

# Setting the Course

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Date: 08 January 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ]    Truthfully, I never thought that this day would come.

And for you who are probably relatively new to this ministry,! I had moved down here before my family had moved, and I was staying in the parsonage, right, the house that is right in front of the church.

And I remember looking out across the field that was there at that time with a sober sense of frailty and fear.

I remember distinctly thinking to myself, I won't last here six months. I had been pastoring in a small rural church in northeastern Ohio that, truthfully, when I went there, I intended to be buried in that community.

I am one who has believed from childhood on that lasting relationships take work but also are worth it. I was called by this congregation.

[ 1 : 31 ]    Judith and I had been members here before I was called to the pastorate in northeastern Ohio. And so it was the only call I received as a young pastor that I attended to.

And I can remember arguing a little bit with God and saying I don't want to leave where I was. Maranatha was a larger church and a much bigger ministry, and I truthfully didn't think I would make it for six months.

I am here today because of the grace of God, because of the persistent prayers of God's people.

No pastor will ever endure without that. I'm also here because many of you over and over again gently admonished me and corrected and instructed, and God gave me a willingness to hear.

As a younger man, I was rather brassy. I still can be that way. As I'm leaving the home this morning, I said to Judith, please pray for my humility.

[ 3 : 00 ]    It's a lifelong battle. And you have ministered to me. I'm thankful. Ah, well, there's a part that I really like to say.

Turn in your Bibles. I trust that John's prayer this morning, which I found to be reflective of things that you should pray when the Word of God is opened, I trust that it will not be the only prayer that will take place in the remainder of our time together.

With that said, I want you to turn to John chapter 17, and we're going to look at verse 18 as a frame. We're going to think this morning about setting our course for 2017.

This month, January, the remainder of it, at least for the next four weeks, what is going to happen is I'm going to preach this Sunday. Pastor Shearer will preach next Sunday.

I will preach the Sunday after that, and then he will preach the Sunday after that. First and third, Kenoyer. Second and fourth, Shearer. After that, we will work on a preaching rotation that will bring each of us to the pulpit roughly about 50% for the remainder of the year, give or take.

[ 4 : 33 ] Please don't keep a tab on how many times we are in, because I just tell you up front, there's always going to be little hiccups in life. Pastor Shearer is going to be going to California where Sarah's family is.

They're going to be gone for three full weeks, so you may have me for three weeks extra there, but bear with it. It's all right. We'll get there. He'll make it up. But the purpose of this process of transition is an illustration of this congregation's very deliberate approach to ministry.

And while I am going to address what we would call strategic initiatives this Sunday, and Pastor Shearer will follow up with that next Sunday, I want you to understand that it is not something that we discuss only on this Sunday, because if you were to think in any frame of what has taken place over the last several years, you would understand that this congregation and its prayer life and the energy of your thoughts and affections in part have been part of a strategic initiative of deliberately seeking a man that will take the ministry into our next phase and place.

It has been something that we prayed about. You as a congregation agreed to over two years ago. A search committee that was framed at that time spent about two years seeking out a man that we would call our senior pastor-elect, and God brought him to us about, give or take, nine months ago.

That was a strategic initiative. I can't say that the transition has been finished, but I will say that I am thankful for the process and progress and blessing that it has been to all of us.

[ 6 : 40 ] And when Pastor Shearer and I began praying and thinking together, one of the things that we began to discuss very early in our time as companions in the gospel was, okay, what are the things that we believe together God wants us to focus on?

Pastor Shearer, in particular, was the one who set the frame of the matter of our working at being the kind of neighbors that God wants us to be. And he is going to take next week to kind of dive into that in greater detail and lay out an overview of what our small group ministries are going to be studying together for the next 12 weeks.

Providentially, it will end up that the conclusion to the neighboring lessons that we're going to study are going to land right up against, guess what, national, spiritual, significant day, Easter.

And I trust that we as a fellowship make our efforts and interest in ministering to other people that God puts us around more than just an event activity, but something that ends up being part of our DNA as a family of believers.

So as we come to this matter of strategic initiatives, let me break it down into very, very simple terms and say, for one, we are committed to follow His instruction. We are committed to find the particulars of what He has for us.

[ 8 : 15 ] And then we are here also to affirm the affection that God wants us to have one for another in the family of God. I want us to think, first of all, this morning about following a command.

We have some responsibility of recognizing a responsibility that He's put on us. And that's the reason I had you look there in John chapter 17, verse 18. Let me read the passage for you there.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. That little word, as, is one that carries a tremendous amount of significance and value.

And the reason I say that is because that word communicates to us just exactly what Jesus meant when He said, hey, I'm sending you out into the world.

