



New Creation, New Calling

The Story of Scripture – Part 32

If you have the Word of God—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open to 2 Corinthians 5. It's good to be together around God's Word. We have a lot of ground to cover today, so I want to dive right in. I have high expectations for what is going to happen in the next few minutes.

I'm hoping and praying that many people in this room will experience new life. I'm hoping and praying that others, just a few minutes from now, will find themselves doing what literally hundreds of people have done over the last month here—putting on one of these shirts and celebrating new life in Jesus by being baptized. Finally, I'm hoping and praying that today and next week God might alter the trajectory of many lives in a way that will lead to the spread of the gospel far from where we're sitting right now. I don't presume I can make all these things happen—only God can. So let me pray before we read this Word.

O God, please do what only You can do in these next few minutes. Please speak supernaturally to every single heart, giving us courage and humility to do whatever You are calling us to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This is the Word of God, beginning in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at key verses that in many ways summarize the Christian life—and this passage does that as well. I want to show you two realities for every follower of Jesus. Or you may not yet be a follower of Jesus. I know many people every week are visiting with family

members or friends, or maybe you've come on your own. We're so glad you're here, particularly today. I don't believe it's an accident that you're here today, because this passage in the Bible gives a powerful picture of what it means to follow Jesus. Today I want to invite you to make a decision to follow Him and experience these realities.

The first reality for every follower of Jesus: You are a new creation.

The memory verse in our Bible Reading Plan for this week is 2 Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* What does that mean? In reality, there are a thousand things it means, which is why I have close to that many things listed in your notes. But let me summarize what the Bible is saying here.

We have all, every one of us, sinned against God. We've all turned from God's ways to our own ways, so because of our sin we are separated from God. If we die in this state of separation from God, we will spend eternity separated from God. But God loves us and has done the unthinkable. Although we deserve death and eternal separation from God, He has come to us in the person of Jesus—God in the flesh. Jesus lived a perfect life with no sin in Him, then even though He had no sin to die for, Jesus chose to die on a cross for our sin, to pay the price you and I deserve for our sin.

Then Jesus rose from the dead in victory over sin, so that anyone anywhere—no matter what you have done, no matter who you are—can be forgiven of all your sin and reconciled into a relationship with God forever. That's what the Bible just said in 2 Corinthians 5:18: *"God...through Christ reconciled us to himself."* Verse 19 tells us that when we trust in Jesus, God no longer counts our sins against us. Verse 21 says, *"For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God."*

Now you start to see what it means to be a new creation. When you put your faith in Jesus, you go from being guilty of trespasses to being forgiven of trespasses. You go from being separated from God to being reconciled to God—and this changes everything. Now that you've been reconciled to a right relationship with God, you experience an entirely new life. I've gone through just the first five chapters of 2 Corinthians leading up to this point and have listed all the things that are new about you when you put your faith in Jesus and are reconciled to God.

We obviously don't have time to look at all these in depth; there's a sermon in every single one of them. But I want you to understand and feel what it means to be a new creation. When you place your faith in Jesus, you have a new identity. You are no longer defined by your sin. You are now defined by God's grace. You can now bank your life on having new peace, new comfort, new strength, new hope, new help, new promises.

You have an altogether new spirit, new joy, a new aroma. That sounds a little weird without some context. It's not talking about body odor here; you should still wear deodorant. But 2 Corinthians 2 talks about how the fragrance of Jesus' character is now a part of you and reflected in you. You're an entirely new person, with new glory, new righteousness, new boldness. You're no longer separated from God and afraid of God. You now boldly come before God as His son or daughter. You have new freedom—freedom from sin, freedom from addiction, freedom from bondage to yourself, freedom from fear, freedom from anxiety. You have new sight. You can see what you were formerly blind to. You have new confidence, new life, new faith, new speech, new grace, a new heart and a new future. You have a new home in heaven and a new guarantee for eternity.

I was actually reading 2 Corinthians 5 this last week on what was my dad's birthday. I loved my dad deeply. He died suddenly of a heart attack years ago, but because he had trusted in Jesus, he knew that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Based on faith in Jesus, he is in heaven now.

Do you know that guarantee? If you were to die unexpectedly on the way home today—which any of us could—do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you will go to heaven? If you have put your faith in Jesus and follow Him, you have a new guarantee from eternity. As a result, you have new courage, a new aim in life, new motivation for life and a new perspective about life. I hope you get the point. When you put your trust in Jesus, you become an entirely new person.

