

# FORWARD

*Building Strength for Long-Term Movement*



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# INTRODUCTION

It is often said that church planting is a marathon, not a sprint. Of course, any good church planter knows it's both. There are moments you have to run and moments you have to pace. Sprint too hard for too long and you will burnout. Lose your sense of urgency and you will lose momentum. The challenge is that most of us know how to sprint. When you tell a kid to run, they sprint without thinking. But as any good runner will tell you, pacing takes practice. I still remember running my first 5K. I planned to pace myself, but as soon as I saw people in front of me, my competitive side kicked in. Pretty soon I was moving at a good clip, passing people left and right. I'm not gonna lie. It felt great for two miles. Then my body started to slow down as that fast pace caught up to me. You can predict what happened. All those people I had passed earlier who were pacing themselves the right way gradually ran by me.

Unfortunately, in the ministry world we are notorious for teaching people how to sprint, but not how to pace. Ministry is a series of races. You set a goal. You sprint towards that goal. You celebrate when you win. And you move on to the next race.

But what if that constant sprint not only makes us unhealthy; what if we lose something by running that pace? We know it takes different kinds of muscles to run different distances. What if the kind of strength that enables us to run fast potentially keeps us from running long?

This resource is a collection of talks from our 2019 Summit Collaborative Retreat about what it looks like for us to run with pace, to build strength for long-term movement. The first, by Ryan Brooks, paints the all-too-common picture in ministry of how we can put ourselves in a position of exhaustion that creates the conditions for compromise. The second, by Trevor Atwood, is a deep dive on the cultural underpinnings that drive us and our people to try and live without limitations. J.D. Greear's session on first vs. second generation faith exposes the opposite tension which creeps into established churches, the tendency to get comfortable and lose our sense of sacrifice and urgency. And the last article, by Ray Orlund, reminds us that the solution to all of these problems is ultimately a realignment of not just our doctrine but our culture and spirituality to the gospel.

Mike McDaniel

Director

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# THE CONDITION OF COMPROMISE

*By Ryan Brooks*

I didn't know if I would make it past the first ninety days when I planted my church five years ago but here we are now. In December of 2017 we were getting ready for our Christmas services. We sent out all the promotions and tickets for our three Christmas services, and as the day of the services arrived I drove my family there.

With less than a half-mile out from the church I turned to my wife and said to her that I didn't want to go. I had my sermon ready with all the notes, I had prayed, and I had everything I needed, but I looked at my wife and told her that I didn't want to go in. I didn't care who was going to be there in the church, I just wanted to drive to my momma's house that was only about two miles farther down the road.

Now, I did go inside the church, I preached, and several people gave their life to Christ that day. That day was also our largest attendance in our church up to that point. Later, I finally made my way home with the "holy-hangover," exhausted at the day I just had, preaching for three services, and I have this conversation with myself. *"What is wrong with me? Ryan, you love to preach, you love to proclaim the gospel. This will be the largest attended service you have this year; there are guests coming that you have never seen before, that have never heard the gospel before; why in the world would you not want to preach?"*

The next big Sunday my church has, the first week of the new year, arrives yet still I feel like this. A possible solution I come up with is to hear another message to fuel me. So I drive up to The Summit Church with my family and we hear a message from J.D. Greear about prayer. Then, after the service, I get a call from the facilities manager at my church and he informs me that the church has flooded. So we dropped everything, drove to the church, and sure enough the entire floor was flooded up over my shoes. As I walked around the ankle deep water I actually began to feel glad about the situation, only because this meant I didn't have to preach the next day. My congregation spent the next month or so meeting at another church and I spent that time trying to figure out what was wrong in my head. Why was I so against having church in the morning?

During this time I picked up *Leading on Empty* by Wayne Cordeiro. This is where I was — trying to lead while being empty. Later on, I took a summer sabbatical for four weeks thinking that would solve my issues, but it didn't. Instead I spent the time worrying about what was going on while I was away. When I came back I realized that the church had lost some of its rhythm and I made the crucial mistake of thinking that I could preach us back into a good momentum. However, God said to me, "Oh, you thought this was about you."

Then, just this past October, I had one of the scariest thoughts in my life: the only reason I am still alive is because my children need me. In the moment I really felt like I believed this and I immediately became terrified of that. I called my doctor because I knew something was wrong and I didn't know what to make of it. After some evaluation he diagnosed me with a severe case of depression.

Meanwhile, at the church I was in the middle of preaching through a ten-week series through the book of Philippians called “The Keys of Joy.” My doctor tells me I have depression, but I’m trying to teach my people about the wonders of godly joy from Scripture. Amidst this, the Lord told me that I need to bring my depression before my church. This is what transparency in biblical community looks like, sharing your life in both the highs and the lows. So during week five of my sermon series over joy, after the sermon was over I stood before my church and told them that their pastor has been diagnosed with depression.

A lot of my people were confused by this news, some wanted to come visit me that evening to express their concern, and a few people sent me emails the next day claiming that they can’t follow a man who preaches on joy while walking in depression so they left the church. It’s depressing to find out you are depressed. Fortunately, I began the restoration process by following my doctor’s instructions and I began to meet with a counselor. I also dug deep into the Word of God, and I want to share what the Lord showed me during this season.

In Genesis 25:29, we find the story of how Esau sold his birthright. I’m sure most of us have gone over and preached this passage faithfully at some point. However, there is something in particular in this Scripture that identified with me and where I was at this time. That is, a time where I found myself ready to pack up the ministry and return to corporate America.

In Genesis 25, we often look at Esau’s want for the stew but I think we forget to ask why he was in the position to begin with. What had led Esau to that moment and what was his problem? Scripture tells us that Esau was exhausted coming into that moment; *before desire was an issue, his condition was an issue*. Esau had a condition of compromise in his exhaustion.



