

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

WE ARE TARDERS POINT | WE HELP PEOPLE KNOW GOD

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Well, it's really good to be with everybody today.

I don't know if you have ever heard about this young couple. It was their first year of their marriage, it's Christmas. They are spending the holidays together for the first time, so they wanted to set up their own traditions as a married couple. So they go out. They didn't have a lot of money. And they bought a ham to take back and prepare a meal together.

They go back to their tiny little apartment, and they are in the kitchen together preparing this meal. And the young bride takes a pan and the ham, and she takes a knife, and she cuts off either side of the ham and discards that. And then she put the ham in the pan.

And her husband is beside himself. He's like, "Honey, we don't have a lot of money. Why are you wasting all of that good ham? And she goes, "I don't know. This is just the way that my mom always made ham when I was growing up."

"Why did she do it that way?"

"I don't know. I never asked her. I'll call her."

So they called her mom and asked, "Mom, why did you cut off both sides of the ham when you were preparing it?" And her mom said, "Well, I don't really know. That's just the way my mom did it."

So they were like, "Well, let's call Grandma." So they called Grandma and Grandma was like, "Well, honestly, I never really thought about it, but that's the way that my mom did it," Great-Grandma.

Well, unfortunately Great-Grandma was no longer with them, but they did have her cookbook. So they pulled out Great-Grandma's cookbook and they looked up her recipe for ham. And there in the margin was Great-Grandma's handwriting from the 1930s and she'd simply made a note to herself. She said, "I didn't have a pan big enough for the ham."

So what began as a real practical solution in the moment unfortunately and unknowingly became a tradition that got handed down from generation to generation.

You know, it's easy at times to lose sight of what we do and why we do it simply because that's just the way that things have always been done. Now, certainly don't

hear me say that I think that traditions are bad. I actually think there are a lot of things about traditions that are really good.

Traditionalism, though, will take us off course and off mission. So rather than taking the time to reevaluate and assess, “Okay, what has God been doing in our past and what is God continuing to call us to do that is universal, across time?” God is never going to change that. And then, “What are the things that He is calling us to do that are somewhat new right in front of us, today?”

Now, that’s what this series is all about. We’re beginning a new series today. We’re going to be in it for the next four weeks, called *We are Traders Point*. And what I want to do in the next four weeks—it’s not just like a history lesson on our church—this is honestly to say, “Hey, God. Thank You for Your provision and faithfulness to us as a church in the past. What have You called us to do that is never going away? It’s never changing. But what are You calling us to do next? What is it that You are asking us to do next as a church family?” I think this is so important.

A number of you, you’ve been in our church for a long, long time. And this is just going to be a really good review as to what God is calling us to. And then others of you have just started coming to our church. In fact, I’m just kind of curious, I did this first hour, across all of our campuses if you’ve been in our church less than three years would you really quickly raise up your hand? Less than three years. Look at that.

First hour was the same, lots of people who have been here for three years or less. So I think a series like this is really important for a number of different reasons. I just want you to know what kind of church you are a part of. I want you to know what inspires us, what drives us and motivates us. What is it that we are trying to accomplish? So you can be all in on that.

And I also think that this will be a clarifying series for you to go, “Well, I don’t know if this is the church for me.” And that’s totally okay. It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people.

Churches are like fingerprints. They are very, very similar but there is some distinctiveness to them. Meaning that God has called every Christ centered, Bible teaching, Jesus loving church to a very similar mission. I’m going to get to that in a minute. But He’s called us to be distinct as well. What is the unique calling God has placed upon our church?

Our church has this really unusual, kind of rich history to it. A lot of people who come here for the first time ask me, “Did you start the church?” No, I did not start the church. Our church got started, are you ready for this? Our church got started 188 years ago. So turn to your neighbor and say, “You look pretty good for almost 200.” We look pretty good for almost 200 years old.

Now, our church got started in 1834 on the outskirts of Indianapolis. The original name was Ebenezer Christian Church. So aren't you glad that they changed it? And they changed it to Traders Point, which was this township that existed on the outskirts of Indianapolis. Kind of a cool history. This is where people stopped to trade their goods before they headed north to Chicago or out west. It was sort of a sending post, which I think is really a cool visual for what we're trying to do as a church as well.

There is a lot of history that has gone on in the last 188 years. Did you know the year that our church got started the refrigerator was invented? The year that our church got started Abraham Lincoln was 25 years old. So lots has happened in that time.

And what I think is really amazing about that is that most churches, from the time that they get started, have about a 40-to-50-year life cycle. Now what I mean by that is that a church gets started by a group of people and they've got a fresh vision from God. They want to reach their community for Christ. And the church has like an S-curve. You can trace it across the decades.

The church has a season of fruitfulness where it is reaching people, and then they begin to forget why they cut the sides off the ham. And they begin to reach a plateau. And they begin to guard preferences and certain traditions that aren't necessarily bad—many of them might be good—but they are not mission critical.

So they lose sight of what it is that God has called them to. Then they plateau. And eventual decline usually takes place. It's painful—decades of decline—to where they eventually close their doors. Most churches—40-to-50-year life cycle.

Well, our church is nearly 200 years old which means that our life cycle has kicked over four or five times. What does that mean? That means that there was a generation of people who saw, at the tip of the S-curve, the tip of their fruitfulness, that this cannot stop with us. So we need to take the baton of the gospel message and pass it to the next generation. We need new wineskins for the same wine. We need to continue to pass this on. And we've got that embedded in our DNA.

So now is the time in which we, as a generation, will say, "Well, okay. God has done something amazing in our church. God's done something amazing in my life. Am I going to keep that to myself or are we going to do what we can to pass that to the next generation?"

