

Paul's Example Testimony, part II

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[0:00] I heard a distinct before in there, before he knew Christ, a moment where he came to Christ and the Lord revealed himself in his life, and then an after where he's pursuing the Lord and following the Lord, and that is just a great story.

It's always good to hear how somebody came to faith in Jesus because you have something to compare to your own story, right? Well, I want to start off this morning just, I want to give you a report.

I was gone last week, and the cat's away, the mice play, right? I mean, Ty did a fantastic job preaching last week. He did it. I got to hear it Sunday afternoon, so I sat down and listened to that, or actually it was Monday morning, I think, when I listened to it, but great job opening the scripture and letting God speak.

It is truly the reminder of Spurgeon who said, when it comes to God's word, all we got to do is let the lion out of the cage and it will defend itself.

And we open up the scripture and the scripture speaks. And so I just praise the Lord that the Lord used you last week. I had to suffer for all of us last week, okay?

[1:19] I suffered for all of us. I went down to sunny Florida to Fellowship Church, and I got to see exactly what I shared with Timothy.

Timothy Pig came several weeks ago from Florida. I now went back to his church, got to stand in his church and experience that.

I remember back in wintertime when I texted him a screenshot of the temperature here. I think that day it was like nine below zero or something. And I sent that to him and he sent back.

It's 72 degrees here in South Florida. And I responded by saying, you are not going to heaven, okay? That was my conclusion.

But I got to see it firsthand. It is so nice. It was like 72 degrees every single day. We drove down to his place.

[2:16] You can't go any farther south. There's only one city, I think, that's further south than his city on the Gulf side of Florida. And so we were down there.

It was Everglades after that. So could have gone to Key West or something. I would have suffered for the Lord to do that, but we didn't have time.

But I got to see firsthand his church. And he shared with us a lot of testimony about his church. I got to see it firsthand. He is reaching two very distinct communities there, Ava Maria and Immokalee. Immokalee is the old First Baptist. And Ava Maria is a brand new city that just cropped up in 2007. And it's all more affluent people.

One city is more migrant workers than the other is affluent. And so it is a tornado of lifestyles that are going on there. We got to see the Immokalee campus.

[3:16] It's old First Baptist. And we got to see the Ava Maria campus, which is a storefront. And inside was just a great worship area.

But the best thing was to meet all of the people. Because he has assembled the most radical group of people I've ever seen in my life.

Okay. You've got some former ministry people that have served the Lord in ministry full time. And you've got some people that are migrant workers.

You've got some that are more educated. You've got some no education at all. You've got some that were in more formal religious settings. You've got some that come from weird, crazy, charismatic backgrounds that now have been saved.

And all of them are coming together on these two campuses and worshipping. And the worship was unreal. The music time, the celebration time together. If I could use one word to summarize that church, it is enthusiasm.

[4:22] Okay. They had their hands in their air like they just don't care. You know. They were engaged. There were some African Americans there that were just hyper engaged.

One of those guys used to open up for the temptations. And he sang on the worship team. There was another Grammy winning pianist that was on one of the pianos.

And some other vocalist that was just off the chart. And the worship was just beautiful. But that in itself was not what grabbed my attention. It was that everybody was so engaged in it.

It was just crazy. And so after Timothy preached here with us, he said, man, I, he said, I, I just, you know, your people are a little more laid back than I'm used to.

And I didn't understand what he meant. And so going there now, it's like, whoa, okay. They are like full throttle, high caffeine. I mean, moving a hundred miles an hour.

[5:25] But the preaching was great. They were in the word. People were engaging each other. People came up, didn't know I was a pastor yet or whatever. And we're just coming up and engaging with us, trying to share the gospel with us.

You know, it was awesome. And so just to say the partnership that we're trying to develop there with Fellowship Church is going to be a strong partnership. It's going to give us an opportunity at times to go down and help them.

Amen. South Florida. Come on. So to go down and help them because they're trying to reach some very difficult areas. And so there's ways that we could actually do that.

And there's going to be ways for them to come up and help us. In the summertime, we want to do some kind of vacation Bible school or something. That may be a mission trip for them to send a group of people up to help us do that.

And we'll be able to pull that off. So things like that, ways that we can partner together in the future are just going to be great. So we want to continue to pray for that effort, pray for Timothy. He is doing such a great job pulling this church together.

[6:30] Grew, their church, the Old First Baptist grew from, I don't know, 50 people or something down to 11. I said grew, right?

They grew down to 11. And that was a good thing because from 11, now they're running 350 or something. I don't know how many they have on Sunday morning in the two campuses, but God's just doing a great work.

So we want to pray for them. In fact, why don't we stop as we transition into this time in the Word. And let's just take a moment, pray for Fellowship Church in Immokalee, okay?

Let's pray for them. Father, we thank you. As we gather here today, we are so thankful for what we have in Christ. Even as we heard Joe's testimony, grew up in this Christian home.