As church planters and as pastors we often put ourselves in this position of exhaustion. I chose to share my journey through depression because I want to warn us all of this. Church planters and pastors are uniquely positioned to find themselves in this place of exhaustion. We go into these cities that we aren't from trying to make something from nothing. We have to wear multiple hats to get all the jobs done in order for it to survive. Almost weekly we are doing something that we have never done before. This lifestyle is exhausting.

I had passion, I had desire, I had direction, but I didn't have restraint. Then, the next thing I know is that I'm five years in with my church and I was exhausted, my exhaustion becoming the condition of compromise. When we say that we're tired, the next thing we'll say is "I quit." Maybe we don't quit, so then the next step is to start skipping steps and cutting corners. Esau sold his birthright because he was exhausted; we will quit the ministry, or start preaching someone else's sermons, or start giving away our leadership to others because we are exhausted too.

We all began this race by being all-in, we were all filled with life and excitement, but the enemy is just waiting for us to become exhausted. He let me do my ministry with my people and he let me wear my busyness as a badge of honor, but when I got tired, when I found myself in a place of exhaustion, he was ready to introduce compromise into my life.

I had to learn from the Scriptures and my own experience that exhaustion should never be the identity of a believer in Christ. It's actually the opposite of what we should be because we should be finding rest in Jesus. So, when we preach the gospel without having it professed and performed in our lives then we will not receive the rest that it gives. The gospel best proclaimed in your life is the gospel best applied in your life.

In my own life I was preaching, pastoring, serving, and loving on people and I got to the point where I was almost taking pride in how hard I worked. I got to a place where God had to ask me, “Ryan, why are you killing yourself for people that I already died for?” And sometimes that person is ourselves.

Jacob offers Esau something little for something great. That’s what we do when we are exhausted. We’ll take something very little and compromise something very great. Esau’s exhaustion caused his own views to change as well. After he exclaims that he is about to die due to this exhaustion he questions the value and usefulness of the birthright itself, the thing that he is about to compromise on. As pastors and church planters, when we become exhausted, our Sabbath, our accountability groups, our Bibles seem to become of very little use to us. Instead we look for the shortcuts and the easy ways to do God’s work.

Find your rest in God. We preach this message all the time, but to not do it is to deny the gospel. As church planters and pastors I know we all work hard and put in 100% every hour during the week, but if it is at the expense of our mental, emotional, and physical health then we are denying the power of the gospel and the rest we find in Jesus Christ.

Six times in the books of Acts believers were called “followers of the Way.” Could the same thing be said of us? I’m usually a good proclaimer of the Way, but am I a *follower* of the Way? One of the things I learned through my own situation was that I thought my problem was with *what* I was carrying (that is, ministry and expectation), but the *way* that I was carrying it was actually the problem.

If you find yourself in a remotely similar position that I have been in, there are two things that I have found that you need to do. First, you

need to repent. Before getting the schedule set right or figuring out the best way to do a Sabbath, you have to repent. For me, my work ethic and exhaustion was a byproduct of my lack of trust in God. Don't make bad decisions out of exhaustion because you lack full trust in God.

There was a moment I knew my parents trusted my driving. It's when they fell asleep while I was driving. No more coaching or pressing that imaginary break or looking around from any strange things going on around us. Just rest. If you can't take a rest it's likely because you don't trust God enough. So first you have to repent to God for not trusting in his power and his will.

The second thing is that you have to pray that the Holy Spirit will hold you accountable for your heart. Our brothers and sisters can only hold us accountable for what we tell them, but the Holy Spirit knows our heart and intercedes for us when we ourselves don't know what's going on.

As pastors and church planters, a lot of people quit their jobs and moved cities just to be with you, but, before you are their pastor, God is your Father and you have to trust him in that. How God sees us affects how God cares for us; he sees us as children, so he cares for us as his own.

With those two principles being known, repentance and accountability in the Spirit, how does your work ethic reflect your trust in God?

# UNLOCKING THE CHAINS OF FREEDOM

*Why the Future Needs Pastors (and Churches) Who Limit Themselves*

*By Trevor Atwood*

“The excess of liberty... seems only to pass into excess of slavery.”  
-Plato, *The Republic*

“Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon the will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.” - Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly of France, 1791*

“The first condition of freedom is its limitation. Make it absolute and it dies in chaos.” - Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*

“Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God’s slaves.” - St. Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:16 (CSB)

I know what you are thinking, “What do Plato and Edmond Burke have to teach me about embracing my limitations?” To figure that out you will have to come along for the journey. But to cut to the chase, in this article I’m going to try and get to the heart of why it is we have such a hard time embracing limitations. And I’m going to suggest our fun-

damental problem is a flawed view of freedom. That flawed view not only undercuts our ability to minister to our people; it actually leads us to live out the very patterns in our own lives that we are trying to lead others away from. The good news is that this flawed view is unraveling and as it does we have a tremendous opportunity for gospel ministry.

The American and French Revolution happened at nearly the same time in history. Both the Americans and the French would tell you that they were fighting for their freedom. But, there is a big difference in what they meant by “freedom”.

The Americans were known as reluctant revolutionaries. Even though they certainly were trying to get out from underneath the British king’s oppression, they weren’t so much rejecting authority, as trying to hold that authority to operating within its own standards. The founding fathers of America (a blend of Christians, deists, and naturalists) universally agreed that they needed government authority over them. Thomas Jefferson, himself a deist, admitted that Judeo-Christian morals were essential to having a well-governed, prosperous society. In short, they believed that freedom needed restraint.

The French Revolution operated on a different understanding of freedom. Their freedom was a desire to remove all authority- to get rid of power altogether. These revolutionaries wanted to level out the playing field and give power to the sovereign individual. The French weren’t reluctant about their revolution, so they became bloodthirsty. But neither of these revolutions happened in a single day. They built slowly: the result of ideas and philosophies.

