

## **A Chronicle of Redemption**

Chapter 44: The Church for the Nations

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## **CHAPTER 44: THE CHURCH FOR THE NATIONS** **Acts**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Acts 9. I mentioned last week that tonight we were going to spend some time, as a faith family, talking about where we are and where we are going in the days ahead as a church. We're going to spend some concentrated time talking about a couple of things and some different ways...just kind of preview, kind of give some trailers so to speak for what is to come in 2011.

If you are here tonight, and you're visiting us from another faith family, from another church, then we welcome you, and you're kind of coming in on a little bit of a family meeting. So, I don't know how much will be necessarily directly applicable to where you are, but even if you're here tonight and you are not a follower of Christ, I hope that you will see a picture in the church, and particularly where we end up in a little bit...a picture of Christ's love for you and the great privilege that is entailed in being a part of the church.

So, we are in the middle in our Bible reading of reading through the book of Acts and letters in the New Testament that come about in the context of the book of Acts. Don't you just read these chapters in Acts and think, "I want to be a part of that; I want to be a part of the Spirit of God, moving like that and people coming to Christ like that"?

### **The New Testament Church...**

So, what I want us to do tonight is I want us to look at the New Testament Church and some characteristics real briefly at the top of the New Testament Church, and then think about how those apply to The Church at Brook Hills.

#### **Making disciples.**

So, four characteristics, really more activities, of the New Testament Church from the start. Number one as we look in the book of Acts: They were making disciples. The New Testament Church, these Christians, they were obeying the Great Commission. People were coming to Christ, learning about Christ, going, baptizing, teaching. It's happening.

One of the things we're going to do in 2011 is we're going to spend some time at the beginning of next year soaking in more...we're kind of flying through Acts right now...but soaking in the book of Acts and early church, and what disciple-making looked like in Acts, how what Jesus commanded in Matthew 28 transfers over into Acts 1 through 28, and to really think about disciple-making. If we're going to do anything well in our lives and in the church, we need to do disciple-making well. What does that look like in the context of our families, our jobs, and how does this play out practically in our lives? We're going to spend concentrated time looking at that in the beginning of next year. So, they were making disciples.

### **Multiplying leaders.**

Second, they were multiplying leaders. It's interesting the way Luke writes the book of Acts. It's basically a story framed in the context of different personalities and different people, mainly Peter and Paul, but you also see Stephen, Phillip, Priscilla, Aquila, Lydia, Barnabas, John Mark. Acts 13, you see this picture of all these leaders together at the Church at Antioch, when the Spirit sets two leaders apart. You see that the gospel is advancing through disciples and through leaders in the church.

### **Mobilizing churches.**

All these churches are starting and being planted as a result of multiplying leaders, leading to, third, mobilizing churches. You see churches planted in different places. The Church at Antioch sends out Paul and Barnabas, and they start planting churches in these different places where they're preaching the gospel. These churches start relating to each other. They start serving each other, supporting one another. They're taking up offerings for each other, and you're seeing this relationship between these churches beginning to form as they're cooperating together for the advancement of the gospel, all leading to this fourth activity.

### **Magnifying God.**

They were making disciples, multiplying leaders, mobilizing churches, and ultimately, they were magnifying God. That's where Acts 9:31 comes in. I want to read this verse, and if you don't have it underlined, maybe encourage you to underline it in your Bible. It's just a great summary of the church in Acts. Acts 9:31 says, *"[So] the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."* Ah, I pray for that, that we as a faith family would have peace. We'd be built up with one another, and that we would walk in the fear of God and the reverence of God, in awe of God, and experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and that we would be multiplying.

So, the question is, "What do these things look like in the context of The Church at Brook Hills as we close out this year and look toward next year?" However, even before...just real quick...before we close out this year, this last week, I've been stopped by different people on different occasions, and I've just been reminded, just been kind of brought back to, "Wow, this has been quite a year." I've been stopped by people this week sharing about different things that God is doing in East Lake and Gate City through members of our faith family, many of you who are serving there. Many of you...some of you who have moved there over this last year into that community to live out the gospel. I mean, let's not underestimate that. What a great picture.

Then, I've been talking with some families this last week who have brought foster care or newly adopted children into their homes, just to think about this emphasis all across our county and beyond, to see children who this time last year were abandoned, or abused by mom and dad, but now have loving arms around them and a home, and that, here in Birmingham.

Then, I was looking at some stuff from India this last week. The very reality that over this last year, over a thousand families have received food and medical care and water and the gospel, most importantly. Most of those things receiving them for the first time really. And then to see a hundred wells built. I mean, over 40,000 people that have access to clean water now that didn't have it this time last year, and thousands of believers and church planters trained.

There are 150 villages that have been engaged with the gospel for the first time ever. Praise God, and thank God for His grace in you as the church. Thank you for showing that it's not about here or there. There's a way to live here for the sake of gospel...here and there. That we can sacrifice our lives and our resources and stuff in the church to be a part of something bigger: Advancement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is worth it. So, you're showing that.