I want to show you a picture of how these words on a page become a reality in somebody's life. I want to introduce you to Holly Dooley. As Holly joins me up here, I want you to not just hear, but see this reality in her life, to see how followers of Jesus become new creations. Would you welcome Holly with me?

Holly: Good morning, church family. My name is Holly. I've been notified that I have between five and seven minutes before David will push me off the stage.

David: I would never push anybody, but especially Holly Dooley, off the stage.

Holly: Anyway, here's the set-up. I'm going to be sharing with you seven milestones from my life, each with a corresponding verse. Even though it's the story of my life, it truly is a testimony of God's grace.

So, Milestone #1. *"Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be"* (Psalm 139:16). I was born April 21, 1992 and my birth name was Colleen Kara Dooley. The summary of my childhood is that my mother's side is Catholic and my Dad's side is Buddhist—but I was raised by a Muslim woman. So there was a lot of religion, but not a lot of relationship. There was no relationship with God.

This is picture of me with my grandparents. I really loved that bathing suit, by the way. It's two fish kissing. I chose this verse because I'm so comforted to know that God is sovereign over all the days of our lives.

Milestone #2. *"We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way"* (Isaiah 53:6). I actually remember the exact day I decided I no longer wanted to have anything to do with God. Just like this verse says, I strayed away from God.



Milestone #3. *"Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God"* (James 4:4). High school was when I really started to get more involved in the party scene. I lived a very selfish, self-centered life. I was very consumed by my image, my possessions, my popularity, as well as other people's opinions of me. There was no room for God and I did not care. As this verse says, I befriended the world.

Milestone #4. *"I loathe my very life; therefore, I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul"* (Job 10:1). This is a picture of the University of Colorado at Boulder. It was



a very dark time in my life. I was a freshman in college and something very traumatic happened to me that left me feeling dirty. I thought no one would ever want me. I really wanted to commit suicide and Satan would have loved for that to have been the end, but God had a different plan. As a result of that happening, I went to church and heard the gospel for the first time. After that year, I transferred to Virginia Tech, which leads to...

Milestone #5. *"Formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods"* (Galatians 4:8). Even though I had heard the gospel, my heart was still very hard toward God. I said, "If You're good, why didn't You protect me? Why did that happen?" At Tech, I pursued the world even harder. I became a complete slave to the idea that I could be perfect. I dyed my hair. I worked out twice a day. Sometimes I would run eight miles. Sometimes I would run 11 miles, only having had a banana for breakfast and a banana for lunch.

I may have been smiling on the outside, but I was dead on the inside. I always thought that if I looked a certain way, then I would be happy. If I had that relationship, that success, that body, then I'd be happy. But it was always a disappointment and a disillusionment. I still felt empty, alone and tired—tired of running, but also tired of running my life into the ground. Sin always promises more than it actually gives and sin says, "I don't need God or His ways. I can run life on my own, thank you very much."

One day I decided to go to a church near my campus. I wept the whole time, hearing about God's love for us. I spoke to the pastor and he said that I needed a relationship with Jesus. I told him he needed a head check. No, I'm just kidding. I didn't actually say that. I'm not a barbarian. But he gave me the book The Purpose-Driven Life by Rick Warren. I learned through that book that we can have a personal relationship with the living God and forgiveness of all our sins by trusting in Jesus and His sacrifice for us on the cross.

Milestone #6. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone; the new is here"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is a picture of me after I became a Christian. I changed my hair back to the original color the Lord gave me. I also changed my name to Holly. The reason I did that was when Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus and became a new man, he went by the name Paul. But if you ever want to make your family think you're crazy, just change your first name.



Milestone #7. *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy"* (1 Peter 1:8). This is a



picture of a game called "High Striker," something you'd see at a carnival. The gist of the game is you have a mallet, you hit the lever as hard as you can, then if you hit it hard enough, it will ring the bell. This is a perfect analogy of what it is like to know Jesus. Jesus is the jackpot. There are some really great experiences you can have, but nothing compares to knowing, following and surrendering to Jesus. We are tempted every day to get distracted by our circumstances and forget the goodness of our God Who gives us forgiveness of our sins, His Holy Spirit and the promise of heaven. He is the only One Who can give us a second chance and make us a new creation. Thank you.

