

The State of the Church Part 3

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Faithfulness and so many blessings that have come to our church so much to be grateful for, and so I want us to keep that in mind as we continue to look at the state of the church. So we have so much to be grateful for and to praise God for. I said two weeks ago that our church is very healthy, that was the first word I shared, healthy, that we have a wonderful blessing of God in many ways upon our body, but I said in a phrase, I said we're healthy but stuck. That is, we're in need of some mid-course corrections. So sabbatical and also something we did last spring, which was to look to a consultant, a brother in ministry that has a lot of experience in leadership of the church, Ray Gentry. I mentioned to you he was here a couple weeks ago when I started this series. Many of you met him. We asked him to help us to look at our ministry and think about where we were. We surveyed the congregation not because we were looking like some churches do for what to preach on, no, the word of God tells us what to preach on but, hey, how do you see the leadership of the church? How do you see the functioning of the church? And so you gave us a lot of feedback. We're still evaluating that and thinking of trying to incorporate the insights we gained through that into our future direction. Next Sunday, as was announced earlier, we have the ministry update meeting which we do twice a year where we talk about the direction of our church as we see where God is leading.

And so all of that is coming together to really help and inform our thinking on this, and so I'm sharing in these weeks this, as I said, the third installment of "The State of the Church," and today I want us to again start off in Ephesians 4, looking at this passage. What we're going to look for or we're going to discuss as we have in the previous weeks, how do we get unstuck? Well we need some ministry mind shifts, some changes of thinking. I borrow that term from Colin Marshall and Tony Payne in, "The Trellis and the Vine." They use that term, ministry mind shift. It's a helpful concept. And so there are areas where our culture, our church culture, the way we think about things, needs to be redirected in light of Scripture. You know, the church culture, culture of any group of people is basically shared values, shared beliefs, shared customs, things that you believe as a group of people, basic consensus ideas, things that you think are important, your values, and then just patterns of behavior and these things form a culture. And so every church has a culture and so we have a church culture which in many ways, as I said, it's very healthy but there are some areas that we need to tweak it. And so these ministry

mind shifts are aimed at helping us do that, that we might adjust areas where our culture is not consistent with Scripture and move it back to the biblical balance.

So that's the purpose of this series, the state of the church as it relates to our church culture and what do we need to do to be more faithful to God in the years to come and to be more fruitful for his kingdom. And so Ephesians 4:11 to 16 has been a passage we've looked at, actually read verses 1 to 16 in previous weeks. Today we're going to read verses 11 to 16 which form the key part of this passage and why I chose this passage, and as I get ready to read it, Ephesians 4:11 to 16, even though you've read this passage, if you've been with us many times, I want to encourage you just to be asking the Lord to help you see the picture as you read this text. So often Scripture paints for us pictures that we need to take time to see, to experience. God wants us to see the pictures that he has painted for us through words in the Scriptures and so look at the picture and as you think about that, the picture is a growing and maturing process that the entire local church is involved in a growth process going toward a goal. So as I said with that introduction, now let's read God's word together. Ephesians 4:11 to 16.

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Do you see that picture? Do you see what amazing privilege the church of Jesus Christ has that we are called corporately to grow up into the full stature of Christ, that is, that we are called the body of Christ is not just a light thing, it is that the corporate gathering of saints in a local body as they use their gifts, as they are equipped by the ministry of the word and they do their part, there is this growing together, there is this growing together and this ability to minister that over time people see Jesus Christ more and more and more in the corporate experience. When they encounter the body, they encounter Christ. It's as if they saw Jesus because they were touched in the way that Jesus would touch; they heard the word in the way Jesus would speak the word; they saw the compassion that Jesus would have; they were served humbly in the way Jesus served. This is the calling of the church. What an awesome picture. We need to keep this before our eyes, on our hearts. This is our calling, this corporate endeavor to help one another to reach this corporate goal of being like Jesus as a body.

Now this is something that, as I said, must be before our body, and it comes through the ministry of the word, and so in thinking back on the history of our church and our time here since Patti and I've been here now for 29 years, I shared in previous messages, if you weren't here about some of our history. And so 2000 and 2002 was a time of adversity for our church, a redirection, refocusing. I mentioned last week that I had the privilege of going out to the Expositor's Institute at John MacArthur's church in 2003 to experience a week of training on the supreme importance of preaching. What a blessing it was to have Steve Lawson and John MacArthur as a part of that week and spending time with them in a small group setting. And the message that came out of that is work harder at preaching and teaching. That's what I took away from that, that my calling is to work hard at preaching and teaching the word. And I'm so grateful for that, that it was used by the Lord in a powerful way to bring great blessing to my life, and I think helped us in this church to prioritize preaching and teaching in a way that we need to.

