



## **THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH – Part 1**

### **Part 48: Acts**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Acts 2. Today’s a really good day at McLean Bible Church, because today we’ll have the joy of baptizing 50 new brothers and sisters in Christ, celebrating going from death to life in Christ. This is a great picture of what we’re seeing in the book of Acts. This morning I read in Acts 2:47 that the Lord was adding daily to their number those who were being saved and I found myself praying, “Lord, may that be so at McLean. Add daily those who are being saved.”

We’re actually going to be in Acts 20 today, but I want to start in Acts 2. Last week at this time I was on the exact opposite side of the world. I was up late at night in Thailand, watching and worshipping on line with you. I was listening to Lon preach on the Bible here in America. He closed by saying, especially in light of his transitioning, that one thing he could assure you of was that McLean Bible Church will continue to be a church that is centered on the Bible. It would be the basis for everything you would do in the future. I prayed, “God, may that be so.”

I think you realize that the Bible is not only becoming less and less respected in America, but it’s also becoming less and less respected in the church in America—even by pastors. I came across a quote that said this:

Many pastors today can preach whole messages with little more than a tip of the hat to a clause or two taken from a biblical context that few if any recognize. Even more pastors have decided that using the Bible is a handicap for meeting the needs of the different generations. Therefore they’ve gone to drawing their sermons from the plethora of recovery and 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 mega-sanctuaries that we have built.

The market forces demand that pastors give people what they want to hear if they want them to return and pay for the mega-sanctuaries we have built. Then this morning I was reading Jeremiah 5. At the end of that chapter, God says, “*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so.*” The whole chapter is about how God’s people were about to experience God’s judgment because the prophets weren’t preaching God’s Word and the people weren’t listening to God’s Word.

I was praying for you, especially as this church looks forward to the future, and I want to say this, regardless of any part I may or may not have personally in the leadership of that future: this church must love God's Word. This church must have pastors who preach God's Word and nothing else, and members who want God's Word and nothing else. May it never be said of McLean Bible Church that an appalling and horrible thing has happened: "the pastors preach their opinions and the people love to have it so."

I think about all the different temptations and trials each of you face. I know that some of you who are here today are in the midst of major struggles with sin and you just can't seem to find freedom. Then others of you come to this gathering with all kinds of suffering, with hearts aching, struggling to go on. Knowing that, the last thing I want to do is stand before you today and give you some of my thoughts and opinions. I want to give you the only thing that is able to help you to overcome that struggle with sin or to persevere through that suffering—that's the Word of God.

Last week God was saying in this gathering that America needs the Bible. This week I believe He's saying the church needs the Bible. Mark it down. As soon as McLean ceases to trust and preach and follow this Book, plainly it ceases to be a church. Proclamation of, belief in, obedience to this Book is what makes the church a church. Let me show this to you. That's why I have you in Acts 2. I want you to see what leads up to our text in Acts 20. This book tells us the story of how the church started and grew. So we'll take a quick tour in which we'll see the centrality of the Word of God in the story of the church. Notice every time you see Luke refer to the Word of God in the story of the church.

Let's begin in Acts 2:41, where the first Christian sermon is preached after the Holy Spirit comes down at Pentecost. It says, "*Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*" That's the first time we see "word." Moving two chapters ahead to Acts 4:4. The church is growing more and we read, "*But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.*" At the end of chapter four we find them experiencing persecution. In verse 29 they pray, "*And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.*" The answer to that prayer is in verse 31: "*When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*"

Next we go to Acts 6. Again, the church is growing—so much so that they're having some problems in the church that need to be addressed. Verse two: "*And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.'*" After they choose some men to take care of the necessary duties, they repeat in verse four, "*But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*" We find the result in verse seven: "*And the word of God continued to increase.*"

Moving on to chapter eight, right after Stephen is stoned and the church is scattered from Jerusalem. Verse four says, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Verse 14: “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John.” Verse 25: “When they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord...” Then go to Acts 10:44. This is right after Peter goes to Cornelius’ house, where he’s preaching the gospel. It says, “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.” Acts 11:1: “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.”