So, I want us to think through how that affects the way we now go into 2011. We talked some last week about "new normal" and how we're going to continue praying and studying and giving and going together and sharing life together. However, in the church, there are some specific, particular ways that this is playing out when it comes to these four activities: Making disciples, and multiplying leaders, mobilizing churches, and magnifying God.

## **Making Disciples...**

### **The foundation ...**

So, we'll start with making disciples. How are we making disciples now, and how can we most effectively make disciples in the days to come, in particular, one area? Here's the foundation: We are a faith family. We have been united together as a church across physical lines, across cultural lines, and ethnic lines. What unites us together is not that we have the same last name, or share the same bloodline. What unites us together as a family is Christ, His bloodline.

We are, literally, a family of faith. We are brothers and sisters. We are all sons and daughters of the living God. We are an eternal family. Like, we are stuck with one another forever. Forever, and this is how, oh, where we see that the church and our relationships in the church, there's a bond there that supersedes even physical bonds in this world. This will last far longer. So, that's why we use that language a lot around here. We are a faith family. It's what it means to be the church.

As a faith family, we have been entrusted with a Great Commission that we, for good reason, talk about a lot around here, about how we need to focus our lives in the church on making disciples of all nations.

Now, as I mentioned, we're going to talk some about that next year and what does that look like. What I want to draw your attention to tonight in particular, as we head into the next year, is the reality that if we're going to make disciples of all nations, then that necessitates that we make disciples of succeeding generations. If we're going to make disciples of all nations, that necessitates we make disciples of succeeding generations.

I want you to turn with me over to the Old Testament to Psalm 78. I want to show you this picture in the Psalms. This chapter is foundational, really. It's what we see all over Scripture, but this chapter just sums it up and what I want us to talk about for a minute here. The reality is, all throughout the history of God's people, He has placed a priority on passing His Word and faith in Him on from generation to generation to generation. So, I want you to hear that in the words of the psalmist.

Psalms 78 is a rich text. The psalmist says,

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of*

*old, things that we've heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

This picture of God saying to His people, "Do not look at just what is in front of you. Look toward the children yet unborn; and not just those children yet unborn, to their children." Like, we are living for the gospel, for the Word of God to be passed and multiplied from generation to generation to generation.

### **The question ...**

That's the picture we see. That's the priority all throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. So, that text necessitates that we ask the question, "How can we most effectively make disciples among the next generation?" Many of you know that this has been something that we've really been wrestling with as a church, as a faith family. As we have sought to streamline disciple-making processes, to eliminate programs that are not best for fueling disciple-making in the city and all nations, we've wrestled. What does this look like when it comes to our preschoolers and our children and our teenagers? Praying, "How can we most effectively make disciples among preschoolers and children and teenagers, not just have activity or do stuff to do stuff, but make disciples?"

What we've come to is...it's really pretty obvious when you think about it. If we're going to make disciples among the next generation, we have to empower parents. That only makes sense. Our children, of all ages, spend time in our homes, and their spiritual development is highly influenced by mom or dad, and God has designed it that way. So, if we want children and students to follow after Christ, then we would miss the whole point if we just started with children and students. If we want children and students to follow after Christ, we need to start by strengthening and supporting marriages and families.

I want to make a couple of statements here that I'm firmly convinced of. The stronger marriages are in our faith family, the more effectively we will pass the gospel on to the next generation. If we have weak marriages in our faith family, and we have all the coolest activities for children and preschoolers and students, we will miss the point. The stronger homes are in our faith family, the more effectively and faithfully we will pass the gospel on to the next generation.

So, we need to equip parents to make disciples in their homes, in their families, with their children. My prayer is...our prayer together, "Lord, may every mom and dad in this faith family be equipped to make disciples in their homes. May every dad in this faith family be equipped, teaching the Word to sons and daughters in his home, and teaching them to pray and showing them how to follow after Christ." Moms and dads together, leading out in that, showing how to share the gospel and make disciples, how to grow in Christ. That needs to start in our homes.

However, not just in the homes, but through their homes; meaning, not just making disciples among the children under our roof, but realizing that the opportunities we have to make disciples in this city and this community optimally are found at the ball field, the

practice, the school event, where we are rubbing shoulders with families all over this community, where we're showing what a gospel saturated family looks like in action. Not some special event here or there, but in the context of where we live day in and day out, rubbing shoulders with other families.

It's the picture of Rock the Block, where we said, "Okay, we're not going to do just a Bible club here, where we invite people and children to come to this one place, one time for an event. No, we're going to do it all over the city, and we're going to invite people into our homes. We're going to teach the Bible in our homes. It's that picture applied to our lives. It's realizing that student ministry and children's ministry and preschool ministry is intended not to be confined to one location, but is intended to be happening all over the city as we live out the gospel next to parents of preschoolers and children and students, and that in our homes, that's the best avenue for the gospel to spread.

So, this is where we've got to start. If we bypass this picture, if we relegate parents and marriages and this picture of our homes to a secondary role in the disciple-making process of next generation, then we will totally miss the point. Tragically, we will miss the point.