And that is a part of what's being talked about here in Ephesians 4:11, that the ministry of the word, that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers in verse 11 preaching the word equips the saints, but there's something we're going to see also, this corporate picture of growth into the church at large, growing together to love one another, as we sang, "We are the body of Christ, one hope, one calling." We're all called together to be this, to picture, to be the body of Christ, and that's part of what we're dealing with but I want to take us to a passage that brings an important balancing truth to us, and that is Colossians 1. So just turn over a few pages in your Bible, past the book of Philippians, from Ephesians, past Philippians to Colossians 1:28 and 29 we want to read. This passage Paul gives is an interesting balance to Ephesians 4 and I want you to look at the picture here. Paul says in Colossians 1:28, he speaks of the teaching ministry again. He says,

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

You see the picture there. Now it's not corporate growth into the image of Jesus. Now it's individual growth into the image of Jesus. Every man complete in Christ. Every man.

Let's go to Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You that it is absolutely sufficient, that in it we find everything necessary for life and godliness, that it is able to instruct us, to correct us, to reprove us, to teach us so that we might be thoroughly furnished for every good work. We pray that You would use Your word today, apply it to our hearts, reset our thinking, help us to conform our thoughts to Your thoughts, help us to conform our values to Your values, and help us conform our lives to the life of Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

Now what I want to talk about today is a ministry mind shift that's balanced. It's basically moving from a more or less exclusive focus. Now listen to this, listen carefully: to move

from a more or less exclusive focus on general training to personal individual development. To move from a focus that is more generalized and is aimed at training everyone to grow up as a corporate body and so that the ministry's focus is general to also incorporating a more specific focus on individual development. I think that's exactly what this text is calling for. This text is saying that we must not just think in terms of, I mean, we're called as pastors and elders and teachers and everyone who teaches the Bible and shares the word, we're called to feed the sheep. Jesus said, "If you love Me, feed My sheep. Feed the sheep." And that means preaching, that means teaching, but there's also a sense in which he says, "Tend My lambs," And there is a sense in which, as we see in this passage, that the Apostle Paul's ministry, he didn't just measure by the general well-being of the flock, he also measured by the well-being of each and every individual within it, that we should have as a part of our thinking advancing every single person every day along the path that God has laid out for them to be more and more like Jesus. That is, you individually, we need to have a mindset of helping you become more and more like Christ and you individually – listen, this is very important – you need to have a mindset of helping every other individual in this body become more and more like Christ. It's for all of us to have this kind of focus, the corporate focus and the individual focus.

Here we come to a problem, philosophical problem, that if you've read much philosophy or political philosophy, especially the problem of the one and the many. The problem, the one and the many, is the one more important than the many? Is the nation more important than the individual? Or is the individual more important than the nation? That's where it comes political. But this idea comes in in so many different ways. You know, how much time do you spend with the individual in your parenting training of your children? Say you have five children or eight children, or if you just have two, how much time do you spend with each individual versus how much time do you spend with all of them? The problem of the one and the many. Some folks do a great job of spending time with all of them, but maybe they neglect the time, the one-on-one personalized time.

And I love this because Scripture just corrects our imbalance. The problem of the one and the many philosophically is solved in the doctrine of the Trinity. Who is God. I mean the problem of the one and the many says, what's more important, is the individual more important than the group? Or is the group more important than the individual, right? That's the question and the answer is both are equally important. The group is not more important than the individual, and the individual is not more important than the group. How do we know that? Because God is three in persons, yet one in substance. He is one God. He is three persons, three distinct persons within that one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory, equally worthy of our worship and adoration.

And so you see the one and the many solved in the Trinity, and you see it here even in these passages, these two Pauline epistles which are so much alike. Actually, Colossians and Ephesians in many ways are like mirror images of each other. You read in one and you read in the other and you're like, you're reading Colossians, "I think I've read this recently." Or maybe you just read Ephesians because there's so much in Ephesians that is resonating in Colossians. But isn't it interesting that this one and the many thing

happens, Ephesians emphasizes the many with great force, but Colossians, here we have the one. Paul's saying, "Listen, we're not, the ministry of the gospel is not just about teaching the large group, it's also about finding a way to help the individual continue to make progress along the path toward likeness to Christ." And the standard in both places, the goal in both places is likeness to Jesus. I mean, the goal of the body of Christ as a corporate entity is to be like Jesus, Ephesians 4:11 to 16, we just read. The goal of the individual, what is your goal? What should be your goal? Well, if you want to have the same goal God has for you, and you ought to if you belong to Christ, your goal should be conformity to Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29 says, "Those whom He foreknew He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." Individually, more and more like Jesus, that is the path that God has set out for you and me.

