

For the Love of God

The Blank Check

Dr. David Platt

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THE BLANK CHECK Acts 13

If you have Bible, please turn to Acts 13. There is so much in my mind and heart that I want to share with you this morning, but let me get just a few logistical details out of the way first. As Pastor Jim mentioned, and we just prayed, this last week, I became the president of the International Mission Board (the IMB), and that is effective immediately.

At the same time, for the next couple of weeks, I'll still serve as Senior Pastor of the Church at Brook Hills. I will preach obviously today and the next two Sundays, and during these couple of weeks, I am going to be working with our elders and staff on transition for the days to come. In the sovereign timing of God, we had scheduled an elder retreat for this time of year, as well as a staff retreat, so I'll be working with elders and staff on a plan for short-term leadership in the coming months. We obviously have great pastors who are more than equipped to preach in the months ahead, and then a search process for long-term leadership in the coming years. So that's what the next couple of weeks will look like, and then Sunday, September 14, will be my last Sunday preaching as Senior Pastor here, and then that next week, I'll actually head overseas to a meeting of missionaries on the field with the IMB.

Now, on a personal level, as a family, we've not gotten too much farther than that. This has been a bit of a whirlwind, and this is one of the things we're starting to work through. With my travel schedule and adding things to that schedule over the next few months, it doesn't look like we're going to be moving anywhere right away. So Heather and I and our kids will likely be around Birmingham, and Brook Hills, a good bit this fall -- Heather and the kids probably more than me -- as I'll be traveling some. So, it's not that after September 14, Heather and I and the kids are gone, never to be seen again. They'll be here, Lord willing, the next Sunday, September 21, and likely some subsequent Sundays, and I'll be here some, as well, just obviously not in the capacity of leading Brook Hills at that point. So if you see us around, don't think, "Uhhh...I thought we got rid of you."

You know, one of the lines of our church covenant says, "If we move from this local body, we will as soon as possible unite with another local church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word." And the reality is, we're not moving from this local body immediately. So we'll still be a part of this faith family for a little while longer, until we make a transition at some point away from Birmingham. And we'll keep people updated on what that looks like as we figure out what that looks like.

So, how in the world did we get here? How in the world did I get here? And in order to answer that question today, I want to take us back to what we've read in God's Word over the past few months, which is why I have you in Acts 13. I feel like I've said this over and over again during our Bible reading this year, but it's just not an accident that we've read what we've read when we've read it. God, by His grace, has prepared us through His Word by His Spirit for this point.

Just think about the last couple of weeks in Romans, even. For God to have brought us to this book that shows us our obligation to the unreached. We're reading this book that was written to arouse in the church a willingness to do whatever it takes to get the gospel to people who have never heard it. And we saw last week how that warrants, from all of us, a blank check before God with our lives and our families and our church, and being willing to do whatever He says to make His glory known in all nations, particularly among those who have never heard the gospel.

And I was preaching that sermon knowing that the check was out there in my life in a whole new way, with no strings attached. I was asking myself, "Lord, are you calling me away from the Church at Brook Hills? Blank check -- I'll do whatever you want me to do."

But that's just it, and that's the question I want us to think about today: How do you know what God wants you to do? You put the check out there, right, but then how do you discern what God is writing into that blank? That's an important question. The last thing I want to do (the last thing I want to do) is leave Brook Hills if God is not calling me to leave Brook Hills. So how do I know – and not just me, but how do you know when God is calling you to do something specific with your blank check?

And that's where I want you to look with me at Acts 13, because there's a mystery to how this works in the New Testament. Look at Acts 13, we will read verses 1-2. *"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"*

So I read that, and I'm wondering, "How did that happen?" How? How did the Holy Spirit say that? Did He say it just to Paul and Barnabas during a prayer meeting? Did He say it to others? And how did the Holy Spirit say it? In such a way that, verse 3, *"after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off"* – verse 4 – *"sent out by the Holy Spirit."* How did that happen in Acts 13? This is one of those places in Scripture where I want to be a fly on the wall in Antioch to see how this happened!

And then, turn over to Acts 16. Do you remember reading this? This is Paul, now having been sent out a second time on his second missionary journey from Antioch, and the Bible says he and Timothy and Silas *"went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."* Did you hear that? How did that happen? How were they *"forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia"*? We know it wasn't just because they may have faced resistance in Asia, because they were facing resistance in tons of places. So how did the Holy Spirit say, "No, not to Asia right now."

