

Our Philosophy of Ministry

JOSH PATTERSON, *March 2, 2008*

My name's Josh, and Matt has the flu. That's essentially key information. I am starting a fund for Matt to purchase him a new immune system because this happens frequently. Anyway, what Matt asked me to do Friday was to give a talk that I just gave in the membership class. And so this talk is entitled "Philosophy of Ministry at the Village Church." It's going to be a little bit different. It's not really a sermon *per se*; it's more of an explanation, a little bit more of a discussion. Ideally, we'd be in a setting where we could dialogue. We just don't have that opportunity this morning. But I will say this. If you're a guest with us, this might be just what you need to hear to find out our heartbeat here at the Village and what we're all about. So if you're kind of feeling this thing out and wondering if this is the place for you, this hopefully will be clarifying. And if you've been here for a long, long time, hopefully this will just reiterate why you're here or clarify some things for some new direction. Because we're making some changes as we enter in to 2008. And I'm going to explain that throughout the talk this morning.

Before I start into looking out into what is coming and where we are in this transition, I want to look back a little bit. And the reason is because all throughout the Old Testament, God said this, "When I do something miraculous among you, I want you to pause. In fact, I want you to build an alter of remembrance...I want you to name your child after this event...I want you to take the stones out of the river and put them here so that these things will be stones of remembrance for you. So that as you look forward into where I'm taking you, you can look back and know that I was faithful, that I did among you what I said I would and that I was there." And that gives us hope that He will be there in the future as well. And so specifically, I want to look at 2007. This is my fourth year here and for me that year went by unbelievably fast. It was like a flash. I mean, it was here and gone. And being in the middle of all the hubbub and all that transpired in '07, I realized that I just flew through it. I kind of missed the miraculous and what God actually did among us. It started off like a lot of the other years have started off. We were scratching our heads wondering how we're going to continue at the pace that we're going and wondering where space is going to come from. Because people keep coming numerically; there's been growth here. And so right out of the gate, right at the beginning of '07, we launched out with these video services. And so tonight, we'll have two video services here on this campus. And thankfully those took. People were encouraged by them, people were willing to go and to take part in that. They didn't snub their nose at the idea of watching Flat Matt. That was going to be okay for them. And that was a mini-miracle. That was a big deal. It provided a tremendous amount of relief at many different levels. And we entered that season and it was going well and we were encouraged.

And then we realized that these space issues aren't letting up. So we called the church to a season of prayer and fasting and we called it Venture. And if you were a part of Venture last April, it was a fantastic time in the life of our church. In the very first night, I remember driving up here at about 30 minutes before the service even began and it was packed. In fact, we turned away a ton of cars. Sometimes we have to turn people away at this service because there's not enough space, but that night, people weren't upset about it. They were actually encouraged. They said, "No, no, no, we realize that a lot of people wanted to be a part of this. We're just going to go back to the house and get something to eat and pray." And people were e-mailing us in from their colleges and from across the country saying, "We're joining with you in prayer during these next six weeks." It was remarkable. And I just remember Bleecker ended and said, "Hey, you're dismissed to go." but nobody really left. There was just this lingering effect that first night as the Spirit was really, really heavy in here. And people just stayed and there was just godly chatter going on. Everyone was just really encouraged. And here was the cry, "God, we don't necessarily want a building. We don't want all these ancillary things. What we want is You. Give

us You. That's what we want. That's our hope. That is our greatest need. You are our greatest need. You are our greatest hope." So throughout those six weeks, that was the spirit that just kind of permeated this place.

In the second week, a prayer went out like this, "God, would You be merciful enough to give us something that we cannot take credit for? Would You do for us something that we cannot say, 'Ah, look what we did?' Would You give us something that would be painfully obvious that this is You?" That was the second Wednesday of Venture. That next Monday there was a meeting with a pastor from Denton and that meeting went something like this, "Hey, our congregation is faithful but struggling. We've got about 30 to 50 people and when the college students leave, it's going to dwindle even more. And I don't know that we'll make it through the summer but here's what we were thinking. Would you be willing just to absorb us? And then this could be the Village Church in Denton. And maybe we could just deed the building over to you. What if we just kind of became one?" That's miraculous. I mean, that's unbelievable. Just look at the numbers. This church that's three times the size of square footage of this place comes to us and deeds over a building and says, "Why don't we, in the spirit of humility, join together that we might be one?" And so today, that campus in Denton is up and running and fully functional. They're going to have three services today with about 800 folks who are now going to hear the gospel who weren't at some point hearing it. That's a miracle. That's fantastic.