The French revolution was built on the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who famously begins his Social Contract with the line “Man

is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” By this, Rousseau was saying that humans are born in a pure state, and it is the fault of outside influences that restrain us, keeping us from our original free identity—our true selves. This is a negative view of freedom.

Freedom comes from removing things from the “original” me. In order to free the “real me”, I need to remove all outer constraints and let the inner person out. To come at it from a Disney angle: Elsa needs to “let it go”. Moana needs to stop letting her community define her. She needs to get out there and explore to really discover who she is.

But the American Revolution was more deeply influenced by the quotes you read at the beginning of this article. Plato said that the more negative freedom you have, the closer you are to slavery. Edmund Burke warned a member of the French National Assembly in the wake of the revolution, that without something to restrain them, the French people would become enslaved to their passions. Those quotes stand in stark contrast to Rousseau and the chaotic French Revolution, which paved the way for the bloody dictatorship of Napoleon.

### **So, where does God come down on freedom?**

Jesus said that rest for our souls is found in taking up his yoke (teaching) (Matthew 11:28-29). It comes from receiving his words from outside of us. He said that life comes for those who deny themselves for his sake (Matt. 16:24-25). Peter said that freedom expresses itself in submission to serve God and others (1 Peter 2:15-17).

Over the last 250 years, America has moved away from this biblical understanding of freedom on which it was founded. It has instead embraced a French Revolution understanding of freedom.

This presents the 21st century American church with challenges, to be sure. But, to an even greater degree, it presents us with an opportunity. The scent of revival is in the air. Revival occurs when repentance spreads. Repentance happens when our plans for self-salvation fail us. The negative view of freedom is already failing.

Consider the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Throwing off sexual restraints promised a new kind of freedom. But is America flourishing sexually? Porn addictions, the long-term effects of no-fault divorce, and the #metoo movement have exposed “sexual liberty” as slavery.

Consider the advent of the Internet and smartphones. The Internet promised a way to give power to the little guy. Smart phones promised a rise of individual expression and self-crafted news feeds. Yet, like the serpent whispered to Eve, “You shall not surely die”- they were half-truths. While the internet has given a voice to individuals, those voices have been siloed and used to create large groups of consumers for Amazon to sell to. The smartphone has turned individuals into a set of data to package together and manipulate via advertising through intentionally addictive apps. Just take a look at the people in any grocery line or waiting room, heads bent over their phones, addictively bowing as a herd to the “freedom” of Big Data. Suicide rates skyrocketed in 2007, and have continued an upward trend to date. Also new that year? The iPhone.

The secular idea of freedom and salvation is failing. The counter-cultural gospel of Jesus Christ, once for all delivered by the apostles, carried out into the world by the wind of the Spirit on the breath of the church, will once again ring as “good news” to a world in chains.

Andy Crouch wrote in his book *Culture Making*, “The academic fallacy is that once you have understood something--analyzed and critiqued

it — you have changed it...The only way to change culture is to create more of it.” So, while we could continue to analyze and critique gender fluidity, singularity, sex with robots, identity politics, social media use, the 2020 elections or some other pertinent cultural issues...

I think we’re all better served by addressing the culture that Christians and pastors can create together to better receive and minister to those enslaved by secular understanding of freedom.

**Here are four biblically grounded, culture-creating, and cultivating actions that we should be doing right now.**

**1. Spend energy quietly developing your inner life, instead of projecting an image.**

When pastors spend their trying to appeal to the secular understanding of freedom, we end up posting on Facebook or Instagram about how exciting our services are. We try to convince people that if they come to church they will finally have the liberating experience they have been looking for. We can tend to make Jesus one of many exciting options in a world built on consumption.

But if your Facebook video is right under a girl twerking and right above a cat video in someone’s feed, you may well be reducing the gospel to that level. As Neil Postman notes in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, the medium becomes the message. In a loud culture, more loud messaging does not disrupt. It does not stand out. In a loud culture of where self-expression is everywhere, it is quiet that disrupts. Humility becomes (and always is) attractive.



In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan to project an image of himself to the watching world- “Take a dive off the temple pinnacle, and somebody will surely post it Instagram. You’ll go viral when folks see the angels catch you. And, after all, it’s biblical (Psalm 91). It will reach a lot more people than just hanging out here in this desert can ever reach. Don’t you want to reach people, Jesus? Isn’t that what it’s all about?” Yet, Jesus constantly deferred viral fame. He pushed crowds away. His hour had not yet come. And that “hour” was not being lifted up as a celebrity, but being lifted up on a cross- deserted, denied, and dying.

Jesus spent 30 years in anonymity, began his ministry by walking away from the crowds for 40 days to face the temptation that we failed, and then spent the next 3 years focused on a cross. During that 3 years he withdrew from the crowds in order to properly engage them. He spent more time developing his inner life than crafting his image.

- Pastor, why do you post videos of your own sermons?
- Pastor, how have you intentionally moved away from celebrity and into wilderness?
- Pastor, how are you developing your inner life?
- How are you limiting your own freedom to project an image, and instead using that freedom to submit yourself to God and others?

## **2. Become a Non-anxious presence by practicing the presence of God.**

Our current cultural moment is calling us be gods. We think we can be omnipresent and omniscient through texting or Facebook-stalking. Yet, as humans, we are unable to handle the pressure of Godhood. Instead, we have become anxious, depressed, and overworked.

In all this anxiety, people are looking for someone sober-minded. This is a biblical qualification of an elder given in 1 Timothy 3:3. People are looking for a non-anxious presence in the midst of turbulent times. Think of Jesus sleeping on the boat with his disciples in the middle of a storm. They were freaking out, but Jesus was resting.