However, what this doesn't mean is that we say in the church, "All right, parents, go do it, best of luck to you in the process. Let us know how it goes." No, there's a picture here where the whole church is involved in this thing. Where, yes, parents are primary, but we also, as a community of faith, need to establish a process as a church. We as...this is why that foundation is so important. We are a faith family, and the faith family...we as the church have been entrusted with this Great Commission.

So, we need to establish a process that maximizes other members in the church to help make disciples among children and students. Now, this is huge on numerous levels. We have kids in our faith family right now who do not have a believing mom or a believing dad, and, obviously, disciple-making is not happening in their home. So, there's great need to surround children in those kind of circumstances with the men and women who are spiritual moms and dads that are following after Christ, or we have a ton of pictures across our faith family where a child may be in a home where dad is not present, or mom is not present. There's a huge need there for the faith family to step in and to fill voids that need to be filled for the sake of passing the gospel on to the next generation.

However, I'll take it a step deeper. Even if you've got a family where a child has a mom and dad who are both running hard after Christ, that mom and dad are still not intended to do this thing alone. They're still part of a church for a reason, that the church is intended to surround all of us in this whole process, that passing the faith on to the next generation is a community project that involves every one of us. This is where I would say to every member of our faith family, that if you are a college student, you're a single, maybe you're married with no kids, maybe you're empty-nesters, you're still a vital part of this whole picture. This involves us all. If we're going to be faithful with the Great Commission, making disciples of all nations and succeeding generations, it's going to involve all of us in considering, "How can we pass the gospel on to the next generation?"

So, establish a process that maximizes other members in the church, coming alongside each other and serving one another, and supporting one another, so that we're doing this together in a process that intentionally trains children and students in the church. I emphasize that word "trains" in the blank there because the goal is not just children and students who are able to survive in this world. The goal is children and students who are able to thrive in this world for the glory of Christ. The goal is a process whereby a newborn in our midst would be strategically involved in a process until the time when they go off to

college or elsewhere when they leave the house; where they are able and ready...not just ready, but already making disciples and living out the gospel and ready to take on the world for the glory of Christ with the gospel of Christ. How can we do that?

### **The position ...**

So, there are, obviously, no easy answers in that picture, but what I am pleased to share with you tonight is someone that we have been praying for for a while, I have the opportunity to introduce you to. We've created a position over the last year or so called the Next Generation Disciple-Making Pastor based on that text in Psalm 78, a pastor who could oversee how we can most effectively make disciples of succeeding generations, children and students in our faith family. By God's grace, He has brought us to a brother that I've actually known for a while, that you will get to know more in the days to come.

Just by way of summary, in his previous ministry position, he has been serving in the great state of Georgia, and he's basically been leading and training and equipping churches and ministries all across the state that are to be intentional about raising up disciple-makers among the next generation. He is a disciple-maker himself. More importantly than even that, though, he is a husband who shows a picture of the gospel in his love for his wife, and he is a dad of four kids, and is right in the trenches when it comes to parenting with the power of the gospel. So, I want to introduce you to him tonight, and have him introduce his family to you. So, let me invite Scott Kindig and his family to join me up here, and if I could, could I get you all to welcome the Kindigs to our faith family. The whole family's not here, but, Scott, introduce us to everybody who is here.

*Scott Kindig:* Very good. On my far left is my beautiful wife, Kim, of almost 23 years in a couple of weeks. Then, our sweet, ten-year-old daughter, Mary Beth, and Drew, our 14-year-old son, born on my 30th birthday; it's a good thing. Then, here's Nate, and he's 16 years old and is the fulfillment of my mother's promise that I would have one that's just like me. We also have one in North Carolina that's at college. His name is Seth, and he's 19 years old.

We're so thankful that, having been an iPod member of this church for quite some time, as I have several other friends that are as well, that the Lord has graced us with the opportunity to make a stop here in the disciple-making process that goes on in our own home. So, thank you, guys, so much for your grace, and we look forward to getting to know you in the days ahead.

*Pastor:* I wish you knew what I know. Like, there is a joy inside of me, expressed in the smile on my face, because...and obviously, you don't know Scott and his family, but there was a point when we praying through this whole picture, and the thought came to my mind, "Well, I wonder if Scott Kindig would come?" I thought, "Oh, that would be too good to be true." So, it is true, and you will get to know them much more in the days to come.

Let me encourage you to pray for their transition. They're moving from metro Atlanta. I don't know if you know much about the housing market right now, but it is not at the height. So, they've got a variety of decisions to make, and just a house to sell, and everything else to figure out how to get their feet on the ground over here. So, let me invite you to be praying for them, and obviously, we'll help them get set on their feet and then get to running with this picture of how we can most effectively make disciples of succeeding generations in our faith family. So, welcome the Kindigs.

If you want more information about Scott, there's some biographical stuff that's on the website if you want to dive into that a little later. It's kind of funny. We asked Scott to send

some stuff...I hope he doesn't mind me telling this...some stuff over, just some biographical information, and he attached one file that I don't think he meant to attach because it was, like, the history of the Kindig family name, and including, like, coat of arms and everything. So, we have that. That's not on the website, but if you would like information about the Kindig family name, you let us know, and we can supply you with that.

