

Threads

The Urgency of Eternity
Dr. David Platt
March 10, 2013



THE URGENCY OF ETERNITY **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:20; John 3:16**

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 1. Let me also invite you to pull out the notes you received in your Worship Guide when you came in. And then, for one more week in particular here, pull out this Threads booklet. And if you don't have one of these – if you weren't able to pick one up when you came in -- you are going to want that with you as I'll reference it this morning. So there are some ushers who will be coming up the aisles with them now, and if you would, just lift your hand where you are, and they will bring one to you.

I say this is the last week. Obviously, you hang on to these and we will have them on hand for week/months/years to come. The goal is that this would be a resource for us as followers of Christ, and particularly as members of this faith family, to remind us to be intentional about weaving gospel threads into the fabric of your everyday conversations. My hope and prayer during this series is that God might instill the gospel into our vocabulary – our thinking and our speaking, and consequently, our living – so that we are literally talking about the gospel all day long. We pray that this would happen with one another, with family, with friends, at work, at the store, at the ball field, or wherever we find ourselves, that we would be constantly talking, especially with people who don't know Christ, about the character of God (how He is the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things), about the sinfulness of man (how we are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin), about the sufficiency of Christ (how Jesus is unique among all people in all history), about the necessity of faith (about how the only way we can be restored to God is through faith in Jesus—turning from our sin and ourselves and trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord), and about this last thread today, the urgency of eternity (about how our eternal destiny hinges on how we respond to Jesus). So Church at Brook Hills, let's be a gospel weaving people all throughout Birmingham and as we go around the world.

And then, as a reminder, over the next two weeks, now that we've looked at these five gospel threads, Pastor Jim is going to lead us to look at two examples in the New Testament of how these gospel threads are practically woven into conversations with people. And that will then lead us up to Easter Sunday, where our goal is to bring as many people as we know, particularly those who don't know Christ, to come and to hear the gospel. We are praying that on that day, if not before, many of the people we have been praying for and sharing the gospel with might come to Christ.

This is where I want to say to those of you who are here this morning and you may not be a follower of Christ that our desire today is that you might hear the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God has done for you in Christ, and we want you to respond to it, and here's why. And this is the last question that we've left unanswered from the front of this Threads booklet: "Why is this important? Why is the gospel important? And why is it important for followers of Christ to share the gospel? Why should followers of Christ risk embarrassment or awkwardness or fear or whatever to intentionally, even boldly share the gospel?"

I am so appreciative of your honesty over these last few weeks as you've sent stories of sharing the gospel to us, because some of you have shared how well weaving threads of the gospel have gone, but some of you have shared how not well it has gone at some points. I had to laugh when one email I received, when the first two words on the email were, "Epic Fail." This brother went on to describe how he had tried to share the gospel, and it just didn't go well. And I was reminded of something that I want to make clear all around this room: Anyone who intentionally and continually shares the gospel will inevitably have a moment like that, where you'll think, "Man, I botched that." Or, "Man, that person wanted nothing to do with what I was sharing."

But what I appreciated about what this brother went on to say in his email, talking about what he learned, and what I want to say to every single follower of Christ in this room is: Don't let those "epic fail" moments stop you. Think about it: Paul had moments where he was stoned or riots broke out or he ended up in prison for sharing the gospel. But thank God, that didn't stop him. So don't let anything stop you -- anything. Don't let anything stop you from sharing the gospel, ultimately, because of this final thread -- because the urgency of eternity is at stake.

The Urgency of Eternity ***Knowing this Gospel Thread ...***

Our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus.

This is the biblical truth I want us to consider today. Knowing this gospel thread: Our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus. Now I know that's a huge statement, but I want to show it to you in Scripture, and I want to say to every single person in this room as clearly as I possibly can today: Your eternal destiny hinges on your response to Jesus. I'm talking destiny, destination, the place where you will spend eternity. Eternity is forever, millions and millions and billions and billions of years without end. Your eternal destiny hinges on your response to Jesus.

And if this is true, then there is nothing -- nothing -- more important than this in our lives and in others' lives. We must realize that you and me and every person we know and live with and live around and work, friends and family and people in this community and peoples around the world -- all of our eternal destiny hinges on how we respond to Jesus. There is nothing more important than this!

