

# **RADICAL TOGETHER**

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## Introduction

Atop the Andes Mountains, the rays of the sun strike ice, a single drop of water forms gradually joining with other drops to become a steady stream. Hundreds of miles later, the mightiest river on earth: the Amazon. Flowing in the Atlantic Ocean at a rate of more than seven million cubic feet per second, the Amazon is more powerful than the next ten largest rivers in the world combined.

You and I are not intended to plunge down the mountain of radical obedience alone. I love this imagery of the Amazon. The force of a single drop of water descending the Andes is minuscule. Similarly, as long as individual Christians journey alone their effect will be minimal. But as men and women who are surrendered to the person of Christ join together in churches that are committed to the purpose of Christ, then nothing can stop the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

### **How can we in the church best unleash the people of God in the Spirit of God with the Word of God for the glory of God in the world?**

As leaders and members of churches, we are called to spur one another toward Christ and his agenda in the world. I believe certain ideas are foundational for Christians who desire to be a part of churches that are unleashing people into the world with the gospel.

This book is organized around six such ideas. **Essentially, here's a preview:**

1. One of the worst enemies of Christians can be good things in the church.
2. The gospel that saves us from work saves us to work.
3. The Word does the work.
4. Building the right church depends on using all the wrong people.
5. We are living-and longing-for the end of the world.
6. We are selfless followers of a self-centered God.

My aim is to put forward ideas that upon deeper investigation will bring to light important realities that most overlook.

A right understanding of the church fuels radical obedience among Christians.

God has chosen to call out not just individuals but a people for himself. Through Christ, God brought Jews and Gentiles together as "one body" in which "each member belongs to all the others." Peter told the church, "You are a chosen people,...a people belong to God." God's

intention is that “through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”

**If you and I want our lives to count for God’s purpose in the world, we need to begin with a commitment to God’s people in the church. God has called us to lock arms with one another in single-minded, death-defying obedience to one objective; the declaration of his gospel for the demonstration of his glory to all nations. This is God’s design for his people, and it is worth giving our lives to.**

## **Chapter 1 – TYRANNY OF THE GOOD**

**ONE OF THE WORST ENEMIES OF CHRISTIANS CAN BE GOOD THINGS IN THE CHURCH.**

Mark realized that, despite all the good things he had done in the church, he could not name one person outside his family whom he had led to Christ and who was now walking with Christ and leading others to Christ. Mark said, “I have spent my life doing all the stuff in the church that I thought I was supposed to do. But I’m realizing that I have missed the most important thing: making disciples.”

**The story of Mark’s life as a Christian should frighten us. The last thing you and I want to do is waste our lives on religious activity that is devoid of spiritual productivity.** If we are not careful, we will spend our lives doing good things in the church while we ultimately miss out on the great purpose for which we were created.

**Too often we’re oblivious to the threat posed by the good things we’re doing. We’ve laid down our defenses against the way that the good can hinder the best. In this sense, good things can subtly and effectively become one of our worst enemies.**

**You and I can easily deceive ourselves into thinking that dedication to church programs equals devotion to kingdom purposes.**

**We must be willing to sacrifice good things in the church in order to experience the great things of God.**

**For this reason we must put everything on the table. We have to put everything, even good things in the church, up for reconsideration before God, asking him to show us his priorities and purposes for each.**

I'm not talking about biblical essentials and theological non-negotiables.

But everything else belongs on the table.

***The gospel compels the church to go to God with everything we have and everything we do and then ask, "What needs to go? What needs to change? What needs to stay the same?"***

And then wait for God to answer.

A church is a community of individuals who have lost their lives to follow Christ. Surely we would be willing to lose our programs and our preferences, to sacrifice our budgets and our buildings, to let go of our most cherished legacies and reputations if there is a better way to make his glory known in the world.

For us, the flood depicts the radical call of Christ to Christians and the church. When Jesus calls us to abandon everything we have and everything we are, it's almost as if he is daring us to put ourselves in the flood plain. To put all our lives, churches, property, possessions, plans, strategies, hopes, and dreams in front of the levee and then ask God to break it. To ask God to sweep away whatever he wants, to leave standing whatever he desires, and to remake our lives and churches according to his will.

Are you there personally? Is your church?

**Is your community of faith willing to put everything down before God and say, "We will do whatever you want, we will drop whatever you command, we will eliminate whatever is not best, and we will add whatever is necessary in order to make your glory known in the world around us, no matter what."**

**After becoming pastor, I began with a list of questions:**

- **How can we most effectively mobilize the people of this church to accomplish the Great Commission?**
- **How can we most effectively organize the leadership of this church to accomplish the Great Commission?**
- **Do we need all the staff, teams, and committees we have?**
- **Does our church budget reflect the desires and design of God in his Word?**
- **Are our facilities the best use of our money for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world?**

- Are all the programs we have the absolute best way to advance the gospel from our community to the ends of the earth?
- What good things do we have or what good things are we doing that we need to abolish or alter for greater ends?

**When you ask questions like these, people wonder if you're looking for a short tenure as pastor.**

I remember well it was not uncommon to hear the question, "Well, what's wrong with doing these things?" "What's wrong with having a fall carnival for children?" "What's wrong with having a basketball league?"

We all quickly realized asking what's wrong would get us nowhere.

**The conversation would change only when we asked, "Are these programs and activities the best way to spend our time, money, and energy for the spread of the gospel in our neighborhood and in all nations?"**

All of a sudden we found ourselves open to letting go of good things in order to achieve greater purposes. Our perspective had radically changed.

**That didn't make it easy to let go of good things.**

Sometimes we have moved too quickly or too slowly. Sometimes our communication about change has been confusing at best. As a result, some have left the church.

**We have learned that letting go of good things is one of the hardest things to do in the church.**

None of us, had answers to all the questions, and we still don't. The key is simple to ask the questions. We begin to grasp how much the good things in the church have a hold on our hearts.

**We begin to discover our dangerous tendency to value our traditions over God's truth. We find ourselves defending a program because that's what worked before, not because that's what God has said to do now. We realize how prone we are to exalt our work over God's will, our dreams over God's desires, and our plans over God's priorities.**

**We see up close a propensity in our budgets to value our comforts over others' needs.**

Our pastor who contacted me recently was upset about *Radical*. His church was starting a multimillion-dollar building campaign, and some of his members who had read the book were expressing hesitancy about moving forward. I told him I simply and humbly want to ask the question, **“Amid all the good things we are doing and planning, are there better ways to align with God’s Word, mobilize God’s people; and marshal God’s resources for God’s glory in a world where millions of people are starving and more than a billion have never even heard of Jesus?”**

**I’m convinced it is a question we cannot avoid.**

**Our team at Brook Hills are continually rethinking our use of resources.**

**In James 2, those who have received mercy extend mercy. Grace is our hearts overflows in goodness from our hands. James makes it clear people who claim to be Christians but who fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved.**

**Christians in North America give, on average, 2.5 percent to their church. Out of that 2 percent goes to needs overseas. In other words, for every one hundred dollars a North American Christian earns, he will give five cents to a world with urgent spiritual and physical needs. This does not make sense.**

**When I sat down with our leaders, I tried to soften the blow of what cuts might mean for individual ministries. But as I was sharing, one of our preschool leaders spoke up. “David,” she said, “you don’t have to go soft on us. We realize from God’s Word that this is something we need to do, and it is something we want to do. So let us get to work and start cutting our budgets!”**

There were big cuts-worship ministry sliced 83 percent. And there were little cuts. Preschool leaders reasoned that the kids on Sunday morning have a great breakfast and a great lunch, so why do they need snacks in between? These changes wouldn’t affect just the leadership in the church. They would affect the entire church.