So that's what this passage is talking about. So this ministry mind shift, we might say it this way, I said generalized training to personal development, we might say it this way: to move from an almost exclusive focus on instructing the body to also being intentional about developing the individual. Almost exclusive focus on instructing the body, you see the corporate body, to now an intentional development of the individual, adding that in. Now it's not that we've been out of balance, way out of balance in this area. No, our home groups, our mentoring groups that the ladies have, there are so many ways that this is happening, but I think it's something that for myself and the elders and I think for all of us, we have to take this more seriously than we tend to. We all have a responsibility for every other believer and we need to help each person grow in grace.

Now with that said, I want us to look at the text in Colossians and we're going to have two main points. The first point is basically what we need to do, and the second point is how are we going to do it. Those are the two main points: what do we need to do and then how are we going to do it. So what we need to do from Colossians 1:28-29. Three subpoints under what we need to do. For us to do what God is calling us to do, we need a singularity of focus. This is the first subpoint 1A. We need a singularity of focus.

Listen to the words that are used by Paul here in Colossians 1:28 and look at the specificity, the individuality that's in mind as he says this, "We proclaim Him," that's Christ. Our message is still the same. The message of the church is always Jesus. No matter what your problem is, the answer really in the final analysis is Christ, union with Christ, loving Christ, following Christ, right? So it's we proclaim him, but he says, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. Do you hear that repetition? Three times the phrase "every man." Some of the other translations, the ESV says "everyone," which is okay, that's alright, that's the main point. In the Greek it's literally "every man." The NIV does what it sometimes does here, it takes one of the "everyone's" out, it uses everyone, but it's it takes it out, it says in the in NIV, it says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone so that we may present everyone." So you'll have two "everyone's." This is one of the reasons I think it's always good to have multiple translations when you're studying the Bible, but particularly to have one that's more literal, like the NASB that gives you, that tries to give you word for word accuracy because it's really helpful to hear that repetition. It may not sound so good to the, you know, it's the kind of the way

we like to hear language, but it's there in the text. Paul said, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ." The emphasis is there for a reason and the phrase "every man" means every single individual. It's talking about every singular person in the body. Paul's saying he's laboring not just to help the group, he's laboring to help every single individual make progress on their road to Christlikeness.

We need a singularity of focus. We need to be able to look at where every single person is along the way. This is one of the things that in life, these principles apply to life. I'm telling you, the one and the many has great application, a great application to college football. You know, I was thinking about that. Sometimes I spend a little too much time thinking about college football. I love football. I've played it when I was in school, you know, and then you just love following it and it's a great day to be a Georgia Bulldog right now, too, I have to say. A lot of times where it wasn't. I've been one all my life, but one of the, indulge me for just a minute here, I think it really does make a good application here. This isn't just for fun. No, but the one and the many. If you want to be a great coach, you want a great coaching staff, you want to measure success by the way the team plays, and then you want to step back and evaluate every single player and how did he perform on every single play. And if you do that, then you're cultivating, you're helping every single person become better every single week and you're also teaching them to celebrate one another and to celebrate success so that they rejoice just as much as when the other guy scores a touchdown as when they do, or the other guy makes a sack than when they do. When you cultivate that kind of culture, you have something that is gold when it comes to helping people reach their full potential.

You see, you have to have both. It's not just the corporate measure, "Well, we won the game. That's all that matters." Well, it does matter. That is a big deal. But how did every single person perform on every single play? You start focusing on that and every single person becomes better and better week by week and what happens is the team becomes better and better week by week. And I think it's really easy in coaching any team sport and in the church to step back and focus on the big picture and not help really evaluate in individual metrics. Now I'm not talking about we're not going to have score sheets each week like, you know, the way football works is they'll grade the whole offensive line. You graded out at 92%. You graded out 80%. You graded out 70%. You're not starting next week unless you really practice well this week. No, we're not talking about that, we're not talking about trying to score everybody and you're going to get graded each week. Nothing like that. It's beyond the ability of the church to do that, and it's not what God wants us to do, but what he wants us to do is to have an ability to step in whenever we have opportunity and to be intentional about creating opportunities to really be changing the way we see success in the body of Christ. Success is as much measured by the development of each individual as it is by the group at large.

So we need a singularity of focus, that's the first subpoint, what we need to do, we need a singularity of focus. B, 1B, we need clarity of mission. What is the goal? What is the goal? What's the mission? What are we trying to accomplish? Well, the text is clear, every man complete in Christ, present every man complete in Christ. That clause "we

may present every man complete in Christ," in that phrase or that keyword is complete. I'm reading from the New American Standard, complete in Christ. In the ESV it says, "mature in Christ." King James says, "perfect in Christ." Often the King James will translate that word "perfect," and many times you see the word "perfect" in the New Testament, well, really, every time you see it, it's this underlying Greek word which really means mature. It doesn't mean perfect as in no flaws, it means mature as in complete in a sense of a fully adequate. The NIV translates it "fully mature," which I think is helpful. So that's why you can use multiple translations and you get the sense of the text even better.