David: Will you pray with me? God, we praise You for Your grace and love in Holly's life. We praise You for making her a new creation. We praise You for this reality in so many lives represented in this room right now. We pray that You would make this a reality for more lives today, that You would bring about new creations today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thank you, Holly. Holly is a new creation. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus, today can be the day when you begin to celebrate a new start. You can hit the jackpot. It's a start that will last for all of eternity.

The second reality for every follower of Jesus: You have a new calling.

Here's why I wanted Holly in particular to share. Her life not only illustrates this first reality, it also illustrates the second reality. Holly has not only been changed by God's love for her in Christ; she is zealous to share God's love for others. Holly goes all over the city and everywhere she goes, she tells people about Jesus. If you encounter Holly, you are going to hear about Jesus, because she gets this second reality: if you're a follower of Jesus, you are a new creation and you have a new calling. Not only have you been reconciled to God, you want others to be reconciled to God. You know where the jackpot is and you want others to experience Him.

Do you see in 2 Corinthians 5:18 where Paul says God *"through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"*? Then in verse 19 he says in Christ God was not just reconciling us to himself, God was also reconciling the world to himself. That means that we who have been reconciled to God are now ambassadors for Christ (verse 20). This is our new identity. It's who we are.

What an image! It's like we're a representative from another country who speaks on behalf of the king of that country. We are making an appeal to everyone in this world. We are imploring everyone in this world to be reconciled to God. Here's the new calling for the new creation. God has called every follower of Jesus to live for the spread of the gospel—the good news of God's reconciliation through Jesus—throughout the world. In other words, God has called every follower of Jesus to live to see more disciples made and more churches multiplied in all nations throughout all the world.

This is our new identity—we are global ambassadors for Christ. This means the global cause of Christ dictates everything the Christian thinks, desires and does. The global, worldwide cause of Christ—which is to make disciples of all the nations and spread the good news of God's reconciliation all over the world—is now what drives the Christian. The global cause of Christ drives the way we pray, the way we spend our money, the way we spend our lives.

This is so significant, yet so missed. So many professing Christians are content to be reconciled to God in Christ, but have missed what it means to now be an ambassador for Christ in the world, living to invite and implore people to be reconciled to God throughout the world. It's what a Christian is. Members of McLean Bible Church—every follower of Jesus in this room—as new creations, as men and women who have been reconciled to God in Jesus, we live for the world to be reconciled to God in Jesus.

This is why we talk, not about just reaching Metro Washington, DC, but all nations—because this is the way God talks. This is why we don't say, "Why do we always talk about global missions?" The answer is obvious: we talk about global missions because God talks about global missions. God's entire goal in history is all headed toward men and women from every nation, tribe and tongue gathered around His throne and reconciled to Himself. Read the end of the book.

If that's God's goal, then that should be our goal. If it is not your goal, as a Christian, to reach all the nations, and it is God's goal to reach all the nations, well then, I would just ask whose goal needs to change? God wants the world, so we want the world. You say, "Wait a minute, David. Are you saying that all Christians are supposed to move to other nations to share the gospel?" Well, I'm not even going to answer that question, because it really doesn't matter what I say. What matters is what God says. So, does God say that all Christians are supposed to move to other nations to share the gospel?

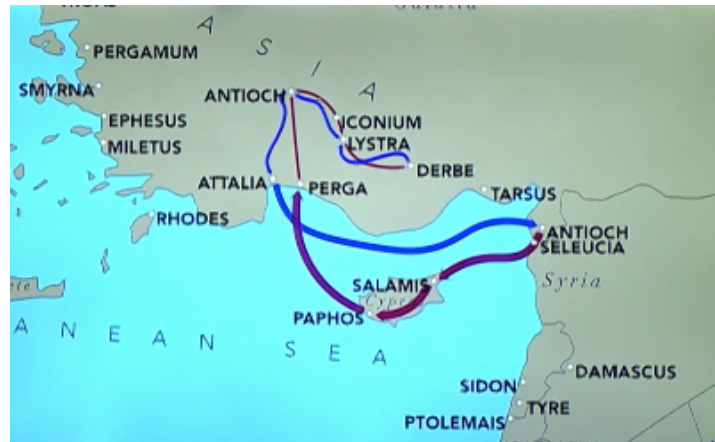
I want to show you that while God has called every follower of Jesus to live for the spread of the gospel throughout the world—for every one of us to live to see disciples made and churches multiplied among all the nations, letting that goal dictate everything in our lives, everything we think, desire and do—God has called some followers of Jesus to move for the spread of the gospel to unreached peoples and places in the world. In other words, they are to make disciples and multiply churches where the gospel has not yet gone, among groups of people in places that are not yet reached by the gospel.

