

Well, good morning Grace Hills.

Good morning.

Glad you guys made it on Labor Day weekend when tons of people that normally sit around you are traveling the world. We've had folks in places like Maui this week and even more amazing places like Silver Dollar City, and it's just one of those weekends. I want to take Labor Day weekend. I do this every year to one degree or another and I want to talk in a different way. I want to share something unique today. If your guests, we're glad that you're here any Sunday, but this is a day I really want to talk about what it is to be a church, why we're here, what we've done, where we're going, and just share about the journey that we've had so far and where we're headed and all that's coming next and throughout this day, I just want to give God praise and glory because he has been amazingly good to us. Amen?

Amen.

I believe that God is up to something great with this body of people and I say that because I have felt the intensity of the spiritual warfare so to speak of Satan being very against us. We talked about in our staff meeting this last week and we spent close to half an hour just praying in this room, just asking God and over this weekend, just felt it with intensity. Now you need to understand I'm not a sentimental guy. I told my wife last night, I said something to her that was sweet and then I said, "And I'm not one to quote movie line type things," and she goes, "I like movie line type things," and I said, "Well, you complete me."

No, I don't say that, but I'm not normally into sentimental things or things that are abstract. I like spreadsheets. I like to count stuff. That's the way I think, but I believe that we live in a world that is both physical and spiritual, and that all of that interfaces and there's a supernatural God at work around us all the time and he defends us because there is a war going on, and the victory is to believers, but I also know from history that every time God gets up to something great, Satan gets mad. He doesn't like you, he doesn't like me. He doesn't like people standing up for God or speaking and sharing their faith or praying for their children.

I mean he hates all that and so he attacks, and I believe that excites me because I believe what that means is God is up to some big, big stuff. I want to share some of those things with you this morning. What I'm going to do today is a little bit different than usual. I'm going to teach some scriptures in a bit, but I want to start out by just teaching about church, about why Grace Hills is who we are and what we value and all of that. I think that God has been so faithful to us and that we've come a long way.

I reflect sometimes on eight years ago when it was two families and we were in a little office and through the movie theater and our last building to this place, that we're finally in a place that we own and have a piece of soil, that God has just been faithful and he keeps raising people up and sending people, and there are reasons why we do things the way that we do. I just want to continue to enjoy God's blessing, so I want to equip you and this is also the message that gets recorded.

All those people that are still in Dollar City this week, they can watch the recording later and be educated on why we are what we are, so welcome you guys and if you're watching on Facebook, hello, but I want to just share for a few moments some core beliefs of mind that I've been thinking about for 10, 20 years and just imposed them on you and ask God to plant these thoughts in your heart, okay. I'm
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going to share a quote with you by my old Pastor Rick Warren who said that the health of a church is not measured by its seating capacity, but by its sending capacity. In other words, it's not so much about how many people we can collect. I think that you can do lots of things to collect people.

We took our boys up for some some ice cream at Andy's last night and we could hear the concert, right? All you have to do is build a stadium and get the right band in there and you can attract tons of people, but that's not what a healthy church is all about. Now that doesn't mean we don't do things to be nice to people or to be attractive in some way. We don't like try to make church ugly. Does that make sense? We love it when people come, but at the end of the day, the health of a church is not measured by how many people attend on Sunday.

It's measured ultimately by its sending capacity, that when we leave here on Sunday, we go love people, we go serve people, we send people, we we empower and equip, and we grow spiritually so that our lives are fruitful, and we give life to other people around us, and so that is a big part of who we are that we focus on being a healthy church that gets to send people. In the midst of that, we believe the way we work as a church as we create weekend services that people love to attend and that when they attend, we invite them to go deeper and to get into a group and to grow spiritually to discover their gifts, to serve one another, that by the time you become a committed member of Grace Hills Church, you're serving other people and you're loving other people.