So the idea is it's a word that pictures personal growth and development. We want to present every man complete in Christ. "Every man," and this word comes from the Greek word "telos." The Greek noun is the underlying word that this adjective is based on, and that means "goal or end; destination." And so this adjective means something that has been brought to its end, brought to completion. It is finished. This would be the word that you would use to describe a house that has been built. A new house has been built, it has come to its telos when you can now move in and live there. It doesn't mean it's perfect, perfect. It means it's ready.

And so our goal is to see everyone become fully adequate and complete in Christ and I think that the text here, as well as what we saw in Ephesians, begs us or encourages us to think in terms of just growth and development. I mean, think about we have a picture of this when we look at how a child develops. A baby. And think about, you know, how dependent an infant is, right, they can't do anything for themselves. You have to feed them. You have to change them. You put them in bed. Then as they get a little older, they can start doing some things for themselves. They can feed themselves. And then learn how to use a fork. Then they learn to walk. They learn to talk. And a lot of these things just happen naturally, don't they? You don't teach your child. I mean, you could be involved in sort of helping them with walking, but basically there's something just within the child that wants to walk. They see everybody else walking and, "Hey, that looks good to me," and they want to do it. Now I always, it's funny how parents are so excited when their child walks until after they realize what this now means. Increased mobility means a lot more supervision is required. Oh for the days when you could just put them there and they stayed there. So the child naturally learns to walk, the child naturally starts trying to speak. I mean, we help it but basically it wants to speak. It's funny how you hear baby just making sounds and you're wondering that they think they're probably just talking and carrying on a conversation, don't they? They don't realize they're not really forming words. They're just jabbering but they're like, "I feel like I'm contributing to the conversation," if we could know what was going on in their minds.

So a lot of it takes place without intentional parental focus. It just takes, and this is the way it is in the body of Christ, somebody gets saved, think about what happened in salvation, the Bible teaches that salvation is not just a change of mind, it's not just that you accept something as true, it is a change of heart. God causes you to be born again. He takes out your heart of stone. He gives you a heart of flesh. He helps. It's rooted in your connection to Jesus. You have to come to Jesus. He's the one who gives the new birth,

and you believe in him and you repent and place your faith in him, and you're saved. Now, according to Scripture you're a babe in Christ. You've experienced new birth and you've got to grow up individually into being more and more like Jesus. And so that means you've got to learn to walk and you've got to learn to talk, and some of that just happens naturally by being around other Christians who are walking and talking just like it was as you were a little child. And you stumble around a little bit and you need help and we have to love one another and be extra gentle with those babies, right? I mean, we care for our grandkids or anybody's baby and we're understanding. We need to be understanding of the body of Christ, those who are mature and takes a little more effort to deal with babes in Christ. Yes, it does but what a joy it is to have babes in Christ. Just like what a joy it is to have babes in the family. How awesome, right?

So but there's this natural development that happens, but then there also needs to be intentional instruction. If the child is going to grow from being a baby to being a mature man, or from being a baby girl to being a mature woman, there's some things that have to be taught intentionally. You have to think about that individual, how's he doing. You know, you have to teach ABC's, they don't come automatically. It is amazing though how much verbal skill comes automatically. I mean, you think about it, it's amazing. Children at like 3 years old are figuring out subject verb agreement, plural form of verb equals plural form of subject. They don't have a clue that that's what they're doing, but they naturally they say things like, you know, "He went." Oh no, that's not a good word. I always hate that. I think I wrote something down but anyway. Okay, he runs, she runs, they run. They learn that. Plural takes the singular form of the verb run instead of runs is the singular form, right? So that's just happening. But if they're really going to learn to handle language well, they have to learn ABC's so they can read. They have to be taught to do their math, you know, arithmetic. They have to be taught how to write. They have to learn history. They have to learn logic. They have to learn how to think. Not just what to think, you have to learn what to think too, but you have to learn how to think. And then they have to learn skills. I mean, kids don't naturally learn to ride a bike. I know sometimes if you've learned to ride a bike without any help, I'd love to, just tell me about that later. I'd just like to hear about that because that's something that kids, they may want to, but they can't do it without some help, somebody running alongside. And a lot of kids don't even want to if they're more cautious. They're scared to. They have to be pushed to, right?

Well, there's all kinds of skills, manners, table manners, etc., etc., etc., down to driving a car, changing a tire, balancing a checkbook, managing communications, etc., etc. You have to learn all of these things and then you have to be active physically so that you can develop muscles. And you have to learn how to work. And if all those things happen, then you have, say an 18-year-old young man who's become a man, 18-year-old young lady, although now it's more like 25 or 30 before they become adults fully, right? That new verb adulting. That is not a verb. That's not a word. But that has to happen. There has to be some intentionality and some focus on that particular person and sometimes we run into problems. Sometimes there are learning challenges, disabilities. Sometimes there are just, you know, certain aptitudes and areas that if you really focus on, you can really

help them advance greatly if you give them some instruction in that area. Now if you don't, you're going to kind of waste an opportunity, right?