So, making disciples. God give us grace to pass the gospel on well to our children and students so they can stand on our shoulders and impact nations for the glory of Christ, in ways that maybe we could never fathom. So, making disciples.

## **Multiplying Leaders...**

### **The responsibilities of elders in Scripture ...**

Then, multiplying leaders. Now, this is an area that involves a lot more detail here tonight. So, I want you to follow with me here. Responsibilities of elders in Scripture, and this is really a recap of some things we've talked about more as...talked about as a faith family before; stuff we're seeing all over the book of Acts, and we'll see even more when we get into some of these other letters: 1 Timothy and Titus.

However, if there's anything I've learned about church government and church leadership it's that whenever you mention church leaders, different titles, elders, things like that, there's a lot of different people with a lot of different backgrounds and a lot of different ideas of church leaders; some good ideas, and some not so good ideas. So, I want to clarify some of this. Some of you might be thinking...when even you see elders, you're thinking, "Well, what is that about? I thought it sounds a little cultic. Like, what is an elder?" Well, the reality is, in Scripture, elder, pastor, overseer, these are interchangeable terms in Scripture. So, if you come from a church background where you had pastors, well same thing, you just called them pastors instead of elders. Elders and pastors are interchangeable terms in the New Testament.

Now, I'm guessing there's some people that probably have come from a church background where deacons basically operated as elders, in the role of elders, in overall leadership in the church, which is not so good because that misses some of the heart. A deacon and elder are not intended to be interchangeable terms. Those are different and different functions.

So, I want to remind us what the elders do. What is the responsibility of an elder? We're just going to fly through this, but just to remind you, elders, first, they lead under the authority of Christ. That's the picture implied in that word "overseer." There's an oversight, an overall leadership role for elders. Now obviously, it's not this hierarchy, where elders are ultimate. Elders belong to the church, and the church belongs to Christ. Elders are accountable to Christ for how they lead. So, Christ is head of the church, and He entrusts leadership that are intended to be a reflection of His character and His Word, which we'll talk about.

Second, elders lead under the authority of Christ; elders care for the body of Christ. This is what we see in that term "pastor," "shepherd." To be pastoral is like a shepherd caring for sheep. Elders nurture the flock, the people of God; feed the flock; care for the flock; and protect the flock; protect the church from false teaching; protect the church from heresy, or danger, or division, evil influence. So, elders have this caring, shepherding function.

How do they do that? Well, this leads to the third function, role, the responsibility of elders is they teach the Word of Christ. 1 Timothy 3:2 makes it clear that an elder must be able to teach. Why is that? Why does an elder have to be able to teach the Word? It makes sense because Christ is the head of the church. Christ leads the church. However, if Christ is not here physically, then how does He lead the church? Well, He leads the church through His Word, by His Spirit. So, elders, in order to lead...any authority they have to lead, any credibility they have in leadership is based on the Word. It's not based on their opinions, their thoughts, their ideas. It's based on their attachment to the Word of God.

So, in order to be an elder, you have to know the Word extensively. You have to know the Word in order to teach it, and then be able to communicate it effectively. If an elder cannot teach the Word, is not teaching the Word, then he should not be an elder. This is how elders lead, by teaching the Word of Christ, and, fourth, by modeling the character of Christ. We see this in 1 Timothy 3. We'll read about this in Titus 1. The elder exemplifies Christ in his personal life, in his family life. Obviously, an elder is not perfect, but elders are set up in the church so that members of the church would see in them a reflection of the character of Christ. This is high responsibility, high role in the church.

### **The need for more elders in our faith family ...**

So, over the last few years, and particularly over the last year, we've been wrestling in-depth, even as elders now in the church, with the need for more elders in our faith family. Let me give you a little background here. Currently, as The Church of Brook Hills, we have nine elders, eight non-staff elders, plus myself. We moved to that structure a few years ago, soon after I came, and it's been a lot of good reasons why we moved to that structure, and a lot of good things that have come from that structure in many different ways.

When you look at those responsibilities of elders, and the more we dove into this as a group of elders, when it comes to 4,000-plus people in our faith family, 8 elders...or 9 elders is clearly not enough to carry out those functions. One of the things that burdens me most right now as a pastor/elder is that it is really easy for someone to just fall through the cracks in our faith family. Whether they're struggling with this, or even wandering into sin, whatever it may be, that's not good.

Hebrews 13 talks about how leaders are accountable before Christ for those who are under their care. 1 Peter 5, same thing. So, we need to, if we're going to rightly, biblically care for the body of Christ and all of its members, then we need more elders, elders who are shepherding this church, who are caring for people all over this church.

