need to begin to see that Brook Hills is not a place of ministry; Brook Hills is a base of ministry. This is big. If Brook Hills is a place of ministry, if this is where it all happens, then what we're saying is, "We're expecting all the people in Birmingham to come into this building." But the reality is, let's be honest, most people in Birmingham are not going to come into this building, and that's okay.

What if this is a base from which we take, as we were talking about earlier, the place of ministry, i.e., ourselves, out from this place into the world; and that becomes the place of ministry right around us, and this is a base for sending out. That's the picture when we gather together tonight. We scatter tonight and tomorrow morning to go to different workplaces and homes and neighborhoods, and different contexts around this city. This is why we need to eliminate all references to the church as a building from our vocabulary. This building is not the church. We are the people of God gathered together. We are the church, and we must become, then, decreasingly dependent on ministries that require large budgets and large buildings.

Now, we must become decreasingly dependent on ministries that require large budgets and large buildings. This is where the reality check comes in. We have a large budget and a large building. So what do you do? I praise God for the elders and those who are on the stewardship team in this faith family. Men and women who know a lot more about budgets and numbers and finances. The elders and the stewardship team have been working together constantly and have been working over the last couple of months and will present a budget in a couple of weeks. It's a process, because the reality is we've got a large budget that reflects a large building. So how can we begin to transform that one step at a time? And I praise God for how they've been working through how we transform that in light of this vision, mission, and goal.

But when we say this, what we're saying is we don't believe the best way to multiply the gospel we have around the world is to create buildings just like this and create budgets just like ours around the world. Because as long as that's the case, we will be severely inhibited in our ability to reproduce the gospel. Instead, we want to begin to learn some things from our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world and begin to think through how can we do multiplication of the gospel and reproduce the gospel in ways that are not dependent on a lot of money and a lot of nice places.

We talked about a year ago about Brook Hills developing bases for disciple-making, and that is still front and center. It's not moved along quite as quickly as I, or a variety of others, would like to, but at the same time, it's been good. It's been a refining process, a good refining process, and I trust God's timing. But the reality is I am convinced there is no reason, that in the years to come, this church should not be planting multiple churches every single year, here and around the world. It's the picture we see all over the New Testament. It's the picture we see in our brothers and sisters around the world, and we need to join in what God is doing. It means we need to look at how we can give ourselves to that which is most reproducible.

**Cross-Cultural ... Everything we do at Brook Hills, we do ultimately for the sake of God's glory in all nations.**

That leads to this next picture: Cross-cultural. Everything we do at Brook Hills we do, ultimately, for the sake of God's glory in all nations. We talk about this all the time. We live here for the sake of people over there. That means we are intentional about penetrating various cultures with the gospel through various means. We don't want to reach people that are just like us. We want to reach all kinds of people. This is what heaven the kingdom of God is about. We do this through various means, but in order to do that, in order to be effective and equipped for cross-cultural ministry, we focus our energy here on gospel ministry that transcends culture.

Here's what I mean by that. That's kind of a loaded sentence. Think about it with me. Small groups doing disciple-making are an example. We've put that really at the center of this whole picture. We see it in the life of Christ. We see it in the precedent the early church was setting, but think about small groups doing disciple-making with me. We can do that in Greystone. That'll work in Greystone, and it will also work in third-world, impoverished countries where it's illegal to even be a follower of Christ. It would work in both places. If you've got something, a plan that will work in Greystone and in impoverished countries where it's illegal to be a follower of Christ, you're onto something.

And so, when we begin to give ourselves to doing disciple-making in small groups here, we're multiplying the gospel here. And then, when we have the opportunity to go to another culture over here, then we've got an opportunity to encourage them in what they're doing and for them to encourage us. We have to learn from each other and partner together and learn together how to give ourselves to this mission.

But don't miss it. If our picture over here is not cross-cultural, if it is about, say, building large buildings and having big budgets and mega-programs, then when we go over to this country over here, what do we have to say? Nothing. They can't do that, nor do they want to do that. So, either we have nothing to say when we're there, or we begin exporting the unbiblical model of ministry over here that we've adopted into other places in the world, and we are helping people learn how to build buildings when they need water next door. This is the picture. What happens when we begin to live here in Birmingham for the sake of people around the world, and we begin to see the people around the world are living also for our sake here? We're a part of a global family, and this whole picture is cross-cultural.