There came a point where he realized he needed Jesus. You revealed yourself to him. He responded in faith. You changed his life. And Lord, we all have to look at our life in that way, in the before and the how and the after, to make sure that we have a platform from which to preach the gospel.

[7:38] So Lord, I pray that you would just help us in that. We see Fellowship Church down there in Florida doing an amazing work. They're reaching people with the gospel of all kinds of backgrounds, all kinds of ethnicities.

It is just the craziest thing. And Lord, it is just a testimony of what the gospel does. It overcomes. And I'm seeing a group down there where so many things have just been overcome.

Economic disparity and racial disparity. So many things that the world has no answer for. But I see the gospel at work in a way that shows that the gospel changes everything.

Christ has changed everything. Lord, we pray for them, that you will fill them with the Holy Spirit, that you will ground them in the word, that you will cause them to be effective, and that the preaching of the gospel in South Florida will multiply and expand greatly.

God, we pray for Timothy as he leads, that you will just anoint him, empower him, use him. May the Holy Spirit just reign in their moments of worship together.

[8:45] And may you speak and send those people out with great power to preach the gospel everywhere they go. And so, Lord, just be with them in that way.

We thank you for the fellowship that we have in the gospel with them. And we pray that in the future there will be good ways that we can encourage one another even so much more as we see that day approaching of your return.

So, Lord, just be with them. And now be with us also, Lord, as we open up the word together, as we make application to our life and see how you're working and how you're going to work. May you just fill us so that you can use us.

May you just open up your word to us so that we might grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And may we know him.

Father, be with us now. We love you and praise you. It's in Christ's name we pray. God's people said, Amen. And if God's people said it with enthusiasm, they would say, Amen.

[9:50] Hey, that's what I'm talking about. All right. I want you to open your Bibles to Acts chapter 26. We're going to conclude this message in Acts 26 as we're talking about getting our story straight.

It is very important for us to get our story straight. And I was, as we were driving, we did a lot of driving. It took us two days to get down there and then two days back.

So it was a lot of driving. But along the way, I can't remember where in Florida or where along the way it was that I saw some rowers and some competitive kind of rowing.

You know, the long boats, several of the guys sitting, you know, in the boat and all of them in unison rowing together going down the way. And as I thought about that, I just thought, just, you know, it's interesting how typically in those competitive kind of rowing situations where the rowers are not facing forward, the rowers are actually facing backwards.

They're facing the back of the boat. They're not facing ahead. They're facing backwards. And it's interesting because as I thought about that, I had to look it up and I was like, well, what's the deal there?

[11:04] Because, you know, you think you don't see them like in a kayak or a canoe, like going down the Suwannee River, you know, just easing along. I mean, they are pumping this thing and moving at a pretty good rate of speed.

They're not just drifting along in a kayak, you know. They are really moving and with great force. And the reason is because the way you're sitting in the boat facing the back enables you to move all of your muscle groups in unison in a way that your shoulders and your back and your arms are all in it, as they would be if you were rowing forward.

But it also engages more with your legs. And so your legs are actually doing a tremendous amount of the work in this as you're pushing and rowing as you're facing backwards.

And so as I was reading through some of the instructions that are given to these rowers, the reason is that that force that you have when you're facing backwards is now increased like four times.

You have four times the force facing backwards that you do facing forwards. And, interestingly, you're wondering, well, how do they stay on course then?

[12:24] Because if it was me, I'm going to run into something. I'm going to wreck. I'm going to hurt somebody or I'm going to be hurt. And the reality is, in this situation, they are fixing their eyes on a point on land, an immovable point on land, like a tree, like a mountain, like a house or building or some structure, something that they can see as they line themselves up with the goal.

And as they look to that, that becomes their anchor point. And then, if they're practicing on a lake or if they're in some familiar place, then every 20 to 30 strokes, they're going to not only look at that, but they're going to glance forward in between strokes.

So after about 20, 30 strokes, then they're going to glance forward again, and they're going to keep going. But in competition, these competitors actually are instructed every three to four strokes there to look ahead.

So they fix their eyes toward the back on an immovable object and then keep glancing forward toward the goal. Man, what a picture, right? I mean, are you guys tracking with me?

I mean, we've been talking about our testimony, and really what I see in this is there was a philosopher by the name of Soren Kierkegaard who said, life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.

[13:52] We understand it looking back, but we have to live toward the future. And this, to me, is exactly what you see in the Apostle Paul.

This is the instruction of Paul as he is embodying the gospel in such a way to instruct the Gentiles, the message that's going to be given to the Gentiles, this gospel message wrapped up in his life, and how his experience with God is now going to be the platform for him to proclaim the truths of the gospel and in such a way that he can instruct them to instruct others.

So what does that mean for you and me? That means that this picture of the gospel in Paul's life becomes the framework for you to be able to examine your life.

It now becomes the platform for you to proclaim the gospel and fulfill the great commission work in your own life. That's what this is.

That's why Paul would say something to the believers like, imitate me as I imitate Christ. He's just a man.