We just grow and grow in that way, growing from the outside in if that makes sense. We keep inviting and drawing and welcoming, and then empowering and equipping and challenging, and then ultimately sending and hopefully reproducing our church elsewhere. We've watched God do that amazingly. We moved into this building in March and it was a big task. We were supposed to be in by January and in Pastor Neil laughed at me when I said January and now I know why. We finally made it in. We thought well well maybe February and eventually we got here and here we are, and so we enjoy this space, right? I don't know if you looked around last week, if you were here last Sunday, but this first service, the 9:00 service was fairly full.

The second service, we were squeezing in three rows back there and one in the middle and there were people sitting on the floor and some people sitting in the lobby. We're going to have to move again, right? That's not an announcement. We don't have a plan, but we we do know that God has blessed us. He's blessed us and that all the praise and the glory for that belongs with Jesus. It's all for him, it's his church, it's his place, and it's all for his honor and for his glory, but that's where it starts and then we challenge people to dig in and deep and a new life together and serve and give our time and our talent and our treasure and and spend our lives pouring into and investing in other people.

Over the last eight years, we've gotten to plant to daughter churches out of ourselves and one in Siloam and one in almost in Mexico City. Oklahoma City, same thing. Oklahoma City, we planted two churches there. We've sent families the Crabtree's and the Sanders have sent them to Papua New Guinea, and they have been there almost five years now. They are now translating the Bible. They moved in and built a hut and it's an indigenous people, and so they don't have a lot of resources. They have to hike up a mountain to get there and they built a little hut, and these three families, the [Hambrice's 00:07:41], well they live there. They've lived among the people.

Their kids have lived there and played with the kids from the tribe, and now they've learned the language of the tribe. They're writing it down and once it's written down, they've given the tribe a

written language. They'll start translating the Bible into that tribal language and then finally be able to share a very complete gospel, but right now, they're just loving them and serving them and being there. It blows my mind that these three young families with their kids have packed up and moved to the other side of the world to a remote village in the mountains, and they're raising their kids there for the glory of Jesus.

That blows me away and that we got to send them that we know them these are our people, and we got to send them and bless them and support them to this day. Every time you give every Sunday, that part of that goes to them and we're sustaining their life there and taking care of their families, okay. We've gotten to do a lot of work in Belize that we've talked about before, a support around 90 kids in Belize City who get uniforms for school and a meal every day, resources for their family. They're connected to a local church. They leave school at lunchtime and the school system says you have to come of school and you got to wear a uniform you got to figure out how to pay for it and we're not going to serve lunch, you got to go get lunch.

A lot of the kids just scattered and go wherever at lunchtime, but now they go to a local church and they eat a meal because of you guys. We get to invest and send and be part of that global mission and this past week, we made the decision to adopt a new family, someone that they have visited Grace Hills in the past when we were first getting started and they plugged in at a different church, but now they're they're going to plug in elsewhere. We're going to be supporting a new family. I wanted to introduce them to you on the screen. This is their picture. It's a little fuzzy, but it's Matt and Christine Rule. A few of you might know the Rule family. They're in Northwest Arkansas folks and they're now in Colorado Springs training to move to the Middle East.

They'll be based probably in Lebanon just about 60 miles from the Syria border, really close to where Isis had been operating. They're dealing with refugees. It's an amazing ministry that they've already gotten started over there. They spent three months in Lebanon already, just meeting people, being in homes, reaching people in a very predominantly Muslim culture, and just loving them to Jesus. We now get to partner with them as a church and adopt them and call them our children and send them to another side of the world, inside what is called the 1040 window. It's this 10 latitude to 40 latitude north where the gospel is just absent, where there are places where 99% of the populations of some countries have never heard the name of Jesus before.

We get to adopt them and send them to a place. I don't know if you notice, there's several churches in Northwest Arkansas, but over there is not as many, okay. Just understand that we get to send people and that we're going to send more people, and we're asking God to enlarge our territory and help us to influence more and to share the gospel further and to love more people and to grow the family of God. We're going to keep doing that and doing that and doing that. That's why we are here and every time we give, we give toward that. Now let me talk about the home base here for a second. This place called Grace Hills Church where we operate from, what's in our future as a church. Well, let me share something else with you.