And then, verse 7, *"And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."* How did that happen? How did the Spirit of Jesus not allow them to go into Bithynia? Was it during one of their quiet times, all of their quiet times, and what happened during those quiet times?

And then, listen to what we read next in verse 8:

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

There you go, a vision in the night, but even that, how do you know if you're having a vision from God, or if you just ate something heavy the night before and you're having weird dreams?

And then, turn over to Acts 20. Remember when Paul is spending time with the leaders at Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, he says to them, "*And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit...*" Constrained by the Spirit, how does the Holy Spirit *constrain* you to go to a certain place?

He continues, "*not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.*" Which, again, means that just because something is going to be hard or involve resistance, that doesn't mean the Lord is not leading you to it.

Paul goes on to say, "*But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*" So he's going to Jerusalem, but here's what's interesting: Look at the next chapter – Acts 21 – pick up at verse 3 and see what happens there: "*When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*" Ok...now I'm really confused. Paul, constrained by the Spirit, is going to Jerusalem, because the Lord has called him there, but then these disciples at Tyre, "*through the Spirit*" are telling him not to go!

You get farther down to verse 10, and listen to what happens:

While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

So you've got this back and forth between Spirit-led Paul and Spirit-led disciples and prophets, and in the end, they conclude, seemingly against what some of these disciples would have said was the best way to move forward, "The Lord's will be done." So Paul does go to Jerusalem, and he's arrested there.

Now, the next book in the Bible (which we've read the last couple of weeks) is Romans, where Paul, on this journey to Jerusalem, makes a case for why the church at Rome needs to help him get the gospel to Spain. So fast forward with me to the end of Romans 15, where we left off last week, and remember what he said there?

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...

In other words, "I've done what the Spirit of Christ led me to do in this region, but", verse 20 says:

And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see and those who have never heard will understand." This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

So get the picture, to sum it all up: Paul, led by the Spirit, constrained by the Spirit in all he had done, came to the conclusion that the Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem, and from there to Rome, in order to eventually get the gospel to Spain. And the question is, "How did all of that happen?" How did Paul come to the conclusions He came to about where he would spend his life for the spread of the gospel?

And the reason I'm asking is because that's the question I'm always asking (and have been asking these last couple of months): "Spirit of God, where is the best use of my life (of David Platt's life) for the spread of the gospel?" And the reason I'm asking this question out loud, in front of you, is because I hope it's the question you're asking in your life: "Spirit of God, where is/what is the best use of each of our lives for the spread of the gospel?" That's what we said last week: We've got to ask that question, and we've got to be open to the Spirit's answer. We've been saved by the gospel, we've been sent by God, we're slaves of Christ, servants in the church, and sure that this Great Commission is worth giving all of our lives to.

So here's what I want to do: I want to give you a glimpse into why I am constrained by the Spirit to go to the IMB. I know that's bold language, but I want to express to you just a glimpse of the ways God has used His Word, His church, and various circumstances to write this assignment into the blank check I have given Him, and I want to share that with you for two reasons: One, I want you to know, I want you to have confidence, in an Acts 13 kind of way, in the context of worshiping and praying with this faith family, that the Spirit indeed has said, "Set apart for me David and Heather for this work to which I have called them." I want you to see and hear what I've seen and heard in this process in such a way that, a couple of weeks from now, you might as a church be able to surround me and Heather and our kids and say, "Yes. Together, we believe that the Spirit has sent you out, and we are sending you out with confidence that His Spirit has done this."

And then, the second reason I want to share the journey I have been on with you is because I want to encourage and even challenge you in the journey you are on. So this Sunday is not just about me and my family and what we believe God is doing with our blank check; this Sunday is about you and your family and what He might do and how He might lead in the days to come with your blank check. That's why I wanted you to have a completely blank notes page today. You feel free to write down whatever along the way, but there's two words I want to encourage and challenge you with after I've shared my journey that I hope will lodge themselves deeply in your heart and your life and your family and ultimately, in this church.

