

A Passion for Church Planting

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My heart is so filled with thanksgiving - with gratitude to God. It is enough for me simply to be in this room with all of you, because of the great love that I have for you, and the deep joy that I have because of you. I thank God all the more to be here on this special occasion this week, celebrating together 40 years of the faithfulness of God to our beloved Sovereign Grace Churches.

God indeed has been very faithful. It has been my prayer that he would use each of these messages that we have been so well served by and that he would use this message, in particular, to prepare us for the future, I'd like to invite you to please turn to [Acts 14](#). Mark Prater recently talked with me and with others about the importance of church planting in our future. He has shared his sense that we are about to enjoy a wave of planting new churches.

What I want to do is take that burden, take that sense that Mark shared with me which I and the entire leadership team share as well. I want to envision us for the priority of church planting as we move into the next 40 years of partnership. My title is *Planting for Christ: A Dream For the Future of Sovereign Grace*.

[Acts 14](#), we'll begin reading in verse 19.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. **20** But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. **21** When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, **22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. **23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. **25** And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, **26** and from there they

sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

May God bless the preaching of His Word.

In 1859, on the afternoon of Tuesday, August 16th, the foundation stone was laid for the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Beneath the stone, they placed a large ceramic jar containing a Bible, a confession of faith, a hymnbook, and a program of the day's events. The 25-year-old pastor, Charles Spurgeon, and his father, each gave an address during that ceremony.

Charles Spurgeon, speaking to a crowd of some 3,000 people that day, lifted his voice and said,

"God, sparing my life, if I have my people at my back, I will not rest till the dark country of Surrey be filled with places of worship. I look on this tabernacle as only the beginning. Within the last six months, we have started two churches, one in Wandsworth, and the other in Greenwich, and what we have done in two places I am about to do in a third and we will do it not for the third or the fourth, but for the hundredth time, God being our helper."

Spurgeon was expressing a desire, a dream, that the Metropolitan Tabernacle be used by God to plant 100 churches in and around London. His prayer was that this new church building would be used to bring many more churches into existence. Spurgeon, of course, was not motivated by numbers, nor did he confuse numbers with success. He wasn't so much setting a strategic numerical goal as he was expressing his desires and his hopes for the future.

It was a time of great revival in London, and the young Charles Spurgeon was a man of faith who sensed that the winds of the spirit were blowing and he couldn't help but to dream. The Pastors' College had already been established, and it had the goal of raising up pastors and church planters. Spurgeon was always on the lookout for where new churches could be planted. Now listen to this. During the first five years in their new building, they formed 18 new churches in London alone. At the 10-year mark, 50 churches had been planted by Pastors' Collegemen. By the late 1870s, over 130 churches had been planted from the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

When Spurgeon died in 1892 at the age of 57, nearly 200 churches had been planted in and around London from the Tabernacle with many others being

planted throughout the world. Charles Spurgeon was a remarkable man. He is collectively our historical hero. If you're a Sovereign Grace pastor, Charles Spurgeon is your historical hero. You actually don't get to choose.

We study his life and ministry, not so much for imitation but for inspiration. It's not so much, here's how you too can do with your life what Spurgeon did with his life. That's going to be, step one, you're not Charles Spurgeon, step two, stop trying.

Yet, oh, what inspiration we find in this man of God. Spurgeon was not only the prince of preachers, he was a master of mobilizing people for mission and was skilled brilliantly so at organizing systems and delegating the work to carry out that cause. Spurgeon started his monthly publication, *The Sword and the Trowel*, in large part, to give information on new churches that were planted.

In one issue in 1878, he reported on the work of the Pastors' College, and he wrote that from the beginning, their plan with the Pastors' College "was not only to train students, but to found churches." Then over the next 29 pages of that month's issue, he documents the stories of 50 churches and how they were planted, and what Christians can do to support these congregations.

In 1881, Spurgeon wrote,

"It is my greatest pleasure to aid in commencing new churches."

In one sermon at the Tabernacle, Spurgeon said this,

"It is with cheerfulness that we dismiss our 12s, our 20s, our 50s, to form other churches. We encourage our members to leave us to found other churches. We seek to persuade them to do it. We ask them to scatter throughout the land and become the goodly seed which God shall bless." Then he says this, "I believe that so long as we do this, we shall prosper."