We get sometimes lost up in the details of our lives and the business of making a living or raising a family or seeing to it that our kids receive an education, and we forget that we are here fundamentally for something more significant than that.

[ 9:23 ] We are here because Jesus saved us. And we are here for His agenda and His objective. And so when we look at this passage and we recognize what Jesus is praying for here, just hours in front of the cross, we understand that these words communicate a very significant responsibility and instruction that He has.

He's praying for me. He's praying for you. And He says, listen, Father, in the same way, that word as means in the same way or in the same manner, for the same purpose, that You sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

So I ask you this question this morning just to kind of stop and think about it for a moment. When you think about what you're going to do tomorrow, how often do you actually stop and realize that tomorrow is a day that really is to be governed if we are thinking biblically and we're thinking in the light of eternity, tomorrow is a day to be governed by its value and effect upon the testimony and the glory of Christ?

That's the way we should be thinking. When you walk in to work, your thoughts should not be, okay, how do I get through this day so I can get to Friday, which is payday, so I can have money for whatever it is that I'm here to do.

No, no, no. When you walk into work, you're thinking to yourself, this day is a day that I have the opportunity of lifting up the glory and the supremacy of Christ and modeling the power of the gospel around me in the environment that He has placed me.

[ 11:06 ] How many of you recognize that you are where you are by divine appointment? You may think to yourself, well, I got it because of my education and because I had a better interview than so-and-so.

No, no, no. You have what you have and you are where you are because God in His grace and His purpose puts you there if you're a believer for His glory and for His purposes.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the text here this morning, but I just want to remind you that in blessing us with salvation and giving us life, it is not so that we can go about spending our energy for our own glory and our own significance, but for His.

And so I want to put it here to you in very candid terms. We are here to do the same work that Jesus came to do. We are here to do the same work that Jesus came to do.

And I want you to fix that in your mind as you think about why we are, when we gather together here as a body of believers to sit under the teaching of the Word of God, it is so that our minds and our thinking can be framed properly in the light of the Word.

[ 12:14 ] There is a natural tendency in all of us to have our hearts drift away from that which God would desire be the characteristic of our life. I think about that, the words of the song that says, prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it.

Prone to leave the God I love. And so we need the reminder of the Word of God that says, here's what you're here for. Here's why I draw breath and I'm still present here among the living and not in eternity.

And so I want you to think for a minute just for practical terms that when you go out the door tomorrow morning to go to work, you are going out the door not so you can have necessarily a second vacation home.

You're not going out so you can spend the rest of your days kind of in indolence and self-centered ambition, but you are going out the door to serve the Lord Jesus Christ that someday you are going to stand before and give an account.

And so when Jesus said these words here, there in John chapter 17, verse 18, just like you sent me, can you imagine Jesus talking to the Father and saying, hey, you know what?

[13:27] I'm glad you sent me down here. I am just having a whale of a time. I'm just enjoying the fact that everybody loves me. No, he was actively engaged in the mission and the ministry that the Father sent him to be engaged in for the testimony and the glory of the cross.

We who are his children and called to be ambassadors are here for the same mission that he sent us on. And I want you to recognize that in relationship to that command that we have to be sent for his purposes, I want you to understand that there is a day coming when each of us as a believer is going to give an account for this life.

How many of you recognize that such a day is coming? Think with me just for a moment. Turn in your Bibles. You're there in John, but I want you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10. Jesus said, I'm sending them for this reason.

I want you to recognize that the day is coming when your energy and your effectiveness in the mission that he sent you for is going to be given an account.

You're going to give an account for it. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10. So whether we are at home or away, verse 9, we make it our aim or ambition to please him.

[14:48] Question? Do you actually stop and think about that when you are at a baseball game and you're engaged in rooting on your particular child and saying, man, the most important thing is that he hit a home run or that he snagged that fly ball or that he looked spectacular or is your primary man.

I want to be sure that I bring glory to Christ in what I'm doing. How many of you fathers here have ever stepped across the line and had to ask forgiveness for getting too wound up about the game?

I'm one of them. I have to remind myself, this is for the glory of Christ. And here in verse 9, it says, I make it my ambition to please him. Verse 10, for, why do I make it my ambition to please him?

For, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. The day is coming when I am going to give an account and you are going to give an account for the way in which you use the life that he gave you and use the abilities and resources the energy that he has appointed to you.

He's going to say, what did you do with what I gave you? I want you to look at another passage in relationship to this. If you will, go to Romans chapter 14, go back a little bit to Romans chapter 14, verse 10 through 12.