Yet, so many of us pastors are FULL of anxiety. Some of us, more anxious than those we are called to serve, because we aren't caring for the inner life. Pastors are called to be EMTs. Can you imagine have one of your limbs severed in a terrible car accident, then the ambulance shows up, the EMT approaches and all he says, "OH MY GOD! This is terrible! What are we going to do? This is terrible!". Then he begins to vomit uncontrollably before he passes out. That doesn't help--at all. A trained EMT shows up on the scene with calming words and a sober mind. One that doesn't make promises he can't keep, yet still reassures and goes to work to do the next, right, lifesaving thing.

As pastors, we can't freak out. We must be a non-anxious presence in the midst of an anxious people chained to their broken self-salvation attempts. And that sober-minded presence can only happen if we ourselves are practicing the presence of God. Reading Scripture. Meditating on Scripture. Silence and solitude. Praying for more than lists of requests.

- Pastor, when was the last time you sat for an hour without no earbuds in and no book in your hand and asked God to speak?
- Pastor, how often do you meet with God that isn't tied to meeting with your staff or a person you are leading.
- Pastor, are you anxious? Are you the EMT or the patient?

### **3. Love people through their suffering, by showing up in person.**

Suffering isn't a distraction from ministry. It is the ministry. Suffering isn't a set back in discipleship. It is discipleship. This means we need to be with people in suffering. This means we need to stop trying to pastor people on Facebook.

If we are embodied people, we have limitations, and those limitations need to be recognized. People are craving embodied ministry in a disembodied world. You know what this means? You might not grow as rapidly as you hoped. But the people with whom you endure suffering will make deep commitments to the local, embodied church. They will make real commitments, covenants. And they will turn into a force for the Kingdom of God. The book of Acts follows the Gospels. Pentecost comes after the cross.

The negative view of freedom believes that suffering itself is a sin. That the fastest way out of suffering, the most immediate fix, is always the best. It has no patience for outside forces restraining its self-expression. This idea tempts us to walk away from the "hard cases" and embrace the "low hanging fruit". But Jesus calls us into suffering with him. He says that as we serve the least of these, we serve him.

To minister to an anxious people as they endure suffering, not only deepens our relationship with our Father, it helps those we minister to see a God who does not abandon them when they become "useless" to his cause.

- Pastor, do you prioritize hospital visits?
- Pastor, how quickly do you dismiss the hurting because they are a nuisance to you and slow down your church's growth?

#### **4. Become “Veterans of Creative Suffering.” Live cruciform.**

Martin Luther King, Jr’s most famous speech is known by the phrase “I Have a Dream”. But to get that beautiful dream of racial harmony in America, he first set the expectation that the suffering was not over for those who shared his dream. He told people to go back into the very painful, violent, and degrading situations they faced in their cities. He called them “veterans of creative suffering”.

That is a beautifully paradoxical phrase. The revolution was going to come not from making their oppressors suffer, but from enduring suffering to the point that it creates a new culture. Sacrifice is hard to argue with. And it honors God.

Jesus’ entire life was pointed toward creative suffering--a cross that would liberate. In the Great Commission (Matt 28:20), before Jesus sends his disciples into the world to lay down their lives to make more disciples, he gives them a word of comfort. “All authority in heaven and earth have been given to me...and I am always with you.”

True freedom is not found in throwing off authority and expressing ourselves. True freedom is found in submitting to the only authority who suffered to create a people, and a world, and who did it for the purpose of being with us.

Our lives are forfeit to this God and to this cause. Therefore, no disciples will be made, no churches will flourish, without us, the pastors, following in the cruciform steps of our Master. The future of the church depends not on our social media strategies or cultural appeal, but on our willingness to become veterans of creative suffering.

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# FIRST GENERATION FAITH

*By J.D. Greear*

At the Summit Church, there are some key themes and philosophies that we are currently implementing to remain focused on calling and obedience towards making disciples. What does it look like to be faithful? How do we remain faithful? And what does it look like to replicate faithfulness in others to that end?

If you are in your first couple of years of church planting, this might not apply to where you are now, but as you move into your third year, fourth year, and beyond, I think you'll be able to relate.

Many years ago at The Summit Church, there was a group of people who said, "Jesus and his mission will be first." That was expressed in two primary ways: They were willing to do whatever it took to reach the lost (even if it was uncomfortable), and they were willing to do whatever the Holy Spirit said.

But here's what happens: When churches like ours get big and "settled," so to speak, they experience a natural inertia. Within a generation, they move from mission to maintenance. They go from being reckless in the mission to being comfortable in the institution.

We see a dichotomy between first generation faith and second generation faith. There are vast, yet subtle, differences between the faith and

activity of the first generation in the local church versus those that inherit the product of their labors. This dichotomy works as a framework from which a church may be able to assess its own efficacy in faith to follow in obedience, or its laziness and lack of initiative to follow out what God has called them to do.<sup>1</sup>

## FIRST GENERATION

Has a firsthand experience of God's vision

Assumes personal responsibility via ownership

"We will do whatever it takes"

Owens the vision

Expects personal sacrifice

Sees problems and seeks solutions

Sees possibilities and dreams about would could be

Steps out in a bold, reckless trust in God

Fears holding anything back from God

Feels privileged to just be part of the movement

Scared of sin; uncompromising

## SECOND GENERATION

Inherits the vision secondhand

Assumes someone else will do it

"I will do what I am asked to do"

Questions the decisions

Expects personal comfort

Sees problems and complains

Sees situations and their barriers

Sits satisfied in the stability of the institution

Fears commitment

Feels entitled to the benefits of the institution

Feels comfortable with compromise

<sup>1</sup> I was first presented with this framework by one of our campus pastors who got it from his days in Campus Outreach. I am not sure where it originated, but I want to give credit where credit is due.