It's not about growing a large church. It's about growing a healthy church by focusing on growing people. Healthy things naturally grow, okay, so the goal is not to grow the church larger. Now I also will say in the same breath because sometimes people will come in to visit Grace Hills and be like, "We're just looking for... We've been in part of some huge thing and we're just looking for something smaller. We're a little tired of six flags over Jesus. We're looking for like something..." and I go, "Great, hope you

fit in here. We'd love for you to just belong among us and then we really hope to disappoint you," because we have to keep growing because there are thousands and thousands of people around us who don't know Jesus, but I can assure you that just getting bigger is not our goal, that our goal is being healthy.

The problem with that is healthy things naturally grow. Healthy things where people experience real love, where they hear truth, where they experience grace, where there is this life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. All of that is contagious and it ought to be, and so we ought to cultivate that and protect that and be the healthiest church we can be relationally. If we focus on growing people, on helping people grow in their faith and grow spiritually and give their lives away and invest in something bigger, then I think the church grows as a byproduct of that. We don't want to try to make it bigger.

We just try to grow people, just love people, be healthy, help people find healing in Jesus name from all of their relational issues and hurts and habits and hang-ups and at the end of that, that the church just naturally begins to grow. With that, we ask ourselves how do we focus and make that happen. We have a purpose statement as a church. I want to throw that up on the screen. It's simply this, we exist to help people know God, find freedom, discover their purpose, and make a difference for God's glory. That's one single sentence that sums up everything we do and I want to unpack it for a second because it says a lot. We're a purpose driven church.

Meaning, we believe that in scripture in the New Testament, God gives the church five purposes, five reasons and functions for which we exist. Evangelism that's sharing our faith, fellowship that's getting close to one another in relationships, discipleship which has to go going deeper in Christ, ministry which is serving other people, and worship which is giving honor and glory to God, that those are the five things the church exists for and they're all wrapped up in that statement. We help people find God, to know God, that's evangelism. To find freedom, that's discipleship. To discover their purpose, that's ministry, that's finding out my gifts.

To make a difference for God's glory, that's missions and all for his glory is just saying that everything we do ultimately is worship. Let me unpack that and break it down for a second. When we say we help people know God, we do that primarily, primarily by creating weekend worship services that people outside the faith love to attend. In other words, our primary method of helping people hear about Jesus for the first time is creating weekend worship services, that people outside the faith will love to attend. That means we love them, we greet them, we care about them, connect with them. We make the message hopefully understandable. Doesn't mean we don't go deep, it just means we take deep things and try to present them in a way that's simple and easy to understand.

It means that we as a church family enjoy God's power and presence in such a way that that manifests, that it shows something to people who are guests. Our goal weekend after weekend is to create worship services and environments where everybody in this room can feel confident. I can bring my friend to church with me on Sunday and they're going to be welcomed, they're going to be loved, they're going to be taken care of, they're going to hear the good news of the gospel, they're going to hear about their life, they're going to experience child care that we've devoted a lot of time to making it safe and fun and colorful, and the place is as secure as we can make it, and we're serving coffee.

We're doing everything we can so that everybody in this room who worships here feels confident about bringing others, and here's why that's important. It's great for you individually to share your faith in

Christ with other people. Obviously, Jesus wants us to do that, that's a big part of my mission, right? Sharing my faith is a huge responsibility, but here's the cool thing about that. I don't have to do that alone, right? You get to help me and I get to help you. I get to say, "Hey would you come with me on Sunday to my church, and I know that you guys are not going to make fun of them or like beat them with stuff when they walk in the door?" Amen? I expected more feedback on that, yeah, that as a community like a family, we get to do this together.