Now, I want to be careful here. At the same time, we wisely and responsibly contextualize ministry methods in view of the culture around us. What I simply mean by that is I realize we're not in Sudan right now, or we're not in India, or we're not in China. And so, things look a little different than they do in Sudan or India or China and here in Birmingham. But the challenge is to wisely contextualize ministry in those different places. Sure, it's not the exact same everywhere, but there are truths and principles and plans here that are cross-cultural. So, let's make sure we're giving ourselves to that.

Now, I want to pause here for a second. I want us to think practically. Okay, biblical, intentional, reproducible, and cross-cultural, just these four right here: How does that look practically? And I want to use an example. I want to use children's ministry as an example. It's a good example, because there have been a variety of different changes over the last year when it comes to children's ministry in the context of this faith family. I want us to think about how Kymberly Bankston, who leads children's ministry, and the team that she works with, serves with and how they have implemented these changes in light of some of these thoughts.

We'll start with first big change, which was eliminating VBS, Vacation Bible School. Now, what we did was we looked at the reproducibility of VBS. We thought, "Okay, we are inviting a bunch of children from all over this community to come to this one place to learn about Jesus. Can we make this more reproducible?" The answer is absolutely yes, we can. So, they began to dream about doing backyard Bible clubs, and that's exactly what happened. Fifty-plus backyard Bible clubs are going on around this community, all the way from inner-city housing projects to Greystone and everywhere in between. This was reproducible in each one of these different contexts. It was not people coming and dropping their kids off at the building. Instead, they were taking their kids down the street to their neighbor's home, where they would learn about Jesus in the context of that home, and where they would have the opportunity to hear about Christ. And children were coming to faith in Christ in those homes while their parents are talking with each other about Christ in the living room. And what you had was relationships beginning to be formed and multiplication of the gospel. The reality was there was a limitless number of people that could have been involved in backyard Bible clubs.

Now, it's this point, where some say, "Well, I wasn't able to do it that way; so I missed out on that." And that's the beauty of it. What if it doesn't have to happen that week? What if you can do that whenever best fits your schedule during the summer, and you can take time to invite people into your home to learn about Christ and provide a way, an avenue, for children to engage the gospel and to minister to parents along the way? That's the picture, and God blessed that picture. So, we began to see the multiplication of the gospel.

Well, what about reproducible? Another change in children's ministry involved Sunday night, Sunday morning and Wednesday night. Those who were leading in these two areas got their heads together and said, "You know, we're actually overlapping. A lot of things we're doing on Wednesday night, we do on Sunday morning and vice versa. So how can we better maximize the children's time when they're here and how that helps fuel what parents are doing when it comes to disciple-making?" So what we did was we took the good things that were going on there, made sure we kept those, and took Wednesday night and made sure those things were solid on Sunday morning. But then, we took Wednesday night and began to transform this picture into a picture where parents have come together and are working on a curriculum, teaching the kids about a God-sized view of the world and a God-inspired love for the world.

There are children all across this faith family this fall that are learning basic Spanish. They're learning about how the gospel is shared in Hispanic cultures, not just overseas, but right here in Birmingham. They're involved in projects in Hispanic communities here and around the world, and along the way, they're beginning to see that the world is bigger than our zip code, and that everything in Christianity doesn't revolve around this picture. It doesn't look like this picture. There's a whole other horizon out there. Is that a good thing? Yes, that's a great thing.

So, that was reproducible, but what about cross-cultural? Let me give you another example from our children's ministry. This change dealt with Upward Basketball. Upward Basketball is a basketball league, or a program, that was designed to engage people that would not normally come in the doors of a church building, engage people who are unchurched with the gospel. That's the way it was designed, and I would say, from the very beginning, I am a huge proponent of sports evangelism. I think sports are an incredible platform for proclaiming the gospel. This is part of how I even got started doing ministry was through sports evangelism. And then, I had the opportunity to go overseas on some different sports trips. Sports are a great avenue for proclamation of the gospel.

One of my heroes in ministry, one of the guys who's had the most influence in my life, is the master of sports evangelism and taught me how to do that well so that I'd see that picture. What we did was we looked at the Upward Basketball program in the context of Brook Hills, and basically, we had a limited number of people that could be involved. What we saw was the majority of the people in that program were Christians from The Church at Brook Hills. There was a small percentage of people that were non-Brook Hills. Out of that small percentage, there were some of them who were just in other churches besides Brook Hills. There was a very, very small percentage of people that were actually unchurched.