So let me share with you why, constrained by the Spirit, I am going to the IMB. Four years ago, the IMB came to me, and they were looking for a new president. It was clear to me that Heather and I should not be walking through this process alone, so I wanted to share

with our pastors if they would pray with me through this. So, we spent months praying together about this possibility. I had different meetings with this search team and came to a clear conclusion that the Lord was not leading me to do that. The church, the pastors around me, myself, Heather, eventually this team -- it was just clear that the Lord was saying, "No."

This was so clear in such a way that, a couple of years ago, when Dennis Blythe, our Executive Pastor was coming here, and he said, "Hey David, do you see yourself at Brook Hills long-term?" And I said, "The Lord could lead me overseas at any point, but outside of that, the only other thing I can imagine doing may be the president of the IMB. But it was such a clear "No" before. So, I have to apologize to Dennis numerous times over the last couple of months for that. But it was true. It was such a clear "No".

Fast forward to last year about 15/18 months ago. A couple of pastors and I were invited to go up and spend some time with the trustees of the IMB. Now, let me pause for a second. Some of you may be wondering, "What is the IMB?" It is the International Mission Board, and it is the mission-sending agency that is attached to Southern Baptist Churches, of which Brook Hills is one. 40,000-plus churches in North America working together to send brothers and sisters around the world specifically to engage unreached peoples. So you have 40,000-plus churches, about 300 million dollars a year, about 5,000 missionaries right now on the field. So that is the picture you have right now. This is our primary partner as a local church in sending brothers and sisters to unreached peoples. So our church planting teams in Central Asia and North Africa, and the Arundo and the Baloche, and the Middle Eastern peoples, and the Wey are all through the IMB. So our church planting teams as well as a variety of other things that we are doing around the world all go through the IMB in cooperation with all these other churches.

So I spent some time with the trustees, and in the process, we were kind of challenging them to explore new paradigms for missions. I was freshly reminded of the potential that's there. When it comes to engaging unreached peoples, you think about 40,000 churches representing 15 to 16 million church members, and you look in mission history, you see the Moravians at one point. Of the Moravians, it was said that 1 out of 92 of them were crossing cultures for the spread of the gospel. One out of every 92. You take these 16 million members -- let's just take 10 million of these 16 million church members. If we had 1 out of 92 of them going, that is 100,000 brothers and sisters crossing cultures for the spread of the gospel. We have 5,000 right now. And that's just among Southern Baptists. There is obviously a broader kingdom picture. But there is so much opportunity.

I read at one point that there has been in the IMB's history, there have been 20,000 missionaries, which is glorious. But the reality is, we need 20,000 now. We need tens of thousands more. So, we began to see in a fresh way the potential that's there.

Now, fast forward a couple more months, and I was with a group from Brook Hills, and we were hosting a retreat in Dubai for missionaries from the IMB from Central Asia. And there are some brothers and sisters living in some really hard places. So we are serving them, and during that time, in different conversations, I walked away with, not just a picture of the potential, but even vision for some ways that I think could open up doors for tens of thousands more to go. And I came back from that time in Dubai, and I told a couple of our pastors that I meet with on a weekly basis, "I don't know what to do with this, but there is just a desire in me to see this happen, and even vision in me for what this could look like. And I don't know what to do with that." The president that was serving before me, Tom Eliff, is a great brother, was still in that role. So I just shared that with these guys, and we kind of left it.

Well, fast forward a couple more months, and I was overseas in China and Korea and Japan. And the Lord, during my time there, just began to renew some convictions in my heart, wrestling in my heart, about how the gifts he has given me can best be used to mobilize the church for the spread of the gospel. This happened in such a way that I came back, and I preached from 1 Corinthians 15 and just said at the beginning, "There are some convictions in my heart that God has brought back to the table, and I don't know what to do with them, but I think there are some major things to change in my life." Then I just kind of left it and went on, and some of our pastors, when we did sermon evaluations, came to me and said, "Well, it was like you took a grenade and brought it into the room and pulled the pin and just walked out. You just kind of left us all hanging." But I didn't know.

So just fast forward again to this last February and my time in Nepal. I try to go overseas two or three times a year, but the Lord did an unusual work in my heart and life on the trails in the Himalayas during those days. Just seeing the massive physical poverty, which I have seen before, but now, just in a new way. And spiritual poverty, and just to go four or five days without any person you meet having heard of Jesus before you got there. It's just not tolerable. How is it possible that people on earth haven't heard?