The Bible is clear that hell is a dreadful reality for those who turn from Jesus. Now there is so much here that we could explore, and three weeks from now, on Good Friday, we're going to spend an entire night in this room and in small groups joined with tens of thousands of other people thinking about heaven and hell at Secret Church. And I've been doing tons of study here. You're going to hear a lot of quotes today about heaven and hell from that study. But I want to hit in these moments today the essential truth about heaven and hell according to the Bible.

Obviously, we are wading into truth that is neither popular nor politically correct in our day, but the question is, "Is it true?" The Bible certainly says it's true. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:8 with me: Those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." And by the way, just as a side note, notice here that if you memorize 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 just as it is, you're obviously coming in on a verse in the

middle of a sentence from the previous verse, and so it can be confusing. But remember: Memorizing this verse here is for the purpose of sharing the gospel, specifically at this point the reality of hell. So it is fine not to quote the first part of the verse, but to say, "Second Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." So that's clear in the Bible and all over the Bible. Scottish professor James Denney said, "If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the Gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns."

And people might say, "Well, that's just the Old Testament God", or "That's just New Testament teachings, but this is not what Jesus taught." But it is what Jesus taught. That's what is most frightening. He talked about hell a lot. Matthew 10:28, "*Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" Mark 9:43,

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

J.I. Packer said, "All the language that strikes terror into our hearts—weeping and gnashing of teeth, outer darkness, the worm, the fire, Gehenna, the great gulf fixed—is all directly taken from our Lord's teaching. It is from Jesus Christ that we learn the doctrine of eternal punishment." Tim Keller commented, "If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth." And it is crucial truth that flows directly from all that we've seen in the gospel up to this point.

Now we've got to be careful. Amidst pictures of fire and darkness and destruction that we see of hell in the Bible, there's a lot of debate about whether or not these images are intended to be taken literally or symbolically. And we're going to spend time talking more in-depth about that at Secret Church. But suffice to say at this point that, even if they are symbols, that's still not good news, because the purpose of symbols is to represent something that can't be described in mere words.

So think with me biblically about these descriptions of hell in light of the gospel we've already explored. We have seen that God is holy, and we have realized that we have rebelled against Him. And as a result, we are separated from God. And so, when you picture hell, don't just picture this scene of fire. Picture hell as the natural outcome of our rebellion against God and our separation from God. I'll quote Keller again here because he is so helpful; his chapter in "The Reason for God" on how a loving God can send people to hell is so helpful. He writes:

Modern people inevitably think that hell works like this: God gives us time, but if we haven't made the right choices by the end of our lives, he casts our souls into hell for all eternity. As the poor souls fall through space, they cry out for mercy, but God says, "Too late! You had your chance! Now you will suffer!" This caricature misunderstands the very nature of evil. The biblical picture is that sin separates us from the presence of God, which is the source

of all joy and indeed of all love, wisdom, or good things of any sort. Since we were originally created for God's immediate presence, only before his face will we thrive, flourish, and achieve our highest potential. If we were to lose his presence totally, that would be hell—the loss of our capability for giving or receiving love or joy.

So follow this: What is hell? Hell is a place of continual rebellion against God. We've talked about how we have all turned aside from God to ourselves. And we've talked about how, what we thought would lead to our freedom, has actually led to our slavery – slavery to ourselves and slavery to sin. We used the illustration of an alcoholic or a drug addict. Is an alcoholic or a drug addict a slave or free? They are slaves, without question. So imagine the alcoholic or the drug addict given over to alcohol completely, or to drugs completely. This is the state of the soul given over to sin and self. In the words of Romans 1:24, God gives people over to what they desire. This is why C.S. Lewis called hell "the greatest monument to human freedom." He described how

the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. I do not mean that the ghosts may not wish to come out of hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man 'wishes' to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.

He went on to say: "There are only two kinds of people—those who say 'Thy will be done' to God or those to whom God in the end says, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn't be Hell." Hell is a place of continual rebellion. Man is given over to his freely chosen identity apart from God.

This, on a side note, but I believe a significant side note, brings up the question, "Well, why doesn't God save everybody?" And some people – even some who would call themselves Christians -- believe that in the end God will save everybody. But once we realize the nature of man's rebellion -- the nature of man turning aside from God to himself -- then we realize that there must come a point when we turn aside from ourselves to God. And this is a choice that only we can make. Even in His sovereignty, God will not negate human responsibility for the choices we make. C.S. Lewis said,

If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender [then] no one can make that surrender but himself (though many can help him to make it) and [a person] may refuse. I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will" I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies "How if they will not give in?"