Scripturally speaking, every succeeding generation has to receive and reinvigorate the faith they inherited from their predecessors. I especially want to highlight the story of Moses passing on his leadership to Joshua at the end of Deuteronomy. When Moses passed on his leadership to Joshua, Joshua had to make his own leap of faith in order to lead the Israelites. Joshua could not merely just take what Moses did and was a part of, expecting it to work with his own generation – he had to create in himself, and his generation, another first generation faith in order to execute God’s will for them. With this, I encourage that we, as church leaders, ought to not only inherit the blessing of those who labored before us but to be faithful to seek what God has ahead of us.

If a church is entering into a period beyond their first generation, then they have to reassume the first generation’s faith to make sure that they are still seeking God in total faith and obedience. It really is life or death for a church. Lack of this will lead to plateauing, if not actual death in the church; not even necessarily plateauing or total fallout in numbers, but in sheer spiritual health, the church may be in danger of becoming stagnant and lukewarm in faith. Therefore, let’s constantly re-evaluate ourselves, our staff, and our congregation on this matter since the vast majority of church leadership and membership is currently reaping the benefits of someone else’s audacious faith that occurred years to decades prior. The goal is to be the second wave of the first generation instead of the second generation.

The Summit has put this First Generation/Second Generation mentality before the congregation initially by way of the “First” campaign which touched on finances and putting the congregation’s first and best before God. Then by the “Who’s Your One?” initiative which touches on personal evangelism. The latter has been put forward to the entirety of the Southern Baptist Convention in an effort to revitalize a sense of

personal ministry outside of the church walls. The “Who’s Your One?” initiative works on three core theological assumptions of this.

First, *the core of our commission is to spread the Gospel and make disciples*. There are two particular passages that anchor down this point. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus explains that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7). Though we ought not to neglect the ninety-nine (those internal to the church), what we do for the one (those external to the church) brings the most joy to the Kingdom of Heaven. The second passage is the Great Commission text in Matthew 28. The only verb in that passage is the command to make disciples, everything else is a modifier of that verb. Therefore, the action of making disciples is the focal point of the Great Commission.

Second, *ordinary people are the tip of the Gospel spear*. I would boldly put out there that the call of the “minister,” in a round-about way, is actually a call to leave the ministry in order to equip the saints of the church to do it. This is because the vast majority of ministry should be happening outside of the church building. The early church took hold and ownership of the vision, conviction, and commission God had given them and enacted it with little to no resources and without relying on high capacity leadership strategies.

Third, *in today’s increasingly post-Christian world we know that we need to reach people outside of the church*. At some point we cannot focus on improving our “product” (e.g. guest services, better sermons, etc.) and expect people outside of the local church to come inside of our doors when most people have total apathy towards ever thinking of entering a church to begin with. The fact of the matter is that improving or developing what we have on the inside will not affect the people on the outside. Interper-



sonal relationships and having answers for the questions people have in life is the bridge over the great divide. It is only by going outside to the people that we can invite them into the church.

The faith of the previous generation was awesome, but it's not enough to take us there. As we look to the Promised Land, let's do whatever it takes to put God and his mission first in our churches and in our lives.

# GOSPEL DOCTRINE, GOSPEL CULTURE, GOSPEL SPIRITUALITY

*By Ray Ortlund*

I want to tell you something that you know but I think you need to hear: You matter. Do you hear that? Church planters matter to God. You are God's marines. You hit the beach without having fully adequate support. and you just start moving inland and start gaining ground. You take the ground that nobody else has taken. And what you're doing matters. So thank you. It is going to be okay. It is going to be better than okay. Stay low, and stick together.

So, what would it look like for us to get as good at strengthening our churches to thrive, as we have been at equipping them to launch? You know what? That looks to me like the New Testament.

Indeed, we want to plant churches that are even healthier, and more alive, and more compelling than our established churches. Our goal is not simply to grow, but to ascend. We're following "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). In his essay "Puritanism as a Movement of Revival," J. I. Packer writes:

*“. . . The end to which all church order, on the Puritan view, was a means, and for which everything superstitious, misleading and Spirit-quickening*

*must be rooted out, was the glory of God in and through the salvation of sinners and the building up of lively congregations in which people met God.”*

How, by God’s grace, do we as pastors help our churches get there and stay there, so that our established churches keep their edge and our daughter churches exceed their mother churches? When the gospel takes over in our churches and unfruitful things lose their grip and only the compelling things remain, what does that look like?

As a young pastor, I was unprepared to lead anything. I could parse a Hebrew verb, but I couldn’t do much else. In my naiveté, I thought I’d preach Christ from the Bible in a positive way, and people would light up. Many did. But others turned away. They wanted something else, and I was surprised by the collision between my expectations and the more complicated reality of an actual church. I didn’t have categories for understanding what was happening and what would help. Eventually, I had to rethink everything from the deepest foundations.

Gradually, I began to see pastoral ministry with new eyes – both new realism and new hope. And a key passage, for me, was Galatians 2:11-21. I realized, from this text, that I had missed a major dimension of ministry that had been there all along. And once I finally saw it, I began discovering it all over the New Testament. That category is what I call “gospel culture.” It creates lively congregations where people meet God. A church where our self-invented complications stop mattering and lively congregations are meeting God—that is when a church becomes awe-inspiring. An ordinary, fallible, unimpressive church that inspires awe because it is obvious that something from above has come down.