So parents, teachers, Bible teacher, Sunday school teachers, we need to be thinking like that as we relate to all of our children here. The same is true in the body of Christ. So I mean, as a Christian we need to learn these things and so but the mission is to become more and more like Jesus. Now the third thing I want, this is the third subpoint under what we need to do. We need to have singularity of focus, we need to have clarity of mission, the goal is likeness to Christ, it is growth toward likeness in Christ. It is intentional focus on growth toward likeness in Christ. That's B. C. What do we need to do? Intensity of effort. This is one of things that jumps off the page as you read these two verses in Colossians 1, Paul's intensity of effort to accomplish the goal that he has when he's looking at each individual.

"For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me." Five different words that just speak of effort and intensity. The first word: labor, "For this purpose I labor." The ESV says "toil." The idea is the word here means to work to the point of exhaustion. To work to the point of exhaustion. To be weary. It pictures great exertion and effort, and this is a word that's used more in terms of physical labor. You're working so hard physically, you know you're picking up heavy things, you're moving them and your body is now at the point of giving out from all of that physical effort.

So he says, "For this purpose I labor." He says, "When I'm trying to build individuals, I labor over the work. I work hard at it," he says. But then he adds another descriptive term, he says, "striving, I labor striving". Here's the participle in the Greek and it's the participle agonizomai. We transliterate that Greek word agonizomai into English letters with the word "agonize." He says, "For this purpose I labor agonizing." The word translated here means "to contend for victory; to fight." It pictures wrestling. It's a word, the first word I said, labor, is the word from really from the workplace. It's physical labor. This word is from the athletic contest. This is the striving of an athlete. It was the word used often to speak of the wrestlers and those who fought in the games, hand to hand combat, all-out exertion. It's that straining of every muscle, straining of every nerve to achieve victory.

So Paul lays these two words on top of each other. "I work to the point of exhaustion," and both of these words are in the Greek present tense. The Greek present is not just present, doesn't mean time, present time. It does mean that, but it also means the more important part is the kind of action, and the Greek present is used to emphasize the ongoing nature of the action. It's continuous ongoing action. So, he says, "For this purpose I am laboring. For this purpose I am laboring, continually striving according to His power which mightily works within me." So Paul lays these two terms on top of each other to say that we need intense effort. This is not easy. It's not an easy thing to help people to have Christ formed in them. And this is not just for the pastor, it's for all of us because we're all called to shepherd each other, but certainly it's called most for us as pastor/elders. We're the ones that are going to give the fullest account for this in this

body, but it's for all of us as Christians because we're supposed to all spur one another on to love and good works. We're all called to build one another up. You're called to help one another grow in love for Christ in holiness, in fruitfulness.

So also intensity of effort. Now that is what we need to do. We need to have singularity of focus. We need to focus on the individual as well as the group. We need to have clarity of mission, that is, that the calling is to bring about growth toward the goal of individual likeness to Christ. And then we need to have intensity of effort. We need to be willing to expend great energy. This is why this is so important. God's like, "This is what you're to be about." I said last week, I think, that whatever you do for a living is really secondary. What you're here for is to glorify God by building his kingdom, and one of the main ways you do that is by building the body, building other Christians and helping them become more like Jesus, and as you do that and as individuals make progress, we all make progress, and we all start looking more and more like Christ.

So that's what we're to do. Now second main point: how are we to do it? How are we to do it? The Scripture gives us some clarity on this, of course, and essentially we're to do it by speaking the truth in love. That's what Ephesians 4:15 talks about. Here, Paul says we are to proclaim him. We're to admonish every man and teach every man. So there is this admonishing, admonish actually means to, it's sometimes translated by other translations as "warning." Literally it means to place something in the mind of the other person, but it has the idea of bringing correction, that the way that we help one another individually to become more like Christ is we point out where things are not like they should be. And this is to be a part of the body life of our church. This is to be a part of the way you and I live and interact with each other. We're supposed to love one another enough to talk to one another about the areas where we're just not where we need to be, where we think maybe there's something there. We never have perfect knowledge, but we're to go toward each other and love each other, and when we see problems, we're to point them out in love. I mean, we're to get the log out our own eye first, we're to be humble, we're to be ready to listen ourselves, be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Yeah, be more ready to listen to someone else correct me than I am to correct them, yes. When you have that attitude, now you're in a good position to be ready to correct like Jesus would in humility.