We get to do this together, so that's why we do that, okay. Let me just tell you in regards to that, our newest message series that kicks off next Sunday is one of our big ones. It's a big fall series. We're going to produce small group studies for it. We're launching a bunch of new small groups so like everybody connected, but the next series is simply called made for more, made for more and it's just a message series about how tons of people around us are stuck. They're stuck in a sense of mediocrity and mundaneness. They're stuck in relationships that are just not moving forward. They're stuck in terms of their finances. They're stuck in terms of their emotions and not being able to grow and not being able to heal.

We're going to spend six weeks talking about some of those issues where people are stuck and the big message every week is you were made for more than that. You were made for more than the rat-race. You were made for more than scraping by. You were made for more than just surviving. Every week we'll focus on that and so for the next six weeks, I really want to ask you to pray who can I bring to a weekend service with me so they can hear the good news about Jesus in a way that makes sense to their life, okay. Here's the second purpose for us. We help people find freedom primarily through small groups because life change happens in circles. Now I say that Sunday services, weekend services are a big deal.

Oh by the way, I forgot to mention this, but here pretty soon we're going to be going to three services instead of two. Let me move on real quick from that. We really are, so just be praying how can we make that happen because it's like an all-hands-on-deck thing and then we smooth out over time and things run smoothly again, but at first, it's a little bit chaotic so we're going to do that very soon. We help people find freedom through small groups. When I say life change happens in circles, what I mean is a lot of times, people come on Sunday and they hear the message and they hear the songs, and they hear the gospel and they're exposed to what Christianity is all about, and they get to check things out and investigate things without a lot of pressure, without judgment.

People can come in and be part of our Sunday service and they may not be Christians at all. They may be totally atheistic in their worldview. Were okay with that. We welcome them, we love them. They are friends no matter what, but a lot of times, life change, that is the things I have in my life where I'm broken. Life change happens in circles, not necessarily rows. Circles are those places, maybe it's a Tuesday night ladies night where you're gathering around tables here in the auditorium and you're having conversations where it's about your life, and your sharing hard things. Maybe it's a Thursday night men's event and you're getting close. Maybe it's a small group, one of the small groups that meets around Northwest Arkansas, but life change often happens in circles.

It happens in groups. It happens in environments where I can talk to six people or 12 people and we can share. My personal life was changed the first time I got into a small group. I mean I was headed for burnout and death, not literally, but just spiritually dying and it was a small group that God used to turn us around. We help people know God by those weekend services. We help people deepen and find

freedom in their life in groups, okay. Let me move a little quickly. Third one, we help people discover their purpose primarily through what we call growth track. This is fairly new in that we're just implementing it now in the way that we're doing it. Every month we offer Discover Grace Hills.

If you've been to newcomers lunch, if you've been to that in the past, you've already done this, okay. It's exactly the same thing. We just moved it to 4:00 a Sunday afternoon and we're starting to add things to it. If you've been to Discover Grace Hills or if you've been to newcomers lunch, you've covered step, one okay, and step one is all about who we are as a church, why we are what we are, what we believe, what we value, why we do things the way that we do them, what kind of ministries we are and how we operate, and all of that kind of thing. Step two is all about how do I develop the habits in my life that helped me grow spiritually, how do I study the Bible, how do I pray, how do I get involved in a small group in fellowship, how do I give.

Those are the habits that help me to grow and so step two is all about that. In October, we will offer step two at the very same time as we offer step one, on the same night. If you've been to newcomers lunch, you've been to Discover Grace Hills, you're ready for step two and we're rolling it out in October, okay. Then step three which we'll roll out probably in January is all about finding your gifts and developing them. It's helping you to see your shape, your personality, your heart, your ability, your experiences, how God wants to use all that to uniquely prepare you to serve other people, okay, so that's step three.

Then step four is all about sharing your faith and living on mission and being a part of what God is doing around the globe and going on mission trips and all kinds of things, so those are the big steps that we want to use to help people grow through, okay, as they deepen and develop and discover our purpose and how I'm supposed to serve. Here's the fourth one, we help people make a difference by giving everyone a ministry in the church and a mission in the world. Everyone has a ministry in the church and a mission in the world.