Now you ask, "Where do you get that in 2 Corinthians 5?" This is where I want you to see why we have 2 Corinthians 5. Hold your place here and turn with me back to Acts 13. I want to show you some important contexts behind what we're reading in 2 Corinthians. Why is Paul writing this letter to a church in the city of Corinth? In order to answer that question, we need to go back a few years in time to when there was no church in Corinth, and the gospel—the good news of God's reconciliation in Christ—had not yet come to Corinth. Read with me the story of what happened in a worship service one day in a church in Antioch, beginning in Acts 13:1:

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Let's pause here make sure we have the picture. One day, when the church was worshiping, fasting and praying together, the Holy Spirit spoke and said, "Set apart two people, Saul and Barnabas, to leave Antioch and take the gospel to places it has not yet gone." Notice, the Holy Spirit didn't say, "Set apart everybody in Antioch to take the gospel where it has not yet gone." The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart these two people" and they did. The church laid their hands on Saul and Barnabas, then sent them out for a specific purpose to spread the gospel to people and places it had not yet gone. And that's exactly what they did.

Let me show you some maps. In this first one, if you look all the way over to the right, you'll see Antioch where these arrows come together. That's the Antioch in Acts 13. They sent out Saul and Barnabas. The reddish arrows coming out from Antioch represent their outbound journey.



They went to the island of Cyprus, then north into Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In all these places there were hardly any Christians at all. In each town they shared the gospel, people came to faith in Christ, so they gathered those people together in churches. Disciples were made and churches were planted in each of these places.

Then you'll notice that the blue arrows show them going back. They began retracing their steps, strengthening these different churches as they returned. You'll notice they came back to Antioch, which was like their home base. There they told the church in Antioch all the things God had been doing in places where the gospel had not yet gone. That's known as the First Missionary Journey of Paul.

That then sets the stage for the Second Missionary Journey. Look at this next map with me. Again, Antioch is over on the right and you'll notice this time Paul goes north to the places he's already been before. This time he goes with Silas and they pick up Timothy along the way. They're going to the same places, not breaking new ground yet.



But then in Acts 16:8-10, Paul receives a vision from a man in Macedonia saying, "Come over here and help us." So they conclude, "We need to go and take the gospel to places where it has not yet gone." They travel to places you might recognize from the Bible: Philippi, Thessalonica, to which the letters of Philippians and Thessalonians were written.

Then they came down to Athens and then to what city? Corinth. There were no Christians, no churches in Corinth, until Paul and those who were with him got there and shared the gospel. People came to faith in Jesus and gathered together as a church in Corinth. Then Paul left there and went over to Ephesus, to which he later wrote the letter to the Ephesians. Finally he went down to Jerusalem, then he made his way back to Antioch. That was his Second Missionary Journey.

That brings us to trip number three—Paul’s Third Missionary Journey. He goes out from Antioch and you’ll notice at this point he is retracing all the steps to places where he has shared the gospel. This is why we have this letter to the church in Corinth. He had led people to Christ, gathered them together in a church and now he is encouraging them through a couple different letters.



My point in showing you these maps is to show you that the whole reason we have 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Bible today is because God sent out some followers of Jesus to take the gospel where it had not yet gone. These kinds of people are what we commonly call “missionaries.”

Now, as soon as I say that word, all kinds of images might come into your mind. I want to encourage you to put those images out of your mind, because I want you to see this picture when you hear the word “missionary.” Missionaries are followers of Jesus, which goes right along with what we just read in Acts 13, who are set apart by the Holy Spirit and sent out from the church. The church sends them out to cross geographic, linguistic and/or cultural barriers, for the spread of the gospel among unreached peoples and places. To make this even easier to understand, missionaries are Christians whom God calls to spread the gospel where there are no Christians and there are no churches.

Now you might be thinking, “David, thanks for the New Testament geography lesson. What does this have to do with us today? So what?” Well, let’s ask if are there any unreached groups of people in places in our day? Are there any places in the world where the gospel has not yet gone and churches have not yet been planted, where there are few if any Christians at all? The answer is yes. Actually, straight-numbers-wise, there are far more unreached people and places today than there were 2,000 years ago. Today, estimates are there are over two billion people in the world who are classified as unreached by the gospel.