[15:03] I'm just a man. Anything good that you see in me that looks like Jesus, I say imitate that. Anything in me that doesn't look like Jesus, don't listen and don't follow that.

There's plenty of that in my life. Amen? Enthusiasm. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. There is a before that was distinct in Paul's life as we read the passage.

There was an encounter with Jesus where he meets Jesus on the Damascus Road in a very unique situation, but fundamentally what everyone has to experience.

And then there is a now. After he's received Christ and followed Christ, what does his life look like now? So the before and the how and the now.

The picture for Paul as he looks back is not just some gentle nudge for a better life. Right? It's not some new moral compass that he found.

[16:08] He didn't look back at his dip into religious exercise and think, oh, that was so impactful and empowering because I eased into this Christian life almost unnoticeably.

Right? Like a transformation over a long period of time that nobody could see. It wasn't that. It was actually a radical life upending encounter with Jesus that changed him.

It's what everybody needs. Everybody. There's nobody that has always been a Christian, even though we could talk about John the Baptist and the situation there of him being filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.

Lucas and I had some good debate on that one. But the reality, from the time of the New Testament at least, we can look forward and say there's no example in the New Testament of someone being a Christian who did not have some turning point like this in their life.

There's no infant bat infant conversion. There's no un cognitive experience that where they just became this.

[17:18] There was a point in time, a moment, where someone went from what the Scripture describes as from death to life.

Have you gone from death to life? And when Jesus describes it, he describes it how? In terms of being born again. Just like I was born physically.

We hear these great babies in this room reminding us of birth. I was born physically one time. And the recognition of Nicodemus was, what must I do to be born again?

There must come a point in time when we are born. There's no therapy that's going to produce this. There's no social movement that's going to help us in this.

There's no counseling strategy that's going to navigate you to this. There's no medicine that's going to calm you in a way that's going to help you to this. There's no new philosophy that's going to enlighten this.

[18:23] It is a work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel of Jesus Christ. When your eyes are open to the truth of who Christ is and you respond in faith to receive him.

Paul was confronted by Christ. Transformed him from being a sadistic, cruel, hate-filled monster dragging people from their homes, Christians, so that he could persecute them.

Transformed him from that to a preacher who himself is going to be dragged out of cities, stoned and left for dead because of the preaching of the gospel.

And the homes and the families that are going to be left behind, that are transformed from the work of the gospel are going to be incredible. It's the message he preached.

So there was a before, a moment of confrontation with Christ, and then now we're coming to the after. How was his life changed?

[19:27] So, did we read the text at all, or am I just, I'm just flat, see, that happens. Let's stand together. Acts chapter 26, beginning in verse 19.

This is Paul in this third phase of his discussion.

Verse 19. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day, I have had the help that comes from God.

And so I stand here, testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

[20:56] As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning has driven you out of your mind.

Paul said, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. But I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, of whom I speak boldly.

For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know that you believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, in a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul said, whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.

Father, bless the reading of your word this morning, and may your Holy Spirit clarify for us the story of our life, the story that we need to preach.

[22:16] Help us, Lord. Fill us with your Holy Spirit to that end. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So as we've looked at this, he gives a perfect picture of a testimony.

What does it look like? There is this before Christ. It's the contrast, as we said. A contrast. What was my life like without Jesus?

A moment of confrontation with Christ. And now it is the life being changed by Christ. The commission of Christ.

How have you been changed? I think when you look at the before phase, we looked at it in layers. He included certain things. The reason sometimes we don't share is because we don't know what to share, what parts of our story to share, what's important. He modeled it for us.

[23:18] The before included several layers in there. One, not only just in method, where he's establishing rapport with the people that he's talking to, but he described his upbringing and heritage.

That was important. His background. His religious background specifically. For Paul, he was grown up religiously. You heard that in Joe's testimony.

There was a religious experience in his life. He grew up in this Catholic setting in a home where the Bible was being taught. This was his upbringing. Religious background.

This is what Paul shared. He also shared his erroneous view of God. How he saw God wrongly before. There is a contrast to how I understood God.

And then you see the extent of that into the sin of his life, his recognition of the extent of his sinful condition. He recognized that.

[24:17] These are the layers of the past that when we're telling our testimony of how we came to faith in Christ, these are the things that are important to share. This is what's been modeled for us.

And so it's worth repeating. It's worth telling. That's the platform from which the gospel is reaching into my life and changing me and Jesus coming in and transforming me so that I can go and be a different person.

Those components are all essential if we're going to share it clearly and if we're going to have confidence in our story. If you can't look back with clarity of where you come from, it's very difficult for you to be enthusiastic about preaching the gospel.

If you realize what you came from, what he saved you from, what he changed you from, if you don't see that clearly, man, you need to look deeper. You just got to look deeper because you're not as good as you think you are.

Amen? You're not as good as you think you were. Thank God he helps us to recognize in the gospel that we were a sinner lost without him.

[25:28] Amen? And so when he describes this, in verse 16, he describes the purpose of this saving and what God's going to do in Paul's life.