And then just a few weeks later, as we're trying to scramble to figure out what it's going to look like to have two campuses. And trust me, it's complex. Then all of a sudden, this grocery store right down the road goes out of business and goes up for sale. Somehow we get wind of this and put in a bid. And they accepted the bid. And now all of a sudden, what some people in this church have been praying for for five, six, seven, eight years is now coming to fruition, something as ridiculous as a grocery store across the street. The Lord provides. Now, all of a sudden we're faced with this new challenge of faith. What's keeping us from getting that? \$4 million. That was big. We had done a fund raiser in 2005 and didn't come anywhere close to that amount. The Lord provided what we needed at that time, but here we were. And so we did this campaign and we cleverly thought of this title, "We Need \$4 Million in 60 Days." And that was the name of it. And here's the ridiculous thing. The Lord provided. And through that time, through that season, He drew out from us some spirit of generosity that we would give towards that end. And we purchased the building in December, outright, debt-free, free and clear. We got it. The Lord provided. That's fantastic. Now here's the crazy thing, and I was thinking about this just to put this in perspective. That's \$66,000 a day for 60 straight days. It just blew me away. But God did it. And so now all of a sudden, we begin '07 with just this. And now we've got this \$4 million building over here that we're not sure what to do with and we've got this thing in Denton. And we're trying to coalesce all of this. It's getting complex, it's getting crazy. It still is complex and crazy, but we feel like we have some clarity in where we're going.

And so what I want to unpack as we look forward to '08 and where we feel like the Lord has us for the next few years is really this philosophy of ministry and how we're going to coalesce all these crazy ideas into the heartbeat of the Village. But to start to talk about a philosophy without an underlying foundational theology is foolish. It's foolish for me to get up here and go, "This is our philosophy. We just thought it up." I mean, the hope would be that we wouldn't simply be philosophers but that we would go to the Scriptures and see what the foundation is, what the church is, who we are to be, how we're supposed to do this thing. And from that theological and scriptural foundation, then we would come forward and say "This is our hope, this is our philosophy," and then that philosophy would in turn provide our practice. Our hope is that it would come down to the nuts and bolts of how we're actually doing things. And so I am going to fly through the theological foundations of the church. You can take an entire class at seminary on this, and I'm going to do it in ten minutes.

I'm going to start in John 1. He starts like this, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." And if you drop down to verse 14, here's the remarkable thing. "And the Word became flesh." The Word is Jesus. The Word is Christ. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ is the Word. The Word was before humanity. The Word was before Creation. The Word is the second person of the Trinity. The Word is in the Godhead. The Word is pre-incarnate Christ, the One who is coeternal with the Father. This is the Word. Now here is the crazy thing. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God would condescend and come here and be among us. Christ Jesus our Lord came here. This turns the world upside down as the Word becomes flesh and the Word grows in maturity and favor with God and man and wisdom. Then the Word begins to validate who He is by miracle after miracle after miracle. He is healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk. He's the one who is calming the winds, feeding the five thousand, bringing the dead back to life. He's sending out the demons, calling forth life in humanity. He is the Word who became flesh. And then His brother and His flesh around Him, humanity, we, you, me hang Him on a cross, the scandal of all humanity, and we kill Him. We crucify Him. But the great thing about the crucifixion is that we didn't think this up. God did. God did this. It was His preordained plan He would slaughter His Son. Because through the death of His Son, He might give us life. It was in the death of Christ, as He hung on the cross, that He absorbed the wrath of God for His people. He bore our sins. Christ came to save sinners. And that's what He did on the cross. So on the cross, He's hanging there bearing the reproach and the sins of His people. And we killed Him. But it was in His death that we get life.

But He didn't stay dead. He comes back to life three days later. He rises from the grave and comes forth glorified as the Christ who has saved humanity, who has given humanity the opportunity to be redeemed and reconciled. He comes forth as the risen Savior in all power, in all glory. And it's in the power of the resurrection of Christ that you and I have hope. So just before He ascends to the Father's right hand, He gathers His people, He gathers His disciples and goes upon the Hill and He gives what we call the "Great Commission." It's found in Matthew 28. It reads like this. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." This is the charge that He gives to His people. He says, "In light of who I am and the authority that I have and My authority is universal, My reign is now universal, I now give to you this authority. I'm giving to the church this authority. And the authority that you are to walk in is the authority to make disciples of every nation." So wherever the church is, the church stands on the authority of Christ. The church does not need the authority of the government. The church does not need the authority of class, creed or culture. The authority that the church has is the authority of the sovereign ruler of the world, Christ Jesus Himself. It's been given to us. And that authority that you and I walk in is to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them and teach them of Christ.