Now, it's not...and we have small groups, and there's a lot that happens in the context of those small groups, but still, God has put pastors in the church for a reason, to care for the body. There are times when, and God's designed it this way, where members in the church desire counsel from, encouragement from, care from, prayer with, whatever it is, a pastor. Now, obviously, I cannot do that for 4000-plus people. I'd prove insufficient real quick in that picture, and certainly not eight others plus me can do it. We need elders all across this faith family, who are caring for the body of Christ, teaching the body of Christ, which is why there are some Sundays when I'm here in town, and yet, somebody else is teaching. It's not because I'm slacking off that week; it's because it's healthy for us as a church not to be dependent on one person, one personality, one communicator.

The Word is what leads us, and we need to make sure to cultivate that in our midst, where we are often prone to attach ourselves to this or that teacher. Just to be blunt, there are people in our midst who sometimes choose to come based on who they know is teaching. That's not good. The Word is good, and as long as it's being taught, then it's the draw, and



it's what consumes us and captivates us. So, I want to make sure to guard that and cultivate it. We need men who are teaching that all over the place, and all the better. As long as we have the Word, then bring it. So, anyway, biblically and practically. We want men who are pastoring and shepherding this church, and who are multiplying this church.

Remember Acts 13, when we read that this last week? We saw the Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas to go plant churches. Oh, we need that, desire that, want that. I was reading this last week in the paper, and I'm guessing a lot of you are following this whole discussion about 280 and what to do with traffic and everything else on 280. The article was talking about how, over the next 20 or so years, the population of Shelby County is expected to grow by over 100,000. The reality is, all 100,000 of those people aren't coming into this building, and we're not about to spend \$100 million on a building for them all to come into. So, we want to be intentional about sending guys out from this place all over the place, being a part of churches and planting churches and multiplying churches.

So, when you think about biblical qualifications of elders, like, oh, when you think about church leadership, please don't think about some guy, group of guys, in a dark room with hoodies on, making decisions. Like, that's not the picture here. We don't need more of those. Like, we need men who are shepherding and caring and teaching and multiplying the church. We want that all over our faith family.

### **A proposal for more elders in our faith family ...**

So, what we've been wrestling with, as a group of elders, is, "Okay, how do we put that in practice as The Church at Brook Hills?" We've been working long and working hard on a proposal for more elders in our faith family. Now, this is what you received when you came in tonight, this nice reading packet for you that says, "Revised Elder Structure" on the front.

Let me encourage you to pull that out and open it up. We're not going to go through this whole thing, but basically, I want to hit...when you open up those first kind of couple of pages...I want to hit the main points here, and then...well, what we put in there is some frequently asked questions that kind of...probably would spring from this, and all this is on the Internet.

However, here's the deal. Follow with me here, don't start reading ahead yet. I see all you looking down, all right, okay, all right. Here's the deal: In order to move in this direction, to create an avenue for more elders, that involves a change in bylaws for us as a faith family. Let me tell you one thing that nobody told me when I signed up to pastor was the glamour of bylaws. However, they are good and a necessary part of the picture. Like, this is where I think that our brothers and sisters in some underground churches have a slight advantage here, because they do not have to do anything with bylaws. Now, it's because they are circumventing the government, and they're gathering together for worship, but we are, by God's grace, free to worship. With that freedom comes tax codes and corporations and organizations and blessed bylaws.

So, with joy, we embrace them, and this is good. It's good for us to define very clearly how we are led, but the whole picture is, in order to make changes in this whole area, then we have to dive into bylaws. Now, you ask me, "Where are bylaws in the book of Acts?" They are not there. By the grace of God, they are not there. However, for The Church of Brook Hills and any other church in our context, they are there.

So, what do they look like? What I want to do is put before you, tonight, a picture that, two weeks from now, we're going to present a whole draft of bylaws that puts all this into the necessary legal language that is necessary to put this into practice. However, I don't want

you to be surprised by anything there. I want to kind of give you an overview of that. You can kind of soak this in over the next couple of weeks.

Then, when those are put before us as a faith family in a couple of weeks, that we'll have them; we'll have a couple of question-and-answer times on Wednesday night and Sunday night if you want to dive into anything that's not covered in some of these frequently asked questions, just to make sure we're totally clear, and then, we'll have a time where we will vote on whether or not to change the bylaws in accordance with this picture.

So, what I want to do is I want to walk through this. I know it's going to feel really detailed and really overwhelming, but there are some people in this room that details mean nothing to you. You just kind of sit back and just kind of soak it all in. There are some that every "i" dotted and every detail is vitally important. So, I want to cover this and give, as best as possible, in a brief time, an overview of what this proposal is. So...and there will be some graphics on the screen and a couple of different points to kind of help put a picture to this.

So, here's the deal: Revised Elder Structure. Right now, and I mentioned this earlier, there are eight non-staff elders, plus me. So, there's nine of us. So, there's me, the loner on the end, invited late to the party. So, that's me. Nine elders total, and all of us carrying out the functions that are there that we've talked about. Now, the goal in this picture is to expand that number, the number of elders, to many more.