You're being saved, verse 16, to appoint you, I'm going to appoint you as a servant and a witness. You are going to be, Paul, a servant and a witness.

He's going to be that in a very unique way. But that is also fundamentally what every one of us, as a follower of Jesus Christ, are called to be, a servant and a witness.

Right? Right? Enthusiasm. This is an enthusiasm moment. Right? Ain't that right? Woo! Yes, that's right. Amen. Philippians 2, verse 5, Paul encourages believers with this mindset.

Take on the mind of Christ, who took on the nature of a servant, humbling himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

[26:32] You, as a believer in Christ Jesus, have been called to be a servant and a witness. Even as Peter said in 1 Peter 3.15, believers here are instructed to be prepared to, quote, give an answer to everyone who asks them for a reason for the hope that they have.

You, as a believer in Christ Jesus, have the same calling, in a sense, that Paul has to be a servant and a witness, even though you are not called to be an apostle as he's called.

Fundamentally, you are called the same way. I am called the same way. So for you to share your story is actually important because you have a responsibility not only being a servant, but being a witness.

You've got to appreciate what Christ has done in your life. It's going to be difficult for you to fulfill your calling to make him known if you cannot articulate what has happened in your life.

You may find yourself in the uncomfortable place where you feel like the mission of proclaiming Christ is for somebody else, but not for you.

[27:46] And so in a church like this, I just want to encourage you because you will feel increasingly uncomfortable here. You will. Because we recognize this as being fundamental to who we are.

A follower of Christ is a servant and a witness. We've got a message to tell. That's why this is important. That's why I've been taking a few weeks to look at this and really hone this in and encourage you to write yours down.

Some of you have sent yours to me. I will be giving you feedback on that. I'm working through those things. Some of you, you need to write it down if you're in a D group. Do it through your D group. Your D groups are doing that together.

If not, send it to me. This is fundamental to discipleship. There are a few insights, I think, that we gain in looking at this that help us to appreciate what God is doing in Paul's life.

And then a couple of instructions that he gives us in sharing the layers of this part of our testimony. So the insights. What are the insights into this section?

[28:59] Number one, God's intervention in Paul's life reveal a sovereign will of God in salvation. He's sovereign.

This is the encounter of Paul as you find description of it in Acts 9, verse 1-19. This is the transformation that Jesus brought in his life.

He was not seeking Jesus. Jesus sought him. I want to encourage you in this because that's good news.

He is a rescuer. He finds us in our lostness, not in our goodness. That's what makes your past so appealing.

You sometimes might be tempted to think, I don't want to share my past because I don't want people knowing where I came from. I don't want them knowing how bad I was. Do you hear how dumb that is?

[30:04] I mean, it's just dumb. It is a temptation of the enemy to try to help you elevate yourself in some way, make you think that you're better than you were.

The reality is, your sin sent Jesus to the cross. It is the absolute absurdity that God would love us with that kind of love, that he would demonstrate his love for us while we were still sinners, the scripture says.

While we were sinners, the God of the universe in all of his perfection, the Son of God in all of his glory, emptied himself, came in the form of a human, in the form of a servant, humbled himself to the point of obedience even on the death of the cross, whereby God has highly exalted him, given him a name which is above every name.

Why? Because the Son of God died for my sin. Man, that is glorious. Your sinful condition of the past is something now that is a point of glory.

Not shame. Now am I ashamed? Yes, I'm ashamed. But it's become glory. Sovereign God.

[31:19] I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, he said. A heavenly vision. This call to salvation is divine.

It's a work of God. It's actually God opening your eyes and illuminating you to the truth of the gospel. Through the preaching of the gospel, yes, it is the means. But make no mistake, this is a work of God.

You're dead and your trespasses and sin. He pulls you out of the grave. David said, I was in the miry clay. I couldn't get out. He rescues you out. Isn't that good?

Vision from heaven. An authoritative revelation. A heavenly vision. It's an authoritative vision. God called me. Not with a man-made vision, not with an earthly vision, a heavenly vision.

Something from God. It's something like when you're driving down the street on the highway per se and you're driving somewhat over the speed limit. I mean, I'm not saying that I do that.

[32:23] I'm just saying that it happens with people. And as you're driving along and you see the police officer, what do you do? Pump the brakes.

I don't even know how fast I'm going. It's just a reflex. I've grown up that way. You know, when I was younger, I was a sinful man, right? I drove crazy and wild and whatever and had a radar detector and I thought that was going to somehow get me around the police.

I don't know. 90 miles an hour downtown. Police all around me. Police pulls you over and they step in and say, do you know how fast you were going?

Not exactly. Roughly over 90. I don't know. Why is he pulling you over? This is not, I sought the police officer.

I was not looking for him. It was that he was seeking me. He was actually watching and he, when I sped, he pulled me over and then he intervened in my life.

[33:26] All right. So there's some limitations to this, of course, but the reality is you didn't seek God. God sought you. He rescued you.