And so, we're working with this ministry in Nepal where they are doing all kinds of great stuff, and they are saying to us, "Can Brook Hills send a church planting team to lead out in church planting efforts?" And I start at the beginning of the week telling Jack, who leads that ministry there, "We are going to find you a church planting team and somebody who will lead that church planting team." And by the middle of that trip, I am looking at the guy I am rooming with, and I am saying, "You need to be the guy to lead this church planting team."

Which then leads to the end of the trip, I am asking, "Do I need to be the guy to lead this church planting team?" And, in a fresh way, wrestling with, "Lord, are you calling me to the front lines of unreached peoples, just to give my life to seeing these twenty-four Tibetan Buddhists reached with the gospel in these mountains." So, hours with brothers and then alone on those trails, and the Lord is just working in my heart. And by the time we got out of the mountains, I am asking Jack and others all the questions, "What does it look like to live in Katmandu?" And this or that that I know Heather is going to ask me when I get back when I ask, "Hey, you want to move to Nepal?"

So, this will show you, just as a side note here, the grace of God in the gift he has given me in my wife, because when I got back from that trip -- we hadn't been able to communicate hardly at all on the trip in those mountains. She could tell though in the little bit of time we had to talk before I came home that something was going on. So, we get back and it was late on a Friday night when we flew in, and we are just exhausted, jet-lagged, and she is saying, "Well, tell me, what's going on?" And so, we are laying there in the bed, and I am just scrolling through my journal and sharing all kinds of things, and I get to the point where I said, "So, maybe, the Lord is leading us to move to Nepal." And I am just tired, jet-lagged, and it was right after I said that that I fell asleep. My precious wife, like her head is on my shoulder, and she has tears streaming from her eyes, and I am snoring over her. So, I wake up the next morning, and she is like, "We need to finish the conversation that we began because we left off with us in Katmandu. So we need to pick up right there."

So, that is what I am wrestling with coming out of Nepal, asking, "Lord, do I need to be there?" So, we had one day in Katmandu before we flew out. We got out of the mountain, and we had one day in Katmandu. And that morning, I woke up and rolled over and picked up my phone just to check any messages, and the first email in my inbox was the announcement that Tom Eliff, who has served as the president of the IMB, was stepping

down, and they were looking for someone to fill his position as soon as possible. I just put my head back down on my pillow, and I didn't know if they would contact me or not. But I thought back to four years prior, and just found myself asking, "Why would I consider moving to the front lines in this way, and not at least consider the possibility of God leading me to mobilize and shepherd thousands of people to get to the front lines of Nepal and other places?"

So I just fell out of the bed onto my knees and just started praying. I had been memorizing parts of Luke on the trip, and I thought about Luke 17. "So you all, after you have done all that you are commanded to do, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done what is our duty.'" That is what I was praying. "God, I want to do my duty, whatever my duty is. If that is spending four more years at Brook Hills, I would love to do that. If that is my duty, I want to do that. If my duty is to be here in Katmandu, then I want to do that. Or if you are leading me to the IMB or wherever, I just want to do my duty." And I wrote in my journal one thing that was clear that I concluded: Something major is about to change in my life.

So, I came back, and many of you have been on short-term trips before. You know there is a tendency for intensity or emotion to kind of subside or lessen as days/weeks/months go by. Well, this was not the case. Over the next few days, months, weeks, just intensifying emotions, deeper desire. The only way I can describe it is Romans 15, which we mentioned already. We saw last week, Paul saying, "My ambition is to see Christ preached where he has not been named." Which, I wanted to see Christ preached where he had not been named before I went to Nepal or before any of this, but there is just a narrowing ambition in me to spend more of my time and my energy and the resources I have, the short life I have on this earth, I wanted to spend more intentionally on getting the gospel to unreached peoples and spending time there.

And that just began to grow, to deepen. Now, what was tough is that I was wrestling with that, and at the same time, I was working on this book, which has been pushed back. It is now coming out in February. I am writing to say, amidst this rapidly shifting moral landscape we are living in in this culture, and that we have to hold firm to the gospel in this culture, in a way that will propel us to take the gospel into other cultures. So, I have the desire to be there and the desire to strengthen the church here. So, how do I bring that together? Wondering, "Ok, could the IMB be that if they approach me? They haven't even talked to me."