So we have to see what God has done in our past and thank Him for it and glorify Him for it.

You know, I am so grateful—I've told the pastor who I've followed by the name of Howard Brammer, he served here for nearly a quarter of a century... I just thank him all of the time, "Thank you for letting me stand on your shoulders. Thank you for what you

set up here that has made this such a joy and so easy to transition into a new generation.”

And man, over the last 15 years... I got here 15 years ago this month as a wide-eyed 31-year-old kid who didn't know what he was doing, and pretty much the only thing that has changed is my age. Alright?

I got here and I didn't really know what was going to happen. We had just moved into this current building, which is our Northwest Campus, six months before I got here. And this room that you are sitting in now (if you're in this room with me) seats about 2,600 people. There were 1,500 people in the church when I got here, 300 were kids. So 1,200 adults, two services—which made first service pretty slim. There were about 250 or 300 people in here in first service and they were just scattered all across the room.

And I was too stupid to know the challenge that was in front of me. After a service my third Sunday here I got down off the stage and I was off to the side. And I'll never forget this. A gentleman walked up to me, and he put his finger in my chest and he said, “We will never see the seats filled in this place.” And I was just like, “Okay.” I didn't really know how to respond to the idea of: This was daunting. This was a waste of space. We will never reach that many people.

That has been the challenge in front of us. And you know what? God has continued to multiply us: multiple campuses reach thousands upon thousands of people. Honestly, I don't really care much about church size. I'm going to get to that in just a minute. What I really care about is the number of people we send out.

There have been roughly a dozen pastors who have served on our staff that I've had the privilege of investing and pouring into and then we sent them out to either plant a church or lead a church from Florida to California.

To use the analogy of an NFL team, we didn't just want to win a couple of Super Bowls. I want to win like 25 Super Bowls with a family tree of coaches who we send out.

We've sent them out. We've planted churches. We seek to start flagship churches in urban areas around the world because cities are where culture is shaped. And we believe that if we can reach the city we can reach the culture. So we just send people out and send resources out to plant churches.

Since 2011, we've baptized over 6,000 people. That's just amazing to me. Prior to COVID, we had about just under 10,000 attending physically. We had a smattering of people online. We had six campuses. And then COVID punched us in the mouth.

I've shared my story with you guys. I've tried to be as vulnerable as I can and kind of share my heart with you. It was about 18 months ago that, just in my quiet time, I was praying and reflecting. And I just said, “You know, God. Here in this next year I'm going to be here 15 years. And you just run the math, I just kind of feel like I'm at half-time.”

I feel like God's called me here. I love this church. I don't want to go anywhere else. I feel like I've grown up here. This is just family to me. And in another 15 years, it's probably about the time when I need to hand the baton to another leader who will lead this church into another generation. All of that, Lord willing.

I just feel like I'm kind of in half-time. And I had this really sobering, kind of scary thought. I said, "God, You've done so much over the last 15 years." And I could barely utter the words. I just said, "God, are our best years behind us? All of those fruitful years where we just saw people reached, and we sent out pastors, and we planted churches and multi-sites. Are the first 15 years like a S-curve and then my last 15 years just maintenance? Just plateau and decline?"

And God led me to this passage in Isaiah, chapter 43. It says this. God is talking to the Israelites about how He has delivered them from Egyptian slavery and from Pharaoh through the Red Sea. And God says:

"But forget all that – it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something," what's the word? *"new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?"* And then He says, *"I will make a pathway through the wilderness."* AKA, COVID. *"I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."* AKA, cultural division. Isaiah 43:18-19 (NLT)

God was like, "I'll make a way. I've already begun. Don't you see it? There are these obstacles that are in front of you but I'm going to do something new." Why? "Because it's My church. It's the bride of Christ." And God seeks to reach more people in a new generation.

So I honestly believe, I've got to believe, that our best years are not behind us, but in front of us. And I'll also say this. It's generally a bad rule to tell God what He's going to do. Right? Just generally. So we're not telling God what He'll do, we are not speculating what God will do, we are anticipating what God might do.

It's this idea of, "God, we're leaning in. We're open to whatever it is that You want to through us as a people. We don't want to be caught back on our heels. We don't want to be asleep at the wheel when You send Your Spirit to empower a movement to reach a whole new generation."

So that's what this series is about for the next four weeks. And I'm going to try to do a lot of teaching today and really share my pastoral heart and a vision for where we are going.

This series is us walking through this diagram right here. I'll throw this up on the screen.

I'm going to use a little bit of internal staff language. We talk with our staff about this a lot. This is called (what you are seeing) the Great Commission Engine. That's just how we've chosen to call it. For short we call it a GCE.

By that I mean that every Christ centered, God fearing, Bible teaching, on mission church regardless of denomination, regardless of size, regardless of ministry, philosophy or geographical location is going to have this at its core because every one of these things finds their foundation in Scripture.

So, when you look at this, if you were to pop the hood of a church, you would see this as the engine. And God is very, very clear. We are to help people know God.

We are to help people know God. That's what we are going to talk about today. And then throughout this series we're going to hear about life-giving relationships, helping you make a difference, all fueled by prayer and the Holy Spirit.

Now, I say all of that to say that over the past 2,000 years this is the engine of every church that is on mission with God. And God is very, very clear about what the church should be. So He uses words like: *ecclesia*, the gathering of the saints, the called-out ones, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. He's very, very specific about what it is. God gives us great freedom as to how that might be expressed. Does that make sense? Okay, maybe not. I'll try harder.

When we talk about the Great Commission Engine, we're saying, "Hey, that's under the hood of every car." God is like, "Make sure you get the engine right." We need to help people know God, have life-giving relationships, and make a difference all fueled by the Holy Spirit. Now the chassis can look like what we want it to look like. It can be a SUV. It can be a sports car. It can be a sedan. Whatever. God is like, "You can look like any one of those things just as long as the engine is right."