This next map depicts unreached people groups around the world today. I don’t expect you to be able to read the bottom part, but the green represents places in the world where there is an established or significant presence of the church. Obviously it does not mean that everybody is Christian in all these places. We know that. But there are churches. Disciples have been made, churches have been planted in the places shown in green.

Yellow stands for a formative or more nominal church presence. It's a weaker presence, but at least there is some presence. Then the red stands for unreached or least reached people and places in the world, where there are few if any Christians and churches relative to the population around them. Now again, realize what we mean when we say "unreached." It doesn't just mean that people don't believe the gospel or that they're separated from God by their sin. If somebody has not trusted in Jesus, they're just as separated from God by their sin whether they live in Washington, DC or in Turkey.



But here's the difference. There is access to the gospel in Washington, DC. By God's grace, there are churches filled with thousands of people in Washington, DC. That's not the case in Turkey. Out of 80 million people in Turkey, do you know how many Christians there are? Estimates are there are about 6,000. Which means there are more followers of Jesus gathering in McLean Bible Church today than there are in all of Turkey with a population of 80 million people. They are unreached by the gospel. Most of those millions don't know a Christian and don't have a church where they can hear the gospel.

If that's the case, I am wondering if God is calling some of us to go to them, just like He did in Acts 13. If our church has thousands of new creations with a new calling—all of us called to live for the global cause of Christ—I'm guessing that God is calling some, maybe many, of us. Not all of us, as we see in the Bible, but at least some and maybe many of us to spread the gospel where it has not yet gone to unreached people.

Unreached is such a key word here. We're not just talking about going somewhere else in the world. Did you know that 90-plus percent of mission sending and going and giving activity from United States churches is actually to reached places in the world? When most American churches and Christians do or think missions, we're focusing on countries in Latin America, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa. Not that that's bad, but don't miss the problem. We're patting ourselves on the back doing all kinds of missions work, but we're not actually getting the gospel to places it has not gone.

No matter how good it makes us feel, two billion people still haven't even heard the gospel. It's not that what we're doing is bad, but at some point somebody needs to go to the regions in red. God is calling all of us, as new creations, either to go to them or to help others go to them. Right? If this is the cause for which we live, then we say, "God, is it me? Who is it?" This is not a matter of who's a super-

committed Christian and who's not. It's not that super-committed Christians go there and less committed Christians stay here. That's not the picture.

What matters is not where you live, but whether you are being open and obedient to the leadership of God's Spirit in your life. The reality for every Christian is that God could call any of us to live anywhere in the world. Our lives are God's to spend however He wants, not however we plan. That's what it means to be a Christian. I wonder how many of us are living that out, praying, "My God, my life, my family—Yours to spend on this map. Totally Yours."

We pray this, knowing that God calls followers of Jesus to different places for different periods of time. I say this because Paul and Barnabas went out for a time, then they came back. Then they went out again, returned, then went out again. This looks different for different people. God is calling many followers of Jesus in this church to go short term to places where the gospel has not yet gone. We have all kinds of opportunities as a church for you to be involved in taking a week or two out of your year to spread the gospel to other places in the world.

Paul was sailing at times and it took weeks for him to get there, where we now can get anywhere on this map in about 24 hours. They could only dream of the kind of opportunities we have to make the gospel known among the nations today. I would suggest it's a good way to spend PTO, taking the gospel where it's never gone before.

Or maybe not just short term, but what I'll call mid-term—spending a couple months, six months, a year or two years. I think about retirees or others with jobs that might have flexibility to do this. I think about students. What a unique opportunity students have to take a summer, a semester, a year or two to go and work for the spread of the gospel where it hasn't gone.

I think about Mormon families who expect their graduating senior daughter or son to spend a year somewhere else in the world. If they are that committed to spreading a false gospel that says you have to work to get to God, then what does that say about you and me who have the true gospel that says by God's grace, He has made His way to us? Why are we not expecting graduating seniors or college students to spend at least a summer, if not a semester, in this unique window of life for the spread of the gospel in the world? Why are we, as Christian parents, actually discouraging that because of risks that might be involved in taking the gospel to people who haven't heard it?