[16:10] Part of what my point is in relationship to these different passages is that this issue of being accountable to the Lord Jesus for my life is not just a single statement made in one passage, but it is a theme running through the scriptures.

Romans chapter 14, verse 10. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Are you? Why do you despise your brother?

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us will give an account for himself to God.

The day is coming when you, when I, will stand before the Lord and give an account for our life. And in relationship to that, I want you to understand that we are going to be judged on the basis of the gifts that we've received and the responsibilities we have.

And so if Jesus says to me, Tim, I am sending you out to do basically the same thing that my father was sent out to do. How's it going to go when he finally says, and how did you do at the job I gave you?

[17:24] And I say, well, you know, I didn't have much time. The truth of the matter is, is I was really interested in my retirement home. I really didn't have much time because I was so deeply invested in athletics.

I didn't have much time because, you know what, you made me the way I am and I really like deer hunting and so I, you know, I can't do deer hunting and help people move at the same time. You know, I just have to decide which is more important.

Do you follow that? Yeah, you think he's going to say, attaboy, Tim, that's a good guy. I really appreciate the fact you were self-focused. No. I want you to turn to one more passage.

Let's get very practical about this. 1 Corinthians 3, verse 13. Each one's works will become manifest for the day will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

[18:46] Hey, ask yourself the question. When the day comes that you will give an account for the way you have used your life and your resources are some of the things that you have invested your energy and your resources in going to amount to a hill of beans in the scope of eternity?

And the answer is for some, no. For some, no. And so as we think about being intentional as a body of believers, it's appropriate to call us to the task to recognize, hey, he sent me, he sent you for the same thing, for the same purpose.

My life is to draw attention to the glory of the gospel and the power of the cross and at the end of the day what I do to bring testimony to the supremacy of Christ is all that counts in the scope of eternity.

A little sign in our home, a reminder to me, my wife put it up, it says, only one life will soon be passed.

I remember looking at that in my early 30s and think, what? How many of you remember being 30? How many of you aren't there yet? For you who aren't there yet, you're thinking, it will take forever.

[20:01] I remember looking at that sign in my 30s, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last. And I thought, yeah, I'm 30.

A little poem you can remember and remind yourself that the day is coming that you will give an account to the Lord Jesus. And so, with a firm understanding of the fact that you're going to give an account to the Lord and that the things that you do that have no eternal value and significance are not going to last and are not going to bring credit to His name nor give you a crown of glory that you can give to the Lord Jesus.

Let's think secondly, one is we're going to be judged, but secondly, I want you to find some direction for what we do in relationship to this matter of accounting and responsibility. I want you to turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 10 verse 25 through 37.

I'll tell you that next week Pastor Shearer is going to teach on this passage in a far more extensive fashion, but we're looking at a little text here where Jesus has an attorney come to Him.

Verse 25, Behold, a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Hey, hey, what do I need to do to be saved?

[21:27] And I want you to understand that in the thinking of the majority of the culture in which this question was posed, the way in which you worked your way into heaven was by being a good person, doing good works, doing the right things.

And Jesus answered him in essence and said what? He said, You know, you are to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself. The first and second commandment.

It's interesting to see there in verse 29, but he, desiring to justify himself, what does it mean when it says to justify himself? What he was trying to do was set very specific boundaries on just how loving he really was.

Hey, everybody smile just for a minute because I'm talking to you. Huh? You listening? There are some people we're great at loving. Did you know that the Lord Jesus intends to bring people into your sphere of influence that you are really going to struggle at loving?

How many of you learned that already? And how many of you learned that when you do your best to push them out of the circle, hello, Jesus hates a vacuum and he replaces them.

[ 22:45 ] Does that make sense? Sometimes we try to push them out by being snarky. Sometimes we try to push them out by just avoiding. They're all different kinds of strategies and he keeps on bringing replacements.

The attorney was saying, okay, okay, I get this loving deal but can I draw a little circle, us four and no more kind of thing? There are some people I do love. Oh, I'm really good at it.

And so what happens we find here when this guy puts his foot in his mouth and tries to justify himself that Jesus tells a little story. Now you always know you're in trouble when Jesus uses a story.

Isn't that right? Huh? You got that one figured out? He's trying to ding you and he's trying to do it gently. Okay? It's like, Bubba, you're not getting this one so I'm going to use a little story to kind of let the thing sink in.

And Jesus tells the story about the good Samaritan. who actually steps in where two other individuals, a priest, if anybody had formal responsibility to show mercy to a wounded fellow Jew, it would have been a priest and a Levite.