He didn't just arrest you. Thank God he rescued you. This is the message of Scripture all through the Old Testament, even as God spoke to Jeremiah.

I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for a welfare, plans for your welfare, not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. For Israel, that was the message. I am the God that gives you hope.

I am the God who rescues. I'm the God who saves you from your sin. Aren't you glad we have a sovereign God? Second observation is not only we see his sovereignty, but we see his redemptive plan.

It's redemption. He's coming to save. He's not coming like the police officer that's just coming after you. No offense to our brothers in arms. They have a role to play, given by God.

[34:27] But, this is more than that. This is not him coming merely in justice. It's him coming in mercy and justice.

God did not break the law to redeem you, as Stephen Furtick said. He fulfilled the law. He rescued us in perfect harmony of grace, mercy, justice, all together, love, all wrapped up.

And it's the redemptive plan of God. A message that was going from Jerusalem, as he said, to Judea, to the Gentiles. This is the progression of the Great Commission through Acts. As they are filled with the Holy Spirit, they are told, as apostles, and when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And now you see that same commission playing out in Paul's life. Not just to the apostles, to Paul. [35:37] Redemptive plan. When Isaiah is describing the coming Messiah, that's the kind of words he uses. God speaks to Isaiah and says, it is too light a thing that you should merely be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.

I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Why, Jesus came. The redemptive plan of God.

This is the fulfillment of everything we see in the whole narrative of the Bible. from Genesis to Revelation. The fall of man in the garden. And the message there is that you're going to you're going to bruise Satan's head.

The seed that's coming through you, Eve. You're going to bruise Satan's head. You're going to give a lethal blow. It's going to bruise your heel. And this message of the Messiah that's going to come is the message of the Bible.

It's the redemptive plan of God. And Paul is unfolding that redemptive plan. Why was he saved at all? To be part of the redemptive plan. That God was going to use him to reveal the Gospel to people that have never heard it.

[36:55] Why has God saved you? God saved you with this same purpose. The redemptive plan of God so that you will proclaim His glory until He comes.

Not just so that you can be saved from your sin. That's part of salvation. But you've been called to be a disciple of Jesus. That's the call.

Number three, the observation is just the grace that comes in His sustaining power. Paul describes here the hardships.

They were trying to kill me. He said, I was preaching the Gospel. Doing the right thing. And as he described in verse 22, it was the Lord who helped me all along.

The Lord was my helper. Grace of sustaining power to we who believe. Isn't that good? That's what we see in Paul's life, man.

[38:05] God was pouring out His grace in Paul's life and giving him strength to carry on. You see over and over that Paul's sharing his testimony. And what does he share?

2 Corinthians 12, 19 as he gives the picture of God's grace. My grace is sufficient for you. I had a thorn in my flesh and I was suffering. And God said, my grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, Paul said, I will glory all the more in my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell on me. And we need God's strength.

Number four, we see the calling and commission in Paul's life that shows the transformation. And he went from persecutor of the church to proclaimer of the gospel.

Man, what a transition, right? Is everybody's story going to be that dramatic? Well, maybe not. But there is going to be clarity. For him, it was dramatic.

[39:11] You see the evidence of this over and over as he describes his testimony through Acts. You see the picture of transformation in his own words.

Describes himself over and over as a witness just as he does here. You're going to be a witness to these things. What does a witness do? A witness testifies to something that you've seen and heard. Peter said, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Why? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Who's he talking to? All the believers. It is the plan of God to commission those who he calls. All of us who are called to salvation are commissioned to this work.

That's what we see in Paul. So that's the excitement that comes from this. These are some great insights for us, encouragements for us to get some clarity.

[40:18] Why is it important that you know your testimony? Why is it important that you can clearly tell this? Because this is the platform God has given you to proclaim the gospel.

Isn't that good? Enthusiasm. That ought to get us fired up. To know that the sovereign God had a redemptive plan who has grace poured out into my life to empower me for this work that he has called me to do.

He's going to give me the strength. He's going to give me the wisdom. He's going to grow me. Everything belongs to him. So now we come to the testimony part.

What is it that you're going to share in this as you tell your testimony, as you tell your story?

Because the reality is a testimony of divine conversion that does not clearly depict a changed life will never encourage someone to change.

You realize that? If your life was great and your experience in coming to Christ was just kind of a hazy thing, what are you encouraging somebody else to do?

[41:40] Why would they change from where they're at when they see no change in you? The reality is this is a phase of critical importance for us as we share our testimony.

So what are we going to share? Number one, you're going to describe how Christ has transformed your purpose. And if your purpose hasn't been transformed, you need to ask yourself, well, have I been redeemed?

Is there a transformation that I've been changed from? Did I experience Christ in a moment of time and put my faith and trust in him? And is my life now a life of transformed purpose?

Notice he used the word obedient. I was not disobedient to the heavenly call. And then I, he showed his obedience in this, I declared first to these people in Jerusalem and then to Judea and Samaria and then to the Gentiles themselves, the uttermost parts of the world, everybody else.