In other words, God would have to force man into self-surrender in order for all to be saved, but that would negate the very point of self-surrender in the first place. Lewis went on to say,

In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell, is itself a question: "What are you asking God to do?" To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive

them? They [choose] not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.

Hell is God leaving man alone in his self-chosen rebellion against Him.

And keep going. It only makes sense, then, that hell is a place of final separation. We've already seen that we are separated from God in our sin. So the Bible teaches us that hell is the finalization—the culmination—of that separation.

So follow this: The Bible teaches that, even though we live in a sinful, fallen world, there is much common grace from God all around us. Jesus teaches that the sun rises on the evil and the good, and God sends rain on both the just and the unjust. God blesses this sinful world with His goodness on a moment-by-moment basis. Yet for those who turn aside from Him, and die in separation from Him, all such blessings are removed. Keller wrote, "In this world, all of humanity, even those who have turned away from God, still are supported by 'kindly providences' or 'common grace' (Acts 14:16-17; Psalm 104:10-30; James 1:17) keeping us still capable of wisdom, love, joy, and goodness. But when we lose God's supportive presence all together, the result is hell." This is what 2 Thessalonians 1:9 means: "*They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.*" In the words of A.W. Pink: "Forever separated from the Fount of all goodness! Never to enjoy the light of God's countenance! Never to bask in the sunshine of His presence. This, this is the most awful of all."

This leads to this last reality about hell: Hell is a place of eternal duration. We've already seen that one sin against an infinitely holy God is worthy of infinitely eternal justice and condemnation. And this is the testimony of all Scripture regarding hell. We've seen it in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 with the word "eternal" or "everlasting." It's in the teachings of Jesus. Mark 9:43-48: Hell, the place where the worm doesn't die and the fire is never quenched. Matthew 25:41-46, "*Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" And this is clear in the book of Revelation. Revelation 14:11 says of those in hell that "*the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever, and there is no rest day and night.*" Thomas Watson said, "Thus it is in Hell; they would die, but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends for ever and ever. Oh! Who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word 'ever' breaks the heart." And it does.

Jonathan Edwards vividly described this forever, saying,

When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions and millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then you will have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains.

And we hear what Jesus teaches and what Scripture teaches, and we think, "Surely that is not just. Punishment forever? Is that right? Is that just?" And we begin to point the finger at God. But we must realize who we are, and who He is. A.W. Pink said,

Who are we to pass judgment on the justice of the decision of the All-Wise? Who are we to say what is consistent or inconsistent with God's righteousness? Sin has so enfeebled our power of righteous judgment, so darkened our understanding, so dulled our conscience, so perverted our wills, so corrupted our hearts, that we are quite incompetent to decide. We are ourselves so infected and affected by sin that we are altogether incapable of estimating its due merits. Imagine a company of criminals passing judgment on the equity and goodness of the law which had condemned them!

Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus is clear: Hell is a dreadful, eternal reality for all who turn from Jesus. But praise God that is not the end of the story. Good news! Gospel! Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Jesus. Oh, turn with me to Philippians 3:20, just a couple of books to your left in the Bible. You'll go back past 1 Thessalonians and Colossians, and you'll come to Philippians. Look at Chapter 3. For all who turn from their sin and themselves, and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, can declare with Philippians Chapter 3, verse 20, "*But...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Heaven, a place not of continual rebellion, but a place of full reconciliation. The dominant theme of the Bible when it envisions heaven is a place where we are reconciled fully to God. Revelation 21:3 pictures heaven, saying, "*The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will dwell with him.*" The picture of man and woman with God in Genesis 1-2 is fully restored by Revelation 22, where we will be with Him. And the imagery is glorious. We will be like priests living in the temple, like a bride joined together with her husband, like children united with their Father, like heirs of a King enjoying their inheritance with Him, like participants in the banquet of all banquets -- heaven is a place of full reconciliation.