But it's essential. I mean, back to the illustration about the football. I mean, if the coach just said, "Hey, we won the game. Hey, you guys all played great." That's good. No, when they get specific and say, "Look, look at this play. You were supposed to get your head on this side of that defensive lineman so that you could cut him off and you didn't get there. So you need to make sure you're taking that first step quicker with your right foot to get over there." They show them on the film, then they go out and they practice it. Now why do they do that? Because they hate them? Some people think if they're corrected that the other person hates them. That's a completely unbiblical way to think. Now listen, sometimes people correct in a way that looks like they hate them. Some people correct, like I want to go around like a referee. Now think about the difference between a referee and a coach. A referee, you're never happy to hear what they have to say about you in a game. I mean, are you? "Thank you so much, Mr. Referee, for

pointing out that I did commit this foul." They throw the flag, it means 15 yards or five yards or whatever, right? No, you don't want to see the referee and the referee nobody likes the referee. If you do referee for a, you know, as a part of your work, praise God for that. I think it's great. I used to umpire some myself and I remember nobody likes the umpire either. The only time you notice the umpire is when you think you did a bad job. You never think, "Man, you did such a great job today." The only time you ever think about him is when he does a bad job. Okay, so but the coach, the coach is pointing out the problem not to penalize, to take yards away, the coach is pointing out the problem to make you better. And if he's a good coach, he cares about you and he's trying to advance your personal character as well as help the team. I mean, Christians, this is a great area for Christians to minister because we can think biblically about this. We can bring the one and the many together with perfect harmony, by God's grace, or with almost perfect harmony.

So we need to admonish one another. This is how we do it, we admonish each other. That is, we point things out. "You know, hey, what about this?" It's always good to do that humbly. To say, "I'm not sure I'm seeing this correctly, but this is what I thought I saw. This is how it appeared to me. Help me out with that. Is that what was happening? You know, your tone of voice when you spoke to your child, it seemed like that you were kind of really struggling but is that right? Help me out with this." Well then, that may turn into that person seeing, "You know, I didn't realize my tone was even harsh and this brother's loving me enough to show me that maybe I may be causing my child, I may be provoking them to wrath," As it says, "Don't provoke your children to wrath." And I'm going to keep on doing it unless somebody comes along and tells me. And a lot of times our wives have gotten tired of telling us the same thing over and over and over. They shouldn't. They should keep on telling you. There's no excuse for it, but it's got to be hard. I know it's got to be hard for my wife to put up with telling me the same thing over and over and over again and thinking it's going to make a difference. At some point, you know, you do the same thing over and over and you expect a different result. What is that? That's the definition of insanity, right? So it's like, "I'm not going to be insane. I'm not going to talk to him anymore." Well, that's not biblical. Because of the power of God, it can change this time. But maybe his wife's weary and you telling him, you telling me, is going to be a breakthrough, the Lord is going to use that to change things. I'm going to do things better going forward.

So teaching and admonishing. Preaching, instructing, yes, it's the preaching of the word, but it's also the practical application of the word is the idea here because it's speaking in terms of that individual, right? We're not talking about every group, we're talking about individually admonishing and teaching individually. This is how this applies in this situation in your life. And I want to add two subpoints here. That general introduction of how we do it, those two keywords, admonishing, teaching. You could say that's the first subpoint was keywords admonishing and teaching. Second subpoint is curriculum. How are we going to do this? There is an important thing for us to think about in our curriculum, church curriculum. Something we've been talking about as elders is having more of a mindset of scope and sequence. Some of you who maybe homeschool or you're an educator, you teach at a public school or a private school, or you've had experience in

education, you've heard that term scope and sequence. The idea is the scope of education and the sequence. You know, where do we want to take somebody from point A to point B? What are the things that need to happen to get them from point A to point B? What do they need to learn? And then what's the sequence in which you teach those things? Certain things have to come before other things. I mean, you can't learn algebra before you learn your addition, subtraction, multiplication, decimals, etc. You've got to learn those things before you can learn algebra and then you still may not be able to learn algebra.

So scope and sequence and so how do we lay out in the church more thoughtfully and intentionally a scope and sequence type curriculum. One of the things that we're doing in our children's ministry is we're trying to work on if a child is born in the church and from zero to 18, what are they getting in our children's ministry? This is part of what the Adventure Club is. We want to teach them the Bible. We want to teach them systematic theology. We want to teach them biblical theology. We want to teach them historical theology and practical theology. We want to do that for our kids, but then also scope and sequence for let's think of it this way, a new baby spiritually comes into our church. Newborn. How do we get them from being a newborn Christian all the way to being a fully mature Christian? What are the things that have to happen to get them there? One guy I read said, and I believe this is true, the local church should be able to take a pagan and make him a pastor. It should be able to happen in the local church. From pagan to pastor. Unsaved gets saved and to disciple all the way up to being able to pastor the church of God. That's what we want to see happen.