And so, we began to think, "Okay, how can we best engage children and families who are unchurched in this community with the gospel? By inviting a few of them to join our league over here, or by raising up and equipping all of these children and all of these families to go into leagues across the city empowered to live out the gospel and to share the gospel as they coach and they play with people who would never be part of a church league? Which is better? To isolate the Christians in a league over here, or to send Christians out to make the gospel known in leagues all over the place over there?"

Now, it's at that point, we think, "Well, yeah, but isn't this a good thing for our kids? Even the church children, is this a good thing?" Well, sure it's a good thing, but what we're seeing in the Word is the best thing for us, when we experience the most satisfaction, is when we are giving ourselves to the mission of Christ. The best thing for our children is to see us sharing the gospel alongside men and women in the context of the places we live, and we work, and them learning to do that alongside us with their friends. So, we said, "We need to take the gospel to as many people as possible."

And it brings around to, really, that first picture: Biblical. And I think this is really the crux of it. Where in Scripture do we see that it's the church's responsibility to provide basketball leagues for children? Now, I want to be careful here, because I'm not saying just because it's not in the Bible doesn't mean we can't do it. There are a lot of things practical that don't always come out in the Bible, but is there stuff in the Bible that we are told to do, like feed the hungry and clothe the poor and go to the needy? Absolutely. So, let's be a people who prioritize. Instead of creating basketball programs for our kids, let's prioritize creating avenues for our kids to feed the hungry and clothe the poor and serve the needy.

Put this together, and this next summer, there are small groups from this faith family who will be initiating and starting Upward Basketball in the inner-city of Birmingham, where their children will be playing alongside children who most likely have no mom or dad. In most cases, they have no dad. These are needy children, and we'll have the opportunity to serve alongside them. Now, here's the picture of intentional. The people of God doing the ministry, reproducing the gospel in a way that can be done in all kinds of different contexts.

**Simple ... We focus all our resources on a straightforward process aimed at producing world-impacting disciple-makers.**

Okay, how does that begin to play out? And that whole picture of that small groups leads to this next one, and I want to camp out here. Then, we're going to fly through the last one. Simple: We focus all our resources on a straightforward process aimed at producing world-impacting disciple-makers. Keywords there are "focusing resources on a process." Now, I'm going to fly through this right here. Then, I want us to think about three primary activities. What we've said as leaders in the context of this church is, if we're going to do anything well, we're going to do these three things well. Instead of trying to scatter, trying to do a bunch of stuff and not do any of it well, we're going to do these three things well.

Number one: Worship gatherings that glorify Christ. We're going to worship in a way that brings glory to Christ. Number two: Small groups that are making disciples; small groups that are making disciples. Worship gatherings that glorify Christ, small groups that are making disciples, and number three: Short-term missions that impact the world. I know I'm flying through those, but you see vision, mission, and goal all represented there, right? We glorify Christ: Worship gatherings that glorify Christ. We make disciples: Small groups that are making disciples of all nations through short-term missions that impact the world.

And three primary levels of support to help make that happen. Number one: Assimilation. And that will come up on the screen for spelling's sake. There we go. Assimilation. Basically, what we mean by assimilation is we want to be intentional about helping people get into that process, helping people get plugged into small groups. You see in the Worship Guide you received tonight, there's an insert in there about "Singles' Group Link". How can we help singles get connected in small groups? It's why we talk all the time at Brook Hills about getting involved in a small group, because we want it to be more than a performance. We want to experience and share life with each other.

So, assimilation, then administration that undergirds this whole picture. And then, third, communication. And I'll be honest. On that last one, as you're writing those out...assimilation, administration, communication...I don't believe we've done a good job, and I'll put myself at the top of this list, of communicating. Some of these things, even about changes in children's ministry, Kimberly and her team do an incredible job of communicating that to the folks that they are serving alongside. But then, on a whole, I think we need to do a better job of communicating these things. And so, I certainly would take responsibility for that. We are redesigning our website, which, hopefully, will be helpful in some of that. But then also in more personal ways. But communication is very important.

Now, here's what I want to do. I want to show you up on the screen a picture of these three primary activities: Worship gatherings to glorify Christ, small groups that are making disciples, and short-term missions that impact the world. Look at this up on here on the screen with me, and I want you to picture this process. What we're saying is if any person in this room is in a worship gathering that's glorifying Christ, then that's fueling them being in a small group where they are doing the disciple-making, and they have the opportunity to do what we talked about last week, through short-term missions involved in the world. That if somebody is involved in that process, then that process will yield men and women who are passionate about making disciples, passionate about glorifying Christ by making disciples of all nations, by being involved in those three facets, in some way, shape, or form. So, what we've said is we're going to prioritize those things, and what doesn't fall into that picture, we're going to put to the side.