In Acts 11:19, we pick up from where the church was scattered in Acts 8. It says, “Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.” Then we get to Acts 12—where James is beheaded, Peter is miraculously delivered from prison and Herod dies—and the whole point of that chapter is this in verse 24: “But the word of God increased and multiplied.” In chapter 13, the first missionaries are sent out from the church in Antioch. What are they sent to do? Verse five: “When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God.” Verse seven: “Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence...summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.”

Then I love the end of chapter 13. Look at verse 44: “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Verse 46: “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.’” Verse 48 has a great phrase: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.” The nations are glorifying God’s Word. Verse 49: “And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.”

Let’s keep going. Acts 14 tells of the end of Paul’s first missionary journey. Verse 25: “And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.” Acts 15:35, after the Jerusalem council, says, “But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Next verse: “And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord.’”

Then you get to Acts 16:32. This is Paul’s second missionary journey, where he and Silas encounter the Philippian jailer. “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house...” and they get saved. Keep going—we’re almost there. Acts 17:11: “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness.” In Acts 18, Paul is now in Corinth. I love this phrase in verse five: “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word.” He was occupied with it. Verse 11 says, “He stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” Then Acts 19:10, he’s now in Ephesus: “This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” Verse 20 is a great verse: “So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

Are you getting the point? We just looked at about 30 verses—and there are more we didn't get to—that emphasize the supremacy of God's Word in the growth of the church. It's crystal clear from the book of Acts: you don't have church if you don't have God's Word. Everything in the church revolves around God's Word.

All of that now leads up to Acts 20, where I want to show you five intentions God has for His Word in His church. In other words, how does God intend His Word to be used to shape and to affect His church?

## **1. God intends His Word to be taught.**

God intends for His Word to be taught in the church. The last half of Acts 20 is basically a sermon Paul gives to a group of church leaders. This is the only sermon we have in Acts that's directed to Christians. All the other sermons in Acts from Paul, and from Peter for that matter, are directed to non-Christians. But here we see Paul teaching the church. And in the context of teaching the church, over and over again he refers to how he has taught them previously. So look at the words Acts 20 uses to describe either how Paul is teaching or how he has taught God's Word.

In Acts 20, Paul is traveling to places where he's already planted different churches. Verse two says, *"When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece."* That word "encouragement" literally means he exhorted them with much word. When we get down to verse seven, we read, *"On the first day of the week...we were gathered together to break bread..."* This is one of the clearest pictures we have in Scripture of the church gathering together on the first day of the week—much like we're doing right now—for worship.

And what does Paul do in that gathering? Verse seven says he talks with them. In fact, *"he prolonged his speech until midnight."* Here we have biblical precedent for long sermons. I've got a verse! To which you might say, "Yes, and look what happened as a result." Verse eight: *"There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer."* In the Greek, it says he was slowly lulled to sleep. But let's be honest—we've all been there. You can just picture poor Eutychus, fighting, fighting to stay awake; his eyes rolling back. He's pinching himself, doing everything he can, but then finally he gives in. He's the first man we ever know of to fall in sleep in church, but he's had many successors since then. But Eutychus will ever be remembered as the first. I mean, this poor guy. We're going to meet him in heaven and every one of us—as soon as we meet him and introduce ourselves and he'll say, "Hi, I'm Eutychus," and we're going to be like, "Ah." And the poor guy will say, "Yes, that's me. For all of eternity, I'm the guy who first fell asleep in church."

Look what happens next: *“And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.”* So there is the biblical warning: don’t fall asleep in church. I’ve got a verse for that one too. Verse ten: *“But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, ‘Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.’”* So Paul raises Eutychus back to life. Which then leads to my favorite part of the story: *“And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak.”* So you think Paul would get the hint. When people are so bored they’re falling over dead during your preaching, it’s time to call it a night, man. But not Paul. He keeps preaching until the morning. So I’m just saying, be glad we’re going to be out of here by lunch today.

In all seriousness, though, the picture here is clear—when the church gathered together in the first century, the teaching of the Word was primary. It wasn’t just kind of a side thing. It was primary. Verse 11 says they conversed about the Word for a long while.