Now, there's not a set number in how many to expand to. This is kind of wide open. Could be, yeah, any variety of numbers that there could be. So, according to who the Spirit of God raises up, and the needs in our faith family, and timing, we could have a different number of elders each year. So, that could be 20, 30, 40, 50 or more elders, who are shepherding this church and multiplying this church in our context and other contexts around the world.

So, Elder Council is...when you see "Elder Council" in this, that includes this whole body, however large it would be at any given time. That's all the elders. So, an Elder Council that includes two leadership teams: An administrative elder team, and we're going to talk about both of these, and a Pastoral Staff Team.

So, let me begin to unpack this. Elder Council will include both staff and non-staff men in the church. The non-staff elders must always be in the majority. Now, just a quick note right here from the beginning, this is a change. Right now, I'm the only staff elder in our faith family, and what we've seen as we've been diving into this, is there's a variety of men, leaders in our faith family, who are biblically qualified to be elders, who are biblically functioning as elders, but they are basically disqualified from eldership simply by nature of the fact that they are financially supported by the church. That just doesn't make sense.

Now, there were some good reasons why we moved in that direction a few years ago, and some conflicts that we were trying to address. However, in the context of putting staff elders back in the picture, we built in some safeguards like this. Non-staff elders must always be in the majority. We don't want to become too heavily dependent on staff elders. So, we want a good relationship there.

There were also situations where, in the former structure in our faith family, the staff elders, staff pastors were basically in situations where there was a conflict of interests with things that they were having to deal with that dealt with staff. So, what we've done is we've tried to build in some safeguards to avoid that. However, Elder Council, both staff and non-staff men in the church. Everybody, all elders on the Elder Council, leading under the authority of Christ. Now, here's the picture: Every single elder carrying out these four

functions that we talked about. So, every single one of these elders leading under the authority of Christ, carrying for the body of Christ, teaching the Word of Christ, and modeling the character of Christ; all of these.

Here's the deal, though. One of the reasons why we've been hesitant to move in this direction is because you get to a group of 20, 30, 40, 50 or more elders and that becomes very tough when you're sitting around a table to dive into issues and have good discussion. It's one of the things that's been great about the picture we have had now. With nine elders, it's really, really worked well. So, what we've done is in the context of that broader Elder Council is established two leadership teams: One an Administrative Elder Team, and the other a Pastoral Staff Team.

Follow along with me. What I'll do is I'll kind of read this, then give a little explanation:

An Administrative Elder Team will serve as a subset of the Elder Council and provide overall leadership and direction for the activities of the Elder Council. [That's AET throughout.] The Administrative Elder Team will consist of the senior pastor, no less than eight non-staff elders chosen by the Elder Council, meet more regularly than the Elder Council, provide direction for the Elder Council meetings. Non-staff AET members will chair certain ministry teams of the church.

Basically, in essence, this Administrative Elder team is the equivalent of, basically, what we have now as elders: A group of myself and eight non-staff men, brothers who are...when it says, "The AET will provide overall leadership and direction for the activities of the Elder Council," basically, how that plays out...say we have to, one day in the future, revise bylaws again. Well, instead of 40 or 50 guys, however many elders there are, sitting down and having to dive into all the legal details of this or that, and getting bogged down in all those discussions, the Administrative Elder Team would do all of that groundwork, spend the long, long hours of discussion that go into that, and then come to the whole Elder Council, basically, with the proposal for what this might look like. The Elder Council, at that time, obviously could ask questions, or make changes, but that picture is so much farther along than just starting with this discussion of 30 people around a table.

Similarly, maybe on a more significant spiritual matter, maybe there's a small group that is starting to teach a false doctrine. Heresy is beginning to jump from this small group, to this small group, to this small group, and elders see that, and so the Administrative Elder Team would dive in-depth and to research into what's being taught, and how to refute that, and how we as a church can best refute that. Then, they would come to the Elder Council with basically saying, "Here's ways we can refute that." So, doing a lot of legwork on that that frees up as many elders as possible to give themselves to the shepherding and the caring and the teaching, the not getting bogged down in all these other details.

So, that's the picture of the Administrative Elder Team. Then, you've got the Pastoral Staff Team that will serve as a subset of the Elder Council. Again, I'll read through this, then provide a little explanation:

Provide overall leadership direction to the church staff. The PST, Pastoral Staff Team, consists of staff members serving in staff positions that require elder leadership. Positions on that team will be determined by the consensus of the Elder Council, and they will work daily in the implementation of the church's vision, mission, and goal, according to the direction of the entire Elder Council.

Basically, what that is, is like myself, the Executive Pastor, Pastor of Biblical Training, those kind of positions that require elders in order to have that position, that are responsible for overseeing implementation of the church's vision, mission, and goal in the staff, so that they would be on this Pastoral Staff Team that's working daily in that way.

So, what you've got, then, is a broader Elder Council, where a small group of men are on an Administrative Elder Team to help work to provide the groundwork for activities and what the Elder Council's doing, and then a Pastoral Staff Team working beside them, and then all that together in the context of an Elder Council. So, that's the picture. Now, there we go. You've got the Administrative Elder Team, and the Pastoral Staff Team, and then yellow and blue make green in the middle as I'm overlapping in those two teams.