Now, it's at that point that there's kind of a rub. There's a tension, because we think, "What you're saying is you're going to focus on these three things. You're not going to focus on all

the other things that we could focus on.” And we start to think, “Well, doesn’t that seem kind of narrow? I mean worship gatherings, small groups, short-term missions, okay, I like that, but what about this program over here? What about this activity or this event or this or that?” And so, at that point, I want you to be in the dream. What happens when a small group of people with a variety of different gifts and skills and passions comes together, not just for a Bible study in a room once a week, but comes together to share life and to join hands in impacting this community and all nations for the glory of Christ with the gifts and skills and passions and domains that are represented in that circle? What happens is that circle in the middle begins to explode, and people begin to dream about how the Spirit of God has equipped each of us to do ministry, and we begin to give ourselves, take the initiative in doing all kinds of different ministry. And it doesn’t have to be channeled through the professionals, because it will just get bottle-necked there.

What happens when that circle in the middle is empowered and equipped to take on the world with the gospel? What happens is, in this process, we set free the people of God in the power of the Spirit of God to accomplish the mission of God for the glory of God. That is a loaded sentence, I know, but we set free the people of God in the power of the Spirit of God to accomplish the mission of God for the glory of God. That middle circle begins to explode.

Now, let me give you just a few examples. I started collecting stories just a few weeks ago from people who were emailing me or letting me know what was going on. I was not even soliciting these things. People coming up and sharing these things with me. I just want you to hear what’s going on in that circle in the middle in these instances.

I had lunch with one small group leader and his wife a couple weeks ago, and this small group leader and his wife started a small group with young couples in their home. That group began to multiply, began to grow, began to get way too big for their home, to where there was just not enough room, and it wasn’t healthy for sharing life with each other. So, what they did is they began to multiply, and right now, there are small groups of young couples meeting all across this city that came from that one small group.

Then, they got together, and they went to Peru. This morning, Alejandro from Peru was here, and he was telling me about how this group, the young couples, took what we studied on the gospel and our families in that “Attachment” series, and they went down to Peru, and they taught churches all over Peru how the gospel affects marriage, and how the gospel affects all different facets of our family relationships: Singleness, parenting, that whole picture that we’d seen in the Word. They went down there teaching it, and they came back, and they’re serving in the context here. This member of our faith family looks at me a couple of weeks ago, and he says, “David, my wife and I have done a lot of things. We’ve been in the church a long time, and there is nothing in life that is more exciting than what we’re seeing right now.” Their lives are being multiplied with the gospel.

Another single adult in this faith family, a woman who was in an inductive Bible study, has been involved in inductive Bible studies for a long time, studying the Word. And she’s sitting in the Bible study, and she realizes, “You know, there are a lot of people in Birmingham who don’t have access to Bible study. I need to go study the Bible with them and teach them how to study the Bible.” And so, she finds a rehabilitation center filled with women who have been addicted to drugs, imprisoned, abandoned, and abused and are now living in an undesirable area of Birmingham. She goes to them, and she says, “Can I start studying the Bible with you?” They said, “Sure.”

So, she starts a Bible study with them. She emails me a couple of weeks ago, and she tells me about how it ended that week. It ended with those ladies with their Bibles open, holding hands, with tears pouring down their faces as they prayed after reading Revelation 21, when it says that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. These are ladies who are hurting. Nobody programmed this; nobody planned this. This was the Spirit of God in this woman going into this area of the city and infiltrating it with the gospel.

In another small group, I get this email from a pastor in a small community around here, and he writes, "To my brother in Christ, David Platt," a pastor. He says, "Like you, I'm a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, serving God in a small community." He mentions what it is. He says, "I'm a full-time pastor of a church." He is a full-time pastor of a struggling church. He begins to talk about that. He says, "We're in the fifth month of our second year. My wife and I have six children, three boys and three girls."

He says, "I recently met two members of your church." He mentions their names. He said,

They asked the members of their small group to join them in praying for our family and for our church. This group is not only praying, but in the spirit of James 2, they have ministered to us in a very tangible way by providing the money needed for repairs to our family's car. Being a pastor, I know how God often lifts your spirit through seeing those you shepherd working for His kingdom. This small group may never know the impact they have already had in our lives. Their prayers and assistance have come at a critical time in our family and in our ministry. May God bless The Church at Brook Hills for encouraging them to do this.