Here in this passage, I see three essentials to this kind of pastoral ministry: gospel doctrine, gospel culture, and gospel spirituality. I allow

myself to over-use the word “gospel” to convey how the gospel must touch everything in a church—not just a gospel sermon surrounded with other things but everything in a church service oozing with gospel. But here in our passage, the doctrine is obvious: justification by faith alone. That really matters. As our Lutheran friends remind us, justification by faith is “the article by which the church stands or falls.” It isn’t a denominational option; it is a Christian essential. And it sets us apart. No one else builds their identity and their sense of okayness on the basis of someone else’s life from 2000 years ago.

The second essential to pastoral ministry is less obvious in our time but is in fact the burning issue in this passage. It’s gospel culture, that is, the grace of the gospel no longer a mere concept but made visible and felt in the beauty of human relationships, in the tone and feel and vibe and honesty and gentleness and humor and relaxedness and cheerfulness and humility and the spirit of praise in a church—all the subtleties and nuances that comprise a culture.

Gospel doctrine is heard in a church, and gospel culture is seen in a church, when natural enemies start treating one another as royalty for Jesus’ sake and without an ounce of coercion. A gospel culture is not just nice; it is awe-inspiring. Nursing along a healthy culture is a matter of sensitivity and keen personal awareness with your finger on the pulse all the time.

The third essential to pastoral ministry in this passage is gospel spirituality. It’s how weak people like us are lifted up and borne along, as we build up lively congregations here in this world of exhaustion and inertia where people are belittled all week long and crawl into church defeated every Sunday morning. We beat the odds by the power of the risen Christ moment by moment. It’s not just us being good at ministry mechanics; it’s us receiving what only Christ can do.

If we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us, the watching world will notice. People asked the apostles, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (Acts 4:7). When William Burns was preaching in Perth, Scotland in 1840 and one of the notorious sinners of the city was converted, the man was so surprised at himself that he said, “It is something altogether unearthly that has come to town.” We are not recycling the earthly but are reaching for something altogether unearthly and life-giving.

But of these three glorious powers – doctrine and culture and spirituality – gospel culture is the part that is commonly neglected and yet the most visible, the first thing people notice when they walk in.

The early Roman, Tertullian, wrote, “Look how they love one another!” The Romans had religion galore, but they had never seen beautiful community. Their world was brutal. Then came the Christians as a new world, not as a weekend option but as a new kind of community, as the Eschaton in the present, and it felt like heaven on earth. Christian teaching was a barrier, but Christian relationships and honesty and gentleness and inclusivity and generosity. That culture was alluring.

What I am saying is that the churches we all long for will require of us diligence and wisdom at all three levels simultaneously – doctrine and culture and spirituality – because that is the Christianity that will compel the attention of the world today just as it did in the first century. What we don’t need is a new kind of Christianity but the old kind, the real kind, no longer held back by our overlays of complication. It’s what Paul insists on here.

John Stott wrote about this passage, “This is without doubt one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the New Testament. Here are two

leading apostles of Jesus Christ face to face in complete and open conflict.” Something massive was on the line here in Antioch. Peter didn’t see it. Paul saw it clearly. He sums it up in verse 21, “I do not nullify the grace of God.” Were the others nullifying the grace of God? Were they saying, in effect, that Christ died for no purpose? Yes.

So let’s dig into the passage with three questions. One, what is the doctrine here? Two, what is the culture here? Three, what is the spirituality here?

### **1. What is the doctrine in this passage?**

“We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

We are Christians because we’ve given up on ourselves. Our lifelong project of idealizing ourselves has collapsed. We have deeply accepted that our only justification is Jesus. Our free and complete and unimprovable validation and okayness and completeness and reinstatement with the all-holy God – this gospel of justification means everything to us. We join with Paul in saying, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” Faithful Christians throughout history have stood here.

For example, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church affirm, “We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort.”

The Heidelberg Catechism asks us, “How are you right with God?” And it teaches us to answer:

*Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments, of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks us, “What is justification?” And it teaches us to answer, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.”

Justification by faith alone is like a debit card. In the gospel God says to us, “I have here a debit card that accesses a fund of infinite worth, the righteousness of my Son. All your debts – past, present and future – you can charge to this account. It will never run out. Your account will always be clear with me. And you don’t need a good credit rating to receive this card. The whole point is, you’ve squandered your resources. You’re in debt way over your head, and you can’t dig your way out. There is no payment plan that will work for you now. But it is only to the discredited that I give the credit of Jesus. Your only part is to receive this card with the empty hands of faith.” And we’ve done that. We have accepted the debit card of justification. As God the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts that we have sinned, we confess our sin to the Lord, and we might have to go apologize to people and re-earn their trust; but as we stand before the Lord, by faith alone we swipe the card, and we move on

rejoicing, because Jesus paid it all. And we know this is consistent with what we see here in the apostle Paul. He saw justification by faith alone not only as the entry point for converts but also as the pathway for all Christians all the time.

My dad told me a story about Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was a mentor and friend to my dad. Barnhouse was preaching as a guest in a church. Before he was to preach, a lady sang a solo – the old song, “I am satisfied.” The chorus goes like this:

Is my Master satisfied,  
Is He satisfied with me?  
I am satisfied with Jesus;  
Is He satisfied with me?

And Barnhouse stepped into the pulpit and shouted, “Yes, he is!” That is the joyous finality of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from all our works. “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.” Paul and Peter and we here today believe and teach that. It’s the gospel doctrine in this passage. And we love it.

But if all we have is right doctrine, even right doctrine that we love, we can still lose our way, as no one less than the apostle Peter did. If we are faithful to the right doctrine, but oblivious to the relational culture in line with the very truth we teach, then our churches will be ugly and will die and they will deserve to die. We can see in this passage that Paul is demanding of himself and others more than good doctrine. Let’s take the next step.



## **2. What is the culture in this passage?**

Sadly, what we see here is the opposite of gospel culture. That is the very thing so offensive to Paul:

“But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” (Galatians 2:14).