Spurgeon knew that the sending church is a prospering church. The church that sows in abundance will reap in abundance. Starting new churches is not an easy work, it involves great sacrifice and cost, but so long as the church prioritizes church planting, so long as a denomination prioritizes church planting, we shall prosper. Here's a question. What led Charles Spurgeon in the midst of all his many responsibilities, to give such a high profile to the work of church planting? What was it that inspired and informed Spurgeon's church-planting dreams? What was it that sustained these church planting efforts throughout his life.

The answer, it was what he saw in the word of God and in the Book of Acts, in particular. In one issue of *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon wrote,

"The Christian church was designed from the first to be aggressive. It was not intended to remain stationary at any period, but to advance onward until its boundaries became commensurate with those of the world. It was to spread from Jerusalem to all Judea. From Judea to Samaria, and from Samaria to the uttermost part of the earth."

The plan upon which the apostles proceeded and the great apostle in particular in his mission to the Gentiles was to plant churches, in all the great cities and centers of influence in the known world. In great cities of influence and in small towns of no great influence the apostles planted churches, read the Book of Acts and it will light a fire in your soul for planting new churches.

This book is all about what Jesus continued to do from Heaven's throne following perfect life, his substitutionary death, his victorious resurrection for sinners. What we see in the Book of Acts as the risen and ascended Christ continues his activity in this world is that the unstoppable gospel is spreading as new churches are being planted by the Lord of the church. Christ loves the church. Christ died for the church. Christ promised that He would build His church and His promise cannot be hindered. The Book of Acts records, "This Christ is keeping His promise to build His church and He's doing it through the planting of new churches."

Earlier in [Acts 13](#), the previous chapter, "While the church in Antioch was worshiping the Lord and fasting," I hope your church does that, "they were led by the Holy Spirit to send out two of their finest leaders, Barnabas and Paul." Barnabas was that giant of gospel culture, excelling in personal generosity, encouragement, joy, service, and Paul, who had over a dozen years of ministry experience at this point was with him.

Chapters 13 and 14 record their historic travels as the gospel spreads to the Gentile world, they are armed with the message of a suffering Messiah. They are armed with a sacred zeal for the work and the goal of their mission was not simply to preach the gospel, it was to plant and strengthen local churches. Conversion creates communities. In this passage, we have an extraordinary record of Paul's unwavering zeal and resilience in the work of planting churches.

It is an account in which Paul is almost killed. While Paul and Barnabas were in the small town of Lystra, probably AD 46, there were Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium, we are told, which means traveling over 100 miles to

come and oppose their efforts. That's how you know you're hated with a special kind of hatred, when people are willing to devote all kinds of time and effort to opposing you and such as the utter folly and ignorance of some to this day.

They succeed in influencing the people of Lystra against Paul and so there is a massive change of heart in the people as they move from earlier in Chapter 14, great appreciation and even worship. They move from there to great hatred. We can't rush through the second half of verse 19 without attempting to imagine what this moment was like.

They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. Paul would later say in the context of describing his imprisonment, lashings, and shipwrecks, [2 Corinthians 11:25](#), "Once I was stoned." Stoning was a cruel act of punishment with the goal of inflicting as much pain as possible in the process of killing. They intentionally drag it out. Imagine the great apostle standing there before an angry mob with stones repeatedly striking his body.

Imagine the pain. Imagine the agony, the humiliation. Paul is bloodied, he is bruised, he falls to the ground unconscious. A victim of mob violence and brutality. The one who had previously overseen the stoning of Stephen is now himself stoned for Christ and left for dead. They drag his limp body out of the city and leave him there supposing that he was dead. He was thought to be dead by everybody who saw him.

Now, were they correct? Was their assessment of the situation accurate? Was in fact the Apostle Paul dead? No, he was not. As Mark Twain is often credited with saying, "The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

They supposed Paul was dead, but they were dead wrong. Friends, how often has the world looked upon the church of Christ supposing it to be dead? How often have we thought a good man has reached the end of fruitful ministry supposing him to be dead? How often have even faithful churches and Christians thought themselves useless? How often have we supposed all of our aspirations and dreams to be dead? When the disciples gathered around him, he rose up. He rose up.