Nobody connected that; nobody planned out a program. That was the Spirit of God in a small group coming alive.

Another example is I get an email from a dad of a college student who is down at Auburn. He begins telling me about his son who goes to Brook Hills. He is graduating with his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, and he's been offered two opportunities. One is a high-paying nuclear engineering position, and the other is one he's been offered by Auburn to stay around and do his Master's and his Doctorate at Auburn's expense. And so, he starts saying in the email, "My son has been listening to your Radical series." I'm like, "Oh, no." So, I'm starting to get a little worried about what the rest of the email's going to say, and he begins to talk about how proud he is. He says he raised his son, and he always thought he would jump at the first ring and grab the brass ring of opportunity and settle into a productive family life as soon as possible. Instead, he's turned both of those offers down, and he's going to either Afghanistan, Ethiopia, or New Guinea to help supply basic water, power, and HVAC capabilities through construction projects in one of those countries. Isn't that a great picture?

I got another email from a college student who just got back from Uganda. He was teaching "Secret Church: Doctrine of God" to pastors in Uganda. He writes, and this is an exact quote. He says, "Brook Hills has impacted, like, half of Uganda with solid, God-honoring theology." Isn't that great? So half of Uganda we got. If somebody else could go and get the other half, we'll be set.

Another family who I met with a couple weeks ago, their son has been in the hospital here in Birmingham. They're from North Carolina. Their son has cystic fibrosis and has been down here in the hospital in Birmingham. They met a member of this faith family who began to care for them, who began to do pastoral care in their life. He doesn't call, "Hey, Jim

Houston, come help out in this." Instead, he says, "I'm the church. I can do this." And so, he starts ministering to this family and has walked with this family through months and months and months of caring for them, and I'm meeting with this member of our faith family and this brother in Christ with cystic fibrosis, and they're telling me about what God has done in the middle of all this. You don't plan that; you don't program that. The Spirit of God ordains that.

I love this next one. I get this email from a senior adult couple in our faith family. "For the past two weeks, we have been working." This is what they write. "We have been working in Louisiana and Texas doing disaster relief work. We apologize that we have been unable to go on a Brook Hills mission trip as of yet. We have both had serious health problems the last several years, and when our health allows, we're kept busy doing disaster relief ministry, going all over the country assisting hurricane, tornado, and flood victims." Like, let me tell you what you don't need to apologize to the pastor for doing. "Stop helping those people. Go through our professional ministry." No, absolutely not. Let the Spirit of God lead and guide you to do all kinds of different things. It's happening.

To senior adults across this faith family, I've got to tell you this story. It's outside of our faith family, but it will help us understand one small group in this faith family. I was preaching at a conference not long ago. I met a senior adult there. His name is Ed Walship. He's been retired for the last seven years. He's in his early 70s. He said it's been a down year for him. He says he's only had about eleven trips over this past year. He starts talking to me about going to disaster relief areas in the United States. I mean, people call up Ed when there's a disaster, and he comes. And he goes, not just to the United States. He's been in multiple countries. He was talking about Nigeria. He was talking about Sri Lanka. He was talking about feeding ministry amidst war with rebels in Sri Lanka, and he says, "I usually take my wife with me. She didn't go with me to Sri Lanka, because she doesn't like feeding people in the middle of rebels and sleeping under a bus." That's the only reason she didn't go, because she doesn't like sleeping under the bus, which is where Ed was sleeping. What a great picture!

I want you to hear what's represented in just one small group of senior adults in this faith family. They've been involved in ministry in Romania, South Africa and Central America. One of their couples, a little while ago, moved to Namibia and is now living there. One couple operates a disaster relief food trailer. Another is involved in leading prison ministry. Others are involved in ministering to shut-ins in their neighborhoods, and some of them are starting new small groups. This is using retirement for the glory of Christ.

And it goes on and on. I met two men this last week in this faith family, who both have jobs where they have started Bible studies in their jobs. This man saw one co-worker come to faith in Christ. This man saw two co-workers come to faith in Christ this last week. I met with some businessmen who were dreaming about how they can use the resources they have to begin to mentor underprivileged, inner-city kids and help them find jobs and become contributors to the kingdom of Christ.