So we believed it was important to have the entire church vote on moving forward in this direction. We put a proposal before our church family that said:

In love to God, in light of the needs around the world, and in obedience to Scripture (Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 28:27; Matthew 25:31-46; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18), the leadership of the Church at Brook Hills proposes that the church body affirm the following actions:

- We will immediately begin radical saving as a church during the remainder of 2009 for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.
- Our leadership will work together over the next two months on a 2010 budget that saves every expenditure possible for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.
- We will immediately designate up to \$525,000 of our current excess cash to serve impoverished churches across India.

Not wanting to give our money without going ourselves, we challenged every member in our faith family to pray about leaving their comfortable neighborhoods.

Globally, we focused on northern India, home to six hundred million people, but fewer than 0.5 percent are evangelical Christians.

***The beauty of God's plan is you don't have to possess a certain amount of resources in order to spend it wisely for the glory of God. Every church and every Christian has good resources that can be used for great purposes.***

***It doesn't take a big budget to have a large impact!***

***We will find great joy in gospel driven giving to the glory of God.***

Notice the theme, in each case it was not an issue of giving up or letting go of bad things. They were good things that were preventing far better things from happening.

***If we want to unleash the people of God in the church for the glory of God in the world, we need to let go of some good things. We need to begin by asking ourselves some questions.***

***Are you and I personally willing to put everything in our lives on the table for Christ to determine what needs to stay and what needs to go?***

***Are your church and mine willing to put on the table every program we've created, every position we've established, every innovation we've adopted, every building we've constructed, every idea we've formulated, every team we've assembled, and every activity***

**we've organized? Are we willing to ask God if there is a better way to use the time, energy, and money he has given us for his glory in the world?**

**When we take this step of surrender and obedience together, we will find ourselves becoming part of a movement of God's people who are accomplishing God's purpose.**

## **Chapter 2 – THE GOSPEL MISUNDERSTOOD**

### **THE GOSPEL THAT SAVES US FROM WORK SAVES US TO WORK.**

If we want to see the people of God unleashed in the church, we need to start with the gospel of God in Christians. **Yet confusion abounds concerning the gospel in the church today.**

Imagine Andy has always espoused salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Accordingly to Andy, his actions have nothing to do with his salvation, and unfortunately this is evident in his life. Christ is not clear in his character or his care for others. Andy turns a blind eye to the lost and a deaf ear to the cries of the poor, even those who are among his family in Christ.

**Though he boldly claims belief in the gospel, there is not fruit of faith in his life beyond the religious routine of cultural Christianity.**

Or imagine Ashley, baptized four times. Sermon after sermon and study after study she wants to please God. She works hard at putting Christianity into action. Yet she never feels she has done enough, and she is never sure of her salvation. Trying to live out the gospel is wearing Ashley out.

**Both Andy and Ashley attend your church. Andy thinks work has nothing to do with salvation, and Ashley thinks work has everything to do with salvation. Both are confused. Both are wrong. And until they get a right understanding of the gospel, they will never be a part of accomplishing the purpose of God.**

**Unleashing radical people into the world requires the gospel as our foundation and our motivation. You and I must embrace a gospel that both saves us from work and saves us to work.**

**I get frightened when I think about Radical in Ashley's hands.** Guilt will motivate her obedience, and action will be her obligation.

Ashley will never be radical enough. You cannot do enough to be accepted before God. And the beauty of the gospel is that you don't have to.

The starting point of your radical life is your radical death-death to yourself and death to your every attempt to do enough before God.

The gospel has saved you from your work, and you are free from any effort to overcome your guilt before God. **You can stop working and start believing.**

The Gospel says something else.

**All through the Bible we encounter an important truth, namely the gospel saves us *from* work also saves us *to* work. Right after Paul identifies salvation by grace alone through faith alone, he says that we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works."** James says that faith without deeds is useless and dead. John's letter describes how anyone who sees his brother in need but has no pity on him does not have the love of God in him.

It's important to recognize what these passages mean. I was reminded recently of the importance of clarifying the meaning of words.

*Football.* Same term, two meanings.

When the Bible teaches the gospel saves us *to* work, clarify what is meant by *work*.

**Often Scripture refers to work in a negative sense, as actions fueled by the flesh that do not honor God. The gospel saves us *from* this kind of work.**

**But there are also times when Scripture refers to work in a positive sense, as actions fueled by faith that bring great glory to God. Every time James refers to works or deeds or actions, he is talking about them positively.** He is talking about love for the needy, mercy for the poor, and care for the suffering that flow from faith in Christ. Paul does the same thing when he talks about "work produced by faith," "every act prompted by your faith," and faith expressing itself through acts of love.

**So, if you are Andy, I want to tell you something important; so called faith without acts prompted by that faith is a farce. Real faith always creates fruit.**

Scripture is full of examples of faith producing work. Abraham's belief in God led him to offer his son as a sacrifice. Rahab's belief in God led her to risk her life for God. Paul "worked harder" than others because he believed in the grace of God. He labored and struggled for God out of the overflow of faith in Christ.

The reality is that when you believe in Christ for salvation, the faith that God has graciously given to you begins to produce radical fruit from you.

True faith in Christ inevitable produces great work for Christ, fueled by faith in a life that is abandoned to God.

All of it is by grace. The basis of our salvation – Christ – is a gracious gift from God. The means of our salvation – faith – is also gracious gift from God. And the fruit of our salvation – work – is indeed a gracious gift from God. In this way the One who gives the grace ultimately gets the glory?

The gospel saves us to work.

#### GUILT OF THE GOSPEL?

So how does the gospel unleash the church?

Because the gospel saves us from work, the gospel frees us from guilt. In Christ we have been declared not guilty before God. This is vitally important when the church is confronted with staggering realities in the world. Guilt will be both an unbearable burden and an unsustainable motivator. We may change our ways for a short time based upon guilt, but true and lasting life change will happen only when we believe the gospel. It is never about our doing enough. We can't do enough. We can, though, trust in Christ, who has done enough.

As we trust in Christ, he changes our hearts, minds, and lives. He transforms how we see, feel, and act. As we grow in relational intimacy with Christ through the gospel, we gradually overflow in radical living for Christ. Any low-grade sense of guilt gets conquered by a high-grade sense of gospel that compels a willing, urgent, joyful, uncompromising, grace-saturated, God glorifying obedience in us. We live sacrificially, not because we feel guilty, but because we have been loved greatly and now find satisfaction in sacrificial love for others. We live radically, not because we have to, but because we want to.

When I preached from James 1:27. At the close I gave our church an unusual invitation: “If Christ in our is compelling you to be a part of serving children in our county in this way then please come to a meeting two weeks from today.”

The wonderful folks at DHR had given us all kinds of moving photographs and videos of needy children. But we wanted to be careful not to motivate God’s people through emotional manipulation. So we didn’t use any of it.

**With the gospel as our foundation and motivation our faith family said, “We want to do all we an to make sure tha every child in our county has loving arms around him or her at night. We want to point every one of these children to the Father of the fatherless and the defender of the weak, who cares for them.”**

The immense joy of foster and adoptive care has invaded our church, and our families will never be the same.

The only thing that will sustain and strengthen these families to press on is a gospel that saves them from work and saves them to work.

John and Karen know they cannot do this on their own. John recently e-mailed me and said, “Pastor please pray that I will embrace with joy all the challenges and difficulties that come with being a father. God has ordained it and God is good.”