But, these aren't the last words that Christ speaks. He just gives authority for the mission; His last words give the scope of the mission. And that scope is found in Acts 1:8, the last words of our Savior before He descends. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." He says this in the book of Acts, "You will go forward, church. You will go forward and it will start in Jerusalem, but it will not stay in Jerusalem. It will extend out to Judea, but it will not stay there. It will go out to Samaria, to the very ends of the earth. And in the next chapter, when the Spirit descends, as Christ ascends, the church is born. And Peter preaches and proclaims, and people are gathered under the banner and the name of Christ. And the church begins to flourish in Jerusalem. They suffer persecution, they're challenged but they preach boldly the name of Christ. And in chapter 7, a man names Stephen comes before the courts and they are trying him and he preaches a fantastic sermon as they pelt him with rocks. And Stephen is killed; he's the first martyr of the church. But by God's plan, He uses the suffering and the fear and the martyrdom that transpired after that to spread the church. You see, they were huddled up in Jerusalem. And right after the stoning of Stephen, the message begins to go out. And in the rest of the books of Acts, you see it go out to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Acts ends in chapter 28, and chapter 29 is for you and me to write. You see, the reality is those guys told some guys, who told some guys, who told somebody, who told somebody, who told somebody, who told Tom Bailey, who told me

in 1996. That's how it happens. I didn't go to Jerusalem, I didn't make a pilgrimage there to hear this. You didn't either. Somebody told somebody, who told somebody, who told somebody, who told somebody, who told your parents, who told you. This is how the gospel has spread. It's viral. It just goes and it inundates people, it infiltrates culture, it gets in the hearts of humanity and it changes us. This is the church. The church is a group of redeemed people who sit under the proclamation of the word in fellowship as they share life with one another. The church is not a building. This is not the Village Church; you are the Village Church.

And so, as the theological foundation of the church is born, as we see who she is and what her call is, what's our role? What's the Village? What's our role as a people to play this thing well, to do this thing right, to be faithful in our part? What does it look like? Here's our hope. And as I share these things with you, I hope that you don't see me pointing to other churches. Because you can contrast us with other churches all day long. What I'm trying to unpack for us here is this: this is how we play our part well. This is what we feel God has called us to be. There's a couple of different ways that you can do ministry. I'm going to talk about four. Here's how we hope to do it. You can either do an attraction based approach to ministry or an incarnational based approach to ministry. In the Old Testament, it was more of a "come and see" type of religion. They built the temple. They made pilgrimages to the temple. That's where sacrifices were made. It was a central type of religion. And so the temple was ornate, it was lavished with gold and all the jewels and all of these things because the people would come. And it was through that that you would see the beauty and majesty of God. But when Christ came, it was no longer a "come and see." Christ says, "Go and tell." You see, when Christ incarnates, He gives something not just to celebrate but to imitate. He is showing us how life is to be done, how ministry is to be done. Christ comes here, He dwells among us. So in one word, our philosophy of ministry is incarnational." Nobody drives by this building and goes, "Oh my gosh! We've got to go see. I bet it's even better on the inside. Nobody did that. The chances are that somebody told you about this place. Somebody told you, your neighbor, your coworker, your friend, your children, that's the reason you're here. Somebody took the gospel and said, "The word is being preached and proclaimed at this church." And you have taken the gospel out. That's the hope, that what this is built upon is not the attraction of the building, not the attraction of the speakers or of the music but the incarnation of the word in your life as you take it out.