This is why we're creating a gap year program here, Lord willing, that will start next September for graduates from high school to come and spend a year here. Part of that time they'll be in an unreached part of the world, considering how the global cause of Christ should dictate where they go to school, what they study, who they marry and a thousand other decisions they will make in life. We're planning to do a summer internship like that for college and graduate students. I pray that while they're here as part of this church they'll be part of a church whose heart beats for this.

Knowing that God calls followers of Jesus for different periods of time, He also calls followers of Jesus through different vocations. I want to emphasize this, because I think when many people hear the word “missionary” they think of somebody who leaves their job, sells their possessions and moves to another place to work full time for the spread of the gospel. God definitely calls some people to do that—but not all. Could it be that God is not just calling people to leave jobs, but God is calling people to leverage jobs?

Remember Paul himself, who’s writing this book, was a tentmaker. He worked in many of those places he went to support himself financially through tentmaking as he was spreading the gospel in those places. So if God called Paul to use vocation in that way, I’m wondering how He might be calling some or many of us to use vocations in similar ways. I look across this church and so many people have jobs and skills that will actually take you to these places in the world. What if you intentionally explored and took those opportunities to go and work in places where the gospel has not yet gone? I’m not just talking government jobs. I’m also talking about teachers, engineers, nurses and all kinds of medical professionals.

I was talking to someone a few weeks ago who is creating avenues for medical professionals to work in unreached places. They have 2,000 jobs for nurses and doctors of all kinds ready to be filled right now in the Middle East by Christians who will take them. There are 2,000 jobs available right now for medical professionals to take in the Middle East.

That same week I was talking to another person about a school in an unreached country that is looking for 30 Christian teachers right now. I was talking last week with an executive who’s expanding business in some of the hardest to reach places in the world. He’s looking for Christians who will go and work intentionally as part of that business for the spread of the gospel. Are you getting the picture? Opportunities exist for the nations to pay you to spread the gospel to them. That’s not an accident.

I ask what if God has designed the globalization of today’s marketplace for the spread of His grace in the world, because He wants to reconcile the world to Himself. That’s exactly what He’s done, if we will open our eyes and look at the world with a new lens. If we’ll look at the world through the lens of the high calling God has given us, then maybe the default is not just to stay focused on the places in the world where the gospel has gone, but to think, “What are the unique ways I can be part of spreading the gospel where it hasn’t gone. Maybe God has given me a higher calling than just the American dream.”

One question for every follower of Jesus this week

Here’s the deal. Starting today and over the course of this next week, I want to call us as a church to do Acts 13. I want to call us to worship and fast and pray this next week. I want to ask one question of every follower of Jesus this week. Is God calling you, as a follower of Jesus, to leave Metro Washington, DC, for at least two months to spread His gospel among unreached peoples and places in the world?

Now, before you come up with all the reasons why you think God is not calling you to this I want to call you to put yourself out here. For every follower of Jesus, ask this question and wait for an answer. Just give it a week, asking, “Is God calling me to leave this city for at least two months?” So we’re talking about more than a one-week or two-week trip somewhere else—at least two months, maybe longer. Maybe a year, maybe two, maybe many years, or maybe permanent as far as you know.

“Is God calling me to spread His gospel among unreached peoples and places?” This is not to go to a place where there are Christians and churches. God may call you to that, but what we’re talking about here is going to a place with very few if any Christians or churches. Then over the course of this week, I want to challenge every follower of Jesus to honestly ask this question—every individual, every couple, every family—every day. Ask God, “Are You calling me (or us) to go?” Then just see what’s going on in your heart as you ask that question.

Here’s what we’re going to do. Much like we read in Acts 13, I want to challenge us to fast at least one day this week. Specifically, if possible, I want to encourage us to fast this Friday, to ideally put aside food for the day. If you can’t do the day, just a meal. And instead of eating, say, “God, more than I want breakfast, lunch or dinner, I want to follow Your calling in my life. I want to see the world reconciled to You. That’s so much more important to me than anything in this world, including my daily bread. So I’m asking, are You calling me and my family to go to the unreached?”

Then Friday night, we’re going to gather in this room for another late-night prayer from 8:00 to midnight. I want to invite as many of you to come to this room where we’ll gather as one church to worship and pray for the spread of the gospel around Washington, DC.

I spoke this past Friday night, talking about the need for more churches in Washington, DC and about planting churches here. We’re talking about that all the time, so this is not either/or. Yes, we want the gospel to spread here and around the world. So what we’re going to do is pray together on Friday night, then all of this will lead to next Sunday, when, Lord willing, we’ll come back together. We’re going to worship, then I’m going to ask who believes God may be leading them to do this.