And I've been preaching the gospel. This is the picture of a transformed purpose. How has your purpose been transformed? We're not talking about a simple conversion to Christianity where I don't the name Christian and now I'm comfortable in my life.

[43:07] All it's done is changed me from one party to another. I was in the lost people's party and now I'm in the Christian party. I'm a party member. I'm a card carrying member of the Christian party now.

It's more than that. It's a conversion. It's a transition, a transformation of my life. It's a call to follow Christ in discipleship.

A disciple is somebody who is called to learn the words and the ways of their teacher so he can do the work of his teacher. That he can live in the ways of his teacher.

So what was the teacher doing? Jesus is the teacher. I'm not the teacher. I'm a teacher. I'm not the teacher. The teacher is Christ. Christ is the discipler in this and the reality is that my life is called in salvation to be a disciple of Jesus who is serving and witnessing.

I'm a servant and I'm a witness. What am I? I'm a servant and a witness. A witness. Now with enthusiasm. I am a servant and a witness.

[44:23] I am a servant and a witness. Man, you guys are good. We're almost ready for Florida, guys. Listen to Paul's testimony.

Acts 22, 4. As Paul gives his defense, he says, I persecuted this way to the death. Binding and delivering to prison both men and women as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

From them I received letters to the brothers and journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

This is who I was. But God. God intervened. And listen over and over through the New Testament as he shows the same message.

1 Corinthians 15, 9. For I am the least of all apostles unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God but the grace of God.

[45:39] Galatians 1, 13. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

So extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers. But when God called me by His grace and revealed His Son to me this is who I was.

I was changed by Jesus and this is who I am. And this is what I'm doing by the grace of God. This is who I am now. Philippians 3, 6.

As to zeal I was a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law I was blameless. Oh, but whatever was gained in me I have counted as lost.

I press on and let those who are mature think this way. It's because of Jesus. Have you experienced a divine conversion that so radically altered your life that it transformed the purpose of your life?

[46:44] What was it? Well, I came to faith in Christ as a 20 year old while I was in the army. And after I came to Jesus I have been trying to grow as a disciple.

I have been trying to fulfill that great commission in my life to tell others about Christ and that's why I'm telling this to you. What does that look like in your life? Number two not only the transformed purpose but I'm going to describe how Christ has provided me with overcoming strength.

That's what you heard in Joe's testimony. I've grown in grace and along the way there's been challenges and I've learned a few things along the way. Isn't it awesome to see that a testimony will just continue to grow as you walk with the Lord?

The word he uses here for the Lord I have help that comes from God in that little phrase there. I have help that comes from God. I'm preaching the gospel and they tried to kill me but I have help that comes from God.

This is part of his testimony. I've been preaching the gospel. I've been persecuted but I have help that comes from God. And when he uses this word he's using a unique word that's describing a handmaiden.

[48:07] A handmaiden. Somebody that's going to serve you. Going to give you what you need what you want. I need a drink. A handmaiden would bring you a drink. I need something to eat. A handmaiden would bring you something to eat. And yet he's describing God at work in such a way that God has been like a handmaiden to me giving me whatever I need in this preaching of the gospel and enabled me to overcome with strength.

He gave me everything I needed. Well who is the servant of God? Christ. Christ. The handmaid of God is Christ.

I have Christ. Christ has enabled me to overcome. God himself gave me the help that I needed in the person and in the work of Jesus.

And now that I have Jesus even though they're trying to kill me I'm telling you what I've got help that comes from God because I've been filled with his Holy Spirit and the God of the universe who made me is the God of the universe who saved me on his cross and gave me life and it's that God who intervened and interrupted my life with divine authority called me in a moment of time and now has given me purpose in my life and strength to make it to the end.

Amen? Amen. That's your testimony. That's your story. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[49:35] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. God of the universe is serving me I mean you think of Paul's experience did they try to kill him?

Oh they literally tried to kill him. Acts 14 in Lystra some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and they came to stone Paul they thought he was dead they drag him out of the city what does he do he gets up he goes and preaches again Acts 16 in Philippi Paul and Silas attacked by the crowd stripped beaten imprisoned without trial who helped him through that he's saying this after the fact who was it they tried to kill me over and over I had helped it came from God I overcame in Antioch and Iconium I overcame in these other cities I overcame 2nd Corinthians 11 Paul lists all the persecutions and sufferings that he endured for the gospel I received beatings three times receiving 39 lashes from the Jews five times being stoned left for dead Acts 21 in Jerusalem mob attempt attacks Paul tries to kill him