Paul opened up his own body bag from the inside. Paul said, "Hey, you guys can stop digging my grave now. Send back the casket, cancel the funeral." God had other plans and by the power of God, he rose up. Paul gets up, bloodied, bruised, and he walks back into the city. This is like something out of a movie. He gets up and walks back into the city like, "Yes, I'm still here."

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed and this is to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Matthew Henry says,

"God's faithful servants, though they may be brought within a step of death and may be looked upon as dead, both by friends and enemies, shall not die as long as He has work for them to do."

Christian, Sovereign Grace pastor, you shall not die as long as God has work for you to do. We will each be called home in God's good and perfect timing. When we lose a dear brother, we grieve, but not as those who have no hope. Friends, as we celebrate 40 years of God's faithfulness, as we look together to the future that God has for us, we are together certain of this, God has work for us to do. God has preserved and sustained Sovereign Grace Churches. Why? Because he has work for us to do.

David Peterson in his commentary, says this,

"Paul's return to the city," described there in verse 20, "Paul's return to the city was a sign of God's care and deliverance, and an expression of Paul's own trust and confidence."

That's what this means, the return to the city. It's a sign of God's care, God's deliverance, and an expression of Paul's own trust and confidence. When I look at our churches these past 40 years, I see so many signs of God's care. I see so many signs of God's deliverance, and I see so many expressions of your trust and confidence in God.

Paul was left for dead, but he walks back into the city. For the record, I would not be going back into the city. I'd be done. That's when I call it a day, like, "Welp, it was a good running ministry. You'll find me lying on my sofa, under a blanket sipping chamomile tea." What about you? I want to urge you, I want to appeal to you. Weary saint, fainthearted saint, don't give up when you face setbacks and trials. We are not those who shrink back and are destroyed. You rise up, you enter the city, you say, "Yes, I have been beaten up. Yes, I have been bruised. My opposition is great, and my sorrows are many, but my God has work for me to do," and you get up and you enter the city.

Matthew Henry also says this, he says,

"All the stones they threw at Paul could not beat him off from his work."

Oh, how we need more pastors and churches with this kind of rugged perseverance. I see so many people in our fragile generation, especially in America, which is why we must learn from the nations, I see so many people, they face one difficulty and they throw in the towel. Paul did not give up and by the grace of God, the pastors of Sovereign Grace Churches will not give up in the shared mission God has graciously entrusted to us.

The next day, Paul goes on to Derbe with the gospel, 58 miles from Lystra, where he preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ and there are many who believe and become disciples. Verse 21, "He rose up and he continued his mission of planting churches." He's not going home. He's pressing on through southern Galatia with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Stoned and left for dead but by the power of God now preaching the gospel and planting churches for the glory of God and Paul's missionary work is given to us in scripture to provide a model, a paradigm for the mission of the church today.

His example inspires the church of Christ today, whatever her circumstances to likewise rise up and plant churches and his mission is recorded to encourage us to bring the same sacrifice, the same zeal, the same resilience to bear in our mission, which is exactly what we have sought to do these past 40 years by the grace of God.

40 years ago in the early 1980s, there was a church outside of Washington DC, the church was led by a man who describes himself as a former pothead, longhaired passionate preacher, with no formal theological training.

His name is Charles Mahaney.

In that church, there was an emerging leader that CJ was discipling. In fact, he was in CJ's first discipleship group in the church. His name was Bill Patton. Bill was a gifted young man full of the Holy Spirit, a remarkable preacher of God's word. In 1983, God made it clear to Bill, to CJ, and to the other pastors there that Bill was to lead a church planting team to the Philadelphia area.

CJ could have insisted on holding onto Bill, his gifts would certainly have been of great use, but CJ, Bill, and the other pastors had a desire to plant churches. At no small cost, Bill and Sue Patton were sent out along with Alan and Linda Redrup, and others like Bob and Val Wright, Tim and Cindy Campbell. In October of 1984, they launched Covenant Fellowship Church, where I presently have the indescribable joy of serving as a pastor.

Bill Patton, the church planter and founding senior pastor, serves alongside me as an elder, along with Mark Prater and all of the other brothers there.