I say “may,” because for anybody who says a week from now, “I think God may be calling me to this,” next Sunday will begin a process by which we begin to do what they did in Acts 13. We’ll begin to discern with you if God is indeed leading you in this way and what that might look like. Is it something that might happen soon or a while from now? Next week will be a marker for starting that process.

Just to make sure we’re clear. This week I’m challenging every follower of Jesus to pray, if possible to fast, and ask God, “Are you calling me or my family to move to the unreached for a period of time?” I want to invite you to come to late-night prayer on Friday if you can, then don’t miss next Sunday. Come back next week with an open heart, ready to follow the Spirit’s leadership to this question. That’s next week.

Three questions for every person today

I want to close today with three questions for every person that will affect this question next week. I want to ask these questions of every single person in this room, whether you're a Christian or not. Let me ask you to bow your head and close your eyes with me. I want you to be able to focus, just between you and God right now. No distractions. There's nothing else to write down. But I want to ask you these three questions.

Number one, are you a new creation? Has what happened to Holly happened to you? Do these words we've seen—a new identity, a new spirit, new hope, new joy, new freedom, a new future, a new home in heaven—describe you? Do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that if you were to die unexpectedly today that you would go to heaven? Do you know that you have been reconciled to God through Jesus? If the answer to these questions is not a resounding yes in your heart, then I invite and implore you right now to be reconciled to God. Second Corinthians 6:2 says now is the time, today is the day of salvation. Not tomorrow, not later, but today.

If God is speaking to your heart right now and you want to be reconciled to Him, then I want to invite you just to pray in your heart right now. Say to God, "Dear God, I know I've sinned against You. I know I'm separated from You. But today I want to trust in Jesus and what He did on the cross to remove my sin and to reconcile me to You. Please make me a new creation, God. Please give me a new identity. Please give me a new future with You forever."

If you just prayed that to God, I want to invite you to do something. With every head bowed and eye closed, if you just prayed that to God, lift up your hand quietly before God right where you're sitting, as a picture of you saying, "Today I am receiving reconciliation to God through Christ."

O God, You see these hands. All glory be to Your name for reconciling people to Yourself right now and making new creations. I pray that You would give them the courage to take this next step, along with others who have not taken this next step yet.

That leads to the second question I want to ask every person. Have you publicly celebrated new life in Jesus? Have you been baptized as a public celebration of becoming a new creation? That's what baptism is. It's publicly saying, "I'm a new creation. Old is gone and new has come."

Over the last few weeks, hundreds of people have done this at MBC. If you have not been baptized as a follower of Jesus, today is the day. Perhaps you are just now trusting in Jesus today. Or maybe you've been a follower of Jesus, but for whatever reason you have never taken this step since becoming a follower of Jesus. Maybe you were baptized as a baby and today is the day to say, "Of my own volition, I publicly celebrate new life in Christ."

Whatever your circumstances, if you have never of your own volition publicly celebrated new life in Jesus through baptism, I want to invite you to do that today. We have everything you need—shirts,

shorts, towels, everything. The only question that remains is are you willing to be publicly identified with Jesus? As soon as I pray, I will share how you can do that today.

The final question I want to ask every person in this room is are you really willing to go wherever God calls you to go? For everyone who is a new creation with a new calling on your life—and even for those who are just now trusting in Christ today—before we go on to this next week, I want to ask are you really willing to go wherever God calls you to go? I use that word “really” because this question really hits at what it means to be a Christian. Is Christ your life, such that you will do whatever He calls you to do? It’s one thing to say that generally; it’s a whole other thing to say to God specifically, “I’m willing to go to Turkey or Afghanistan or the Middle East. Whatever You want, God, just say the word.”

God, I pray that You would give each of us, including myself, this kind of surrender to You today and this week. Lord, I put my life and my family on the table before You today, this week. All across this room, we do the same. We pray that You would set some, maybe many, of us apart this week for the spread of the gospel where it has not yet gone. God, we ask You to do what You did in Acts 13 among us this week. Please set apart and send us out from here so the gospel may be made known far from here. Help us all live for Your global cause and please use McLean Bible Church to reconcile more and more people in Washington and people in the world to Yourself. We pray this, we ask this, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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