And heaven is a place of complete restoration in every way. And it makes sense. Spiritually, we will be completely free from sin. The Bible says we will literally be robed in righteousness, no longer touched by even temptation. Heaven is a place where spiritually we will be utterly free to obey. Paul Helm said, "The freedom of heaven is the freedom from sin; not that the believer just happens to be free from sin, but that he is so constituted or reconstituted that he cannot sin. He doesn't want to sin, and he does not want to want to sin." Oh, heaven is a place where sin will literally be unthinkable to us and ultimately be undesirable to us.

We will be spiritually restored and physically restored. Oh, don't get this ethereal picture of all of us spirits playing harps on clouds. This is not the way the Bible pictures heaven. The Bible pictures heaven as a new earth – a restored earth – where we will eat and drink and work and play and explore and discover entirely new creation. Oh, this is part of what I can't wait to talk about at Secret Church, because our view of heaven is so warped. If we're honest, heaven seems pretty boring to us. We think, "What are we going to do? Just stand around with each other and sing songs and stare at light for a few quadrillion years?" No, there's so much more to hope for in heaven.

Spiritually, physically and mentally: Our knowledge of God will be right. Emotionally: Our desires will be completely satisfied, and our wants will be totally trustworthy. I love this: In the words of Randy Alcorn, "One of the greatest things about Heaven is that we'll no longer have to battle our desires. They'll always be pure, attending to their proper objects. We'll enjoy food without gluttony and eating disorders. We'll express admiration and affection without lust, fornication, or betrayal. Those simply won't exist." This is why C.S. Lewis in

The Chronicles of Narnia wrote that Lucy said, "I've a feeling we've got to the country where everything is allowed." Everything is allowed, because our wants are trustworthy. Finally, what Augustine said will be reality: "Love God and do as you please."

Oh, heaven, a place of complete restoration, and heaven, a place of ultimate reunion. "Our citizenship together is there," Paul says. Later on in Hebrews 12, the Bible envisions coming to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." Heaven is a place where we as God's people will recognize one another and love one another as a family before a Father, as a people from every nation with ancestry from every generation. Jonathan Edwards said,

Every Christian friend that goes before us from this world is a ransomed spirit waiting to welcome us in heaven. There will be the infant of days that we have lost below, through grace to be found above. There the Christian father, and mother, and wife, and child, and friend, with whom we shall renew the holy fellowship of the saints, which was interrupted by death here, but shall be commenced again in the upper sanctuary, and then shall never end. There we shall have companionship with the patriarchs and fathers and saints of the Old and New Testaments, and those of whom the world was not worthy And there, above all, we shall enjoy and dwell with God the Father, whom we have loved with all our hearts on earth; and with Jesus Christ, our beloved Savior, who has always been to us the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely; and with the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier, and Guide, and Comforter; and shall be filled with all the fullness of the Godhead forever!

This is heaven.

Will you turn from Jesus or will you turn to Jesus?

And so the gospel leaves every man and woman with a choice: Will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus? "Or" is the key word. This is the choice that we all have, nowhere more clearly stated than John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." These are the two options for every person in this room and every person on this planet and every person in all of history. Will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus? There is no middle ground here. And eternal life and death hang in the balance with this question.

Will you turn from Jesus? Second Thessalonians 1 talked about those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, who choose to live without Christ now. You choose to do things your own way. Maybe you verbally or publicly reject Jesus. Or maybe you give Jesus intellectual assent. You say, "Yes, I believe He's real and that He died on the cross and He maybe even rose from the grave." You believe these things, but you continue to live as the lord of your life. Maybe you're even religious. You're involved in church, but your life doesn't belong to Christ. You choose to live without Christ now. Whether it's deliberate or couched in a religious façade, you live without Christ now, and as a result of never turning from your sin and yourself to trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, you die without Christ forever.

Oh, will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus? Will you die with Christ now. Will you turn aside from your pride, will you confess your sinfulness before God and will you die to

your selfishness, to all your self-indulgence and all your self-righteousness? Will you die to your sin and yourself now and will you live with Christ forever? Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Is this the testimony of your life? Your eternal destiny hinges on your response to Jesus.

Oh, I urge you, even in this moment, to turn from your sin and yourself and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Oh, I urge every student in this room -- you may be sitting here thinking this isn't important for you because you're so young and you have so much life to live. But the reality is you will die, maybe at 8, maybe at 18, maybe at 88 years old, and you don't know which or when it will be. And Satan would like nothing more than for you to sit here and think about all the stuff you have and the fun you've had this weekend and the television shows and video games and the Facebook pages that entertain you. He loves using all of these things to keep you from thinking about what really matters forever.