Because since the inception of the church in America, she has been competing with one another. She has. Because this country was founded on freedom of religion, democracy, capitalism. And that which was in the will of the marketplace and the people, in you and me, has inundated the church. So now we compete with one another. "Well, we'll get the better speaker so maybe they'll come to hear the speaker, maybe we'll get this worship guy and maybe we'll do this and this and this. So that we can compete. So that you would not go there, but you would come here." And most places don't have that problem because they have a state religion. You can go to any church; they're all going to be the same. But not here. We just line up the buffet and say, "Whichever one you like...but please like us better." And so we'll spend our time and our talent and our energy and our resources to make the facade look so appealing that you would want to come try us out. And so our hope is that we would fight against that and what we would bring to center stage would be the gospel. But the reality is, what you win them with, you keep them with. So if we win you with some glitz and glamor and high technology and an unbelievable building, then we've got to keep that up. But if we win you with the gospel, then you won't be surprised when you realize that's what we try to keep you with. The gospel, it's our only hope. It really is our only hope. So we fight against an attraction based or an incarnational based ministry, and we hope that we would be more incarnational based.

And another challenge is we fight against width vs. depth. And sometimes those two are at odds with one another. Again, as the market place has entered the mind of the church, as we see the marketplace mentality of the bottom line, what's the bottom line. It could be your stock price. How's it looking this quarter? You either know if you're doing good or bad. And so in the church, we've adopted this mentality. What's the bottom line? Numerics. "We have more people,

so we're doing better. We have a church of a thousand people; we're doing better than the church of 500. The church of 5,000 is doing better than the church of a thousand. And the church of 30,000, let's write some books, send out some public service announcements. We'll do some conferences so we can all figure out how we can be like the church of 30 or maybe even 40,000 people. Because that is success." And we've whittled life-changing transformation down to one simple, easy to measure metric, how many people are coming. And the sad reality is, we fill stadiums full of people who have no idea about the gospel. And I don't think that the Lord is going to be pleased on that day if we say, "But look around. See how many people are here?" Because He clearly gave us the commission which was to make disciples... not even converts, not to put skins up on the wall and say, "Look how many converts we have." He says, "I want disciples, and discipleship is a lifelong, difficult, painful, suffering process, then you die. That's it." And if you and I are not willing to be transformed and beaten and molded and shaped into the image of Christ, then we have no idea what His will is for His church. He wants to take us deep, and if we get wide during the process, hallelujah. But if we take width over depth, we have sold out the gospel. We've just absolutely sold it out. And sometimes those can be an enemy of one another, width and depth. We hope and our prayer is that somehow we will learn to work with those here, because He has brought width. And so what is success here? It's not a full service, it's really not. It's a people who go out and are known as people who evidence God's grace, their hearts are full of affection for Him, they walk in a spirit of humility as their lives are changed by the gospel and they extend love to one another. That's a win. It's much, much more difficult to measure than butts in seats. That's a reality. And so we'll fight for that. You've got to fight for that. You've got to pray towards that end.

So we can do an incarnational based approach or an attraction based approach. We can do width or depth. We can grow this place because we market well or we can grow this place because our people are on a mission there's a vast difference. Again, as the marketplace has inundated the church, and it has, you can go to a Christian bookstore and you can find how to brand your church, how to brand Matt Chandler, how to brand the Village logo, how to brand this place and posture and position this place in such a way that people will come. And that's how we'll grow. And then if we grow, we're successful. And then we're validated. We pat ourselves on the back and say, "Look how good we are. Isn't this great?" And it may or it may not be. And our hope is that we wouldn't spend our time and our energies and our talents on creating a clever marketing campaign, rather that we would invest our time, talent, energies and resources in getting our people to be on mission. We hope to understand the value of missional living. This is the call on our life. It's go and tell. It's to incarnate the gospel and the word to our neighbors, to our coworkers, to our family, to our friends. That's why people come. We don't even have a marketing department, so we're five years behind. And here's the thing about marketing. It just assumes a really, really bad theology. It assumes that what is keeping people out of here is that we just haven't found a niche, we just haven't found the right slogan, if we position Matt a certain way, if we whore him out in a certain way, then people will come. But the reality is, the reason people don't seek Christ is because they're blind. The reason people can't hear the gospel is because they're deaf. The reason that dead men don't respond is that they're dead. And so, what we need is not a marketing campaign; what we need is the gospel in their lives. What they need is to be quickened by the Spirit, that might see and hear and believe. That's what happened to you. That's what happened to me. One day I have no idea why I didn't believe; the next day I did. I have no idea. I just had a talk with a guy in the gym on Friday. He was sixty nine years old. For sixty nine years, he doesn't believe. Then he believes. Why? Christ opens his eyes. He didn't drive by and see a marketing campaign on a billboard. It was his kids inundating him with the word of Christ as they take the mission forward and incarnate the gospel to him. That's why. And we can spend our time and our energy and our talents doing one or the other. And the reality is, our heart is to be on mission. We want to be on mission.