This is all fueled by the Great Commission in Matthew, chapter 28. Let me just read it to you. For many of you, you already know it. For others of you, I want you to know the mission of our church:

"Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore,'" what's the word? *"go...."* He doesn't say, "Therefore come," He says, "You've got to go." The church is always this movement. Always this sending.

He says, "Go," and what? *"... go and make disciples...."* We don't want to make converts, go and make consumers, fill up a room.

"... go and make disciples of all the nations," meaning that there is going to be diversity within the church, *"baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey,"* that's another word for application. I'm not just going to teach you what God's Word says, but teach it in such a way that you would apply it.

"... obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this:" you can't do this alone, so *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

That's the Great Commission. That's what Jesus told every church to be about. Now, if a church doesn't have that at its core, like its mission statement can't be found in that passage, then you might want to find another church. That's just what I would say.

Matthew, chapter 28, the Great Commission, that is the mission for all of us. Now, how we choose to state our mission can be informed by some other things. So I want you to know that our mission statement finds itself, as the bedrock, in Matthew 28.

But then there are some other passages that inform it. Matthew, chapter 3. The prophet Isaiah is talking about John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, who comes to prepare the way for Jesus. And it says:

"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!" Matthew 3:3 (NLT)

So one time John the Baptist was asked, "Are you the Messiah?" And John goes, "No, man. I am not the Messiah. I am here just to clear the way for Jesus who is the only One who can change anyone."

Jesus would say in John, chapter 12:

"If I be lifted up, I'll draw all people unto me."

So our job as Christians is not to convince anybody, it's not to argue anybody into faith. If you can argue them into faith they can be argued right back out of it. We're not trying to twist anybody's arm. We are simply saying, "Let Jesus do what only He can. Let's clear the way so people can get there."

And Mark, chapter 2, illustrates this so beautifully. It's one of my favorite passages. You've got these four buddies. My theory is that they were all high school buddies, and they have a friend of theirs who was a paralytic and he's on a mat and they try to get their friend to Jesus.

They hear that Jesus is in Capernaum and He's in a house teaching. And Ticketmaster really messed up. They oversold the event. So nobody can get in. There is standing room only. So instead of doing the logical, rational thing, which would have been, "Hey, let's wait until Jesus finishes His talk and the house clears and maybe we'll get an audience with Him. They are like, "No, no, no. We're going to climb up on top of the roof and tear a hole through the roof." Wouldn't you?

Think about that for a minute. I wouldn't tear a hole in my roof let alone somebody else's roof. And you know that would have been reckless. It would have been dangerous. It would have been expensive. It was full of passion. And Jesus rewards

them for it. You could just see that these guys wanted their friend to get to Jesus so badly they removed the roof to get their friend to Jesus.

Now, we've taken all of those passages and sort of smashed them together to state our mission statement. And our mission statement is: We exist to remove (and this next word, I cannot stress the importance of it) unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus.

I hear our mission statement misquoted all of the time. And honestly, it drives me nuts. If you were like, "Oh, we're just here to remove barriers." No we're not. We're here to remove unnecessary barriers and there is a difference. If we say we're just here to remove barriers, that could be interpreted by some as saying, "Well, we're just trying to lower the bar, water down the gospel, make it easy to believe." But that's not what we are trying to do.

This is not like, "Hey, man. Follow your heart. You do you. Throw a little Jesus on the side." That's not what this is. This is unnecessary barriers. Well, what is an unnecessary barrier? Well, in Ephesians, chapter 2, it gives us a pretty good definition. It says:

"For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations."
Ephesians 2:14-15 (NLT)

In other words, Jesus' whole ministry, the incarnation of God, was that God said, "I'm going to remove that thing that has separated Me from My people and I'm going to reconcile back to people through Jesus." Jesus is going to come to do for us what we can never do on our own.

So for generations of Old Testament law, they were having to go to the temple, make all of these sacrifices to God and it was messy, it was inconsistent, it wasn't for once and for all doing the job. So God sent Jesus to be our sacrificial Lamb. Jesus comes to tear down that dividing wall of hostility.

In Acts, chapter 15, when the church gets started the Jerusalem Council meets—one of the very first church meetings. They sit down and here's what they were debating. They said, "We are making it too difficult for some of the Gentiles to come to know God. We need to clear the way so that they can come to know Him."

So what do we mean when we say unnecessary barriers? Well, we're primarily talking about dogmatism and legalism and judgmentalism and just like weird experiences that may keep people from knowing God.

I don't know about you guys, but I grew up in a church that just had—can any of you relate to me? When you walked in it just had a funky smell. Do you remember a funky church smell? You walk in and you were like, "What is that? Are we bottling that up?"

Pumping that into the air ducts?” And we had these benches called pews. And I hated the word because it was like, “Pew. Yeah, it stinks in here.”

And it was Christianese, making it an uncomfortable experience. So that way, all people can think about is maybe the environment or how others made them feel and they missed the gospel message. We just remove all of those things that are absolutely unnecessary to get people to Jesus.

So, how do we help people know God? That’s the thing that we are aspiring to do. We want to know God and we want to help others know Him too. Jesus would pray in John, chapter 17:

“And this is the way to have eternal life – to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.” John 17:3 (NLT)

Now, the word *know* does not mean know about. It’s not like, “I believe in God.” The word *know* does not mean head knowledge. The word *know* means heart experience. It’s a personal encounter with God.