Alan Redrup, the other founding pastor who we prayed for is now a pastor emeritus. He's presently very ill and likely doesn't have long to live, but his legacy and his story will not be forgotten. Every few years through our partnership with Sovereign Grace Churches, God has enabled covenant fellowship to plant another church we most often plant nearby, which greatly strengthens and enriches the experience of partnership among the churches. Church planting is not just a vision the pastors have, it's one that the entire church has.

We recognize that our church quite simply would not exist were it not for the church-planting vision that CJ, Bill, and others had nearly 40 years ago. We desire to carry forward that same New Testament vision to future generations. It was just over a month ago that Nick Kidwell and a group of dearly loved members stood in front of the church as we sent them out to plant Valley Creek Church in Malvern, Pennsylvania.

I read some sweet words that Charles Spurgeon shared with a particular church planting group of 75 people who were sent out from the Metropolitan Tabernacle. We plant churches. Friends, there are yet more churches to be planted from Sovereign Grace Churches throughout this nation and throughout the world.

David Peterson says that in the Book of Acts, despite suffering and setbacks, churches continue to be founded and nurtured by the power of the message about Jesus. How do you found churches? How do we nurture churches? By the power of the message about Jesus. This gospel is the unstoppable power of God unleashed in human history, resulting in the establishment of more gospel communities until Christ returns.

The open ending of the Book of Acts communicates that this same mission continues to this day, and that we play a part in this mission. Brothers and sisters, may it be that Sovereign Grace Churches continue to be founded and nurtured by the power of the message about Jesus. To our great joy, as you know and have heard, this is happening right now in churches that are being planted in South Carolina, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and throughout the world in places like Liberia, Germany, Mexico, Italy, and the Philippines.

Every time we plant a church, you hear from Ben and Jeremy, every time we plant a church, it is yet one more evidence among many that the ascended Christ is continuing his work. We have planted churches these 40 years, and by the grace of God, we will continue to do so as we move into yet another decade of mission for the glory of Christ. Now here's a concern I carry for us that I

want to share with you. Moving forward, it's going to be absolutely crucial for us to preserve as we have throughout our history, a resolute focus on the local church and the mission of the local church.

That is our calling. That is our lane. That's where we in Sovereign Grace do our best work. Brothers, we are pastors. I am not a sociologist, a political scientist, an economist, an epidemiologist, a cultural theorist, a philosopher, or any of these things. Moreover, I would remind you that the mission of the church as an institution is not the transformation of the country or the reconstruction of a just society. The mission of the church is to make disciples of all peoples. We do that how? The same way we have been doing it for 40 years.

Don't change the game plan. Don't abandon what has been modeled by a founding generation. We proclaim the gospel. We plant churches and we set our hope fully on the grace that will be revealed when our Lord and Savior appears. This is, this is our calling. You may say, "But our culture is so rapidly declining and the hostility is growing and foundations are eroding. What are our churches going to do?" We have the plan. We preach Christ crucified.

We will administer the sacraments. We will shepherd souls. We will not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some. We will sing, we will pray. We will love our enemies with kindness and compassion as Christ commands us. We will hope in Christ until his appearing. We will refuse to join the many on the left and on the right who are engaging this cultural moment with earthly priorities and passions and are doing so with the weapons of this world.

Brothers, I want to say to our pastors, it falls to you to courageously guard the flock in this particular way. To guard them from having a passion and concern for any cultural, political, national issue that surpasses their passion for Christ and His church. Without an unwavering focus on the local church, not the nation, the church. I'm afraid there are some pastors, none of you, but there are pastors in the evangelical world today who I'm afraid when they imagine Paul speaking to the Ephesian elders in Miletus, they imagine that he said, "Pay careful attention to the nation." He did no such thing.

Many of us find that we have our hands full, paying careful attention to ourselves and to the flock. I am concerned that without this unwavering focus on the local church, I'm concerned that cultural engagement and social concerns, however legitimate they may be, have the great potential to displace the gospel, to draw us into areas that are emphatically not our expertise, to divide us, and to distract us from our mission.