[ 24:04 ] You follow that? I got to tell you, when it comes to moves on Saturdays, pastor will be there. One of the reasons that I'm going to be there and Pastor Shearer and Pastor Andrew, it's not because we're paid to do it, but we are examples to the flock of God.

Does that make sense? I shouldn't expect you to do something that I'm not willing to do. Now I'm telling you, I'm at the point where I don't carry washing machines like I used to. And that's why I like heavy lifters.

Do you know who a heavy lifter is? The guys between, I was reading this morning in my devotions where that the Levites, they started working at 25 and they quit at 50. Does anybody know why they did that?

That was the heavy lifting phase. Some of you are maybe 24, but I give you an exemption. You can go ahead. Join the crowd.

The point that I want you to recognize here in this passage is that this business of who we love is something that he has charged us with a responsibility to.

[ 25:10 ] And the way we go about doing that love is something that's pretty significant. He wants us to recognize this. The story of the Good Samaritan is an illustration of just how far biblical love takes us.

And by the way, who is it that we're responsible for loving? Not just those that we're familiar and friendly with, but all those that God puts in our path. And so as you look at this passage, you recognize that the responsibility we have of loving and serving other people is something that is far more significant than we may think.

I want you to recognize that often what you do precedes what you say. And the way in which we behave and serve one another is a gospel testimony long before we have an opportunity of actually sharing the truth of how salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you understand that? Most of the time, people come to Christ not because of drive-by witnessing. What does drive-by witnessing reference? Truth of the matter is, I'll tell you, I remember in India when we would go out in the cars, and there weren't very many cars when I was growing up in India, I can tell you that, and just the car driving down the road was a media event.

And we thought that one of the very efficient ways of passing out tracks was to just kind of take a wad of them and kind of fan them out in the slipstream of the car. Do you know what happened with tracks when you put them out the window in a slipstream of a car?

[ 26 : 44 ] Today, we would call it littering here in America, but out in India was track passing. I mean, hundreds of them, people would pick them up.

I'm not real sure what they did with them, but we passed them out. I've got to tell you something. Drive-by ministry like that is grossly ineffective.

You follow that? People don't need that. What people need is they need to see people that are willing to be good Samaritans to the needs that people have and it is when we are being good Samaritans that God opens up the gospel opportunities.

So I want you to stop and realize that when you look at this passage and we're going to deal with this matter more carefully, in this coming year, we want our fellowship to be more intentional in our efforts to meet the needs of people who need Jesus.

I want it to be something that is a conversation point, not just for talking, but because we're sharing things that we're going to be praying about together, that we are ministering to our neighbors.

[ 27 : 56 ] Let me ask a question just for a second. How many of you can name, let's try this, just raise your hands if you can, how many of you can name at least six different families that are within eyeshot of your home?

Just six. Six. You can name six different families that are within eyeshot of your home. I'm not going to have you raise your hands on this one. How many of you are consciously and deliberately praying for those six different families?

Would that be an appropriate thing to do? How many of you are actively engaged in doing acts of ministry and service that show them that you love them and are interested in them?

By the way, we've only had one snow so far this year that was worthy of my snowblower. But guess what I was doing with my snowblower after I got it fired up?

Oh, we have three snowblowers in the garage that we're trying to give away. There's no cost associated. Just take them. Done. After I got it fired up, I'm scampering up and down the neighborhood.

[ 29 : 04 ] Guess what I'm doing? Blowing snow. Why am I doing that? Because I'm a Baptist pastor. No, because God wants me to be a Samaritan. And by the way, those activities end up being things that resonate significantly in the lives of unbelievers because they want to know, why are you doing this?

So when we think about the direction for this fellowship, one of the things that we are going to work at, we are going to recognize that Christ brought us here into this world. He kept us here. He brought us to salvation and we are here for the well-being and the gospel testimony.

And so how are we going to go about doing it? We're going to minister people's needs. We are here to show his heart. We are here to show his heart. And this coming year, consciously and deliberately, we are going to consciously set aside time.

We're going to be engaged in activities that are going to allow us to minister more directly in the neighborhoods that he has put us in. give you an illustration.

On July the 4th, it is a big holiday weekend here in our community. Isn't that right? I mean, I live on the west side and people, I'm not sure if it's gunfire or firecrackers, but I got to tell you, it goes on for a solid week and a half.

[ 30 : 27 ] Judith is in the nursery, but she'll testify. She says, is that gunfire or is that firecrackers? I don't know. But July the 4th is a great time to invite people over for a barbecue, right?

Okay? It's a great time to build relationship. Memorial Day, Labor Day, there are times that we are going to consciously and deliberately focus on how do we develop closer relationships with our neighbors.