The same word that Jesus uses in His prayer in John 17 *know* is the same Greek word in Matthew 1 when an angel visits a teenage girl named Mary and says, “Mary, you are pregnant with the Son of God.” And she says, “How can this be? I *know* not a man.” Same Greek word. Mary didn’t mean, “I don’t know what a man is.” She meant, “I have never been with a man. I’ve never been in that close proximity.” And that’s the same word that Jesus uses. Jesus wants us to have an encounter with the living God.

WE HELP PEOPLE KNOW GOD

We have a group of people, a gathering, an *ecclesia*, who have had an encounter with God, to really know God, now we want to help others have that encounter as well. It’s too good to keep to ourselves.

So, how do we do this? Well, my outline today is really, really simple. We gather, we scatter, and we stay on message. And if a church begins to reach a plateau and decline it’s because they’ve forgotten one of those important steps.

WE GATHER

Now, one of the marks of the New Testament church was that they gathered on a regular basis, both in big settings and small settings. So the early Christians gathered in large settings, very similar to what we are doing right now, in the temple courts. And then they also gathered during the week in each other’s homes.

And I think that there is something to that. There is a dynamic about meeting in pairs that a group of 12 doesn’t fully capture. There is also a dynamic about meeting in a small group of maybe 8 to 12 that just doesn’t get captured in pairs. And then there is something that you just can’t get anywhere else unless you are meeting in a large

gathering like this where you feel the power and presence of God through worship and corporate teaching.

Now any one of those things in and of themselves is not the full expression of the church. It's the combination of all of those things. Primarily, God didn't mean for this to be a thing that we do by ourselves. If you talk to people who share their testimony or how God got ahold of them and started working in their lives, chances are that they will mention a name or a set of names of people God sent into their life who encouraged them, introduced Jesus to them, and fanned the flame of faith in them.

Unfortunately, deconstruction is a big thing in our culture now a days. And if you talk to people who are deconstructing their faith, who has church hurt or baggage or they walked away from God, oftentimes they will mention some names, names of people who actually hurt them, traumatized them, or damaged them.

See, relationships are a double-edged sword, aren't they? Right now, what makes your life so enriching is relationships and what makes your life so painful is relationships.

Now, there is a personal nature to all of our faith, but it was never meant to be private. So this idea, "I don't need the church, it's just God and me." That is foreign to the New Testament. Even the Son of God gathered around Him a small group of people.

And church attendance is not tied to your salvation, right? Just because you're here and we gather every Sunday doesn't mean that God is up in heaven putting a little gold star on your attendance chart. God is not going, "Oh, man. Look at them, they are such good Christians, they've got it all figured out. You know? They are in church."

No, we gather precisely because we don't have it all figured out. I love what it says in Hebrews, chapter 10. It says:

"Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." Hebrews 10:23-25 (NLT)

So simply put, the reason why we gather is because life grinds us down. The reason why we gather is to get our perspective adjusted because we can begin to drift and lose our way. The reason why we gather is to remember who God is and why we need Him.

The reason why we gather in a big setting like this is to be reminded that what God is doing in the world is much, much bigger than us. And He's invited us to be a part of it. We gather, not just to get our individual needs met and our preferences met, but to serve others. And that act of service is actually what can change us.

Jesus modeled this Himself. Jesus said, “I’ve not come to be served but to serve and to give My life as a ransom for many.”

And I would say that if you’re just coming and showing up and consuming a worship service and consuming a message but you’re not contributing or serving in any way, then you’re leaving a lot on the table. You’re actually leaving out a significant part of what God wants to do: to speak into your life and to grow your faith and to give you your purpose.

I love the digital age in which we live. I think there are some amazing things about it because it has caused us to reach people faster and farther than we ever could have reached them.

Some of you will relate to me. The church that I grew up in, if you missed a Sunday, if you got sick, you went on vacation, you just decided to sleep in—if you missed church you just missed it. You couldn’t jump online and watch—stream it. You couldn’t go watch the sermon later on YouTube. You just missed it.

And then technology caught up to us and we developed this amazing piece of technology called cassette tapes. And you could go to the church library, and you could check out the sermon cassette tape from the previous week to get caught up if you missed a message in the series.

Then technology advanced a little bit more and we’d melt sermon CDs. You could burn the sermon on a CD, and you could order it that way. Then technology caught up a little bit and we could actually put the sermon and the service on a website so that you could watch it later—to where we are today (or during COVID). Everybody was online and that’s how we were gathering together—through digital.

I love digital because it has always been the front door of our church. Before anybody comes, usually they will check us out online. It’s like a big front door of our church. Here’s what I love about it too. If you miss church for whatever reason, you can still join us. You can stay caught up, up to speed to where things are going, from anywhere in the world. And we’ve been able to reach people in places around the world that I never thought we’d be able to reach.

We have gatherings of people huddled up in India and Africa. We have people email us all of the time who live in Charlotte, Denver, and LA. They are like, “You are our church family. We watch online. We gather with other people.” Twenty or 25 years ago I never would have imagined that.

Now, here’s the downside to digital—some pros and some cons. We went online solely during COVID. There were a lot of people who were like, “Oh, I like this. I can stay in my jammies and make pancakes and just have it on in the background and we don’t have to fight the traffic and find a seat. We can just stay online.”

And listen. I'm not trying to shame anybody or anything about that. I'm simply trying to say that there is something significant that you are missing if you stay there, specifically when it comes to worshipping corporately with others. Here's the biggest thing—serving others. It's not just you and God in your living room. Is the Spirit of God in your living room? Yeah, you bet He is. He is just as real as He is here. But there is something about getting outside of yourself and having eyes for other people that you simply miss.

I love how Dr. Tony Evans says this. He says, "I hear people say, 'I don't have to go to church to be a Christian,' and they are absolutely right. Salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. You don't have to go home to be married, but stay away long enough and your relationship will be affected."