I urge every married and single person in this room: Please don't get drowned out by the temporary, by all the demands of your job or your family or the economy and the bills and your stocks and your investments. Wake up to the reality of eternity. Eternal joy or eternal wrath is coming. Are you ready? To every older man or woman in this room, I urge today not to delay another moment from turning from your sin and yourself and trusting in Jesus. I say to every single person in this room with as much urgency as is in me: Turn from your sin and yourself and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord! Right now -- in your heart, in your seat, trust in Him, in His life and His death and His resurrection. He loves you. He alone is able to remove your sin and restore you to God forever and ever and ever.

Weaving this Gospel Thread ...

Minimize your conversations about temporal things.

And then, as you do, when you do, I urge you to weave this gospel thread, church, into the fabric of your everyday conversations. If this is true -- oh Christian, if the Bible is true -- then we must not stay silent about the long forever that lies ahead. So let us -- practically here -- minimize your conversations about temporal things. We are so inundated with the temporary. And if you listen to much of our conversations, they're all about the temporary. We spend most of our time talking about things that don't matter. Think of all the topics that dominate our conversations that are temporary. The weather, food, sports -- see the Adversary's strategy to blind minds in our culture to what really matters forever. Obviously, I'm not saying it's wrong to mention the weather or food or sports, but minimize -- talk less about -- temporal things.

Maximize your conversations about eternal things.

And maximize your conversations about eternal things. Talk more about what matters. Go below the surface. This is the whole point of this series. How can we take everyday conversations about things in this world and point to eternal realities beyond this world? Just spend some time this week reflecting on your conversations. When you're driving, when you lie down in bed at night, think, "What did I say today that will matter forever?" And as you reflect, resolve to be a man, woman, teenager that talks about things that matter.

And then look for opportunities to express an eternal perspective on circumstances and events and situations around you. Point blank: It changes the way you talk and email and

text and twitter when you realize that the people you're communicating with are going to spend the next quadrillion years either in heaven or hell.

Talking about hell ...

So how do we talk about hell. Well, first, speak about God's character with humble confidence. In other words, I want to emphasize here how we must not talk about hell like we are apologizing for God, which is how many Christians talk about hell. It's almost like we're ashamed of it. Francis Chan puts it this way in a personal confession of his own: "Like the nervous kid who tries to keep his friends from seeing his drunken father, I have tried to hide God at times." But then he goes on to say, "Who do I think I am? The truth is, God is perfect and right in all that He does. I am a fool for thinking otherwise. He does not need nor want me to 'cover' for Him. There's nothing to be covered. Everything about Him and all He does is perfect." So speak with humble confidence about the character of God, not with arrogance or a spirit of superiority, but humbly. Yet do this confidently, realizing the weight of the gospel that we've seen. Sin really is this serious, and God really is this holy and good and just and right.

This leads to the second exhortation here: Speak about God's judgment with healthy fear. Don't speak lightly about hell. "We had a hell of a time. You played a hell of a game. That was a hell of a song." The way we talk about hell shows that we have no idea what we are talking about. Speak about hell (God's eternal judgment) with healthy fear, and speak about God's wrath with honest compassion. I'm not talking about any kind of compassion that you can manufacture. I'm talking about a compassion that springs from the realities of the gospel. This is a compassion that believes in the reality of God's wrath and weeps for people to know the beauty of God's mercy. R.W. Dale said, "I never heard D.L. Moody refer to hell without tears in his voice."

Talking about heaven ...

And then, in talking about heaven, talk like this world is not your hope. When things are falling apart in the world, whether it's a struggling economy or shifting culture or news of nuclear threats from North Korea, and when things are falling apart in your world -- maybe a lost job or a broken relationship or a cancer diagnosis -- amidst the pain, amidst the confusion, amidst the questions, talk like this world is not your hope. Say things like, "Isn't it good to know that this world is not all there is?" As soon as you say that, you clue people around you into the reality of eternity. Speak about the day when all of our desires for joy will be fulfilled and all of our longings for justice will be met.