Why? Because we're here to show his heart and to minister to people. The other thing that we're going to focus on this year is to affirm our distinction as a group of people that know Christ.

I want you to look in your Bible. You're there in Luke, but I want you to turn over to John 17, verse 23. John 17, verse 23. Here's Jesus praying, I in them and you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me.

Now, I want you to have an underline that you place under that little statement so that the world may know that you sent me. How will the world know that the Father sent Jesus?

[ 31 : 44 ] In that passage, how will the world know that the Father sent Jesus? Banner? Public testimony? Passing out tracts?

Pass. No. It will be the way in which we get along with one another in the family of God. Isn't that right? How many of you have noticed that some of the neighbors that you have really don't like each other?

Have you noticed that? I'm amazed at how quickly people in my neighborhood are ready to tell me other things about my neighbors that I don't need to know and how irritated they are at the fact that when they walk their dogs, their dogs don't have social etiquette.

Did you read the tea leaves on that one? And they're concerned about the way some people mow their lawns. I mean, do I need to know? No.

The unbelieving world is at odds with each other all the time. And the thing that should characterize believers is that we have relationships that are marked by affection and by unity.

[ 32 : 58 ] So what's it going to take for us to have a better testimony to the unbelieving world? Let me kind of rattle off a quick one. Number one, by being quicker to show our love and not in going out gossiping.

How's that one? Can you write that one down? Just tag it there. Be quicker to show our love and not going out gossiping. Galatians chapter 6 verse 1 and 2. Does anybody know what it says? It says, when you see a brother overtaken in a fault, you don't bring it up in a prayer room.

What do you do? You go to that person alone and let him know the concern that you have. I said to the deacons, yesterday morning, I said, you know what?

A pastoral ministry would be easier if God's people consistently practiced Matthew 18 verse 15. Does anybody know what that passage is? If you've got a problem, do what? Ask a neighbor to pray with you about it.

Tell three other people so they can kind of share with you their concern and their similarity. No, no, no. Go talk to that person privately and say, hey. So we're going to work at that.

[ 34 : 07 ] We're going to work at helping one another not let things fester. We're going to work to be conscious and deliberate in encouraging one another to love each other.

In 1 John chapter 3 verse 14 and again in 1 John chapter 4 verse 20, the apostle makes this very, very clear connection that the thing that proves the authenticity of our conversion is not our theological quiz score but our genuine affection for one another.

And by the way, when there is genuine affection, one of the things that characterizes that genuine affection is that we tell the truth in what? What? In love.

We don't let the sun go down on our wrath. I've got to tell you one of the things that blows me away. When I hear about a believer that has had some problem festering with another believer for decades, a situation where a person was not willing to go into a room to work on a project with another person because the person in that room they were irritated with, that's not effective gospel living.

Amen? And we're going to work at that. And all God's people said, yes, that's a good idea. Let's try that again because I know I'm a little enthusiastic about that and you guys are coming close to going to sleep.

[ 35 : 35 ] Let's try that again. We're going to work at that. Yes! So, if you have a problem with me, and I'll give you an opportunity, not on purpose.

If you have a problem with me, don't tell everybody else, come and tell me. And, if I come to you and I'm having a problem with Jack, so you understand this, if I come to you and I'm having a problem with Jack and you figure out that I'm having a problem with Jack, what you say, Jack's my friend.

I'm using him as an illustration so that you don't go out and put on something on Facebook about Jack and I not getting along together. I had to stop. Well, we'll try Pastor Saul too. Jack and Pastor Saul, I'm talking to you about both of them.

you say, Pastor, here's the standard thing God's people need to say. How did it go when you talked to Jack?

Let's try that. How did it go when you talked to Jack? I'll say it slower so you can get it. How did it go when you talked to Jack? You guys are with it.

[ 36 : 46 ] Hey, I'm going to get to retire early. You get this Matthew 18, 15 thing down, it won't be a problem. I can go out and deal a whole lot more with people that don't know Jesus.

Amen? There are some of us here that need to be convicted about not being doing this right now. Do you understand that point? Why would a pastor preach on something that has no relevance to the God-fearing people that he stands in front of?

I don't want this to be a problem in the future, beloved. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's close.

Father, I think about the words of Zechariah, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord. You intend for us to be a godly, holy, gospel-passionate people that were drawn out of the pit, ruined, broken, called to be servants of the living God, to live holy, passionate lives for the glory of Christ, loving the lost and loving one another.

And we are convicted that we need to grow in this area this year. we ask for the power of the spirit to break our hearts and to energize us for the testimony of Christ.

[ 38 : 17 ] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.