Acts 23 40 Jews form a conspiracy against Paul take an oath that they're not going to eat or drink until he's dead was he serious about this thing I had help that came from God I'm preaching to you oh governor standing before the governor military tribunal standing around leaders and dignitaries from the city all gathered around and listening to the gospel because it was God who gave him help we went to Ave Maria and we had such a great time there with that church but we in Ave Maria the

name comes because this is a very Catholic city very Catholic Catholic University there huge Catholic church in the middle of the city in the town square and so we went they wanted to show us because it's an elaborate building there right in the middle so we went in we looked at it I prayed over everything in that building Lord show them the true gospel show them the light all the icons everywhere and whatever we come outside as we leave there's a lady standing outside the building and she comes up to us and she's like hey I just want to did you guys enjoy your tour or whatever and we said yeah it was neat and we said well I've got an amulet of St. Christopher I want to give to you no thank you oh no no no this this is there's healing power with this there's testimony after testimony of people that wore this and were protected from death and etc etc etc you know the scripture actually says that there's only one intercessor between God and man and that's Christ Jesus the righteous and so I I don't need that she went on and on and on telling us oh no Catholic church is the only true church

[53:13] Brandy said no it's not if you believe that gospel you're going to go to hell you know I mean so it's like we had this conversation we were as polite as we could be but not going to back down and not you know I don't need magic beams okay I've got the son of God in my life Jesus Christ has filled me through his Holy Spirit I've got everything according to the scripture that pertains to life and godliness and it's all in Jesus I don't need anything else I don't need Mary she said will intercede for you she's a mother who cares I said she can't care more than Jesus I've got Jesus that's all I need and we back and forth kept on going she was entrenched in her position and we were certainly entrenched in ours but I'm just telling you the reality of this is I've got what I need the strength that I have is in Christ who is in me he's in me I can fulfill the mission of God in my life and every distraction that comes along to keep you from that and you've got them right now

I know what's going on in so many of your families Landon's health and it's scary you're like what's going on with him Shep dealing with your stuff families that have got kids that are dealing with mental health issues and distraction and over and over just things that are going on in your families right here in this room and I'm here to tell you the good news every one of those things that you overcome just adds to your testimony everything that Satan means for evil God transforms it in a moment your divorce your difficulty your financial ruin all those things that have happened and you're like oh where's God God's going to use every bit of that in your life every sickness every illness every problem every circumstance everything that Satan throws at you to try to destroy you is all defied by Christ and he takes those things because you have a commission in your life that now can become part of your testimony my son almost my son almost died from cancer Satan could have destroyed us right mom but I had help that came from God my daughter got cancer whoo could have destroyed us I had help that came from God and I can go back through a hundred things in these last five years where Satan meant everything for evil but I had help that came from God and so I stand before you today and I'm still preaching the gospel because the gospel is what matters and Jesus is able to take all of those things and give me all the strength I need to fulfill every part of the calling he has placed in my life and yours that's why Paul would say it's according to the riches of his glory that I'm praying that you may be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being that's what he told the Ephesians because you have Christ that's why he told them in Ephesians 6 finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might why?

because you have help that comes from the Lord Jesus said little children you are from God and have overcome them for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world when you have Christ you have everything Paul told Timothy for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and of self-control why?

[58:01] because you have help that comes from God thanks be to God Paul said 1 Corinthians 15 57 who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ Christ and when Paul comes to the end when he's facing the Roman court 2 Timothy 4 7 he writes Timothy I have fought the good fight finished the race I kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to

me on that day and not only to me but also to all those who have loved his appearing no you cannot understand your life until you look backwards but it's got to be lived forwards a divine conversion that compares my past without Christ confronts me in a personal encounter with Christ in a moment of time and commissions me with power from Christ that will carry me into eternity let's get our story straight let's preach Christ you may come to this message and you may say well

I'm looking at my past I can't see the distinction the answer is maybe there's not one maybe there is that you just need to dig and look and examine and see maybe you're not able to articulate it until you really examine it you need to examine it you better have this down there needs to be a moment of time that you can look to where you say this was a moment in time where I was confronted with the reality of Christ I responded in repentance and faith there needs to be that moment of time it's not a big there's a process where God's at work for sure there's a moment in time where transformation takes place and if you don't have that your next step is to be transformed by Christ maybe he's showing you for this very reason and if your life your life purpose has not been transformed realizing that you have actually been called to do something you either need to get on board or you need to recognize that you've never been born again

Spurgeon said we are all either missionaries or we are hypocrites get your story straight let's preach father we come before you today we praise you we we are so grateful for the example you give us in Paul in your word the clarity of this is astounding Lord I realize for some it brings insecurity because they cannot nail this down Lord I pray for grace in their life to help them work through this issue and nail it down once and for all that they might not be tossed about by the wind not knowing what to believe but Lord that you would solidify this issue in their heart and mind once and for all and there are some here today

Lord that the gnawing reality in their heart is the reason for the lack of clarity is because they've never surrendered their life to Christ today Lord my prayer for them is that you would just reveal yourself show your glory apart from a work of your Holy Spirit can't see through the preaching of the gospel Lord I pray that you would open eyes to see and that today someone would say Lord I'm coming to you as a sinner I've never been changed but I'm coming and today I'm surrendering my life to you and I'm giving I see you for who you I know you died for my sin I know you rose again I know you're the son of God I believe that to be true I don't understand it all but I believe it to be true and Lord I pray that in that moment of surrender and turning from sin and turning in faith to you I pray that today this very day they would be saved born again changed transitioned from death to life and Lord for those that are saved I pray today will be just a recognition of our calling in our life that you would just reignite the fire in us to proclaim you to clarify our story and use that platform to tell the message of