**God dependent faith is the only foundation for God-glorifying work.**

Some might hear stories like this and think, *Well obviously these families never should have adopted.* But these parents see it differently. What strikes me most often in my interactions with them isn’t their struggles but their joy.

**Gospel-driven obedience produces gospel-filled joy. The gospel is the key to – and the only sustainable motivation for - sacrificial living. The gospel reminds us that each of us was once a child of wrath, filled with evil desires and unable to control our sinfulness.** Yet God sought us and saved us. In love he adopted us. And now when we see a child who is left alone or hard to love, we can gladly bring that child into our family. **Why? Because we believe the gospel. For us that means sacrificial love is not just our duty but our delight.**

**The gospel is the reason for radical living. The gospel is the reason Christians are changing their routines, adjusting their budgets, adding to their families, augmenting their plans,**

**altering their ideas and sacrificing their lives to accomplish the global purpose of God. When the gospel of God is clear in the church, Christians will work hard by the grace of God with great delight for the glory of God.**

We must avoid becoming churches full of Ashley's who are continually working hard to earn the approval of God while ultimately wearing out in our assignments from God. Pastors must be particularly careful here. Yes the gospel saves us to work, but we must be careful to plant every challenge, every declaration, every decision, every action, every question, every confession, and every exhortation solidly in the soil of gospel grace. **Only people who are resting constantly in the righteousness of Christ will be able to rish it all wholeheartedly for the glory of Christ.**

**We must also avoid becoming churches full of Andys who aare constantly defending the gospel while rarely demonstrating it. Again, pastors caution. The people you and I lead in the church will never be what they cannot see. Therefore, it is our call not only to preach a gospel of radical grace but also to portray a life of radical goodness. Those who espouse sund doctrine in the church should embody selfless devotion in the world. You and I are fooling ourselves if our lives lack love for the lost or compassion for the poor.**

Let's show in the church a gospel that saves us from work and saves us to work.

### Chapter 3 – GOD IS SAYING SOMETHING

THE WORD DOES THE WORK.

There I was, holding a library of sixty-six books that are decidedly and definitively the Word of God, and this guy had just said that God doesn't have a word for us? "Just open this book anywhere – to Leviticus, for all I care – and read it, and you've got a word from God.

**In our lives and in the church, we are never without revelation from God. At all times you and I have his message to us in all its power, authority, clarity, and might. We don't have to work to come up with a word from God; we simply have to trust the Word he has already given us. The Word of God will accomplish the work of God among the people of God.**

I want to speak specifically to pastors, staff, small group leaders, how do we motivate and mobilize individuals in the church to abandon their lives for the glory of God.

According to countless books and conferences, be innovative and creative. We need an entrepreneurial spirit combined with an engaging persona. **None of these characteristics are mentioned in the Bible as qualifications for leadership in the church. Instead, Jesus tells all his followers that, in order to make disciples, they must be able to teach people to obey God's Word. Scripture is clear that any leader who wants to unleash the people of God in the church for the glory of God in the world must simply be competent to communicate and faithful to follow the Word of God.**

The question at the forefront of my mind: How do I pastor this church? What I did *not* bring to the task simply overwhelmed me.

**That's when God reminded me of what I did bring; his Word. "Apart from me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing.... If you remain in me and my words remain in you,...you {will} bear much fruit." God reminded me my ability to lead his people was ultimately not dependent on my experience or my ingenuity. My ability to lead his people was (and is) dependent on his power that is alive in his Spirit and work in his truth.**

David Brainerd's diary. He was a faithful missionary among Native Americans. Brainerd would often write in his journal about how utterly incapable he was of accomplishing the work to which God had called him. **Based upon Brainerd's example, I began to pray, "Lord let me make a difference for you that is utterly disproportionate to who I am." This has been my continual prayer, in the day-to-day process of leading the Church.**

**The reality is that I'm still a beginner as a pastor, in over my head at every level. I need wisdom – the kind of wisdom that comes only from the Bible.**

**God has designed us to depend on his Word to lead his people in ways that are utterly disproportionate to who we are.**

**The only wise basis for an act of radical obedience is God himself – the author, creator, and ruler of our lives – commanding such action.** That's why dependence on God's Word is his design for all of us, not just the leaders. **For this reason, members of churches should desire and demand nothing less than continual feasts on God's Word in the church. This alone will satisfy, strengthen, and spread the church in the world.**

I spent many Sundays describing the supremacy of the Bible and explaining how it must be central in all our plans, priorities, and programs. To make this clear, apart from God's Word, I was helpless as a leader and we were powerless as a church.

**Everything God has done and is doing among our faith family has been built upon the foundation of our studying God's Word.** You've already seen what happened when we grappled honestly with the book of James. When we came to Matthew 7:13-27, that led us to foundational texts such as Romans 3, John 3, Philippians 1-2, and 1 John, which show what the gospel is, how the gospel saves us, how the gospel works in us, and how the gospel guarantees the completion of our salvation.

The more we studied the gospel in God's Word, the more I found myself asking, Do I really believe this gospel? I preach it, but do I really believe it? For if this gospel is true, then the implications for me, my church, and the world around me are staggering.

**I began sensing a tendency in our people to define holiness by how much we do for God. Amid all our talk of radical obedience, we were losing sight of gospel grace.** This concern led me next to preach through Galatians, where God reminds us of the centrality of grace in the life of faith. After studying Galatians is when we walked through James and **God showed us how his grace in our faith works to his glory.** These immersions in Bible books compelled me to take risks that we had never taken before and to make decisions that we had never made before.

**In short, the Word of God accomplishes the work of God. When the words of mere humans drive how and where we are going, we will get nowhere. When we unclaim the power of God's Word in the church, it will unleash the potential of God's people in the world.**

**If we want to make God's glory known in the world, then we must make the teaching of God's Word central in the church. We are fooling ourselves if we think we can advance the church any other way.**

Unfortunately, many voices today are claiming that teaching or preaching the Bible simply doesn't work as well as it used to.

Even among those who stand by the spoken word, many lack confidence in the sufficiency of God's Word.

**As a result of this lack of confidence, churches begin to minimize God's Word. It's not necessarily that we think Bible teaching is unimportant. We just don't believe it's enough. Members of the church want something else, and so those of us who lead the church give something else.**

Our motives are admirable. Still, in the words of Walter Kaiser, *Pastors have decided that using the Bible is a handicap for meeting the needs of the {different} generations, therefore they have gone to drawing their sermons from the plethora of recovery ad pop-psychology books that fill our Christian bookstores. The market-forces demand that we give them what they want to hear if we wish them to return and pay for the megasanctuaries that we have built.*

At this point we are assuming that God has not given us enough in his Word, and we are acting as if he needs us to supplement his communication to his people with our own talks and thoughts every week.

*God has given us everything we need in the Word.*

God's design in his Word is not to provide all the practical guidelines, parenting tips, leadership advice and financial counsel that Americans are looking for. Instead, the purpose of God's Word is to transform people in every country and every century into the image of Jesus.

The Bible is in a church leader's hands to transform people into the image of Christ and to get people in touch with the Holy Spirit of God, who will not only give them counsel for every situation they face but will also walk with them through those situations. *When church leaders use God's Word for this purpose, then church members develop a healthy dependence on God's Spirit and a healthy admiration of God's glory.*

The Word does this work.

The question is, will we let it?

Will we trust that God knew what he was doing when he gave us his Word?