To which everybody in the room, physically, is like: Amen. Everybody at home is like: click. I get that.

This is not any judgment. This is not any shame. I just simply want to say that we miss you and we want you to be a part of the family of God. We want you to be a part of what God is doing here.

I love what online ministry does. In fact, this is a great example. I want to show you a picture. This is Steve and Kelsey Sager. They started listening and watching our church online about a year ago. They live in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And they would say that our church helped them come to know God online. They never attended a church anywhere. They were just watching online.

But after a while they felt convicted to become a part of a local church in their area. And so they started attending a church and serving at a local church while they were still watching and listening to us online. And they got baptized.

And they said, "You know what? We've never been to the church that introduced us to God. We've never been to Traders Point." So they made a weekend out of it. They brought their kids to Indy and had fun over the weekend and then they attended our West campus so this picture here is with Pastor Ryan when they visited our campus live for the first time.

And I love that. I look at that and I'm like, "Man, God. We want to leverage technology and digital to reach as many people as we possibly can." We're trying to do both. We're trying to engage people digitally and build up the physical body of Christ.

So we gather, and then:

WE SCATTER

One of the things that you see in the New Testament church was that they were not just trying to hold onto people, they were sending them out. The New Testament churches

were always a sending movement, sending some of their brightest and their best, sending their resources to others so that the kingdom of God might expand.

I would say the physical posture of our church isn't where we have two closed fists, "God, You've given us these people. We're going to hold onto them. And, God, we have this many resources. We're just going to hold on to them." No. Our posture is that we want to open our hands and say, "God, they are not ours. They are Yours. So, God, You take them. You use them. We want to bless others."

And by the way, open hands God will always take and use for His glory. Also, open hands, God will give you more. It's this idea that, "I just want to be open-handed before You." We want to send some of our brightest and our best.

We scatter every week when the service is over so that we can go into the community, and we can be the light of Jesus Christ where we live and work and play. We scatter every week so that we can serve single moms and hurting women. We scatter every week so that we can minister to lonely, broken men. We scatter every week so that we can minister to vulnerable children, to come alongside teachers in the classroom and make sure that they've got supplies for their room, to come alongside first responders and let them know that we are with them.

See, church, I've heard it said, is a lot like compost. If you spread it out, it's a great fertilizer. If you pile it up it stinks up the neighborhood. So we want to spread out.

This is why, guys, we have gone multi-site. We didn't go multi-site to grow bigger. Multi-site just complicates everything. We went multi-site to help people around our city be on mission with us.

We love every part of our city. So about six or seven years ago we noticed that there were a whole bunch of people driving more than 20 minutes to this campus. And we were like, "Hey, that's great but they are likely not serving, and they are likely not inviting their friends. They are not on mission. So let's go to where they are so that way they can be on mission with us."

This is the reason why we send significant resources and people to plant churches around the world. It's the reason why we send, as I mentioned, some of our best of the best to serve in other churches.

In a couple of weeks we're going to have one of our missions partners from Kenya here (you're not going to want to miss that) as we talk about what God is doing in Kenya through Missions of Hope International.

This is the reason why we did Men's Night and why we will do Women's Night in January. These are not just cool events, right? It's not like a cul-de-sac where we just say, "Hey, come into this cool event." It's an onramp, it's a bridge event into the community.

I don't know how many guys stopped and texted me last Wednesday and Thursday before Men's Night saying, "Hey, man. I'm bringing a friend of mine from work." Or, "I'm bringing a buddy of mine who I fish with. He's never been to church. He's never been to our church. He's never been to this thing and he's nervous. He wants to know what he's supposed to wear."

And I was just like, "Tell him to wear whatever he wants.'

"Hey, man. He wants to know what to expect here. And I'm kind of curious too. What are we going to expect on Men's Night?"

And we had all of these guys come to Men's Night who don't normally come to church, and they had an encounter with God. I prayed with 30 of them afterward, and that was just me. So that's why we do what we do.

So we gather, we scatter, and:

WE STAY ON MESSAGE

We stay on message. We live in a day and age where the culture wants to tell us what to say from this platform. And I just want you to know that aside from God's Word, I don't have anything worth saying and nothing transformational. So we're going to teach what God's Word says, but we're going to do so in a way that is, in and of itself, living and active.

Now, I believe that the teaching of God's Word, in and of itself, is powerful enough to change the hardest of hearts. I believe and have confidence in that right down to its core.

A lot of my teaching ministry was shaped and informed by a guy by the name of John Stott. Some of you might recognize that name. Others of you may not. He preached in London in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. And John Stott wrote a little book that I read when I was in college that really revolutionized my approach in teaching ministry called *Between Two Worlds*.

He had this visual of a canyon. And he said that on one side of the canyon is God's Word, the other side of the canyon is culture and everyday life. And he said that the two extremes that we could fall on, as preachers, is we could just stay on the cultural side of the canyon. And we could just pull a few little verses from God's Word and kind of sprinkle them in the culture. Or we could stay on God's Word side of the canyon and shout across the canyon the Greek words that they need to know. And he was like: No. Biblical preaching is that you build a bridge between the two sides of the canyon and you walk back and forth.

Charles Spurgeon said that effective biblical preaching is the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. So you're saying, "Hey, this is what God's Word says," which, by the way, is relevant, in and of itself, to every generation across all time.

So, I believe that good, expositional preaching is simply this: teach it, explain it, apply it, and illustrate the application. That's what it is, "Here's what God's Word says. I'm going to teach it, I'm going to explain it. Let me show you why this matters. Here's what I want you to know. Here's what I want you to feel. Here's what I want you to do."