Jude warned us about “ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality” (Jude 4). But Peter fell into the opposite error – nullifying the grace of God with legalism. And Peter’s kind of legalism here was not Peter trying to earn his way into heaven. Legalism is more tricky than that. Peter’s kind of legalism here was creating hell on earth by poisoning his relationships with demands that were not of God. So Paul is not worried that the doctrine of justification by faith alone might start exerting too much influence in how these early Christians are behaving toward one another. He’s worried it won’t exert enough influence – so much so that he is willing to speak about it awkwardly. And the striking thing about Peter’s betrayal of justification by faith alone is this. He betrayed the doctrine not at the level of doctrine but at the level of culture. And to Paul, that did betray the doctrine – what Paul calls “the truth of the gospel.”

Martin Luther understood what’s at stake. He comments on verse 21, “What eloquence is able sufficiently to set forth these words: ‘to nullify the grace of God,’ also that ‘Christ died for no purpose’? The horribleness of it is such that all the eloquence in the world is not able to express it. It is a small matter to say that any man died for no purpose. But to say that Christ died for no purpose is to take him quite away. Nevertheless, this sin is common.”

The horrible but common sin in this passage is departing from the relational implications of justification by faith alone and turning a joyous gospel fellowship into a coercive social environment. Gospel doctrine creates gospel culture. Peter was holding to the doctrine but destroying the culture. Paul says Peter's "conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel." It was not a failure of niceness but a failure of loyalty to the truth. Yes, Peter was orthodox on paper; but he was heretical in his leadership. If Paul were among us today he would insist that it's only when our churches are faithful both in their biblical doctrine and in their relational culture that they are faithful. It is possible for us today to unsay by our church culture what we say by our church doctrine. Which means we can defeat the advance of the gospel, however biblical our exposition and however brilliant our apologetics, by the conduct we display and the social dynamics we create with one another.

How then did Peter sin so horribly that the gospel was endangered by his ministry? You know the background. Peter had learned, in Acts Chapter 10, that Gentiles were equally acceptable before God through Christ. The vision from heaven made it clear to Peter, three times, that "what God has made clean, do not call common." The point of the vision was obvious in the conversion of Cornelius and the other Gentiles in Caesarea. Peter saw these new Gentile believers as his equals, because Jesus alone makes anyone kosher before God. The body of Jewish tradition called the Mishnah warned that "the dwelling-places of the Gentiles are unclean." In other words, if you go into a Gentile house, you'll get cooties. But Jewish Peter walked right into Cornelius' house. As he was doing so, there is a fascinating detail in the text: "And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered." Peter, with his jealously guarded, impeccable Jewish pedigree, makes friendly small-talk with his new Gentile friend, because the gospel put him at the same level before God as everyone else. So as he turns to go into Cor-

nelius' house, I can imagine Peter saying, "Well, what a lovely garden. And is this Mrs. Cornelius? How nice to meet you, ma'am. And here's Cornelius Junior! Hi, pal. Hey, how about those New England Patriots!" Why did Jewish Peter now identify with these Gentiles as equals and friends? He said, "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." Peter said, "God shows no partiality." Finally, in Acts Chapter 11, now back in Jerusalem, Peter asked, "Who was I that I could stand in God's way?" The wonderful new unity of believers in Christ alone was obvious to Peter and to everyone at that major turning point in the advance of the gospel to the nations.

But here in Antioch, how the tune has changed! Verse 12, "For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." What is Peter saying now? His behavior now denies that there is "one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-5). Peter's political cowardice – back in the Gospels, when Peter denied the Lord, he was driven by fear for his physical survival; now Peter again denies the Lord, driven by fear for his ecclesiastical survival – Peter's hypocrisy is saying that there are two justifications, a super-justification for believing Jews and a sub-justification for believing Gentiles. Peter in Antioch is "rebuilding" the walls of exclusion that Peter in Caesarea had "torn down" (cf. Galatians 2:18). Peter's aloofness is saying that Gentile justification is inferior to Jewish justification, and everyone will just have to get used to a two-tiered Body of Christ with the Jews above and everyone else below. Of course, if the Gentiles would only add into their justification the kosher tastes of the Jews, they would be allowed up in the first-class section too – but not until they conform at the level of culture. We see then why Paul uses the strong word "force" in verse 14, "How can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" It was by the psychological power of exclusion that Peter forced and pressured

and coerced the Gentile believers to adopt Jewish packaging as if that were required for all Christians to be legit.

Exclusion because of selfish pride and rigid tradition not only insults human beings but, even more seriously, it violates the gospel. Later Paul says, of the Galatian legalists, “They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them” (Galatians 4:17). It’s like that moment in Tom Sawyer. Remember when Aunt Polly tells Tom to whitewash the fence on that gorgeous Saturday morning? But Tom hates every minute of it. Then he sees Ben Rogers coming his way down the street, and he tricks Ben into doing the job for him. How did Tom manage that? Mark Twain explains: “In order to make a man or boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.” But full stature in Christ is easy to attain! All anyone needs is Christ, received with the empty hands of faith. There is no hierarchy in our justification, no degrees or shades or levels. But offering to the few and the favored first-class elite status with prior boarding and extra legroom – that messes with our insecurities powerfully. It appeals to our pride and arouses our fears. “Our church is better. Our church is for cool (or traditional, or any self-exalting distinction) Christians. You might make the grade.” No church says that with words, but many churches say it with their attitudes and all the subtle intangibles that create culture. And it is a blatant denial of justification by faith alone, even if the doctrine is enshrined in a church’s doctrinal statement and preached in the pulpit. And if you came out of an improperly demanding church background, with a legalistic church culture that was denying its own gracious doctrine, and all your life your heart has been knocked off-balance and to this day you wonder if you measure up, and you’ve had to fake it and not let on how you’re not doing well, but in it all you keep clinging to Jesus, the gospel says to every one of us right now: “You are cleansed, you are received, you are included, because of Christ alone! There is a

place for you among the very best of the people of God. You belong!” It was for this freedom that Christ set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The uncorrupted gospel, allowed to do what it does and not hindered – the gospel creates a social environment so gentle, so respectful, so easy to join, that everyone there breathes a sigh of relief and also tenderly reassures everyone else, “All week long at work we get beaten up, we never measure up, we never fully belong. But here we are now in church, fully accepted by the Lord, and deeply bonded together as one. Isn’t it great to be here together?” Gospel doctrine creates that gospel culture. The truth becomes the experience of the community – not only how they enter, but also how they roll. It’s not a matter of an optional adornment. It’s a matter of essential faithfulness.