And then I began to think about just the IMB as an institution. And just being honest, I am beginning to wonder, "Is that the kind of position or place God is calling me to?" Like, I have had some people say to me, even during this process, "I can understand you going to Nepal, the front lines. But going and spending your life in an office, in an institution?" Now, let me be clear. I have no desire to spend my life in an office in an institution. And I don't think I am alone in this, and sometimes for good reasons, people of my generation in particular, but multiple generations are wary of institutions. And I am wrestling with that. I don't know if I want to step into that kind of picture.

A friend of mine who was praying for me in this process, knew that I was wrestling through a variety of things, sent me an article. The article was actually from the IMB website, and the title of the article was, "Where is the next (spiritual) James Madison?" Here is how the article went:

You can imagine Madison looking out that very window for inspiration during the months he spent alone there before the historic summer of 1787, poring over his own books and the many volumes of history, philosophy and politics

sent to him by his friend and political ally, Thomas Jefferson. When he emerged from his self-imposed intellectual retreat, Madison carried the ideas that would form the basis of the U.S. Constitution and its first 10 amendments, the Bill of Rights.

Without those founding documents, our nation — which was then a shaky confederation of former colonies on the verge of squandering their hard-won independence from England — would not exist. And you would not enjoy the right to speak, worship, vote and assemble with others as you please. Neither would untold millions of other people across the world, freed from their chains by the ideas Madison not only forged but ceaselessly labored for, wrote about and campaigned to see ratified.

“As a framer and defender of the Constitution he had no peer,” wrote historian Garry Wills. “No man could do everything for the country — not even Washington. Madison did more than most, and did some things better than any. That was quite enough.”

He would go on to serve two terms as president, lead the young country through the War of 1812 and live until age 85, the last of the Founding Fathers to pass off the scene. Yet in that pivotal year of 1787, James Madison was 36 years old.

Goes on to talk about how millennials are anti-institutions.

Perhaps you plan to do ministry and missions with your own circle rather than bothering with bulky religious organizations that might waste your time and money. That’s your choice. But consider this: What if James Madison had decided to go it alone after the American Revolution? He could have stayed at Montpelier and enjoyed his big Virginia plantation — and let others worry about a fledgling nation on the edge of collapse. Instead, he rolled up his sleeves and plunged into the long, exhausting task of dialogue, debate, compromise and coalition-building that went into creating the United States of America out of the competing interests of 13 ornery colonies.

So, I am reading that, and I am wrestling. And I am thinking about one day in particular. It was a Monday afternoon a few months ago, where I sat down with one of our pastors for lunch. And he walked me through all the institutional challenges, and saying, “You just need to be thinking through this, this, this, this and this.” And he made a pretty persuasive case for why I should run. So, that was a Monday afternoon.

Tuesday, Heather and I were driving to Atlanta. And just as a side note: Part of the gift God has given Heather and me in this process, is that Heather and I have been, at every step during this process, just in lock-step with one another, in a way that has been so helpful. Not that it always has to be this way. When we were coming to Brook Hills, there were days when I was thinking, “Maybe we need to go Brook Hills”, and she was thinking, “I don’t know. What about this and this and this.” Then, the next week, she would say, “I think we need to go.” Then I would say, “I don’t know. I think about what you said last week was pretty good.” So we were just back and forth and back and forth. And I think part of it has to do with the fact that we have been reading through the Bible together, in the same text. So we have just been lock-step the entire way.

So, Tuesday I have that conversation, after I had had the other conversation with one of our pastors on Monday. And we are driving to Atlanta on that Tuesday, and I hadn't had a chance to debrief my conversation from the day before, and I say, "Hey, here are all these reasons and challenges that would be there that make me think, maybe, we don't need to do this." And she looked at me, and she said, "David, have you read your Bible this morning." "Well, dear, yes I have." And she said, "Did you not read?" And she reminds me of Numbers 13 and 14. What challenges are too big for God? As the people of God are standing on the edge of the Promised Land, and they say, "We are like grasshoppers in their eyes. They are giants and we can't do this because it's too hard." And she just looks at me and asks, "Do you really think that any of those challenges are too big for God?" And I was like, "Well, no ma'am I don't." We began to talk, and in a fresh way, began to say, "No they are not too big. Nothing is too big a challenge if God is calling you to it."