Then you keep going in the chapter and Paul pulls together the elders and pastors from the church at Ephesus, where he lived and worked and ministered for three years. Here’s what he tells them, beginning in verse 18:

*You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Do you see what he said? “I spent all my time with you declaring, teaching, testifying...” and in verse 27 he continues, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* Later in verse 31 he says, “Remember that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with God’s Word.” So over and over again we see the truth that God intends His Word to be taught in the church. This is why Paul later commands Timothy, who was leading the church in Ephesus at that point, *“Preach the word...”* (2 Timothy 4:2). It’s not just a man-made tradition that a significant part of our gathering today, and every Sunday, is a pastor standing up and proclaiming God’s Word. It’s not something we made up so we can kind of play with it or throw it aside as culture changes. No, this is God’s design for His church from the very beginning.

Look back in Acts 2, right after that first verse we read about 3,000 people trusting in the Word of God for salvation. It says in verse 42 that the first thing the early church devoted themselves to was the apostles’ teaching.

Now that actually leads to a side note. In one sense, what we’re doing right now—preaching and listening to God’s Word—is the same thing the church has done ever since it started 2,000 years ago.

However, there is a major difference between how Paul was teaching and preaching then, and how I for example am teaching and preaching now. The difference is this: Paul was giving fresh, first-time new revelation from God. It's much like we hear from the prophets, for example, in the Old Testament. I mentioned that I'm reading Jeremiah in my quiet time right now. Jeremiah often begins by saying, "Thus says the Lord..." and then he proclaims a fresh word from God for the very first time. In a similar way, Paul for the most part was preaching and teaching new revelation. He would sometimes quote from the Old Testament—revelation that had already been given—but most of what he was saying was new, the kind of revelation that would be written down as Scripture, much like we have in the New Testament letters.

But that's different from what I and other pastors do today. We don't come to church today saying, "I've got a new word from God that no one's ever heard before." No, our responsibility is to teach the Word of God that has already been revealed to the church, to expose the truth that God has already given. Maybe you've heard the term "expository preaching." That describes the purpose of preaching—to expose the truth of God's Word. If a preacher isn't exposing truth from this Book, but is teaching things that don't directly come out of this Book, then he's not doing expository preaching.

Prior to being a pastor I taught expository preaching in a seminary. One time I was speaking at a college conference and a student introduced me in front of a large group of people. She said, "This is David Platt and he is an assistant professor of suppository preaching." I was sitting there thinking, "Did you just say that out loud?" So just to make sure we're clear, we're not talking suppository preaching—we're talking expository preaching. The whole purpose of preaching is to expose the truth of God.

Here's the deal: I don't have the right or the authority, nor does any pastor, to stand up and share our thoughts or opinions or ideas. Our job in every worship gathering is to open up this Word and expose what God has said. I want to say as loud and clear as I possibly can—if you don't see what I'm saying clearly in the Scripture, then don't listen to a thing I'm saying. By all means, don't bank your life on it. That goes for me or anybody else who stands before you. Always test what anyone says in the church based on God's Word. At the same time, if what I'm saying or another pastor is saying is coming from God's Word, then I urge you to listen to that word and indeed to bank your life on it. This is so significant in the church.

It's also so freeing for the pastor. I'm so thankful that I don't have to stress over what to say when I get up to preach. I don't ever have to think of something to say. All I need to do is explain what's already been said. There's a big difference between the chef and the waiter. And I'm not the chef here. I'm the waiter. I don't cook the food. My job is just to get the food to the table and get it there hot. That's the job.

Back when I was in college and I was going to a worship gathering one night. I had heard a lot about this guy who was going to be speaking, that he was a great speaker. So I was sitting in the front row and the first thing he did was share that he had forgotten his Bible—which was problem number one. Then he started talking about how he'd prayed about what to share with us that night and he started telling stories

about how he tried to figure out what God wanted to say to us, that he took walks and did this and that. He was a really entertaining guy, so people were laughing.

He talked like that for about 25 minutes, and then his whole conclusion was this: “I did all these things, but I couldn’t come up with anything so maybe God just doesn’t have a word for us tonight.” I was sitting there on the front row, looking at my Bible—which I brought—and I was thinking, “Bro. You got 66 books that are the Word of God. You don’t have to take a walk. Just open it up anywhere—to Leviticus for all I care. Read a verse. You’ve got a word from God.

God’s design for His church is for us, every week, to open up His Word to hear what He has to say. God intends for His Word to be taught in the church.