And along these lines, live like this world is not your home. We undercut the gospel that we proclaim when we store up treasures on earth. Live like people who are longing for another home. Remember the illustration: Imagine your home was in France, and you were visiting the United States for 80 or 90 days, living in a hotel. And imagine there was a rule that said you can't take anything back to France on your flight home. You can't ship anything back, and you can't even carry money back. The one thing you can do is you can earn money in the United States, and you can send deposits back to your bank in France.

So here's the question, then: Are you going to fill your hotel room with expensive furnishings and extravagant wall hangings? Of course you're not. Why not? Because your time in the US is so short, and know you can't take that stuff back with you. And after all, it's just a hotel room. So you wisely send any money you make back home so that it will be waiting for you when you get there.

Brothers and sisters, we're in a hotel room for 80/90 years at most. May it be clear in our lives, particularly in this culture, that we are not living for treasures in this country that we

will never take with us. We are storing up and sending ahead treasure to another country that we will enjoy forever. We point people to the gospel when we live for another world.

Talk like this world is not your hope, live like this world is not your home and talk about your anticipation of being with God. So even when you talk about heaven, don't talk like you can't wait for this palatial palace that will have all the finest amenities you and I can imagine in this world. Instead, talk about a place where the finest amenities of this world will not compare with the reality that we are dwelling with God. We will see Him, and we will enjoy Him, and all of creation with Him.

And in this, talk about your realization that dying is gain. Many of you heard Hugo Chavez, now former president/dictator of Venezuela, who died last week, who in his last moments was reported to have cried, "I don't want to die. Please don't let me die." Oh, it changes the way you talk about cancer and tumor and sickness and tragedy and death when your life is united with the Man who conquered death. Speak with confidence about death.

CALLing People to Turn and Trust ...

Now I want to bring all of this to a head, and particularly to tie this with what we talked about last week when it comes to the meaning of faith (turning and trusting, repenting and believing in Jesus). I mentioned last week that we are not fully sharing the gospel until we call people to respond to the gospel. So we're not sharing this good news for information sake. We're sharing this good news in order that people might turn from their sin and themselves and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. And if someone is going to come to Christ, then we must call them to faith in Christ. Our eternal destinies hinge, not on simply knowing about Jesus, but on our response to Jesus.

So how do you and I, Christian, call other people to turn and trust? And this is where I want to give you an acronym: "CALL" - C, A, L, L - to help you think through how you, in your life, can CALL people to turn and trust. Here are four simple, practical exhortations I want to give you. One, clarify the gospel. So before you call someone to turn from their sin and themselves and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, you want to make sure that you have shared the gospel. The gospel of who God is, and who we are, and what we have done, and what it means to put your faith in Him, and why this is important.

That's why I want you to have this booklet, why I want us to know these threads, so that we might have a simple way of thinking through, "What is the gospel that I have to share?" It's the good news of a just, holy, gracious God who looks upon sinful men and women who've rebelled against Him, are separated from Him, and are dead without Him. And He sent His Son, Jesus, fully God and fully man, to live the life we could not live, to die the death we deserve to die, and to conquer the enemy we cannot conquer, so that everyone who turns and trusts in Him will be restored to God forever. We want to make this gospel clear, so we want to share this.

And then, A, we want to ask a person if they have any questions about the gospel. So you're gauging clarity of communication here. So you're asking, "Does this make sense?" And if they say, "No," then obviously you go deeper into the gospel thread that may not make sense or may need clarification. At the same time, if they say, "Yes," then ask if they have ever turned from their sin and themselves and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Now obviously, I'm encouraging you to use language here that corresponds with the gospel as we've seen it up to this point, instead of just encouraging someone to accept Christ or believe in Christ in light of the ways these words can often be skewed in people's minds to mean mere intellectual assent. So we want to call people to repent and believe, to turn from their sin and themselves and to trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Now this is where things obviously get personal, in an important way, where we ask a friend or family member or co-worker, "Have you ever turned from your sin and yourself and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord?" And if they say "Yes," then obviously you would affirm them and encourage them. Or maybe, like we talked about last week with cultural Christian who might say "yes" to this question but there may not be much fruit from their life, you might ask, "Well, what does this look like in your life?" or, "Can we help each other to turn and trust in our lives?" and begin to explore more of what actually following Christ entails.