Well, we have to intentionally think about what are all the things that you have to learn? You know, what are the various aspects of theology? I mentioned, you know, we know that expositional preaching is a key part of what we do, that's exegetical theology. We all need to have a regular diet of just the preaching of the word verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book. We're going to be going back to that, I promise. I keep talking about expositional preaching and I don't do any. I've had somebody that somebody's been visiting for several months and they're like, "I haven't heard him in a book yet. He keeps talking about it though." Anyway, sabbatical. It did take a while too now. So give me a break. But in October we're going to be in a new book.

I wish I could hear better, but yeah, I'm glad you guys could hear that. I guess that's the Lord's grace to me that I did not hear that comment. Don't even know who said it, but I'll find out.

No, we believe that it's essential for the church to be taught expositionally from the Bible, to let God set the agenda for the body and there are things that we would never deal with if we didn't force ourselves to work through the book chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And that's God's way of making us healthy but you don't just have exegetical theology, you also need to be taught systematic theology. You don't wait until the Trinity comes up after seven books before you teach on it. You have to teach people the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is three in person, one in substance. Systematic theology takes a theme and looks at everything the Bible says about that theme and brings it together to say this

is what the Bible teaches about that. Doctrine of man. All that it says about man in the Scriptures brought together, this is what the Bible says about man. He's fallen and depraved in need of a Savior. That comes from taking all of Scripture. Systematic theology. Biblical theology is another discipline of theology which looks at how these doctrines, these systematic doctrines, develop over time through the progressive nature of revelation. We believe that God...it builds on itself. You know, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers all way to Revelation there's a building upon itself, and it's very helpful to understand what the Scripture is saying when you look at it in light of what's come before and what comes after. That's biblical theology. Historical theology is to look at church history and to see things that the church has struggled with in the past and you learn that the heresy the church is dealing with today was dealt with, you know, in this century. There's nothing new under the sun, and it's tremendously enriching to look at church history, historical theology. And then practical theology is how the Bible applies to life. You deal with issues like how do you overcome depression? How do you train up your children and discipline them? What do you do about spanking and how do you handle issues like that? How do you handle your teenager? How do you build your marriage? How do you seek intimacy in your marriage? All of these things the Bible speaks to and practical theology tries to lay those things out.

And so we need to develop a curriculum that basically helps people in all these areas. You think about, like, skills that you need is practical theology. Everybody should be able to, every Christian should learn how to handle their money biblically, right? I mean, it's a key thing. Stewardship. Every Christian should if they're married, they need to have a marriage that's based on Scripture, learn how to be a godly husband or godly wife. If they're single, how to be single for the glory of God. The church needs to help with that. How we change. How will we meditate on Scripture. All of these things. So we're trying to think about a curriculum that takes somebody from being a new believer to being a pastor.

So that's the curriculum aspect, that's the second subpoint under how are we to do it. We said keywords and secondly curriculum and thirdly culture. The third subpoint is culture. How do we do this? How do we have this singularity of focus, this clarity of mission to help every single person make progress? You create a culture. I mean, we can't invest time in every single person. I can't personally spend time with every single person, but one of the things we're trying to be more mindful of is there's something about life that we tend to be, we tend to see each other more when we have problems, do we not? I tend to spend my time very often with people who have problems. They may have a physical problem, they may have a spiritual problem. They reach out for help, or we know that they need help, and we see them and that's still got to continue but we also have to have time for just being with healthy sheep. "Hey, there's no problem."

You know, I remember hearing about one pastor of a large church that if he ever showed up, you knew it, he only showed up right before you died, basically. And so one time the pastor was visiting somebody who was in that situation at a hospital, you know, really needed him but there happened to be somebody else there at the same hospital and he thought, "I'll just slide by and see them too." So he walks in and they immediately said,

"Oh no. Why are you here? The doctor must not have told me yet." You know, must have really bad news. But it shouldn't be. And listen, even in the body it can be that way. You can find you get the most attention from other Christians right when you have surgery or you lose a loved one. People are pouring out love to you, but then when everything is going okay, or once that kind of dies down, we have to develop a culture where we are creating that "one anothering" that's not just problem driven.

And for us as elders we've been trying to invest more time in each other's lives. You know, how are the other elders doing? That's one thing I'm trying to be more intentional about focusing on. How can I encourage them? How can I pray for you? How are you doing in this area? What's this struggle in your life? Well, how are you doing? And we're all doing self-counseling projects we started a while back where we're trying to look at an area in our life and really deal with it intentionally, and we've got to get back on that because during my sabbatical, we kind of stepped back from that. We've got to get back in doing that. That's the kind of thing we need to do, and then we want to be where we're also every time we're with people when we're you know, we have fun, we love being together, we can talk about whatever, but then we're also looking how can we help this brother follow Christ? And we want you to think the same way about us, because we all need shepherding, every one of us. When we get together, how can I help them and they should be thinking how can I help him to be more like Jesus?