## **2. God intends His Word to be discussed.**

As I was studying that in Acts 20:7, I noticed that Paul talked with them. The original Greek word is the word from which we get our English word “dialog.” What was happening all night there in Troas was not just a monologue. It actually involved dialog. Paul was clearly teaching, but he was teaching in a way that led to discussion in the church. Some of that discussion was happening publicly here. You can only imagine what took place even more extensively privately. Paul said he taught the Word publicly and from house to house. It seems pretty reasonable that the larger, more public the setting, the more Paul’s speech was like a monologue, and the more private the setting, the more it was like a dialog. But both were important. Just like we see in Deuteronomy 6:7, when you walk along the road, talk about the Word all the time. Let it fill your conversations all the time. God intends for His Word not just to be proclaimed by one person, but to be discussed by all of His people.

Now, I want to give a side caution here as well. Just as Bible teaching can be skewed in a way that totally misses the truth of God’s Word—a preacher or pastor simply sharing his thoughts or opinions—a Bible discussion can also be skewed in a way that actually misses the truth of God’s Word. So this is the classic, all-too-common error of so many supposed small-group Bible studies, where you have people sitting around in a room, they read a verse or chapter, and the first question that’s asked is, “What does this mean to you?”

Let’s imagine a small group that reads a passage like Genesis 22, where Abraham offers his son Isaac on the altar. They read through the chapter and then they ask, “Okay, what does this passage mean to you?”

Bob over here is the first to chime in. “Well, I think this chapter means I need to be taking more hikes with my son, because Abraham went hiking with his son Isaac and I think I need to do that.”

“I guess that’s a good thing, Bob. Ah, anybody else got anything?”

To which Joe responds, “Well, I think it’s clear from this passage that it’s okay to sacrifice animals, which means no one should be a vegetarian.” Joe’s wife Mary, a vegetarian who’s sitting next to him, then says, “Well, that’s not what this passage means to me, Joe. Maybe this passage means I need to sacrifice you.”

Whenever we start with the question, “What does this passage mean to you?” the conversation will quickly congeal into a pool of ignorance, where a group of people find themselves sharing what they don’t know about the Bible—and we call it “Bible study.”

I just want to remind you that the first question we should ask is, “What does the Holy Spirit mean in this passage?” Quite frankly, I don’t care what this passage means to you. I don’t care what it means to me. I want to know what the passage means.

Some people say, “Well, David, don’t you know that different verses mean different things to different people?” No, that’s application. Without question, different verses apply in different ways depending on what we’re walking through in our lives. But our goal in Bible study is never to determine our personal meaning for a verse. Our goal is to discover the Holy Spirit’s meaning in a Scripture passage. It’s not going to mean something today that it didn’t mean then. So we need to understand who first wrote this, who first read this and what was the text saying then. We do that not to discover what a text means in our time, but what it means for all people of all times. All this to say that God intends for His Word to be taught and then discussed rightly, in a way that leads to understanding it, not distorting it. We want to know what God has said.

### **3. God intends His Word to be obeyed.**

In addition to the Word being taught and discussed, we also want to apply it to our lives. The third intention God has for His Word in His church is that it be obeyed. This is really all over our text and we’ll be talking about this more next week. But one of the major things in this chapter is not just what Paul taught, but how Paul lived. In verses 18-19 he says, “*You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.*” He uses similar language in verse 34: “*You yourselves know...*” and he starts talking about how much he worked among them and gave to help others.

So much of this chapter revolves around Paul’s example of obedience to God’s Word. Without question, his teaching had the kind of impact it had only because his life backed up what he was teaching. There’s a vital word there, especially for anybody who teaches the Word in the church, in any capacity. God intends our lives to be a reflection of what we teach. It’s good and right for members of the church to expect that from their leaders and to pray for that in them. And really, it’s true for all of us as followers of Christ.

God intends our lives to be a reflection not just of what we teach, but of what we are taught from His Word. It's a dangerous, deceptive thing for anyone to either teach or hear the Word taught and not obey it. What does James 1 say? Don't just listen to the Word—do it. Otherwise you deceive yourself and harden your heart.

Hear this. The more anyone hears the Word and doesn't obey it, the more your conscience becomes accustomed to ignoring the voice of God—that is a dangerous way to live. So realize that it's actually dangerous for you to be here today and every Sunday, hearing the Word of God taught and then to walk away in disobedience to that Word. It will numb your soul to the voice of Almighty God. Don't do that. Hear the Word taught, discuss it, then put it into practice.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:26-27, “If you hear these words of Mine and don't put them into practice, you'll be like the foolish man who built his house on sand. One day it's going to come crashing down.”