But if they say "No," then the clear follow-up question is asking if they would like to turn from their sin and themselves and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord now. "Would you like to do this now?" And they may say, "No." I've had numerous conversations with friends who come to that point and say, "No, I'm not ready to do that." And obviously I emphasize the importance of the gospel and tell them I am there for them, with them, if they would ever like to talk more about this. And then I obviously continually pray for them.

On the other hand, they may say, "Yes." But either way, the key is – number 3, the first "L" here -- let the Holy Spirit work. Only the Spirit of God can draw someone to turn from sin and self and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. So let the Holy Spirit work. Our goal is not to manipulate some decision here.

I've shared before about a book called *Soul-Winning Made Easy*. The author talks about a "soul-winning plan" and he refers to Christians as salesmen. He writes,

The trained soul-winner can bring his prospect to a decision for Christ. There is no middle ground as he moves with surety and deftness right up to the point of salvation. It is his conversation control that makes this possible....The controlled conversation technique is something new in evangelism and represents a real break-through in soul-winning."

He continues and encourages you to "get your prospect alone." Then he goes on to write,

Lay your hand firmly on the subject's shoulder (or arm) with a semi-commanding tone of voice, and say to him: "Bow your head with me." Note: Do not look at him when you say this, but bow your head first. Out of the corner of your eyes you will see him hesitate at first. Then, as his resistance crumbles, his head will come down. Your hand on his shoulder will feel the relaxation and you will know when his heart yields. Bowing your head first causes terrific psychological pressure.

Terrific psychological pressure? This is horrible! I don't want -- we don't want -- to do that.

And this is where I want to encourage you: If, as you share the gospel, the Spirit of God is drawing someone to Christ, He is able to take the gospel you've shared and bring someone to salvation. This is even why I don't necessarily encourage people to lead a person in a sinner's prayer. Now I've written about this and talked about this and gotten in trouble about this. I'm not saying that it's inherently wrong to invite someone to repeat a prayer

after you or say certain words, but I don't think it's all necessary. And I actually think that in some circumstances it's not most helpful.

So I encourage you, if they say, "Yes, I want to turn from my sin and myself and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord," then invite them to call out to God to save them. Invite them to call on the Lord and be saved. If they see God for who He is, their sin for what it is, themselves for who they are, and Christ for who He is and what He has done, then by the grace of God through the Spirit of God, they are more than able to call out in repentance and faith. So let them do so. You don't need to tell them the exact words to say at that point. Their getting words exactly right is not even necessary. The Spirit has turned their hearts toward Christ, so let them call out to God to save them.

I've shared recently about one friend, Ben, who recently came to Christ, and this was our conversation. After meeting for weeks about the gospel, we came to the urgency of eternity, and I, sitting across the table, just pleaded for him to trust in Christ. And I drew this out, and I said, "What is keeping you from taking this step of faith?" And he looked back at me and said, "Nothing." So I said, "Do you want to turn from your sin and yourself and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord now?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, why don't you pray now and just express your heart to God?" And he said, "Okay," and he did.

Now see this: His salvation was not dependent at that moment upon getting some words right in his prayer. His prayer was a simple expression of the reality that the Spirit of God had worked in his heart, and he said in so many words, "God, I need you to save me." Invite them to call out to God to save them.

But at the same time, also be willing to let them be alone with God if that is best. I think of another friend recently who I and others shared the gospel with. We were encouraging him to turn and trust. And then he found himself one morning in his car, and it all clicked, and he repented and believed. He turned and trusted. And we were going to get back together a few days later, and he emailed me and said, "I have good news – pun intended." I wrote back and said, "That's the best email I've gotten in a long time!" Let the Holy Spirit work. That doesn't mean we sit back passively and do nothing. No, we call people to turn and trust, and as we do, we let the Holy Spirit work.

And then, as the Spirit draws people to Christ, then we lead them as a new follower of Christ. This is where we remember that we don't want to manufacture decisions for Jesus in some kind of mechanical, programmatic way. Instead, we do want to make disciples. Going, baptizing, seeing people baptized -- this is one of the first things we encourage a new follower of Christ to do, to be baptized. And along those lines, let me just mention briefly that if you have recently come to Christ (and for that matter if you came to Christ a long time ago), and you have not been baptized, let me encourage you to be baptized as soon as possible. Particularly with Easter coming up, we try to intentionally celebrate baptism as a picture of the gospel on that day. What better day to be baptized! So let me encourage you to indicate that on the back of your Worship Guide tear-off or go back to the Access Corner after we are finished, Because of shorter service times on Easter, we only have a limited number of people who can be baptized in each service. But just let me encourage you to be baptized as soon as possible as a follower of Christ, and maybe even on Easter coming up.