Brothers and sisters, we love the church. We have a passion for the church. We plant and strengthen gospel-centered local churches for the glory of God. Planting churches remains our great passion. Planting churches needs to be a denominational priority for all our pastors and for each one of our churches. That doesn't mean that it looks the same in every church because resources and opportunities differ.

I don't believe that every healthy church will necessarily send out church plants. Sometimes people say every healthy church will reproduce within the first five years. I recommend not saying that. The desire to plant is always commendable, but the Lord must provide. We cannot manufacture new churches and we ought not pressure or place burdens of false guilt upon ourselves or others in church planting. Yet, I do believe that every pastor and every church is called to actively participate in our church planting mission. I would remind you, planting churches is part of the basic reason Sovereign Grace exists and is the goal of our partnership.

We plant and strengthen churches for the glory of God. That's what we're all about. If we fail to plant churches or fail to strengthen churches, then we would no longer be true to our mission. We must continue to give great attention to the priority of church planting. Here's really my desire, and I so appreciated Eric's prayer earlier and Ben's example of leading a church in prayer. We must pray and because we ought to dream together of what we long to see God do through us in the future.

To that end, as we celebrate 40 years of God's faithfulness, I just want to give several encouragements and exhortations in the remaining time that we have related to church planting in Sovereign Grace Churches. One, let's aim to establish healthy churches. Let's aim to establish healthy churches. In our text, Paul and Barnabas returned back to the churches in southern Galatia in order to provide care for the churches.

Verse 22, "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith." They in fact, take the much longer route back to their starting point in Antioch because they cared about the health of these churches. There is theological instruction to give. There's ethical instruction to give. There is verse 22, "Equipping for suffering that must occur."

There is verse 23, "Local pastors to be appointed elders," in the plural because the role of local pastors and pastoral teams is so vital to the health and maturity of the churches. Paul not only revisited the churches on this occasion, on that same trip, but also in AD 47, that was AD 47 on their way back through

also in AD 49, we see in Chapter 16, and in AD 52 in Acts Chapter 18 verse 23. Paul and Barnabas were not just trying to go to as many nations as possible or trying to do so as quickly as possible. They were looking to plant and build mature, healthy, gospel-centered churches that would stand the test of time.

There was a young man named John Chapman in the 1700s, planted apple orchards in New York, Pennsylvania and other territories as they opened for settlement. For 50 years, he roamed the land and everywhere he went, he planted apple seeds and grew apple trees. He became known as the apple man or Johnny Apple Seed. He was basically like the Apostle Paul of apple orchards.

His work was challenging and it was done with great care. He didn't just go around throwing seeds everywhere. He selected a good location. He cleared the weeds and brush, he tended the ground. He made a protective barrier to keep out the animals, and then he carefully planted the seeds in rows. Even then, John did not abandon them. He returned when he could to care for these young orchards, to repair fences, to tend to the soil because his goal was not simply to plant, it was to bear lasting fruit.

Likewise, our goal is not just to plant, but to see lasting fruit. I've been in some of the church planting literature recently, and I have found that there is far too much in the church planting literature of our day that is unhelpfully marked by an emphasis on rapid growth. There's an emphasis on methodology rather than making the message of the gospel central. That's problematic. There's an unhelpful and unbiblical emphasis on rapid growth. They say we need rapid multiplication, we need rapid reproduction. I am here to announce that rapid church planting is overrated. I don't want a doctor doing rapid surgery. I don't want an airplane mechanic doing rapid engine repairs. We don't want churches doing rapid church planting. Our aim in sovereign grace is not rapid reproduction. Our aim is lasting fruit. We are seeking, by the grace of God, to build something that lasts, to build something for our children, to build something for our children's children. God has taught us there's something really beautiful that God has done in who we are as a family of churches. God has taught our pastors to value faithful stewardship over fast growth. He's taught us to value health and unity over numbers every day of the week. He has taught us to value the approval of God over the approval of man, to value endurance over sprinting.

This is a beautiful thing that God has done, and it is a strength of our union. God knows that over these 40 years and to this day, and I say this to the glory of God, there is a sense in which we have done nothing whatsoever that could possibly be described as having been done rapidly. We are steadfast, we are

patient, not despising the day of small things, more than content to have God shrink our army as He did with Gideon, if that seems best to the Lord. We are not here for the numbers game. We've never been about the numbers game and by God's grace we never will be. Eckhard Schnabel says this in page-- it's on page 1,582 of his early Christian mission. Don't drop that on your foot.