Now we are getting to the heart of how God moves his people.

**Take this reasoning one step further. God's Word is clearly the foundation for teaching and preaching in the church, but what if his revelation is also the foundation for strategizing and planning in the church? The Bible is intended not only to dictate our theology but also to determine our methodology?**

Just as I am tempted to interject my thoughts and opinions into preaching in the church, so I also find myself tempted to interpose my ideas into planning for the church.

Nowhere in scripture has God promised to bless my plans or anyone else's in the church, no matter how innovative or creative they may be. Neither has God promised to bless us based solely on our motives. **Sure we are supposed to do everything for the glory of God, but that doesn't mean everything we do for his glory is assured of his blessing.**

**There is only one thing God has promised to bless, his plan. He has given us his plan in his Word.** If we want the blessing of God, then we don't need to come up with something else. We need to align with the plan he has had already promised to bless.

**We begin asking, "Does this plan best align with the plan of God?"**

**As we took this question to Scripture, we saw a clear plan.** Make disciples of all the nations. Take up your cross, follow me, and lead others to follow me in the same way. Jesus never told us to build lobby space, create more class rooms, or design sports fields. Not that it would necessarily be wrong to do these things. After all, Jesus never commanded us to build bathrooms either, but we have those. **When it came to our plans then the question was Is this the best (notice not good but best) way to align with the plan Jesus has laid before us?**

As we asked these questions, our decision became clear. Instead of expanding the lobby for our church, we would use that money to start planting other churches. **Instead of constructing more classrooms where we could listen to more lectures, we would become more intentional about gathering in our homes, where we could better share our lives. Instead of building more soccer fields in our community, we would use that money to serve spiritually and physically impoverished peoples around the world.** (Illustrate - We have members in our faith family now using sports fields in slums around the world to serve and start churches.)

**We believed we were exchanging good, well-intentioned plans that we had hoped God would bless for better. Word driven plans that God had guaranteed to bless.**

I want to clarify what I mean (and don't mean.) The blessing of God does not mean acceptance by the world.

Similarly, I am not implying that teaching and studying God's Word in the church bring instant results. The process of sanctification in Christians and mobilization in the church takes time and requires patience. **The challenge for church members and leaders alike is to faithfully hold**

**fast to God's Word, trusting that ultimately God will use it to accomplish his intended, eternal, global purpose.**

**We don't have to engineer something entertaining to win an audience. The Word is sufficient to hold th attention of God's people and satisfying enough to capture their affection.**

**Trust this Word. It forms and fulfills, motivates and mobilizes, equips and empowers, leads and directs the people of God in the church for the plan of God in the world. This won't automatically make everything easy in the church. But as long as Christians together are prayerfully and humbly asking what the plan of God is in his Word for his people and are abandoning our lives to it, we will be unleashing a radical people.**

#### Chapter 4 – THE GENIUS OF WRONG

##### **BUILDING THE RIGHT CHURCH DEPENDS ON USING ALL THE WRONG PEOPLE.**

What we do at Brook Hills when we gather as the church, our main focus is on the church. We organize our worship environment around believers, not unbelievers.

“Why would we do that?” “If your worship environment on Sunday is not appealing to non-Christians, then how is your church going to intentionally lead unbelievers to Christ?”

“We're going to equip our people every Sunday to lead unbelievers to Christ all week long.” “Your members are going to lead them to Christ?” “That's our plan.”

He said “once those unbelievers become believers, how are they going to grow in Christ?”

“Our people are going to be equipped to show new believers how to live as followers of Christ.”  
**“I want people in the church to be able to fulfill the purpose for which they were created without being dependent on gifted preachers, nice buildings, and great programs to do it for them.”**

I believe in the work of God's Spirit through God's Word in God's people.

The goal of the church is never for one person to be equipped and empowered to lead as many people as possible to Christ. The goal is always for all of God's people to be equipped and empowered to lead as many people as possible to Christ.

The Spirit of God has empowered every follower of Christ to accomplish the purpose of God for the glory of God in the world. This includes the so-called wrong people; those who are the least effective, least brilliant, or least talented in the church.

**Building the right church, then, is dependent on using all the wrong people.**

It's commonly assumed a growing church today needs a few simple elements.

First, a good performance. Someone who can captivate the crowds. A charismatic communicator. For a bonus, we surround the speaker with quality music and arts.

Next, we need a place to hold the crowds who will come. Usually means investing millions in a facility to house the performance. The more attractive the environment, the better.

Once the crowds get there, we need something to keep them coming back. So we start programs for kids, youth, and families, for every age and stage. In order to have those programs, we need professionals to run them. That way the professionals can handle ministry for them. We don't want people trying this at home.

**There it is a performance at a place filled with programs run by professionals. The problem, though, is the one we have left out of the equation; the people of God.**

PEOPLE, NOT PERFORMANCES

**Growing the church was never intended to depend on creating a good performance with all the right people.** Where did we get the idea that this was necessary? Certainly Scripture instructs us to gather for worship. This is nonnegotiable but not necessary in the way we usually think about it.

**Imagine being in a church on the other side of the world where it is illegal for the church even to exist.**

Not one of them has come because a great communicator has been scheduled to speak. Not one is present because a cool band is scheduled to play. All are there simply because they desire to gather with the people of God, and they are willing to risk their lives to be together.

**But what if the church itself – the people of God gathered in one place – is intended to be the attraction?** This is enough for our brothers and sisters around the world.

But is it enough for us?

I have more questions than I have answers on this issue, and I am grateful for leaders in our worship ministry who are willing to ask the questions with me.

**We want to focus on ways we can cultivate the best people: a people who love to pray together, fast together, confess sin together, sing together, and study together; a people who depend more on the Word than on the one who speaks it; people gripped in music more by the content of the song than by the singer; people who define worship less by performance and more by commitment. A humble people who gather week after week simply to behold the glory of God as they surrender their lives to him. When the church is fundamentally a gathering of committed people, the place where the church gathers hardly matters.**

Everything is on the table, and the Lord will lead us in what is best. I am convinced that large buildings are the best or only way to use God's resources.

Nothing in the New Testament says we should construct church buildings. **So why is the first thing we think, We need to spend masses of our resources on a building? Why would we spend an inordinate amount of our resources on something that is never prescribed or even encouraged in the New Testament? Why would we not instead use those resources on that which is explicitly promoted in the New Testament, such as sharing the gospel with the lost or helping the poor in the church?** Seven hundred million people around the world live in slums. Many of them are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Should we really be prioritizing bigger buildings for ourselves?

This is the beauty of New Testament Christianity. We definitely do not have to construct buildings as houses of worship. In the words of Stephen before he was martyred by the Sanhedrin, **"The Most High does not live in houses made by men."**

**With Jesus' death on the cross, the way had been opened for people to dwell in the presence of God in any place. No building was necessary. As a result, they no longer needed to focus on a building as a house of worship.**

What would the house of worship be, then?

You guessed it: people.

**Astounding reality of New Testament religion: we as Christians are the house of worship.**

So let's gather wherever we can in any facilities we can find. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world simply meet outside. **Consider not spending such a large portion of our resources on building places when the priority of the New Testament is decidedly on building people.**

The challenge, we need our places to sustain our programs. **This is when we begin to realize that redefining place in ministry leads to rethinking the importance of programs in ministry.**

How would your church make disciples completely separate for a church building?

**Why not make our homes the place of ministry instead of the church building?** Why not invite people from our neighborhoods, not to go to a church building with us, but to come across the street and into our homes with us? Home is where we could show the gospel to their children while we also shared life with them.