We had that conversation on the way to Atlanta, and we get to Atlanta and a couple hours later, that was when I first received a call from the search team, saying, "Hey would you be interested in this." And we were open to this. And I said, "Man, I am a wreck. I don't know what the Lord is doing in my life. I could see myself at Brook Hills for decades to come or in Nepal or just whatever. So, yeah, I am open to it." So they asked, "Well can we send you some questions." So they send me five or six questions, and I sent them thirty-four pages in response, just laying it out there, thinking, "What are you doing in all this Lord?"

It began a process where I had a meeting with that team. And the morning I had that meeting, in the Bible reading, it's in Deuteronomy, when the transition is happening from Moses' leadership to Joshua's leadership. And you see in Joshua 1, "Be strong and courageous as a new leader." I preached on Joshua 1 that week to pastors who knew this was kind of going on. They said, "David, it sounds like you are foaming the runway." So, I am just preaching the Word, and I don't know.

That led to some time in July in the Dominican Republic. So Heather and the kids and I were there doing a retreat for about seven or eight hundred missionaries from the IMB who were serving all over the Americas, so mainly South and Central America. And just spending time in the Word with them, and the Lord just deepening all the things I have mentioned. To see thousands more of these brothers and sisters going after the nations.

That time with them being followed up by some time where Heather and I and the kids were alone with each other, and alone with the Lord. And, again, I just wish I could walk you through journal after journal and prayer after prayer, and questions on the Word. But after time in the DR, we are beginning to see, how can these gifts God has given me -- preaching and writing and leading -- be used to mobilize more to go. We had that time alone. We were in Judges at that point, and there are a lot of things in Judges that I don't want to parallel with my journey. But Judges 6 and 7 in particular stood out. You know, Gideon, and his reluctant faith. It was like I was coming to the Lord everyday saying, "Lord, make it clearer that this is what you want me to do." And he would just confirm that, and I had a stronger desire to do it, but the next day, I would say, "Just make it clearer." And I never asked God, like, make this wet. I never did that. But just to see how God in his grace came to Gideon in his reluctant faith and said, "I am with you in this."

So, it came to the point where I told Heather one day, "It's as clear as anything else I have ever decided in my life." The only thing I can compare it to was asking Heather to marry me. I knew I was supposed to ask her to marry me. I just had that kind of clarity. And that is a good comparison because I was only one part of that equation, right? So I could say, "I believe it's the Lord's will to ask you to marry me." And she could say, "I don't believe it's

the Lord's will for me to say yes", and that would be it. So I would have to move on and figure out what the Lord's will really was.

So in my heart I just had this clarity, and Heather too. When I shared that with her, she said, "I am the same way. It just seems so clear that the Lord is leading us in this direction." But we prayed all along in an Acts 13 kind of way in what we see in the New Testament, saying, "Lord, if you are doing this, will you confirm that in your church and keep us from doing the wrong thing. Confirm this in your church."

So I had been praying with many of our pastors through this process, and the morning I wrote in my journal, "I believe this is it. Please confirm this", and I was sharing that with Heather, later in the day, I get an email from Keith Anderson, who is the chairman of our elders. And he says,

Pastor, I know you may not get to read this for several days/weeks, but just wanted to pass along a few thoughts. As the news relating to the IMB has sunk in a bit and I have had the chance to pray and process it, I, as your elder chair, have only grown more convinced that, should the Lord allow, you were destined for this position and it is of the Lord. I cannot help but believe that this is a Esther-like "for such a time as this" event that the Lord has opened up for you and your family at this moment in history.

He went on and said other things, by way of blessing. And I read that on this morning that I had prayed, "Lord, if you are in this will you confirm this in your church."

So, I came back from the DR to meet with this search team again in Denver, and just resting confident in the Lord. But not even in a certain decision, but just knowing I had clarity in moving forward with this thing if the Lord allowed. Another illustration I would use is our adoption process the second time around, we believed the Lord was leading us to adopt from Nepal, and I still believe the Lord was leading us to adopt from Nepal. Now, we went through that process for two years, and after two years, right before we are about to be matched with a child from Nepal, Nepal shuts down for adoption. I don't believe we were walking in disobedience those two years, but that we were walking in step with the Spirit. And God used that process to redirect us to adopt a precious little girl from China, Mary Ruth. And then used that process to open up our eyes to the needs in Nepal that led to a trip to Nepal in February, like he has got the whole thing rigged. He is leading, he is guiding, he is directing it all. So, I have clarity that we need to move forward in this process, but this search team could shut this down, but I am resting in the Lord that he will redirect this ambition in some other way.