He says, the New Testament authors show little interest in statistical data of the growth of the churches. The practice of some mythologist in which they provide quantitative statistical projections for the planning of church growth in a particular region or country, and formulate numerical goals of church growth would have been regarded by the apostles as bizarre, arrogant, and presumptuous. Tell us how you really feel, Dr. Schnabel. Not just bizarre, man. It's bizarre, arrogant, and presumptuous. It's like they say on *Shark Tank*, and for those reasons, I'm out.

Following the apostolic pattern, our goal is not simply to plant churches, it is to plant healthy churches, sound in doctrine, strong in biblical values. Our goal is to strengthen existing churches and care for pastors and care for pastors' wives who are serving those churches. We aim to establish healthy churches.

Second, exhortation and encouragement. Let's identify and train church planters. These churches in [Acts 14](#) would have never come into existence without Paul and Barnabas. Our ability to plant churches in the future depends, in no small parts, upon faithful and gifted pastors who are called to plant churches. Did you know? Sinclair Ferguson said that perhaps no one in the history of Christ's Church has been used to train more church planters than John Calvin in Geneva. In the middle of the 1500s, Geneva was an absolute church-planting factory, and Calvin was used by God to plant somewhere around 2,000 churches, largely in France.

They also sent men to Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere, maintaining rigorous standards of evaluation and testing as they identified and trained church-planting pastors. You heard it earlier from [Matthew 9](#). Jesus said, [Matthew 9:37](#) and [38](#), "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few." What do we do about that? Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Spurgeon once said that that text- [Matthew 9:37](#) and [38](#), that text lays on his heart more than any other in the Bible and haunts him perpetually. I wouldn't mind us in sovereign grace being a bit haunted by that verse.

I believe God is calling us in this moment of our history in particular to pray for laborers, to pray, perhaps, as we have never prayed before, asking the Lord

of the harvest to raise up many church planters who can be trained and equipped at the pastors' college, which is so crucial to our church-planting mission, whether it is the US pastors' college, if possible, or one of our other pastors' colleges throughout the world, and then to be sent out from churches to plant new congregations. The laborers are few. This is especially true, we find, when it comes to church planters. One of the greatest needs we presently have in our denomination is the need for more church planters.

Our desire is not just to identify and train pastors, that we do want to do that, but especially to identify and train pastors who can plant churches. Here's part of the reality. We have many good men in our churches who sense a call to pastoral ministry. Not all of our churches, but that is, in the kindness of God, a reality for many of our churches. At the same time, many of our churches, including covenant fellowship, have no room to bring more pastors on staff, and there is therefore no internal path to vocational pastoral ministry, but there is a great need for church-planting pastors and church-planting missionaries, and therefore, we ought to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He provides such men.

One of the believers who was saved at Lystra, who was perhaps among those who gathered around Paul when he was stoned, was a young man named Timothy. Three years later, Timothy would be recruited by Paul to serve him in his apostolic mission, but there were yet more pastors and church planters to be identified and trained. That is why Paul says to Timothy in [2 Timothy 2:2](#), "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Pastors, you know this well, it is part of your responsibility in your job description to entrust the gospel to faithful men and to raise up the pastors and preachers and church planters of our future.

I exhort you, just as you are doing, to continue to do so more and to give yourselves to discipling and training young men. Take initiative toward them, inquire about their future, envision and encourage them, give them honest and thorough feedback. When a man expresses an interest in pastoral ministry, the question of whether he has the gifts to plant a church should also be explored. Pay special attention to the preaching gift. Avoid having too narrow of a profile for church planters. Remember that God uses different personalities and temperaments and gifts to lead churches.

Some men, I realize, perhaps even some who are here, may have the requisite gifts for church planting but think that the call to plant is too great for them. They are like the prophet Jeremiah when he said, I do not know how to speak.

I am only a youth. They need to hear the Lord saying as he did to young Jeremiah, "Do not say, I am only a youth. If I send you, you will go and I am with you."