People discover that God has built into our everyday lives opportunities and platforms to spread the gospel. People realize that we are not dependent on well-crafted programs at designated places to accomplish the mission God has created us for as his people.

Imagine what could happen if **men and women seeing that the most effective avenues for ministry are found not in programs created for them but amid the people who surround them where they live.** The last thing leaders should do is pull away from those avenues in order to participate in our activities.

We woke up and said to ourselves, "Why are we trying to organize how and where and when our people minister? God has already given them opportunities for ministry where they live and work and play." **So we decided to stop planning, creating, and managing outreach programs and to start unleashing people to maximize the ministry opportunities God had already planned and created for them.**

**From that point the impact of our church in the community changed radically.** Now our people are busy leading Bible studies in their workplaces and neighborhoods, helping addicts in rehabilitation centers, supply food in homeless shelters, loving orphans in learning centers, caring for widows in retirement homes, providing hospice care for the elderly, training men and women in job skills, tutoring men and women in reading, helping patients in AIDS clinics, teaching English to internationals, and serving in a variety of other ways. Our leadership

**team understands that it's good when people are so involved in ministry where they live that they don't have time to participate in the programs we create.**

If you are a leader in the church, think about the individuals in your care. Consider how God has written a different story in each of their lives. You have been called by God to serve them in the accomplishment of God's purpose for their lives. You want to equip them, train them, support them, and set them free to use everything God has given them to make his glory known in ways you could never design or imagine.

***If you are a member of the church, start dreaming and strategizing. Consider where God has placed you, who God has put around you, and how God desires to use you for his glory where you live and work.*** (Illustrate – If you are single, how can you make the most of your singleness for ministry? If you are married, how can you serve together with your spouse in your community? If you have kids, how can you make your home a ministry to children in your neighborhood? If you work outside the home, how can you share Christ in your workplace? Be careful not to let programs in the church keep you from engaging people in the world with the gospel.) ***Make the most of the opportunities for ministry that God has built into your life.***

***Imagine the spread of the gospel for the glory of God if every follower of Christ were involved in ministry. Who can fathom the potential of the church when we stop programming ministry for people and start propelling people into ministry?***

**We have a tendency to overlook God's plan for people when we organize churches around professionals. We single out people who seem especially gifted, and we craft the community of faith around them. *But the ministry of making disciples was not intended for professionals alone; it was intended for the whole people of God.***

All men and women who have placed their faith in Christ have the Spirit in them so they might be witnesses for Christ. Read Acts 2. Realize the giving of the Spirit was never to be a special anointing on a select few. This is about a supernatural anointing on every single one of God's people.

Let us not be so unwise as to bank the spread of the gospel on a certain person at a certain place when all week long the Spirit of God is living in every single man and woman of God, empowering each of us to advance the kingdom of God for his glory.

You might be wondering, is there a place for paid leaders – that is professionals – in the church?

Absolutely! When we look in the New Testament, we clearly see a warrant, even a command, to provide financially for certain teachers and leaders in the church.

**What, then is the responsibility of such leaders in the church? Paul answers this question in Ephesians 4. God has given leaders to the church to equip God's people for ministry and "prepare God's people for works of service." The church has been entrusted by God with stewards of God's Word to equip God's people to be servants with God's Word. This goes to the essence of being radical together, it changes everything about how we view leaders in the church.**

There is clearly no way a pastor can minister to all the needs in church, much less in our city. Some might say "that's what the rest of the church staff is for." **If we want to multiply the gospel from our faith family to all the families of the earth, it will require not just a pastor or church staff but the entire body of Christ built up in love "as each part does its work."**

**What this means, is that church leaders are intended by God not to plan events but to equip people. Leaders do not exist to provide services; they exist to serve people.** Realizing this, leaders in our faith family have made a concentrated effort to take resources away from organizing ministry for people and to invest them more in mobilizing people for ministry.

**Passion to tell people about Christ translates into a commitment to train people in the church. When he leads someone to Christ, Dominic takes personal responsibility for helping that person grow in Christ. His goal is for that person to become a leader in the church and then eventually to leave and plant another church somewhere else.**

Dominic's church has now planted more than sixty other churches in his country, with nearly every one of the pastors trained by Dominic. His life and leadership are a picture of what it means, not to organize ministry for people, but to mobilize people for ministry.

**Isn't this the model of Jesus? He spent more time with twelve men than with everyone else put together. In John 17 he recounts his ministry before going to the cross. He doesn't mention the multitudes, they were not his primary focus. Instead, forty times Jesus speaks to and about the men in who he had invested his life. They were his focus.**

When he came to his ascension, Jesus had not buildings or programs to point to and no crowds to boast of. Just 120 unschooled, ordinary people were gathered – a small group with a small brand of leaders.

**And he had given them one command as their commission: make disciples. Don't sit in a classroom; share your lives. Don't build extravagant places; build extraordinary people. Make disciples who will make disciples who will make disciples and together multiply this gospel to all peoples. This simple command was to drive the church. This is the simple command that is to drive each of our lives.**

**I don't want this command to be treated as optional in my life or in anyone else's life in the church I pastor.** Personally, I have an intentional disciple-making plan that involves sharing life with and multiplying the gospel through my family, a small group of men within our church and church planters we are sending out from our church. If I am not careful, disciple making fades into the background. **As a result, I want to act intentionally, for if I forsake the priority of people, then I will miss the purpose of God.**

**We help all new members in our church to outline their plans for how they will be involved in making disciples of all nations. The key for all of us is an intense desire and intentional effort to make every one of our lives count for the multiplication of the gospel in the world.**

You may feel like you are not gifted enough, or qualified enough to engage in effective ministry. This is simply not true. **You have the Word of God before you, the Spirit of God in you, and the command of God to you: make disciples of all nations.**

A house church leader in Asia persecution stripped his church of its resources. "We soon found we were much stronger because our faith in God was purer." **"We didn't have any opportunity to love the 'things' of God, so we just learned to love God! We had no plans or programs to keep running, so we just sought the face of Jesus!..."** We don't believe the world needs another single church building. They need Jesus and they need to worship and grow in God's grace with other believers...according to the pattern of the first church in the New Testament." "When we finally reach the end of all our useless programs and give up in desperation, Jesus will always be there to show us a better way—his way."

**We will never have enough resources, staff, buildings, events, or activities to reach all the people in our community, much less all the peoples in the world.**

**But we will always have enough people. Even if they seem like the wrong people.**

If eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee were enough to launch the gospel to the ends of the earth ten a church with a handful of members can spread the gospel in and beyond a community, regardless of the amount of material resources it has.

**What if each of us were actually making disciples who were making disciples who were making disciples? Is it too idealistic to dream? Is that realistic? You bet it is. In fact, it's guaranteed.**

## Chapter 5 – OUR UNMISTAKABLE TASK

What is interesting and unfortunately ironic, is that the most unevangelized island on earth is also home to millions of Christians.

One believer succinctly said to a friend of mine on the island, “I would rather a Muslim go to hell than for me to have to stop eating pork.”

Reaching Muslims here would not only be uncomfortable for Christians; it would also be costly. Many Muslim tribes on this island are devout, and one state practices shari’ah law. Anyone caught trying to lead people to Christ in that state will be imprisoned or likely even killed. Any Muslim caught converting to faith in Christ in that state will immediately be executed.