So, that's the picture: Selection and service of elders. This is really very similar to what we do now. Elders who are not on the Pastoral Staff Team...so, not the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, or Pastor of Biblical Training, and so on...election: "Once a year, the church will receive nominations for elders." Now, this is huge. It's very similar to what we've done, although we've done this every two years right now, and we will be switching to every year just so we can recognize and affirm men as elders in our faith family according to the changing dynamics in our faith family every year, and changing needs in our faith family every year.

However, once a year, you in the church, every single one of us in the church, will pray and say, "Who are men in our faith family that are biblically qualified to serve as elders, who are caring for the body of Christ, who are teaching the Word of Christ, that we see as potential elders?" Then, you will nominate them. Now, you won't tell this person you're nominating them. They're not out campaigning for it either. Like, this is not an election cycle every year here. This is you saying, us saying together as a church, "We see God raising up these men," affirming them, and then as we nominate them, then an elder selection team would explore those nominations, interview perspective elders, and select men to present to the Elder Council as potential elders.

The Elder Council will then bring them to the church, and the church...we've talked about this before...that the church is responsible and accountable to Christ for appointing leaders and acknowledging leaders. So, the church will have a couple of weeks during which they would be able to express any concern about a man's fitness to serve as an elder, ability to serve as an elder. It's not like we'll put ten men before the church and you have to vote on five, but all the men we put before the church, we would say, "We see these men as elders in our faith family. We want to acknowledge them as that." However, the church would have an opportunity to address that, and then the church would vote, and those people would become elders.

They would serve for a term of four years, after which they'd be required to take a one-year sabbatical. You might ask me, "Where's 'sabbatical' in the Scripture?" That's not there either. It's kind of in the bylaws category, but what is in Scripture is a major importance placed on an elder's personal life and an elder's family life. We want to make sure, especially for a non-staff elder who's got a full-time job and putting this on top of what he is already doing, we want to make sure to provide a breather for him in there. We've done this so far, and it's been extremely healthy and helpful.

So, we provide this breather for a brother to take a year to make sure he's focused, where he needs to be in his life and his family, and then evaluate whether or not this is something he wants to continue. Then, after that year, he would be eligible for nomination again and go through the process.

The difference comes with elders who are on the Pastoral Staff Team, like myself, or Executive Pastor of Biblical Training. We have a personnel ministry team that oversees different issues that pertain to staff, encouraging staff, making sure that we as a church are using wise resources when it comes to staff. So, because staff implications are involved there, they would carry out the responsibilities of the Elder Selection Team in the above process, but everything else would stay the same.

All that to say, timeline for this year is in December, as I mentioned, the church is going to vote on changes to bylaws. We'll have opportunities to discuss those. Then, if that moves through, then in January, we'd start nominating men. We'd have an elder selection team that would work to present men as elders to the Elder Council, who'd present them to the church. Then, presumably around May, new elders would begin to be in service. We've got three elders that are scheduled to rotate off this next year, and then, after that, beginning in the Fall, we would begin a more regular rotation, where we'd do this at the end of every year.

Now, I know that is a mouthful and a lot to process, and a lot to think through. Some, I know, are tempted to think, "Why does this even matter?" Let me kind of bring it all back for a second here. I'm guessing that in this room, with the variety of different backgrounds that are represented, there are a lot of pictures that you have seen of unhealthy leadership in the church. There have been times that you may have been hurt by leaders in the church. There is an epidemic of leaders in the church in our day not reflecting the character of Christ and jeopardizing the reputation of Christ and the gospel in the church.

So, for these reasons, I want to encourage us as a faith family to see the importance of this. Yes, it's bylaws and stuff and this or that, but it's truths we see in Scripture and saying, "How can we put them into practice in our faith family in a way that Christ and His character are evident in leadership, and the gospel is clearly reflected in the way we operate in the church." So, that's why this is important; for our good, and ultimately for God's glory.

## **Mobilizing Churches...**

### **The situation ...**

So, that's multiplying leaders. These last two, we're just going to fly through. These are kind of, like I said, kind of trailers of where we're going in the days to come. Mobilizing churches. Making disciples, multiplying leaders, mobilizing churches. Here's the situation: Others are listening. "Others" meaning other followers of Christ, other churches are listening to, watching The Church at Brook Hills. Scott joked about being an iPod member. Like, the reality is, via Podcast, there are a lot more people that hear what's going on week by week in the Word here than sit in this room on Sunday. This is before that little orange book came out.

So, we get...and have been for a while...been getting kind of bombarded from outside. Questions about this and this and this and this. The problem is, we're learning. Like, we're still learning and have a lot to learn about how to make disciples of all nations. People call us, call me, and say, "Well, like we've got it figured out." It's like, "No, we don't have anything figured out. We're trying to figure this out. What does this look like? We clearly don't have it all figured out."