And then, not just adults, not just businessmen or successful people with all the initiative in the world, but I got an email from a family with a picture of two little girls in this faith family, who would set up a prayer stand in their driveway. Not a lemonade stand, a prayer stand. "Want to be prayed for?" was the sign. "Prayer requests here." People drive by, and they would say, "Pray for this." Okay, these girls are praying. Praise God for girls who are being raised in this faith family to do prayer stands.

And I got another one. I know we've got to move on, but there's just so much here. This email that came to some leaders including myself. Listen to this. This is from a mom in this faith family. She said,

I wanted to share with all of you what my daughter did yesterday. She came home from the bus, and she was excited, because a Japanese girl who sits with her on the bus became a Christian. My daughter said that she had told her about God and Jesus dying for her sins. She said that she offered the little girl her old Bible because she didn't have one, and the little girl prayed to trust in Christ. My daughter told her when she gave her the Bible, she was sorry it had her name on it instead of the little girl's name on it. The little girl said that was okay, because, that way, she would always remember who told her about God.

Praise God for children in this faith family who are equipped to turn to their friends on the bus and introduce them to a relationship with Christ. We don't want to rob each other of this joy and this privilege. This is not, "You need to come and listen to that pastor. He preaches a long time." No, it's, "Let me just share with you the gospel right here." This is the beauty of it. It's the beauty, isn't it? This is the picture. You don't have to bring them to hear me. You have the gospel, and the Spirit of God in each of us.

One last one. I'll finish with this one. I wish I could describe all the details here. It's a long email, but it's from a small group made up of four couples and ten kids. They were thinking, "Okay, how can we be involved?" It's not easy to take four couples and ten kids overseas. So, they begin to think, "How can we be involved in short-term missions?" And they organized a trip to go down to New Orleans. They take some senior adults with them to work in some disaster areas down there. I love this picture. This is the church. He said, "We had men, women, and children ranging from 72-year-old men to nine-year-old girls all serving alongside of one another. We had a 72-year-old man and a nine-year-old boy installing a toilet." Isn't that a great picture? A 41-year-old man and a 15-year-old girl hanging doors, a 40-year-old woman leading a team of women and kids in sheetrocking and laying flooring. It doesn't get much more entertaining than that.

And so, there they are serving down there. Then, they come back here. They are not just doing short-term missions. They're sharing life with each other. One of the couples in this small group is about to get married, and they want to do premarital counseling. They start thinking, "Well, who do we call to do premarital counseling?" They look around their small group, and they're like, "Well, you guys are married. Can you help us?" And so, the whole small group is doing premarital counseling for this couple that's engaged and about to get married. What a great idea! "We're going to help each other. We're going to tell each other, like, the truths about marriage, and we're going to help each really think through the struggles that are there, and, along the way, we're going to grow in our marriages." This is a great picture.

He wrote me. He said,

David, the whole purpose of our small group has come full circle for me. I was so moved by this picture of the church that, when we went to New Orleans, I emphasized the fact that we are the demonstration of the glory of God. We are the church, and evangelism and discipleship are not formal processes that have logical steps to follow in a prescribed course. Rather, it's how we live every day. I think we fail to fully understand how simple it is to spread the gospel, to disciple and be discipled. [I couldn't preach this good.] I think it's

common for us to become overwhelmed with the process or the steps. The only step that matters in my opinion is the first one: To start. If we let God have it from there, it's all good. It's all about one. We should remember that and reject the tendency of this world to make us believe it's all about numbers. Over the course of the last few months, our small group has had the opportunity to model the love that Jesus called us to model. I am so blessed we've been a part of that, and I'm excited to see what He will do with us next.

Yes, what happens when that is multiplied across 100, 150 small groups in this faith family? You cannot plan or program what the Spirit of God will do in that context of people equipped and empowered. So, please, don't see those three primary activities as limiting. See this picture exploding in the world.

**Radical ... We are willing to risk everything to accomplish our mission.**

Leave that last picture of radical: We are willing to risk everything to accomplish this mission. Obviously, this is where we've been the last couple of months.

I want to urge you to continue doing what you're doing in these kind of stories all across this faith family, and there are so many more. I pray that you keep doing those things and for us to press in more and more and more together into these things for the sake of the lost, for the sake of billions of people who do not know the gospel, for the sake of the poor, our obedience to Christ, His commands in regard to the poor, for the sake of the church. Because what we'll find is life when we share life. What we'll find is the power of the gospel in our lives when we share the gospel with others' lives, and, ultimately, for the sake of the glory of Christ. It's worth it. It's worth it to risk our lives for the sake of His glory, to risk our comfort and to risk our security.

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