We meet with this team in Denver, and I say resting in the Lord -- I wrote in my journal one of the psalms I had memorized in this process, Psalm 131. It talks about "*like a weaned child from his mother is my soul within me*". It's just this picture of resting in God, "*like a weaned child from his mother is my soul within me*." So, just coming back and resting in the Lord, saying, "Lord, you are going to lead and guide according to your will." We met with this team in Denver, and they had a bunch of questions that we dove into, and the next day, I get a call from the chairman of that search team saying, "David, I can't explain it. We had all these questions and a variety of different opinions coming in. By the time we left our meeting the next day, we were all ready to move forward in talking with you, specifically, about being in this role." And then he said, "You know, I am just resting in Psalm 131." I was like, "Oh really, of course you are." Psalm 131.

So, I come back from that -- we are getting near the end here -- I come back from that, and a few weeks ago, I had some time with our elders. First, our pastoral staff team and administrative elder team who had known about this process. And the next week, the broader elder body. But even with the pastoral staff team and the administrative elder team, just saying, "Okay, one of the passages we didn't look at was Acts 15, when the Jerusalem Council and the church came together and made a decision that seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them that they say this about Gentiles coming into the church. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them. So I asked the guys, "Okay, it seems good to the Holy Spirit and good to us, so how would you fill in the blank. When it comes to this process, and this possibility, what would you guys say, 'It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us that, what?' Would you say, 'It seems good to the Holy Spirit and good to us that you shouldn't go?' How would you fill in the blank." Just to hear those guys after we prayed together and discussed together, say, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us that we wholeheartedly entrust you to this process and fully support you if the Lord leads you in that process.

So, I had that meeting with them. Well, there were still two more steps to bring that into this week. And this is why I couldn't share anything last Sunday, because there were two more steps still to happen. Monday, we met with this search team one more time, and the goal of that meeting was, at the end, to be able to say, "Okay, yes or no." And we met with that search team, things went really well, and they said, "We want to spend some time in prayer. We will give you a call back in a couple of hours."

So Heather and I had taken the kids up. The meeting was in Virginia, and we had taken the kids up with us, and we decided it was about time to let them into the truth that something was going on. And confidentiality is not their strong suit at this particular age, so they didn't know. And they didn't even ask why we were in Virginia. So we took them to ice cream, and we sat around and were like, "Hey guys, do you wonder why we are in Virginia?" "No", so I was like, "Oh, okay. Well, here is why." And we began to share with them, and Caleb, our eight year old, our oldest, he said, "President, daddy?" He said, "That's a hard job. Are you sure you can handle that?" "That's a great question, son. That's an excellent question." And then you could tell he was processing, a little more than the others at that point. He said, "I am going to miss my friends if we move somewhere." But then he looks at me with a smile on his face, and he says, "But daddy, I know however God leads us, it will be for our good." That's exactly what he said. And later in the conversation, we are talking about all the IMB does around the world, and he said, "And if God leads us to this, it will be for his glory."

So we spent that time over ice cream with them, and then we are coming back to the hotel and we got a call, and the search team said, "We are ready to move forward if you are." And we said "Yes" at that point, which led to a meeting Tuesday with all the trustees. I was being interviewed with them that night, and right before we left to go, the kids gathered around to pray for me. They are praying and Caleb said, "God I pray that you should show daddy and these people if you are leading him to be president of the FBI." I didn't have the heart to tell him. Heather was like, "Should we say something?" I was like, "No, no, no." He thinks we are going to the FBI.

So we spend time with these trustees that night, and there were many of them with some really good questions and even concerns about me being in this role. So it was a lot of back and forth. So, I walked down, and I wasn't sure what would go on in that discussion afterwards, but just to hear later, the people who were there just recounting how, as they prayed, amidst questions and concerns that different people had, they just said that the Spirit of God seemed to visit that room in an unusual way and say, "Yes, this is what I am leading to happen."