### **The challenges ...**

So, the challenge is, how do we stay focused on how we can most effectively make disciples of all nations in our faith family, and shepherding and caring for our faith family, and carrying out this mission as a faith family...stay focused on that and, at the same time, steward influence that God entrusts to us to mobilize others to make disciples of all nations? The reality is, church, we have an opportunity that God by His grace has given us to encourage other churches in the Great Commission and the advancement of the global plan of Christ. We want to maximize that.

There are...you may or may not realize it...there are some stories that are on the Radical Experiment website...but there are churches in, like, from Oregon to California to Tennessee to the Northeast...Florida, multi-ethnic church plants in the North, 150-year-old church in the South. There's El Salvador, London, who are going through different kinds of Radical Experiments, and everywhere in between.

There's one church, smaller church, that e-mailed me recently that was saying they were talking about what they'd done in their budget immediately in 2010, and how in 2011 their goal was to free up between \$300,000 and \$500,000 for the spread of the gospel in the world. Yeah, this is good. It's good to encourage that, to be a part of cultivating that.

I mean, there were two guys this morning, they were sitting over here, I felt so bad. They were probably asleep because they're from Missouri, and they stopped through. They were somewhere, and they wanted to come to church here. They'd been tuned into what's been going on at The Church of Brook Hills, and so they wanted to come. They slept in the parking lot last night in their car. Like, cold night. They come in for like a sermon on elders. Like, what a disappointment. I felt so bad. I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, guys." I wanted to pull them aside and give them something else.

### **The solution ...**

So, people are listening. We're learning. How do we stay focused and at the same time serve brothers and sisters in those contexts? So, here's the solution. We've been working on this for the last couple of years, on something we're calling Disciple-Making International, which is basically...and the key word here... "A resource ministry, the purpose of which is to awaken a passion for the glory of God in all nations by encouraging and equipping Christians and churches to accomplish the Great Commission."

Basically, what we've been doing up until this point is, as a church, part of what we have in our budget, and part of what we've been doing, even staff leadership wise, has been working on resources and distributing resources, translations, materials that we're trying to give out all over the world. However, what we've found is this thing is just growing and blossoming, and it's requiring a lot of attention; it's becoming a bear. In order to continue to let that grow, what we decided to do is, basically, take that out of this picture, put it over here where it can grow and blossom and serve brothers and sisters around the world.

At the same time, we stay focused on the mission, how we're going to make disciples in the context where we are as a faith family, and then have a resource ministry to plot from that. We're going to hear more about this the beginning of next year. We were hoping that we'll have a website up pretty soon after the beginning of the year, just a mega resource website that will be in the days to come in multiple languages, just providing resources, fueling disciple-making, providing resources here and around the world, mobilizing Christians and church leaders here and around the world.

Now, the reason I want to make sure to emphasize this to you now, just put this before you, is because even when you see the budget in a couple of weeks, when it says "Cross-Cultural Resources" in there in the budget, that's going to be fueled through Disciple-Making International, just FYI.

## Magnifying God...

However, that's a picture of where we're going. So, if you put these things together...and I know...I know that there is a tendency all throughout, and I can see it on the faces at different points tonight, like, "Oh, what does all this matter?" I want to remind you why this matters. You have next generation disciple-making over here, that whole picture. You have Disciple-Making International, and then the new elder structure that the question comes to our minds, "What is the point? Like, why is this so important to take time on a Sunday to talk about this stuff?" Here's why: It all comes back to the gospel and the cross of Christ, and the reality that we are a people in the church who have found our life in His death, and we have been forgiven of our sins and freed from our sins. We have the most glorious news in the world, and we want that gospel to be spread all over the world.

So, how do we do that from a church in Birmingham, Alabama? How can we be a part of making this gospel known to the ends of the earth? This is where I want you to see...and this goes back to what we talked about last week. Okay, with this gospel in all of our hearts...every member of the church, with the Spirit of Christ in them, the gospel of Christ in them, equipped to spread that gospel.

What happens when every member of the church is spreading the gospel and multiplying the gospel? However, not just members in the church being shepherded and cared for; led in the charge by leaders, elders in the church, who are showing what the mission of Christ looks like in action, who are putting to flesh what we're seeing in the Word, teaching it and showing it. Not just elders in our faith family, and our faith family doing this together, but mobilizing other churches and Christians along the way, encouraging and cultivating in other churches the passion for the glory of God and the Great Commission. Then, going back to what we started with in the beginning.

If we're doing this faithfully in our homes and passing the gospel on to the next generation to their children, the children that come after them, you can't stop the spread of the gospel here. The picture is, yes, taking that whole picture of multiplication and doing that in Birmingham for the spread of the gospel in Birmingham, but, obviously, not just for Birmingham, but for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Like, that's what we're after: Making disciples, and multiplying leaders, and mobilizing churches and, in the end, magnifying God. That's why we pray, "God, give us the nations, and do it in such a way that only you get the glory." Like, that's not just some idealistic, fanciful prayer. Like, we can pray that and mean that and believe that, and we're praying for this, that God would do in and among us, in our church, in our lives and our families, ultimately in our faith family, a work that will impact nations for His glory.

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