Every now and then I'll get people come up to me and they will say, "What kind of church are you?" And I'm like, "What do you mean?" And they will say, "Are you a church that is for making disciples or are you just evangelism?"

And I really think that it is unfortunate that we split into those two camps. Because I think healthy, New Testament, Bible teaching, Jesus centered churches should be about both. Don't you?

We want to reach people and we want to make disciples, which means, by the way, guys, there is going to be some tension. There is just going to be some tension in that. But I want you to know that's the tension that we've chosen to live in.

Here's my thing. I believe that when I teach God's Word it is enough to feed believers, you are as deep as what you apply. So I want to teach believers and I want to reach people who are really far from God.

Meaning this. When you invite a friend to church, I promise it won't stink in here. We're not going to do any weird stuff. I want you to know that you can bring your unchurched friends and I'm not going to say anything abrasive, or weird, or obnoxious from the stage. Now, I will say something that will make them uncomfortable. I will say something that brings conviction. Because that's the way lives are transformed.

Here's my goal every week. I want somebody who is really, really far from God to walk in here and then walk out and go, "I don't believe what he believes, and I don't believe that's God's Word. But you know what? That made me think. And that was really helpful. And it was hopeful. I have hope and that was helpful. I'll come back."

And I've been doing this long enough to know that if you get people to say, "That was helpful and hopeful," and they keep coming back, and they keep coming back, and coming back, do you know what happens? They run into Jesus. And Jesus changes their lives. That's what we're trying to do. Alright?

So we live in this day and age, it is just like a really wild thing, where something happens in the news or in culture and you see this on social media, "Hey, if your pastor doesn't say *blank* you need to go and find another church."

Now, please hear my heart. I am not saying that we need to be tone deaf to what happens in culture. As shepherds, as pastors, if the culture is hurting because of something that happened in the news, we need to lovingly address it, pray over it, and actually guide people to what God's Word says about it.

But I'm not going to let what happens in the news dictate what we say on the platform on a consistent basis. We stay on message. We stay on message. Here's why. Churches move at the speed of unity. Don't hear me say that and say, "We've all got to agree on everything." That's not what unity means. Unity means the opposite.

Unity means we can disagree on secondary issues but we agree on primary issues, which is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, salvation by faith and not by works, that we are sinners in need of God's grace. That's our main message. We can disagree on all of the secondary ones. And we don't have to look alike, talk alike, think alike, act alike to be unified around the person of Jesus.

Did you know that Jesus' dying prayer was for unity. Look at what He said in John 17, verse 9:

"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are." John 17:9-11 (NLT)

And on down in verse 20 it says this:

"I am praying not only for these disciples," who are these disciples? Well it is the 12 who were in front of Him. He goes, *"but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message."* Who's that? Us. Yeah. Turn to your neighbor and say, "That's you, bro." "That's you, girl." He's talking about us.

"I pray that they will," say it out loud with me, *"all be one, just as you and I are one – as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us,"* why? *"so that the world will believe you sent me."* John 17:20-21 (NLT)

In other words, Jesus doesn't say, "Hey, unity is a good thing to do so that we can all just circle up and sing 'Kumbaya' and just get along." No, He goes, "Unity is mission critical." That's why He prayed for it. He said, "So that the world would know."

Guys, may we never forget our experience of grace. May we never forget. It is so easy. If you're in a burning building and somebody throws you a ladder and you climb up the ladder, our automatic human reaction is to pull the ladder up behind us and forget about everybody else who is in the house. And there are a lot of Christians who live their lives that way, "Man, I'm so thankful that I got saved." But we forget that there are still people who need to know God.

And that's why I love this story I just want to share with you really briefly. I want you to take a look at this screen. Take a look at Chris' story.

[Video]

I started playing guitar around 12 years old. That attraction probably started with just wanting to be like my dad. He taught me a few chords and then I would spend four hours in my basement pretty much every day just playing guitar and learning that. But then it grew into this absolute love for music. It's always been a constant throughout any season of my life.

Around my senior year of high school is kind of when I stopped going to church, but music was always there. And start adulting—you are kind of just by yourself and everybody kind of plays one way. There are no more bands.

So my connection was still continuing to worship at various churches. I was filling that void of just wanting to be on the stage and kind of doing it for myself. It wasn't anything God related once I walked out of the church building.

I spent 10 years doing that. I felt like life wasn't ever going right. There were a lot of losing jobs, moving places, disappointments along the way. Around the start of 2020 my wife at the time asked for a divorce. And that was right on the heels of COVID.

Shortly thereafter I was in a really dark space. Eight months or so into that, for the first time in my life I was suicidal. I never thought I could get to that point. I didn't want to create any issues for anybody. It wasn't a cry for help. I just wanted out.

There was one night, and I was just in that dark space. And I laid down on my bed and I opened up my laptop and I typed in: the most painless ways to die. And my internet just stopped working. So I tried reloading the page and it never worked. So I just shut my laptop and went to bed.

That next day (I worked with my dad at the time) I remember him saying when people have times like these.... In crisis, he said, "I don't think there is anything wrong with demanding, 'God, this is what I need right now.'"

I'm on my way home in my truck. I was listening to K-LOVE radio, which wasn't abnormal for me to listen to. I had this David Crowder song on. And I remember for some reason I just felt like I should try this praying thing. It was almost for the first time in my life that I think I actually tried to legitimately pray. I was like, "This is the only chance that I have for God to show me something."

But I remember that song, that I had turned it down so that I could kind of do my prayer. And I turned it back up and Crowder played the last three notes of the song. And I remember for a brief moment being pretty irritated. Like, "Really? I just did this for You now, and now You ended this song that I love."