God intends for His Word to be taught, discussed and obeyed.

#### **4. God intends His Word to be visualized.**

God intends for us to visualize His Word. I include this, because we see in verses seven and 11 of Acts 20 a reference to the church gathering together to break bread. That phrase is almost surely a reference to the Lord's Supper, which in the book of Acts and in the rest of the New Testament was regular activity when the church gathered together for worship. Now, when I'm using that term “visualize” here, I'm borrowing language from the church father Augustine, who called the Lord's Supper “a visible word.” Basically it means the Lord's Supper is a visible picture God has given us of how Christ saves us from our sins. When we take the Lord's Supper, we're visually reminded through a piece of bread and a cup that Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for our sins on the cross. We're also envisioning the day when Jesus will physically return for us, when we're going to drink that cup and eat that bread with Him. So in that way, the Lord's Supper is a visual picture of God's Word.

And then Christ has given us one other visible picture of the gospel in the church. You know what it is. It's not here in Acts 20 specifically, although it was in Acts 19. But we're going to celebrate it here today with 50 people. It's baptism. Think about Romans 4:25, where Paul says Jesus “*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*” And in Romans 6:4 he says, “*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*”

Today we'll see 50 people visualizing that reality when they're baptized. They'll go under water as a visual picture of how they've turned from their sin and themselves, and how they've trusted in Jesus' death on the cross to save them from their sin. But then, praise God, they're not going to stay under water very

long. Why not? Well, for many reasons, but the primary reason is because Jesus didn't stay in the grave very long. He rose from the grave. So these brothers and sisters who are being baptized are going to come up out of that water as a visual picture of how they now have new life in Christ forever with Him. Every time we see baptism, it is a powerful picture of the gospel. It's a visual picture of "dead to sin, alive to God in Christ." So God intends His Word to be visualized in the church's worship. That's why we have the Lord's Supper and baptism.

## 5. God intends His Word to be spread.

Finally, flowing from all these other intentions, God intends His Word to be spread through our lives. Three of my favorite verses in the entire Bible are found in the middle of this chapter. After all these pictures—where we see the Word being taught, discussed, obeyed and visualized—Paul says in verses 22-24:

*And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

There is so much I would love to share here, and maybe I'll dive into more of it next week.

On the way here this morning, I was listening to Nate Crew, a young adult pastor who actually preached this text here last night. Nate did an excellent job with this text and he camped out particularly on these three verses. He talked about how the gospel of Christ is more precious than life itself and all we hold on to in our lives. At the end of that sermon, he shared a personal testimony to that effect, based on a journey he and his wife Kristen are walking through. When I heard that, I thought everybody needs to hear that. I just want you to hear a testimony of how this word is playing out in one family's life.

**Nate Crew:** This has been very convicting for my wife and me. Over two years ago we decided to become foster parents and go on this journey. To be honest, the last two months have been the most difficult of this entire time. The behaviors we've been confronted with, the amount of stress and anxiety that comes from that—IEP meetings, lawyer meetings, one bad report after another. He did this. He did that. It kind of makes us feel shameful. Everywhere we went, we didn't know what was going to happen. Tensions began to rise in our home. We began to say to ourselves, "It's not worth it." In my own heart I thought, "I just can't do it anymore. My own home isn't a safe place. My time is gone. My energy is completely zapped. I don't know how to help this child." Things seemed to get worse instead of better. We love him dearly, but as we looked at our lives, we just didn't know if we could do this.

But then I read this text and the Word of God just jumped right into my little life. He looked at me and He said, “Nate, is this true? Is it true that you don’t account your life to be valuable to yourself or as precious?” That’s why God has brought a lot of confession and repentance into my life. Every day feels like a sacrifice. I began to think about it this way—and I want you to think about this. The things God has called my wife and I to may be completely different from what He’s called you to do. You may be in something now. Or there may be something God is calling you to that requires humble boldness and a radical willingness.