So the Christians sit back. Instead, they focus on church activities among themselves. They have constructed large church buildings all over the city. They have numerous denominational conventions, nearly thirty theological seminaries, and even mission boards organized among themselves throughout the island. **They have all the trappings of the church. The only thing they are missing is the heart of Christ.**

From most appearances in the church, we seem to be okay with that. We seem content to let these people groups continue church-less, Christ-less, and gospel-less.

**The same potential resides in the church in my context. God has given great grace to the church. He has given us vast resources, varied gifts, Innumerable skills, immeasurable talents, and billions of dollars. If we were willing to take some risks, if we were willing to alter our lifestyles, and if we were willing to organize our churches around taking the gospel to people who have never heard of Christ, we could see every people group on the planet reached with the gospel. In the process, we could be a part of the end of the world.**

“Perhaps the most important single verse in the Word of God for God’s people today,” as recorded in Matthew 24:14, Jesus said to his disciples, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

**Nations** in the original language of the New Testament is *ethne*. It refers to all the ethnic peoples of the world.

When Jesus talks about the nations, he is talking about clans, tribes, and other groups of people united by common languages and cultural characteristics. More simply “people groups.”

Numerous people groups are spread across India.

Experts have identified more than eleven thousand people groups in the world. Mathew 28:19 Jesus specifically tells his disciples to go to all the world’s people groups, and in Matthew 24:14 he promises that all of them will hear the gospel. Indeed, he is not coming back until all of them have heard.

**Jesus did not command us simply to take the gospel to as many individual people as we can. Instead, e made it clear that his followers are to make disciples among every people group in the world.** The end of the age will come when people from every single ethnic group have come to Christ.

This has been God’s plan from the beginning. The story of the church is the story of the spread of the gospel toward every people group.

He will come when every people group has heard the gospel. For this reason he has charged his church, with getting the gospel to every people group on this planet. He is not coming back until this assignment has been accomplished.

A people group is classified as unreached if less than 2 percent of the population is made up of evangelical Christians. **Out of more than eleven thousand people groups in the world, more than six thousand of them are unreached.**

**Our task is massive and unmistakable. Jesus has commanded (not merely called by commanded) us to get the gospel to them. So for you and me not to be intentionally engaged in taking the gospel to unreached people groups is disobedience to the command of Christ.**

George Ladd’s words:

I know only one this: Christ has not yet returned; therefore the task is not yet done. When it is done, Christ will come. Our responsibility is not to insist on defining the

terms of our task; our responsibility is to complete it. So long as Christ does not return, our work is undone. Let us get busy and complete our mission.

Without question, Satan is working feverishly with all the resources at his disposal to prevent the day when the gospel will be preached to all people groups. **He does not want the end to come.**

**The question is, do we?**

If we do want the end to come, it will cost us. Right before Jesus gave the promise in Matthew 24:14, he said, “You will be handed over to be persecuted, put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. **The reason so many people groups are still unreached is they are hard to reach and we haven’t had the resolve to get them the gospel.** Any Christian and any church desiring to obey the command of Christ in the world **and longing to see the coming of Christ at the end of the world must possess a God centered, gospel driven tenacity that is ready to endure an intense spiritual battle.**

**The scope of this spiritual battle is universal. There is no place on this planet where the war will not be waged.**

**The stakes in this spiritual battle are eternal.**

Our enemy in this spiritual battle is formidable. He is dead set on destroying us. He works to discourage us **with temptation. He lures us with possessions and prosperity, and he lulls us with comforts and complacency. He does everything he can to distract the church from knowing Christ and declaring his glory to the ends of the earth.**

**His tactics are subtle; we could even say missional.** While we spend our lives on the people we see in front of us more than six thousand people groups for generations have never even heard the gospel and remain in the dark.

**When we rise up as the church of Jesus Christ and give ourselves urgently, sacrificially, and radically to taking the gospel of the kingdom to all those people groups, we can expect to be met with the might of hell. There will be divisions within us, distractions around us, diversions in front of us, deceptions tempting us, and disease and death threatening us. It will not be easy. And it will cost. However, truly missional churches and truly missional Christians will set their sights on the world, and they will overcome the adversary “by the**

**blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony: because they do “not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”**

### **BROOK HILLS BARUTI**

If the ultimate goal of the church is to take the gospel to all people groups, then everything we do in the church must be aimed toward that end.

When I came to Brook Hills, I was encouraged to identify our target audience. “Who is Brook Hills Bob?” What was the profile of the person we were most trying to reach?

The profile seemed obvious. Business people fill our community. Their average age is in the forties, and they have good educations and well-paying jobs that enable them to support families with multiply children in an upper middle-class community. **This sort of person, some would say, is who we need to focus on as a church.**

**I disagree.**

(AMEN!)

**It is not that I think Brook Hills Bob is unimportant. But we decided our goal was not to reach Brook Hills Bob. Instead, our target was going to be Brook Hills Baruti.** (NOT “BUT” BOTH/AND)

**Let me explain. Baruti lives thousands of miles in North Africa. He is illiterate and poorly paid. He attempts to survive on meager daily rations of food and water from outside sources. He was born where almost no one knows Jesus or has even heard of him. And Baruti’s people like it that way. When a woman in Baruti’s people group heard about Christ and trusted in him for salvation, she was immediately killed – by her husband and her father. Baruti fervently worships a false god and is blinded to the reality of his sin and resistant to the message of a Savior.** (“TO + THRU” = BOTH/AND)

That’s who we are setting out to reach at Brook Hills. We are going to live and plan and strategize and organize and work so that Baruti hears and receives the gospel.

This changes everything about how we do ministry. If our goal is all nations, then our strategy cannot be defined by what will best reach people within ten miles of our church. If our goal is all nations, then our strategy must always revolve around what will best reach people who are ten thousand miles from our church building.

This doesn't mean we neglect Brook Hills Bob or anyone else who is right around us. Indeed, we are going to reach Bob and all kinds of other people in our community. But as they come to Christ, we are going to encourage them to spend their lives spreading the gospel to Baruti. We're going to teach them to pray for Baruti and the billion other people like him who don't have the gospel. We're going to train them to know God's Word so they will be ready to share it on the spot in our culture and in other cultures. We're going to encourage them to stop using their resources for more comforts in Birmingham and start using their resources. We're going to mobilize them to make disciples in simple, reproducible, cross-cultural ways here that will one day impact Baruti over there. (T4T)

Someone might say, "It sounds like Bob is just a means to an end and Baruti is the end. **Bob and Baruti are equally valued by God and equally lost without God. They both need the gospel.** Therefore, I want to make sure that the church I lead has its sights set on Baruti, not to the exclusion of Bob, but to the inclusion of Bob and everyone else in Birmingham. And once we reach Baruti together, we will equip Baruti to reach still other unreached people. And we won't stop until the word *unreached is no longer applicable to any people group.*

NOT EITHER/OR BUT BOTH/AND

***This is part of the genius of making disciples. When we follow the pattern and precedent of Jesus, we will never have to choose whether to impact Bob or to impact Baruti.***

Consider the life and leadership of Jesus. *He spent his life with a small group of men in a relatively isolated geographic area. His ministry to them, however, was always for the purpose of the spread of the gospel beyond them.* Jesus cared about the nations so deeply that he poured his life into a handful of men in Jerusalem who would one day turn the world upside down. ***Jesus cared so much about getting the gospel to Americans in the twenty-first century that he poured his life into twelve Jewish men in the first century. It was never an either/or Jesus; it was always a both/and.***

***As we lay down our lives to multiply the gospel in the context of intentional relationships where we live, we are always doing it ultimately for the spread of the gospel far beyond where we live.*** And if we are faithful to Jesus' command in the Great Commission, we will always be living and longing for the spread of the gospel to all people groups.