So, the next morning, they were going to vote and, just so you know, word broke on social media before the trustees had even voted, or even accepted. But after they voted, they came to me and said, "Are you willing to receive this?" So all of this, all of this is why, in that moment, I felt constrained by the Spirit to say, "Yes, I receive this, in an Acts 20:24 way." I didn't go looking for this, but the Lord has said to do this. With all the emotions that entails, from deep sorrow and sense of loss, to think about not pastoring this people whom I love. Yet, deep resolve to spend my life however, wherever, whatever God wants me to do to see unreached peoples reached for the gospel. I want to see the concept of unreached peoples eliminated all together. I think the potential is there, and there are churches like Brook Hills that are all over the place. I am serious about this, and it won't be long before we are not talking as much about unreached peoples, but we are talking more about the return of our King. All of that is why I am constrained by the Spirit on going to the IMB.

I share that in a way that I hope, in your heart and the heart of this church, it makes sense, and it makes sense a couple of weeks from now to lay hands on me, and Heather and our kids and say, "Yes, we are sending you out with confidence that the Spirit of God has sent you out." And, in a way, that I hope you are all the more compelled to do what God calls you to do in your life. Whatever, wherever.

So these are the two words I want to give you. Two words that I think summarize what we see in Paul and the New Testament. The first word is surrender. Surrender. Surrender everything in your life to Christ. There are so many reasons why I've not wanted to do this - there's a lot of them -- and I could list them all for you right now. In the same way, in a much greater way, Paul could say the same thing. He had all kinds of reasons why he shouldn't go to Jerusalem. He was going to be arrested, or worse! So why go? Why go when so much is unknown? Why go when there's risk? Why go when there's cost? You go because God has said to go, and you've surrendered everything to Him. This is the Christian life. This is not the super Christian life; this is the normal Christian life. The Christian life is a life of surrender; our lives are his to spend however he wants. So we surrender everything.

Oh, members of the Church at Brook Hills, brothers and sisters all around this room, surrender your everything to Him. Tell Him, "I'll do whatever you want me to do. I'll pray however you want me to pray; I'll give whatever you want me to give; I'll go whenever and wherever you want me to go. Surrender daily, every day. *"If anyone would come after Christ (anyone!), let him deny himself, pick up his cross daily, and follow me."* Did you hear that? The life of the Christ follower is a daily death -- a daily death to self to say, "Whatever, whenever, wherever, however, I'm yours." Surrender.

But then you say, "Okay, I'm doing that. So how do I know how the Spirit's leading?" How can I be constrained by the Spirit? How do I have the kind of clarity that you've described? And that question leads to the second word: Abide. Abide. Surrender to Christ, and abide in Christ.

So part of me wishes that I would have had a vision with a man from the IMB saying, "Come over here and help us." And I'm guessing part of you would like the same thing. You'd like for God to give you a vision, or for God to arrange the clouds in the sky in such a manner as to say, "Go this way, or do this thing." But normally -- normally -- God doesn't do that. Instead, he does something better. Instead, God designs journeys like the one I've described in my own life this morning to cause us to daily seek after Him.

Over the last six months, I have prayed, every day, and I have fasted, and I have sought, and I have read the Word, in a fresh way, saying, "God, what do you want me to do? I just want to follow you. Don't let me go in the wrong direction!" And do you know what the

result is of that kind of praying and fasting and seeking and reading His Word? The result is I love the Lord far more today than I did six months ago. I love him so much. And I'm at deeper, greater, more intimate place with God and his Spirit than I would be if I'd have just had a vision six months ago, and everything had been spelled out then. God has taken me on a journey with him, and Heather on a journey with him, us together on a journey with him, where we have sought him, and he has led our thoughts, and he's formed our desires, and he's directed our steps according to his will. And he's done all of this because he loves us.

He has given me, and Heather, and you, and each of us as his children something much better than specific direction in a certain decision. He's given us His Spirit, and he's called us to daily surrender to him, put it all on the table, our time, our money, our lives, our families, our future, and then walk with him, abide in him. Be in his Word. Spend time with him in prayer. Fast. Make disciples right where you live, and wherever he leads.

Just think about how mission here in Birmingham, and mission in Asia and Nepal, have all played into this. So surrender to him every day, abide in him every day, and God will make your paths straight. God wants his mission to be accomplished in your life more than you do. God wants it to be accomplished in you so much that he has put his very presence inside of you for that purpose. So surrender to his Spirit, and walk in step with his Spirit every day, and he will lead you, for your good, and for his glory. Surrender to Christ. Abide in Christ.

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