And then the next song that came on was this song called “Together” by For King and Country, “If you’re looking for hope tonight. If you’re feeling alone and you don’t understand. If you’re fighting the fight of your life, then stand. We’re going to do this hand and hand.”

And in that moment, I almost physically felt like God literally grabbed ahold of my heart and I started crying so hard. I couldn’t even see the road. And I ended up pulling over in a neighborhood and I sat there for a good 30 minutes or so.

I’d always thought of God like, “Once you’re with God everything is happy, and life is great because you have God.” That moment was the first time I ever had a realization that God will always be there in those low moments as well.

I ended up going to bed and I woke up at 2:30 in the morning and I just had this overwhelming, like, read your Bible. I knew absolutely nothing of this story at all. I had heard of the book before, but it was the book of Job. I ended up reading 21 chapters. It was exactly how I felt. There was this guy who had everything. In my case I had the American dream, two kids and a wife. And Job had everything and then absolutely lost everything. And it just opened my heart. It opened my want to understand. I could no longer question that there was a God.

And then it was Saturday morning, and I was up, and I looked up churches. Found Traders Point and it was like four minutes from my house. The first person I met was Bart Shaw. I didn’t know that he was the campus pastor. I just thought he was this nice guy who was on the welcome committee. Then I came back the next week with my kids. He took a real interest in Julia and Bennett.

And then two weeks went by, and I saw Bart again. And he goes, “Hey, Julia and Bennett.” That was a moment when I knew that this was the place that I want to call home.

I spent about a year just really enjoying my time at Traders Point. I felt so much hope. I just craved this, and I wanted it, and I didn’t have all of the answers but once I was actually listening I think I realized like, “Okay, there is for sure a God. Get into the congregation and listen and learn.” I think that it was just that I was listening at that point, and I was never listening before.

I’d like to think it was because of the moment I had with God and my own conversion that God brought me even closer to music. My perspective is so much different. The greatest gift that I can give to people is through music. So that’s why I’m on the Traders Point team. I’m a part of something.

I get to stand up there and praise and worship Jesus alongside the people sitting in the seats. I just always wonder and hope that there is somebody out there that has that

same level of connection to impact them in the same way that had been two years ago for me.

[End Video]

I love that. Can we give it up for Chris for sharing his story? It never, never gets old. It never gets old.

I want to wrap up by just giving you a visual for how I feel we can best help people have an encounter and know God. So I've got this Venn diagram up here. I know for some people Venn diagrams are their love language. Alright?

This is kind of a visual of some observations that I've had over the last few years. I grew up in church. Been to Bible College. Been pastoring for 20 years. And I would say as I look at a New Testament churches there are three streams of churches that come out of the New Testament represented by these three circles.

By the way, they all have Scriptural foundations. I believe that every God-fearing, Jesus centered, Bible teaching church is going to find itself in one of these three streams.

If we were to title this one would be the doctrinal stream. These would be like Word of God churches. If we're talking about the Trinity, this most represents God the Father. Honestly, this is the kind of church I grew up in. Heavy emphasis on doctrine, Word of God. Maybe some of you—yeah, I see heads nodding—that's the kind of church you grew up in.

And we see Scriptural foundations for his. John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* We see this in Hebrews 4, *"The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword."*

So the strength of churches in this stream is that they are great at expositional teaching, high value on theology, can really discern false teaching—really, really devoted students of God's Word. They make disciples really effectively.

Some weaknesses—and this is not judgment. This is not stereotyping. This is just a general observation. At times, if not careful, and I'm speaking from experience because I've been in this, is that they can be a little dogmatic, a little legalistic, a little judgmental—kind of looking down on others. Really good at cleaning up the saved, not so good to reaching the lost and hurting.

Another stream would be what we might call attractational. This would be mission of God churches. Talking about a member of the Trinity, maybe that would represent Jesus, the Son. These are churches that have a high emphasis on evangelism. And we see 1 Peter 3—we just walked through this—always be prepared for the reason for the hope that you have. 2 Corinthians 5: *"We are ambassadors as though God is making His appeal*

through us.” The Great Commission, obviously, would fit into this. It’s too good to keep to ourselves. We’ve got to reach people.

Strengths of this—really, really good at reaching people far from God. Really good at organizational health: structures, systems, scaling all of that kind of stuff.

Weaknesses of this movement—maybe at times, if not careful, this can be a little bit theologically light, maybe drift into some shallowness, maybe over assimilate into the culture, there is nothing distinct about what they are doing. Sermons turning into self-help talks.

Here’s the third stream. One I call charismatic. And charismatic may be more of this idea of movement of God and the person of the Trinity that it represents would be the Holy Spirit—forgive my kindergarten handwriting. Alright?

And we see Scriptural support for this as well. The whole book of Acts. We see the Spirit of God showing up in big ways. And actually they were speaking in languages that they didn’t know so cross-culturally they could come to know God. The power of God was in that.

Strengths of this movement—they give us some of the best worship music on the planet. I want people in this stream praying for me because sometimes Christians can be tentative in their prayers, “Lord, if Thou will, would You please consider....” People in this stream, “God, heal them now!” They are all about faithfulness and passion and healing. “Spirit of God, please show up.”

Weaknesses of this particular movement—they can elevate personal experience over good theology if they’re not careful. It’s like, “Well, God told me this.” Well, that kind of runs counter to what His Word says. So they’ve got to be careful of that.

Here’s just an observation that I’ve made. As I go through these three streams or these three circles, chances are (even if you don’t have any church background or maybe you came from a Catholic background) there is one of these circles you probably resonate with over the others. I do.