***Though they live in the same place where they have lived for the last twenty years their home has become a ministry base to the world.***

True disciple making in Birmingham will have an impact on the nations with the gospel and vice versa.

**Brook Hills Bob has been reached for the sake of Brook Hills Baruti.**

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS  
WITH LONG –TERM IMPACT

Until someone actually goes and sees the nations in person, he or she is likely to underestimate the urgency of God’s global purpose in our lives.

Short term mission trips are often nothing more than glorified vacations. People pat themselves on the back while doing little to advance the gospel.

Successful short-term missions must be a part of fueling a long-term disciple making process in another context. **To expect to make disciples in just a few days is both impractical and unbiblical. However, we can partner with believers in other contexts who are intentionally making disciples. Our time serving alongside them can help move their disciplemaking processes along in exponential ways.**

**At the same time, successful short-term missions must also be a part of fueling long-term disciple making in the sending church. As we go together into other contexts, we grow together in Christ. Our eyes are opened and our hearts are transformed as we serve in situations that make us uncomfortable.**

We relationally connect with disciple making taking place in other contexts while we intentionally focus on the disciple-making process in our church. **That 2 percent of our time in another context ends up radically changing the 98 percent of our time in our own community. “My time overseas has transformed my time across the street.”**

**The inevitable result of short-term missions done right is radically changed lives.** Some say, “I believe God is calling me to spend 98 percent of my time in another context and come back to my current context for a 2 percent visit each year.” Short-term mission trips end up fueling long-term commitments.

**A couple told us, “We don’t really see ourselves as missionaries, We’re just Christians with transferable job skills who live out the gospel among people who have never heard of Jesus.”**

God will be faithful to provide those he leads with every-thing they need to accomplish the task he puts before them.

**We want to see the unreached with the gospel.**

This is the plan of God. If we are obedient to his plan, could we not see the accomplishment of the Great Commission in our day? Is this not worth the sacrifice of our lives and our churches?

I am humbled. **The only reason I have heard the gospel of God is because of the grace of God.**

Meanwhile, more than six thousand people groups still do not have access to the gospel.

Why have I received such mercy from God?

**You and I have been given the great mercy of God for a global mission from God. He has called, commissioned, and commanded each of us as Christians to give ourselves to the spread of his gospel in every part of the earth. Every church that passionately loves the gospel of Christ and patiently longs for the coming of Christ will purposefully live for the glory of Christ among those who have never heard his name.**

**We are living – and longing – for the end of the world.**

#### Chapter 6 – THE GOD WHO EXALTS GOD

Instead of Christianity being a chore or a legalistic to do list, it's a relationship. I wake up every day eager to hear more from God. I regret that I have wasted so much of my life living for myself, but I'm not wasting it anymore.

Many are rearranging their lifestyles, reorganizing their families, and reallocating their resources to make their lives count for the global purpose of God.

God began changing my heart as I began to discover all the other things I was holding on to 'for Jesus.' Funny, Jesus didn't hold on to anything that was rightfully his but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant.

Tom and Amy wrote, "The gospel is compelling us to forsake our comforts, our family, and our home in order to follow God into the unknown. Along with our two daughters, we will follow wherever he leads."

“To share the gospel, serve the poor, and shake the nations.”

Why are local churches beginning to reshape their priorities, *it is because they are gripped by an overwhelming God. They know they belong to a God who desires, deserves, and demands absolute devotion and they want to give him nothing less. He is worthy of their all.*

Christians are selfless followers of a self-centered God. We are selfless in that we have died to ourselves. *We have lost the right to determine the direction of our lives. Our God is our Lord, our Master, and our King. He holds our times in his hands, and he is free to spend our lives however he pleases.* God declares his own glory, and in the world, God displays his own glory. God exalts God. Everything God does, even the salvation of his people, ultimately centers around God, for he is worthy of all praise from all peoples.

*The problem is we often reverse this in the church. We become self-centered followers of a selfless God. We organize our churches as if God exists to meet our needs, cater to our comforts, and appeal to our preferences. Discussions in the church more often revolve around what we want than what he wills. The church becomes a means of self-entertainment and a monument to self-sufficiency.*

#### *LOSING OUR LIVES OR SIPPING OUR LATTES?*

At first it seemed to make sense. But over time I found myself getting nauseated by all the vision talk. Setting and reaching goals is important. But were my sights really supposed to be set on bringing a large crowd together in a cool environment? *If this was to be the vision of my life and ministry, I decided, then I should perish.*

“What is our vision? What do we want to see? Where do we want to fasten our attention in the days to come? What do we want to work toward with all our hearts?”

As we prayed together, the answer became obvious. *The only possible vision for the church of Jesus Christ is to make known the glory of God in all nations. This preferred future or visual destination must drive us because this is what drives God.* We want to know; love, honor and praise God. *And we want all people to do the same. We want to see God glorified by people everywhere.*

*Vision affects everything.* If the focus of the church is on having a large crowd in a big place where people can come and feel warm and welcomed, then you and I will plan accordingly. We will prioritize a nice church campus, convenient parking. We'll give them a latte when

they walk in the door. We'll provide state-of-the-art entertainment for their children while treating them to a great show that leaves them feeling good when they drive away in a timely fashion. Variations of this vision engineered for the savvy Christian consumer are multiplied across the country today, and they work well. The crowds come, and the vision is realized.

But what happens when our primary aim is not to make the crowds feel comfortable but to exalt God in all his glory? Our priorities begin to change. You and I want them to be amazed by the God they cannot fathom. We want to direct them to his praise. The last thing we want to do is raise up people who are casual in the worship of God as they sit back and enjoy their lattes. Instead, we want to raise up people who are so awed, so captivated, so mesmerized by the glory of God that they will gladly lose their lattes – and their lives – to make his greatness known in the world.

“But what’s so wrong with the lattes?” “Isn’t it good to cater creatively to people who don’t know God? Don’t we want to be sensitive to those who are seeking God?”

Great question. As you and I think about all the people who are without Christ in our communities, we long to see as many of them as possible come to Christ. Without question, we want to do everything we can to see people saved.

**But “There is...no one who seeks God.” So if the church is sensitive to seekers, and if no one is seeking God, then that eans the church is sensitive to no one.**

Instead, Jesus tells us that the Father is pursuing worshippers for his praise. He is the one doing the seeking! He has been seeking sinners for thousands of years, and he is pretty good at it. **Since you and I want to see people come to Christ in the church, let’s do everything we can to put the wonders of God’s glory, holiness, wrath, justice, kindness, jealousy, grace, and character on display in his church. Let’s show people the most biblical, holistic, clear, and captivating vision of God that we possibly can and then trust him to take care of the seeking.**

I think about Eric. He was addicted to drugs. At the end of himself, he walked into our worship gathering; we sang songs about God’s greatness and studied Scripture about God’s glory. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul tells what will happen when an unbeliever comes into a worship gathering of the church: “He will be convinced by all [he is hearing] that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” Well, Eric had a 1 Corinthians 14 moment that day. As he was captivated by the greatness of God in the church, he began

to cry out for the grace of God in his life. *Eric was saved from his sins that Sunday, not because he came seeking after God, but because God came seeking after him.*

*So let's be radically seeker sensitive in our churches. But's let's make sure we are being sensitive to the right Seeker.*

#### WHAT ADVANCES THE GOSPEL

*I know of no greater motivational tool for the church than a glimpse of the sovereign, holy, majestic God who is worthy of all worship, who is high and lifted up. This vision will compel a church to radical, risk-taking, death defying obedience to the purpose of God in the world. When our faith communities actually believe that God deserves the praise of all peoples, then our humble worship in the church will lead to an urgent witness in the world.*

When we see more than a billion Muslims in some of the toughest places in the world for a Christian to live, we will sacrifice our lives, if necessary, to go to them because we want the glory of God in all nations more than we want our own safety in this world.