Let faith rise in our hearts. I do believe pastors, more than anyone, we should bring faith to this work of raising up leaders. We lead the way not in checking young men and in keeping them in their place, but in identifying and celebrating God's grace in their lives and having faith for their future. A large part of why we have faith for some young men is because we remember what we once were when we were young men aspiring to ministry. This is where intentionality, planning, and prayer are needed locally, regionally, denominationally. Let's identify and train church planters.

Third exhortation. Let's envision every member for the broader mission. Verse 26, Paul and Barnabas show up at Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. Then look at this picture in verse 27. "When they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

The entire church is gathered, but they're gathered not to hear a sermon, but to hear an update. They're gathered for a mission update, a slideshow presentation of the journey. Here's Paul preaching in the synagogue, next slide. Here's the priest in the temple of Zeus, bringing oxen and garlands to sacrifice in worshipping Paul. Next slide. Here's Elymas the magician in Paphos struck with blindness after Paul looked him in the eyes and called him a son of the devil, full of all deceit and villainy. Paul just being his winsome himself. Next slide. Here we are with the new believers in Lystra who had gathered around Paul when he was stoned. Here are the elders who were appointed in the churches.

They told the church all that God had done with them, and catch this, the whole church gathered together because the whole church is involved in this partnership. They need to know how God is using their support of extra local ministry to accomplish great things for Christ. Every member needs to know that. This is why our partnership in sovereign grace is so strategic. Paul sought to build this sense of partnership and mission into churches and we must do the same in the churches that we serve.

The congregation needs to be informed and envisioned because it's their sacrifices and their labors that make this church planting mission possible. Members need to be envisioned to participate through their prayers, through

their giving, through their sacrifices, through their sending, through their example. We can't plant churches if the members of our churches do not share this vision. Our church planting mission is not the work of the few, it is the work of the many. We have the joy of planting interdependently, which allows all of our churches, including smaller churches, to be significantly involved.

Every church needs to hear reports of what God is doing elsewhere. Every church needs to hear about and support the churches that are being planted in sovereign grace. This is what encourages our hearts. This is what inspires our generosity. This is what binds us together and what envisions us for planting in the future. Notice the content and summary of what they share in verse 27, "they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

That first phrase, they declared, what is it? All that God had done with them. That's how we tell our story. Not all they had done, but all that God had done with them. It was all God's doing. As we have celebrated 40 years of the faithfulness of God in sovereign grace, this is the story we tell, see what God has done.

The Scottish pastor, Gordon Keddie, Gordon Keddie commenting on this phrase,

"All that God had done," he says this, "This was pure encouragement."

The things that could discourage, the railing of hostile people, the threats to life and limb, the pain of stoning, the fatigue of long miles on dusty roads, were all swallowed up by glorious victories for the gospel.

That's my recommendation for how we consider the whole of our lives, the history of our churches, and all of God's dealings with us. The things that could discourage, and at times they have been many, whether it is trials, or opposition, or setbacks, or our own weaknesses and mistakes and sins, the things that could discourage ought to be swallowed up by stories of glorious victories for the gospel. See what God has done.

At 40 years, we should have that phrase from verse 27 ringing in our ears. All that God has done with them. Not our own doing. None of it can be attributed to human leadership. We gather our churches to declare not what we have done, but what God is doing, that we might give God all the glory. You have things to transfer, pastors, from this conference to your church. Let's envision every member in the churches we serve for the broader mission.

Fourth and last point, let's lead our churches in praying for open doors. There's another phrase in verse 27 that I want to highlight. They declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. He opened a door. Did you know our God is in the business of opening doors? Meaning, He creates opportunities to share the gospel and plant churches. He produces fruitfulness, He saves the lost, He opens doors for mission work nationally and among the nations.

God is opening doors in Latin America, in Mexico. God is opening doors in the Philippines. You heard the story of how God opened the door for church planting in Living Hope Church, Middletown, PA. God has opened doors, God is presently opening doors, and He's perhaps doing so more than ever before in our history. We believe He will continue to open doors again and again in the future.