This has to be true for you. I just want you to get one final little picture here. I was thinking about our lives. I had these little pieces of paper and I was thinking about our time, our energy, our safety and just being able to do what we want to do, being able to spend our money how we want to spend it. We want to raise nice kids in a nice place without much trouble. These are good things. It’s good to serve my family, to love them, to provide for them. I thought about my schedule, my time. Then God gave me this picture and I thought about it this way. I put all these pieces of paper in my hands. I’m holding these and they represent everything in my life. I have them but then I just let them go.

Now, if I looked at you and asked, “Did I just lose anything?” you would say, “No, of course not. Unless that was a cut-up check, those were just pieces of paper.” Then God gave me this picture in my life, where at one point I gave up these pieces of paper—and then I thought, “I’ve just got to get them back. I’ve got to get my time and my energy, I’ve just got to get this back and that back.” This is what my life looks like. But I read this text and God said, “Those things in your life that are dear to you—they’re good. You’re not going off partying every weekend. These things are good. These are wonderful things that you should value.” He looked at me again in this text and He said, “Nate, those are just pieces of paper in comparison to the glory and the worth and the preciousness of the gospel of Christ. Let it go.”

Be free to serve the Lord with open hands, however He has asked you to serve. This is what the Lord is speaking to you through this text. He wants to set you free. My prayer for you—and for my own heart—is that you would be set free. You’re just holding on to a bunch of little pieces of paper. When you decide to let them go, you’ll want them back. I’ll just let you know that. Then every day you’ll wrestle with whether it’s really worth it. It’s not easy. It’s not pleasant. But God will be with you and when you need it, He’ll take to just the right text. He’ll breathe life into your tired soul and you’ll be glad just to let it go. You’ll be free. God wants you to be free. He wants you to save your life, not lose it. The only way this comes is when we have humble boldness and a radical willingness to sacrifice anything to share the gospel with anyone, based on the fact that the gospel is more precious to us than life.

My prayer is that this statement in Acts 20:24 would prove true as you walk out of this building, and that you would be both in a state of repentance and confession before God, but also encouraged with a renewed vigor that the gospel is a wonderful, wonderful thing. It is more precious and it’s worth your life.

Of you let these things go, you will be glad that you did and you'll be able to live—as Paul says—the race that's marked out for you. You'll finish the course God has given you. When you stand before Him, He'll say, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." That's my prayer for you and that's my prayer for me.

**David Platt:** I listened to that and I couldn't help but think that's the kind of life that only this Word can produce. It's this Word that has led Nate and Kristen down the journey they're on through foster care. On that journey, it's this Word alone that is able to sustain and strengthen them. It's this Word that is a daily reminder that indeed Christ is worthy of our lives. We need this Word. The church needs this Word and every single one of us in this room needs this Word.

I realize there are some people in this room who have never put your faith and trust in this Word. You're not a follower of Christ. Maybe you're exploring Christianity. Maybe you're here on your own or maybe you're here with a friend or family member. More than anything, we pray and hope that in the songs we've sung and in the prayers we've prayed and in the Word we've studied—even in the baptisms we're going to celebrate—we hope you see today that this Word, this Book, is one big story about a God Who created us to know and enjoy Him. But we have all sinned against this God and we're separated from Him forever. And nothing we can do can get us back to Him. But the good news is that this God loves us. This God loves you so much that He has made a way for you to be reconciled to Him—for us to be reconciled to Him. He has sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, to pay the price for all of our sins. So when we put our faith in Him, we can be forgiven of all our sins and reconciled to God forever. We urge you today—if you've never put your faith, your hope, your trust in Jesus, we invite you to do that today.

Let this be the moment when you say in your heart to God for the first time, "Yes." This Book says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9). You can be forgiven of all your sins and reconciled to God for all of eternity today, based on trust in Jesus. And then when you put your trust in Him, you'll come to realize—and this Word will remind you day in and day out—that He is worthy of your life.

Let's pray.

Oh God, we praise You for Your Word. We praise you for the truth that we find in it; for the hope we find in it; for the strength we find in it; for the good news of Your salvation for us. So Lord, I pray that in the next few minutes, even in this holy moment right now, there might be some who put their faith and trust in Your Word for the first time; who trust that Jesus died on the cross for their sins and rose from the grave in victory over sin to they can have new life. God, may that reality become true for hearts in this room right now.

Lord, we pray that Your Word would continually teach us, mold us, make us into the men and women—marriages and families and the church—that You desire us to be. Let Your Word have its way among us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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