But how can a life-giving gospel culture last, over the long-haul, into the next generation and be reproduced in hundreds and thousands of new churches? We are so weak. We need nothing less than the very touch of Jesus himself upon us, moment by moment.

### **3. What is the spirituality here?**

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

The very personal nature of this verse confronts us about our own personal reality with the Lord. Whatever those men from the circumcision party were thinking – probably a sense of alarm about falling standards, with all those messy Gentiles entering in – whatever was going on inside them, it wasn’t the love of Christ. And whatever Peter and the others were thinking when they caved to church politics, it wasn’t their

personal reality with the Lord. Whenever our hearts drift away from a wonderful sense that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me – that is when we fragment and divide. If we’re drifting from him, how can we stay loyal to one another? Justification by faith alone, as a doctrine, is an abstraction. But the felt love of Jesus for us personally, his grace as a personal remedy, is too real not to hold us together. We need not love him first. He is not living by faith in us. He loved us and gave himself for us, each of us personally. When his love moves our hearts, we can keep in step with the truth of the gospel. We can preach and incarnate true doctrine. I love the way Luther comments here:

Think carefully about this price and see the captive given, the Son of God. He is incomparably better than all created things. What will you do when you hear the apostle say that such a price was paid for you? Will you bring your vows, your actions, your merits? What can all these do? What can even the law of Moses do? What is the obedience of all the angels, in comparison with the Son of God given, most shamefully, to death on the cross, so that there was no drop of his most precious blood that was not shed for your sins? If you would think about this incomparable price properly, you would throw everything else down to hell. . . . Christ is nothing but joy and sweetness to a trembling and broken heart, as Paul shows here when he describes him most sweetly and says, “He loved me and gave himself for me.”

The law didn’t love us and give itself for us. But Jesus loved us and gave himself for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us, to make us clean forever before the all-holy God, whatever our background and culture, giving each of us a place at his table forever. He will never draw back and separate himself from us. He fears no one. There isn’t an ounce of hypocrisy in him. He made full satisfaction for us, because he loved each of us personally. And when our hearts savor his dying love as the

answer to our deep fear that we will forever be exiles and outsiders – when his dying love moves us, we not only enter in ourselves but we also make room in our hearts for other sinners too. And all the critics and fault-finders and the devil himself will just have to cope with the joy we share in the Lord.

“The life I now live in the flesh,” as Paul puts it, is our moment-by-moment enjoyment of the One who loved us and gave himself for us. Savoring our justification as the heart of Jesus for us all the time creates emotional space where sinners like us can breathe and relax and rethink our lives at a deep level. And it’s unforced. It makes going to church every Sunday the highlight of the whole week. Cherishing our free justification is what Paul means when he says, “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” That reality has the power to refresh exhausted sinners. Jonathan Edwards counseled a young believer: “One new discovery of the glory of Christ’s face and the fountain of his sweet grace and love will do more towards scattering clouds of darkness and doubting in one minute than examining old experiences for a whole year.” That is why our goal as pastors every Sunday is to shepherd people back into enjoying the all-sufficient love of Christ for them. Our people don’t need “challenge.” They need the heart of Christ for them – at their worst.

The future of our churches depends on gospel doctrine experienced in gospel culture and sustained by gospel spirituality. Charles Hodge wisely wrote:

*Whenever a change occurs in the religious opinions of a community, that change is always preceded by a change in their religious feelings. The natural expression of the feelings of true piety is the doctrines of the Bible. As long as these feelings are retained, these doctrines will be retained; but should the feelings be lost, the doctrines are either held for form’s sake or rejected,*

*according to circumstance; and if the feelings again are called into life, the doctrines return as a matter of course.*

A church with a tender heart toward the Lord will cheerfully love the gospel and one another. But if a church's heart cools toward the Lord, that church will destabilize at all levels. The heart works with such power that it creates inevitability in a church's future, for good or ill. But knowing his love is what wins us and keeps us, as nothing else can. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:

The whole object of being a Christian is that you may know the love of Jesus Christ, his personal love to you; that he may tell you in unmistakable language that he loves you, that he has given himself for you, that he has loved you with "an everlasting love."

And Francis Schaeffer, in *True Spirituality* – the word "classic" is over-used, but *True Spirituality* is a classic – he put it plainly:

*True spirituality can never have a mechanical solution. The real solution is being cast up into moment-by-moment communion, personal communion, with God himself, and letting Christ's truth flow through me through the agency of the Holy Spirit.*

A healthy church is unlike every other collectivity on earth. A healthy church lives in the all-sufficient grace of God in Christ, equally shared, by all alike, through faith alone, so that diverse people can be who they are in Christ. There is nothing in all this world so happy and so beautiful and so prophetic as a church that shows the world what it actually looks like to believe in the dying love of Jesus for all alike. Then church politics dies. Then dividing walls crumble. Then we experience reformation and revival, as diverse and unlikely people come together with a happiness from above.



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