Jesus may you be at work in our hearts and for families today that are just struggling with so many weights things that Satan is just bound them with problems and issues I pray today would be a day of release that they would surrender those things at your feet that they would lay their son or daughter at your feet their family issue their crisis their situation lay it at your feet and trust you with it and Lord I pray that in each of those circumstances you would reveal yourself as the mighty God who helps Lord may you work as only you can we pray this all in Jesus name amen let's all stand together we have this invitation time it's an open time for you to pray if you want to come and pray you can you want to pray where you're at if you want to pray together with someone grab them by the arm pull them to the side if you want to pray with me

[64:17] I'll be down here in the corner I'd love to pray with you whatever it is God's doing in your life let him do it I'll be down three at here in you and I'll be down through and you and I'll be ETF I depend on you.

I depend on you. You're the way, the truth and the light. You're the well that never won't try.

I'm a man with you all mine. Falling close and teaching you to the right.

I depend on you.

I depend on you. Falling close and teaching you to the right.

[66:17] I depend on you. I depend on you. You are the way to the truth and the light.

You are the world that never will try. I'm the rain and the new world of mine. You are the way to the truth and the light.

I need my strength, my strong and the light. I need my own, my children, my life. I need my own, my world of mine.

The Lord doesn't teach me to my heart. I need my own, my children, my children.

I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children.

[67:23] I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children.

I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children.

I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children.

I need my own, my children. I need my own, my children.

He must take my strong in the light. He is my hope, my treasure of Christ. I am a God for everyone.

[68:29] You are my God for teaching you tonight. Amen, amen.

You can be seated. Be seated for just a second. Let me ask the Kramers to come on up. It was great that Joe got to share his testimony today, just in hearing the before and what happened and the after and just as he's been working through this.

At the same time, not without coincidence, he's been working through this. He and Leslie have been working with Kimberly through this. And in talking about her relationship with Christ, she made a decision a long time ago.

I don't remember how long. About four years ago. So I made a decision, but as she looks back, she doesn't remember. And she can't remember the details of it. I can't remember the before.

And so as they've walked through this, she and they together, as they've talked for several weeks about this and walked through this, she has come to the place where she settled the issue once and for all.

[69:56] She asked Jesus to come into her life. She knows what she's doing and she's ready to serve Christ. So if you rejoice. And so we're going to pray for you, Kimberly.

And just as God has begun this work in you, I've seen this in other kids that God has solidified things in their life in the same way. I know my kids went through that too.

And that's the testimony of a lot of people that making a decision, but can't remember some of those details. Because you don't want to go into eternity with that kind of testimony. You want to go into eternity with certainty.

Amen. And so we're so excited, Kimberly, for what God's doing in your life. And together, you're surrounded by people that are going to help you and encourage you in every way. Your parents are obviously a strong force in that.

And we're going to encourage them and support them in that work. But we're together for the sake of the gospel here. And we're going to encourage that too. So man, praise the Lord what he's done. Aaron Archambault, you'll want to say something to Kimberly as we're done here, just as a word of encouragement.

[71:03] You don't have to stand up here, though. You can just go back to your seat. But then Aaron's going to come. He's got announcements to make. And this is my mobile microphone at this point. I think our announcements are going to be up here on the back.

But I wanted to just remind you guys that we are meeting on Wednesday nights. We started back this week at Brent and Daris. And we are going through the 1689 Confession.

There are some on the back. I would encourage you guys. David started this out this last week. And I would encourage you guys to start reading through this if you haven't already. And I would even encourage you to bring it with you as we go through it.

It's a wonderful document. And we're going to spend some weeks going through this. Regarding Wednesday nights, you know, we've been meeting at Brent and Daris. We're still working on the space. We're still trying to get some other locations so that we have a more permanent space.

We've asked about the K-Life building where we're here, where we're at right now. And having this space on Wednesday nights as well. And we just asked them this week. We also have asked about another location.

[72:06] So we're working on a more permanent space for Wednesday. So just be in prayer about that, that God would lead us to where he wants us to be. We know we need a space to kind of meet on a more regular basis.

And so anyway, just be praying about that. As far as this week, we do have gin moms. I think it is this week, right? Next week. I'm sorry. March 11.

And so that's coming up. Of course, we've got Easter coming up at the end of this month. Let's see.

What else was I supposed to mention? What?

Oh, deacon nomination ends today. So if you could get those in today, and I think we've got, yeah, you can scan that and put those in electronically. Also, the constitution that we presented last week, that's online.

We're going to give a few weeks for you guys to read through that. If you have questions or comments, please let us know. And then we can get that finalized here in a few more weeks.

[73:08] I love you guys. I really do. I love being here. I love being here. I love being here.