And then finally, incarnation-attraction, width-depth, marketing-mission, and this last one is such a challenge to me. Which spirit do we carry? A spirit of entitlement or a spirit of humility and sacrifice? The reason this is so challenging for me is because I love me. I know how wretched I am, I know how little I am and I know how pretty much worthless I am, yet I can't stop thinking about me. I fill my thoughts with me...how I'm doing, what I'm thinking, how I'm living. I look in

the mirror and I love me. And even if you hate yourself, you look in the mirror and you love hating yourself. The reality is you and I are absorbed with ourselves. And so what we can do here is just create this culture that just says, "That's okay. Let's just placate ourselves by letting ourselves love ourselves." It's just so easy and natural. But the Scriptures give something so contrary. Jesus says you're going to have to die daily. Every single day, you have to die. John the Baptist said this, "I have got to decrease that Christ might increase." My only hope is death. That's my only hope. I am so inundated and infatuated with self, and my bet is that you are too. And so we can create ministries that feed us, create songs that feed us, create sermons that feed us or we can die to self and exalt Christ who is our only hope. And we as a people can walk in humility and sacrifice and learn what it means to wash one another's feet. But one of those two spirits we will walk in. And if you're like me, they will war against one another day in and day out. I need you to help me slay me, and you need me to help you slay you. Because it's not about us. And when we get that, that's the most freeing reality, because we will exhaust ourselves on ourselves.

We've got the theology, now I hope we clearly understand a little bit more about the philosophy. So how does it work itself out here? As we looked at the landscape of how we were doing ministry here at the church and began to evaluate where we were and what we were doing, we noticed a few things. We noticed that there were silos of ministry in the church. I don't know that you recognized this, but we did. There's this silo, this silo, this silo and this silo. And the thing about silos is they're separate. They weren't integrated. They didn't work together. In fact, they competed against one another. This one competed for your affections, this one competed for your time, this one competed for your energy. And within the church internally, there competing for budgeted dollars, for staff, for personnel, for announcements, for space. We don't have a lot of space, so we can't accommodate everything. And so they began to compete. So recognizing this, this is what we have done, and this will get it down to the nuts and bolts of what we're doing. Hopefully now you know why. We've kind of cleared the silos. And what I mean by that is we've eliminated some things, we've pushed some things to the side. For instance, we don't have a singles ministry here anymore. We used to have a singles ministry; we don't anymore. We don't have a college ministry anymore. We do not have a men's ministry. We never really had one, so that was just easy to push off to the side. We don't have a women's ministry anymore. Also this will help clarify some things. I'm only talking about adults here; I'm not talking about the kids. I'm not talking about Next Generation, okay. They're still here, they're not running chaotic all over the place. They're safe, they're here. I'm talking about adults. We have pushed those silos aside because what we believe is this. We don't need a college ministry to minister to college students, we don't need a singles ministry to minister to singles and a men's ministry to men and a women's ministry to women. What we believe is this. We have all been given the spirit of Christ as a priesthood of believers. We believe that you and I are equipped to serve one another so that college students can be ministered to by you, and singles by you, and men by you, and women by you, by us doing life together crossing paths. Because as we look at the rest of the New Testament, the miraculous thing that we see there is a diversity of people who were unified by one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism. And so what we want to do is put people together.

So having cleared the silos which were competing for time and affection and energy and resources, we tried to pave one highway, one highway that was going one direction, with one set of leadership, with one idea, with one vision. And this kind of super highway that we're all going down now is this. It's groups. And so what we did was create different lanes of groups on this highway. We have groups that are singles groups. We have groups that are just men's groups. We have groups that are women's groups and college groups. But do you know what else we have now? We've got this really cool thing, this blend which we're calling multi-generational groups. The multi-generational groups started in the spring of '07 and has been far and away the most popular and the fastest growing group since. And here's why. In that context, in this group, you've got the college student with the young professional, with the young married, with the young married with kids, with the seasoned married, with the divorcee, with the widow, with the widower all in one room. And they're breathing life into one another. So the college students aren't just getting together and necessarily just pooling ignorance, but they have the opportunity to bring life to some of these older people who might not understand

the perspective and the way things are changing. But then these older people are giving prudence and wisdom to the younger. And now all of a sudden, out of these groups, these natural discipleship relationships are forming where the older guy or woman is saying to the younger guy or woman, "Hey, next week let's just meet Tuesday morning for coffee." But it's happening out of the natural formation of relationships in these groups. We've got one highway that we're going down, one set of leadership, multiple lanes.