As I said, chances are maybe the church you grew up in was charismatic. Or how about this? The church you came to know Christ in, the church you came to know Jesus in, we have a tendency to really lean toward that stream (attractual). Or maybe it’s just your personality type. Your personality fits more over there.

Nothing wrong with any of it. As I’ve said, it’s all in Scripture. Here’s the challenge. What we have a tendency to do is we lean toward one of these streams and we sort of look down on the others. It’s not too strong of a word, maybe we even villainize the others and say, “Well, that church is off mission because they do that.” That’s actually hurting the body of Christ.

Here's this observation from pastoral ministry. Speaking as a pastor, it's really.... Here's how churches get off mission, one of the ways. Pastors perceive how many people are in one of these streams and we end up leaning into that stream to keep the Christians we've already reached happy. And we let a whole bunch of people go to hell. So what I'm saying is that we don't want to just lean one way into one stream and villainize the others.

What kind of church are we? And some of you in your seats are trying to guess. Which circle is he going to put Traders Point in? Or some of you are like, "I know which circle we're in. It's so clear." And others of you are like, "I don't know."

Here's the thing. I want to be a Word of God church that is really on mission with God in the world fueled by the movement of God. So here's where I want us to be—right in the center where the circles intersect. Right in the center of that bullseye.

Now, here's what that means. That means none of you all are going to be happy. Right? That's what that means. That means that somebody in some stream is going to be like, "I don't think you're Word enough," or, "I don't think you're mission enough," or, "I don't think you're listening enough to the Holy Spirit."

Or there are things that kind of confuse you. Why do we do worship night? Why did we do that series? Why do we have lights and haze on the stage? There could be lots of things that maybe leave you scratching your head. And I just want you to know that you don't have to agree with everything if it doesn't fit into your preferences.

Here's what I want you to know, our heart.... By the way, not every decision we make is the right one. And oftentimes we make a decision and I go, "Man, this stinks. We should have never done this." And it was my idea. So thankful for God's grace.

I just want you to know, we're aiming for the center. We want to be a Word of God, mission of God, movement of God church.

Now, for some of you that's really clarifying, "Alright. We're out. I don't want to be a part of that church. I want to be part of a church that is leaning toward...." And you know what? That's really fine. The Lord bless you. We love you. We'll give you suggestions for how to find that church. Others of you, you're like, "Man. I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of that."

That's where we perceive that God is leading us in the future. I don't want to reach people for the sake of reaching them, I want to reach people so that they would know the Word of God and have an encounter with God and grow to be disciples.

So I want to close with this. One of my favorite stories is about a Bible translator in Papua New Guinea. A few years ago he went over to this little village, and he had interpreted, or he had translated the New Testament into a language the Bible had never been translated in before.

So they are in this village and he's passing out these New Testaments and a guy walks up to him and he smells like marijuana. And the guy said, "Hey, I really want your New Testament, but I don't plan on reading it." And the translator said, "Well, what are you planning on doing with it?" And he said, "Honestly, I plan on smoking it because the pages are so thin they make for really good wrapping paper and I'm going to wrap it up and smoke it."

And he said, "Well, thanks for your honesty." And being really quick on his feet, because he could have just been like, "No, you're not going to do that," he actually looked at the guy and he said, "Hey, man. I'm happy to give you a New Testament. You do with it whatever you want. But I want to make you a deal. Before you rip out a page and smoke it, would you read it?" And the guy was like, "Okay. I can do that." So he takes the Bible.

The translator was like, "I didn't think I'd ever see him again. I didn't think that he would actually do it."

He comes back to the village about 3 years later in the same location and he sees that same man standing in the back clear-eyed, healthy looking, joyful. He walks up to the Bible translator, and he says, "Hey, man. I don't know if you remember me." And he was like, "Oh, I do."

And he said, "What happened?" And he goes, "Well, I took you up on your offer and I took your New Testament, and I smoked Matthew. I read a page, smoked a page. And I smoked Mark. And then I smoked Luke." That is a lot of marijuana. Right?

And then he said, "I got to the gospel of John where I read the words, 'For God so loved the world,' and I could smoke no longer." And he gave his life to Christ. His life was radically changed, because why? Because he had an encounter with the living God.

Listen. I want you to know God. I don't just want you to know about Him. I don't want you to just kind of tip your hat and kind of acknowledge His presence. I want you to have a living encounter with Him. And then if you get a group of people who encounter the living God, God will show up and do amazing things in that community and in that city.

I don't want our best days to be behind us. I don't want to go into maintenance mode in the next couple of decades. I don't want to just plateau and decline. I don't want to play church or just try to keep Christians happy.

I want to reach people who are far from God who will one day come to us in heaven and say, "Thank you. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you that it wasn't all about you. Thank you for being willing to cross the line and barriers."

I love what it says in Jude. And I'll close with this. Jude says, "I want some of you all smelling like smoke," because we were so close to the flames of hell snatching people from those flames so that they might come to know God.

Right now we're just going to have, hopefully, an encounter with God through communion. Hopefully, you grabbed communion on the way in. If you didn't we'll try to get that for you. We just want to spend a few moments together in silence as a people of God gathered together to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. I'm going to give you about 90 seconds after I pray just to spend a little bit of time taking communion.

Father, we come to You right now and I thank You for Your faithfulness to the big 'C' church and thank You for Your faithfulness and provision to the little 'c' church, which is Traders Point.

God, thank You that we are a part of such a rich legacy. May we never forget our experience of grace. God, I pray that this leg of the race would not be the final one or the least fruitful one, but that we would know that there is a whole generation coming behind us and we need to pass the baton of the gospel to them.

God, help us to be a Word of God church that is passionate about the mission of God that is fueled by the movement of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that we might reach as many people as possible for Your glory. And the church says: Amen.