I think of Moravian churches in early eighteenth century Germany. These brothers and sisters were pioneering Western involvement in the global purpose of God. And it was costly. Two Moravian believers decided to sell themselves into slavery in order to teach slaves in the Caribbean with the gospel.

I think of Adoniram Judson, who believed God was leading him to spend his life spreading the gospel among people who had never heard it. He met Ann and fell in love. He needed to ask Ann's father for permission to marry her. So Judson wrote his this letter: (Illustrate)

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall

redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?

His father-in-law approved, and in the end it did cost his daughter her life.

During thirty-eight years overseas, Adoniram Judson lost two wives and seven children to premature death. Yet today there are nearly four thousand Baptist churches with over half a million followers of Christ in the heart of Buddhist Burma (Myanmar). Adoniram and Ann Judson believed the worship of God was worth their lives and churches who sow this kind of passion in worship will inevitably send this kind of people into the world.

"God is not willing that any should perish, and neither am I. He wants all people to know him, and that's why I am going."

What these people need is an advocate who shares their burdens and knows their fear, and we cannot show the love of Jesus Christ to them without descending into the valley of the shadow of death with them. Indeed, that is what Jesus has done for us. And so that is what I endeavor to do, all the while trusting that God will be true to his promise and not task me with more than I am able to bear."

A young couple whom our pastors recently interviewed as we prepare to send them into one of the most dangerous areas in the world asked the precious wife, "Are you sure that you are ready for what lies ahead?"

She softly responded, "I believe God's Word is true. His Word says that the gospel will advance through persecution and suffering. And I am good with that."

Nothing can stop a people who are trusting in the Word of God and living for the worship of God.

#### A CONSTANT DEPENDENCE

Unleashing God's people to accomplish God's purpose in the world requires that we devote ourselves to relentless prayer in the church. In our selflessness, you and I realize that it is impossible for us to accomplish his purpose in our own strength. So we express our dependence upon God in prayer, and he delights in showing his glory by giving us everything we need for the accomplishment of his purpose. Through prayer, God gives grace to us in such a way that he receives glory for himself.

**Prayer is a nonnegotiable priority for selfless followers of a self-centered God.**

**Read the story of the early church in Acts, you see people for whom prayer was fundamental, not supplemental. Three times Luke tells us that the church was devoted to prayer. They were utterly dependent on God's power. Every major breakthrough for the church in the book of Acts came about as a direct result of prayer. God performed mighty works in direct proportion to the prayers of his people.**

**As the early church prayed, "much grace was upon them all."** Every advance of the gospel message came, not by human innovation, but by divine visitation.

The point of prayer is not to carry on business as usual in the church. If we want to make disciples in all the nations, then we will need to pray. On the front lines of a battle we are forced to pray.

Immediately I thought of the green mamba story from the night before and I panicked. What if a mamba like the one that bit the cows dropped on me?

I didn't have anywhere to go or anything to do. So I did all that I knew to do. I started speaking to the trees and any snakes therein: "You will trample upon the lion and the serpent? You will trample on the cobra!"

This set the stage for the whole trip. Everywhere we went I was on the lookout. I would go to bed at night praying that God would wake me up in the morning, and then I would wake up thanking him for bringing me through the night. I would walk around every corner, in every field, at every moment looking for snakes and praying for protection. Everywhere and at all times I was aware of my need for him, and I lived in constant dependence upon him and in desperation for him.

**I am convinced this is the way the Christian life is intended to be lived and our churches are intended to be led. Let's be honest. As long as church consists of normal routines and Christianity consists of nominal devotion with little risk, little sacrifice, and little abandonment, then we can do this on our own.** What happens when we dare to believe that God desires to use every one of our lives? We will find ourselves around every corner and at every moment dependent on his power and desperate for his grace as we devote ourselves to his purpose.

**I have been convicted that prayer has been supplemental, not fundamental.** I began to ask myself, if someone were looking from the outside at the Church at Brook Hills, would they see a people desperate for the Spirit of God? **Unfortunately, no. So I began calling our faith family to pray and fast together. Now we take a Sunday during every quarter to spend concentrated time in corporate prayer and fasting.**

We were hosting some brothers and sisters from Kenya, I asked, "Do you fast regularly in your church?"

"In our church," he said, "we begin every year with a month long fast."

**Whether fasting for a day or for a month, it's healthy for the church to corporately express our hunger for God. Isaiah's words constructed the frame of our fasting at Brook Hills.**

**I have posted watchmen on your walls, K. I.  
they will never be silent day or night.  
You who call on the LORD,  
give yourselves no rest,  
and give him no rest till he establishes K.I.  
and makes her the praise of the earth."**

**I want to be a part of a people who are giving God no rest from our praying and seeking after him. I want to be part of a people who are calling on the Lord day and night, refusing to leave God alone because we hunger for God's Word in our lives and God's power in his church and God's glory in all nations.**

Do you and I want to see the love of God rescuing sinners from all walks of life and redeeming his children from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people? Then let us give God no rest from our praising, confessing, and interceding, and let us watch him unleash his people in his church for his purpose in the world.

**We exist for the glory of God, and God exists for the glory of God. The ultimate key to joining together in radical obedience to Christ is found in fostering a humble view of ourselves and a high view of God in the church. Then we will give ourselves in total abandonment to him for his great purpose in the world; the declaration of his gospel and the demonstration of his glory to all the peoples of the earth.**

A book by A.W. Tozer: *The Knowledge of the Holy.*

Almighty God needs no support. The picture of a nervous, ingratiating God fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one; yet if we look at the popular conception of God that is precisely what we see.

Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help.

I fear that thousands of younger persons enter Christian service from no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation. His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of. Add a certain degree of commendable idealism and compassion for the underprivileged and you have the true drive behind much Christian activity today.

**I realized:**

**God does not need me.**

**God does not need my church.**

**God does not need you.**

**God does not need your church.**

**God does not need our conferences, conventions, plans, programs, budgets, buildings, or mission agencies.**

**God does not involve us in his grand, global purpose because he needs us. He involves us in his grand, global purpose because he loves us.**

How can we in the church best unleash the people of God in the *Spirit* of God with the Word of God for the glory of God in the world?

The question consumes me. **I want to be a part of a community of faith that is enjoying the great pleasures of God in the context of abandonment to the global purpose of God.**

**Church is composed of wonderful men and women who have not been designed by God to waste their lives on good church activity devoid of great kingdom productivity.**

We are constantly exploring what being radical together looks like in the context of our faith family. We are on a journey, and we have a long way to go as a church. More specifically, I have a long way to go as a pastor. My brothers and sisters have

**been patient with me as together we are discovering how to best share and spend our lives together for God's glory in the world.**

Who can imagine what might happen as communities of faith intentionally pray for the world, walk through the Word, sacrifice their resources, and spread the gospel in their neighborhoods and among the nations. ***There is no end to the possibilities when God's people come together in absolute devotion to God's purpose.***

**We have been joined together in the church by God's grand design for a purpose that is far greater than any of us could imagine or achieve alone. So let's live radical together.**