But the question is this. How do you get on the highway? You do recognize that if you're not involved in group life at the Village, then you're kind of missing out on life at the Village? This is not life at the Village. This is an important and vital and integral part of what we do week in and week out as we worship through song and through the proclamation of the word, but it is not the only thing we do. In fact, if this is all you are in, you're missing out really on the heartbeat of what we're about. Because in reality, you're not going to get to know Matt probably. There's 5,000 people who would love to have dinner with him. The reality is, there's only so much of Matt to go around. But you can get to know one another. And you can get to love one another and grow one another, which is really what it's all about. This is simply an opportunity to preach and proclaim the gospel and push people into life. Matt is a mouthpiece and a part. If you are not on this highway, you're missing out on the life of what we're hoping for here. So, how do you get on the highway? Just like if you're merging on I-35, you will get on via an on ramp. There's on ramps. There's ways to get on. There's even ways to get off. But the way that you get on is through different events that we're trying to provide to you, ways that you can merge into the traffic so to speak, ways that you can find your lane, find your niche here and begin to go with people, not by yourself.

And so here's what we've done. We've got a membership class. We'll have five of them this year. We've just done our first one. The membership class is a connection event to connect you to the life of the church, to let you know, to put before you who we are, where we're going and how to get involved. So you have the membership class. You have Recovery on Thursday nights here on this campus, Tuesday nights in the Denton campus. That is an on ramp to get into the life of the church. You heard the announcement about Group Connect. Group Connect next week is simply an opportunity for you to connect, to get on the highway. That's its design, that's its purpose, that's its focus, that you would merge on through this event. So if you're not connected, come and get connected. If that's your heart, then come and merge in with us and let's do this together. So you've got membership class, you've got Group Connect and we're going to throw out different times this year strategic retreats, a men's retreat, a women's retreat, a college retreat so that we can speak to certain issues that are pertinent to those certain life stages and then invite them onto the highway. So look for those, come to those, be at those. And then we'll have a few different learning events that we'll do corporately. We'll have Saturday seminars, which are on Saturdays. And then we'll have "Culture and Theology," which will be on Friday nights. We just had a culture and theology Friday night; it was fantastic. About 300 people came, not college students, not singles, not married, not divorced. All of us were here. A mixture of people were here. We watched a film and learned about the cultural implications of it through a theological lens. It was fantastic. Earlier in January, we had a Saturday seminar, "How to Share the Gospel." And it wasn't a college event, it wasn't a singles event; it was a church-wide event. We are doing this together, one highway. And this is an invitation for those to come and to join and be a part. So those will be scattered all year long.

And so our hope is this. I realize that you might think it's crazy that we don't have a singles ministry or a men's or a women's. And maybe you're right; maybe we're crazy. And if the Lord should lead us to change something down the road, then we'll just humbly change something. We're not infallible here. We'll just admit it and change. And that's okay, but for right now, this is the way we're going. This is how we're building this thing out. And the hope behind it all, and I hope that this is clearly seen, is that we are trying to clear the stage from any distraction that wouldn't keep our eyes focused on who is at center stage. And that's Christ as He unveils to us His gospel. That's what we need, that's what we want, that's our desire. He is our desire, He is our need, He is what we want. And so He will be preached, He will be

proclaimed, He will be heralded in this place and in those groups as we travel down this way, trying by God's grace to be obedient and faithful to the call. And then we get to die. And then it really begins. We're just tuning the instruments now for the symphony that awaits in glory.

Pray we'd be faithful. "Father I thank You. I thank You for Your word and I thank You for Your church. I thank You for the reality that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and Christ has made all the difference. So grace us with wisdom and humility. Father, grace us with the courage to be incarnational and the humility to possibly condescend into neighborhoods that we might think we're better than. Because certainly, Lord, You have modeled for us that in Your humility, You came to our neighborhood. May we model that. May we be a church on mission who is concerned about forming and fashioning the disciple that You're pleased with as we walk this long and arduous road called the Christian life. And may we be found faithful and obedient to You. We will need Your grace abundantly. We thank You it in Christ's name. Amen."

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