Paul uses this same phrase elsewhere, [1 Corinthians 16:9](#) is where he says, "a wide door for effective work has opened to me," and [Colossians 4:3](#) is where Paul asks Christians to pray that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ. Pray for doors to open, pray for the Spirit of God to move in power. In his book, *Memoirs Of An Ordinary Pastor*, DA Carson tells the story of his father's pastoral ministry in Canada. Tom Carson was an ordinary pastor, and for nearly all his ministry, DA Carson says, it was a day of mighty efforts, some of them courageous, with mostly small results. He says, it was a time of slogging perseverance rather than advance.

Some of you know that slogging perseverance life. Most of his lifetime, Carson preached to a congregation of 15 to 45 people. After decades- not years, after decades of slow, humble, painful, often discouraging work, Carson says that in the 1970s, the winds of the Spirit began to blow through Quebec, and he says evangelical work in French Canada exploded. The number of evangelical churches went from about 40 to nearly 500 in less than a decade. Many people were being saved by the power of the gospel, many young men had desires for pastoral ministry and church planting.

In the mid-1970s, the churches knew that their priority needed to be training a new generation of leaders. The church is joined together to start a church-based theological training school for future pastors. Within the first eight months, 60 students had signed up for the school. The harvest was plentiful and the workers were many. The church that Tom Carson was a part of was planting a church every other year during that time.

DA Carson visited Quebec in the mid-'70s, I don't know, probably teaching graduate classes as a five-year-old or something. I don't do the math on his age. He was there in the '70s and he writes this.

"The pace of growth was staggering, and what I discovered when I returned to Quebec was a new generation of converts who were full of life, vitality, zeal, intelligence, and deep experiences of grace. There were potential leaders, potential pastors, gifted personal evangelists, graduate students, the future lay here. It was simply exhilarating."

Friends, there are things happening in our family of churches that are simply exhilarating. The future is bright in our eyes. God is opening doors. We are hearing from young men who desire to one day plant churches in sovereign grace. We have the Antioch project helping churches that don't have a church plant on their radar but want to get there. We are in the process of planting English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Mandarin-speaking churches. It is simply exhilarating, and it is all God's doing and a testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God.

One thing I read, and I had forgotten about this until I went back to the book recently, early on in Tom Carson's ministry, 30 years before that move of the Spirit, and some of you have been praying for 30 years or more, Tom Carson wrote a letter to his ministry partners, and in that letter he said,

"We dare say with Caleb and Joshua, the land which we passed through to search it is an exceedingly good land. We look for the day not far away when those from among this people shall join the army of the Lord and bear testimony to His name and His great salvation."

That long-anticipated day after decades of slogging perseverance and faithful labors, that long-awaited day had come. Prayers had been answered. The Spirit of God was moving in power, and friends, as we celebrate 40 years, we, too, look forward to the day not far away when the Lord raises up an army from our churches of those who bear testimony to His great name and give themselves to the work of planting churches for the glory of Jesus Christ.

I want to encourage each one of you to join us in praying. I want to plead with each one of you that you join us in praying and in dreaming. Pray big, dream big for the future of church planting in sovereign grace. Some Christians are all about the day of small things. They think that's what it means to be reformed. All of their prayers and all of their longings are confined to the day of small things. I do not understand that position at all.

Even as Eric prayed earlier, this room one day may not-- There may be some who think, I like things the way they used to be. It is good that we have learned to not despise the day of small things, but friends, I want to say that is no way to pray and it is in fact a terrible way to dream. God is calling us, as we celebrate His great faithfulness in the past, to look to the future, to ponder anew what the Almighty can do. We cry out, Jesus, come and build your church. Let your gospel fill the earth.

We're praying for open doors, we are praying for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God, we are praying for a spiritual harvest of many new church plants. We are praying that God raise up from among us an army of church planters and church planting teams, that the lost might be saved, that regions might be strengthened, that the gospel might go forth in power to the ends of the earth, even to unreached peoples.

We are praying for the winds of the Spirit, even now, Spirit of God, to come and blow upon our efforts. We are asking you, God, to establish the work of our hands, to show your glorious power to our children and our children's children. Lord, you have called us to this work. You have work for us to do. Establish the work of our hands. Would you, in your great mercy and by your sovereign grace, establish and expand the work of our hands for generations to come, all for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Now to him who is able, we've got this on the screen, stand. Let's say it with me. With one voice we make this our great declaration, [Ephesians 3:20-21](#). "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever." Amen.