And so we want to encourage someone to be baptized. And then, Jesus says, we teach one another how to obey Christ. When we call people to put their faith in Christ, we lay down our lives to lead them as followers of Christ.

The Church at Brook Hills ...

Do we realize people's condition?

This all leads to the last second there in your notes. I want to close this last thread – the urgency of eternity – by simply asking us as a faith family and by asking each of us as members of this faith family three questions. One, do we realize people's condition? Do we realize people's condition apart from Christ? Do we really believe that the people we live next to and work with and see in the stores and restaurants around us are going to hell without Christ? Do we believe this not just about people in Birmingham, but about millions and millions of people around the world who don't know Christ, many of whom have never heard of Christ?

Oh, we've talked about it before, but there are seven billion people in the world. According to the most liberal of statistics, about 1/3 of the world claims to be Christian. Even if all of these are followers of Christ, which is extremely doubtful, there are still 4.5 billion people on the planet today who are today under the judgment of God, and when they die, they will go to hell forever. 4.5 billion people. We don't have time to waste our lives and our families, and we don't have time to waste the resources of this church on a nice, comfortable, Christian spin on the American dream, on what makes us comfortable, and what fits best with our preferences. There is an urgency to eternity here. We've got to make more sacrifices in our lives and our families and our budgets and our church budget and our programs and our priorities. We can't do business as usual while people plunge into hell here in our city and among the nations. Jonathan Edwards wrote that he was "resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments." Do we realize people's condition?

Do we possess the heart of Christ?

And second, in light of people's condition, do we possess the heart of Christ? Oh, this last week, I have read story after story that you have sent in, testimony after testimony. I haven't gotten through them all yet; I've gotten through one half of them, but I'm going to get through them. But as I've read, I've come to the conclusion that there are some messed up people around this room, people scarred and stained by sin with so much self-indulgence and self-righteousness. But God has changed our lives. He has reached down His hand of sovereign mercy and grace in so many creative ways in lives across this room, and He has saved us, and He's transformed our hearts and turned our lives upside down with His mercy. So my question for us is: Do we long to see Him do the same in others' lives? Surely we who know the love of Christ in our own lives are now compelled by the heart of Christ for others' lives! Compelled by the heart of the One who gave His life on a cross to now risk our reputation, face our fears, overcome awkwardness, whatever it takes, to lay down our lives for others to know this gospel.

Do we want our lives to count?

This leads to this last question: Do we want our lives to count? Don't put up your notes here, just maybe write that in and then look up here. When I ask this question, I'm thinking about Paul in Acts 20: "*Compelled by the Holy Spirit, I'm preaching the gospel.*" And he said, "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.*" "This is what I want my life to count for," Paul said. "One thing; this is the task I'm living for: Testifying to the gospel of the grace of God." This is what drove Paul. He didn't care about comfort, safety, security in this world. He wanted his life to count for the spread of the gospel in this world because he knew that would count forever. Oh, God help us to see this!

We are bombarded with the temporary. Make money, get stuff, be comfortable, have fun. And in the middle of it all, we struggle to even see the urgency of eternity. But it's there. Brothers and sisters, we stand on the porch of eternity. If the gospel we believe is true, then even the youngest child in this room at most has 80 or 90 years left. Eighty or 90 years to be followed by thousands upon thousands upon millions upon millions upon billions upon trillions of years. Will we look back ten trillion years from now and wish we'd made more money? Wish we'd been more comfortable? Wish we'd lived more for ourselves? No. Not at all. John Piper said, "When you know the truth about what happens to you after you die, and you believe it, and you are satisfied with all that God will be for you in the ages to come, that truth makes you free indeed. Free from the short, shallow, suicidal pleasures of sin, and free for the sacrifices of mission and ministry that cause people to give glory to our Father in heaven."

I want to challenge us today as a church and you, as a Christian, to surrender your life. Let's surrender our lives; let's surrender this church to God and ask Him to make it count for the spread of His gospel in the city of Birmingham and to the ends of the earth. This is the only possible reaction for a people who believe in the character of God, the sinfulness of man, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: Radical.net