So we create that culture, and the Bible calls for this. This is one of the key words in the New Testament is a word that's translated by two English words, and the two English words that translate this Greek word are "one another." One another. Scripture over and over in the New Testament uses that phrase "one another." More than 50 times you have that emphasis in the Scriptures. Love one another. Encourage one another. Build one another up. Admonish one another. In fact, Colossians 3:16 says that we're to be teaching and admonishing one another. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and that is, let the word of Christ dwell in you, plural. Just like when Ted read that verse from 1 Corinthians 3:16 that said, you are the body, you are the temple. That was actually in the Greek. In English, it's ambiguous. Is that singular? Is that plural? In the Greek, it's not ambiguous, it's plural. You all are the temple of God. So if someone destroys the corporate temple of God, God will deal with him, that's the message of 1 Corinthians 3:16. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you all." How does the word of Christ dwell within you all? "With all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another." Isn't it interesting exactly the same words Paul used in Colossians 1:28 when he said, "I am striving, agonizing, teaching and admonishing, teaching every man, admonishing every man." Then he says, in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell within you." How does that happen? You are to be "admonishing one another, teaching one another with all wisdom with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

This is the culture that we need to create. We have to just, we have to pray for it. We have to let Scripture shape our thinking. We have to launch into conversations where we don't really know what to say. And we've got to pray. When you don't know what to say,

ask the Lord. Think some Scripture. "Lord, give me something that'll be a blessing." Listen carefully. That's one of the most important things. Ask questions. "How are you really doing? You seem a little preoccupied, or you seem not yourself. Is something going on?" Creating a culture where we're going to help one another be more like Christ requires some changes in the way that we relate but the Lord will give us the power.

I love what Paul says in Colossians 1:28 and 29. When he said in verse 29, "For this purpose also I labor, striving," remember that's work to the point of exhaustion, physical labor, striving as an athlete, straining every nerve. Look at the next phrase, "according to His power." Not my power. Not your power. His power. And look what he says about his power, "which mightily works within me." The divine energy is within the body of Christ and he gives his power to those who know they need it. "I don't have the ability. I don't have the heart even now. Lord, I don't have the affection for this person. I don't care and if I'm honest, I don't care like I should about their suffering." You cry out to God and you know, "But You've told me I'm to love one another. I'm to bear their burden. I'm to come alongside them. I'm to encourage the weak. I'm to help the faint-hearted. So I'm going to move toward them. I don't think I have anything, Lord, I don't have anything to give, but I'm moving toward them." And I begin to ask them, "How are you doing? Tell me about it." And trusting in the finished work of Christ. "Lord, You've got to give me everything." And then suddenly his power does work mightily within us and we find our hearts moved with compassion. I mean not, not always. Sometimes you're going to still feel kind of numb through the whole thing. Just keep on doing what God said to do. But sometimes you'll be amazed at how his grace just floods that moment. A little act of faith and stepping toward that person even though you didn't have the energy, you didn't have the resources, you trusted that Christ had everything that you needed. You move toward them and God does something profound, and you know what happens? They are picked up and they are put back on the path toward likeness, to Jesus and God is glorified. And the whole church, every time that happens, the whole church becomes a little bit more like Jesus. It's a seismic thing happening, invisible, unseen, but the whole church is becoming more and more mighty against the kingdom of darkness. That's why Satan hates this stuff.

But we are called to it and there's no better place to be. And he will help us. He's going to make us all more like Jesus because he who began a good work in you will complete it to the day of Christ Jesus. Let's get to work by his grace.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. How beautiful it is and, Lord, how beautiful our Savior is. Jesus Christ, everything that we need is found in Him. His perfect righteousness, tempted in every way yet without sin, able to empathize and sympathize with us in our weakness, and then offering Himself in our place at Calvary. His blood as payment for our sins, taking our sin and removing it as far as the east is from the west so that You remember it no more, robing us in His perfect righteousness so that when You look at the believer as weak and feeble as he is, if he is in Christ You see him robed in robes of absolute spotless righteousness. You delight in every one of Your children in the

same way You delighted when You looked at Jesus. How wonderful is the gospel. Lord, help us be people who are committed to the things You're committed to. You're committed to making us all more like Jesus, every one of us, to conforming us to Christ. Help us be committed to that ourselves. May that be my desire. May that be every single believer's desire in this room to be more like Jesus tomorrow than they were today. And help us also realize we have a responsibility to help every other person that we love along that same path. We thank You that You have given us everything that is necessary to make this happen in Your word, in the Spirit that dwells within us, and in the power of the risen Christ. And we give Him praise and we ask for His glory in all these things. Amen.