You may not know what it is yet, but you have a ministry in the church and there are about 30 different things that we do here in terms of like activities every week, whether it's the folks in the sound booth back there that are running the video and the sound and the lighting. In most churches, they get blamed for everything, right? It's too loud or the lights went out or something happened, but those are like heroes and you guys rarely see them, but give them a hand real quick. They're like awesome, yeah.

I'm really doing that so they won't cut my microphone off and there are people that do things behind the scenes and they change diapers and wrestle in the floor with babies, and the people that you see on stage every week, but man that's such a tiny percentage of the number of people that give themselves here. It's wonderful to see and just it's life-giving, so we help to empower people in that way. Then the last thing is this, it's all for God's glory. It's all for God's glory. When we celebrate dozens of baptisms or worship services are growing or we're sending a new missionary, planting a new church, we're going to tree services, we're going to look at property soon or whatever, any of those kinds of things that happen at the end of the day, the reason it happens is Jesus and the glory all goes to Jesus.

It's not about a personality, it's not about a denomination, it's not about the church itself. It's for Jesus, all the glory goes to God, okay. Just know that as we roll things out, go to multiple services launch, those Sunday afternoon classes, as we create new small groups, that are challenged to you is to have a conversation with God about your next step. Always be asking God what is my next step because I've

been here eight years and I'm the lead pastor, and I still have a next step of growth and I see them all the time. My wife sees them first usually, but we all need to keep growing and plugging in and taking steps, and that's what we're here to do, okay.

I want to shift gears slightly and the reason why I want to shift gears is because I believe strongly that visionary growing churches are led by visionary growing people. Visionary growing churches are led by visionary growing people and when I say led by, I'm not talking about me and I'm not talking about our staff. I'm talking about you. We believe that ministry is something for every believer. Ministry is not something that just a few people get paid to do. Ministry is something that all of us as believers carry out. If you follow Jesus, you have a calling the ministry. If you follow Jesus, you're called to serve Him and the way that you serve Him is by serving others, right?

Love God with all your heart soul mind and strength, how do you do that? Love your neighbor as yourself, okay. This horizontal ministry to other people is an act of worship for God and so he even says, "Hey if you've got problems with people, don't come to worship. Lay your gift at the altar and go fix the problems with people," right? Love matters and relationships matter, and so this is all of us being given a ministry. Ephesians 4 teaches this idea that the pastors per se are here for the equipping of every believer for the work of the ministry, that we all get to serve each other and that everybody gets the significant role in God's kingdom and so we believe that. Visionary growing churches are led by visionary growing people and that's you.

I want to challenge you today to think about your life, not just your church, but to think about your life, your family, your work, your career, your business, your kids, your school, your education. Think about all of that from a visionary perspective, okay. Here's the personal question for you. What is your vision for your life? What is your vision for your life? For some of us if we're really honest, we would say my vision is to make it to death without running out of money. That is not a vision for life, that's a vision for death, okay. What is your vision for your life? What do you envision for your family, for your soul? How do you want to grow next? How do you want to get to where God wants you to go?

I want to just translate this for us as people living life for a second. Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul wrote about his personal vision about his life, what life was about for him and he said this, "I want to know Christ. I want to know Christ." Now think about this, he is already an apostle, he has planted churches, he has written letters already, he has encountered Jesus, he spent three years in the Arabian desert learning from the Holy Spirit personally, he knows Jesus, right? He knows him but he says the goal of my life is to know Jesus. When he says know, he uses a word for know that doesn't mean just getting information. It's not like taking a class now I know the stuff. It's a word that means to know by personal experience.

I've handled this, I've walked through this, and now that I've walked through this, I now know it, I've experienced it. He says I want to know Christ, I want to experience Christ. That's the goal of his life. Someone who knows Jesus and is an apostle says my vision for my life is that I want to know him more and more and more and more. I want to know Christ. Yes, he says to know the power of his resurrection and people and believers in the house when we hear I want to know the power of his resurrection and we were like yeah, bring it on. How many of you that excites you, right? To know the power of his resurrection, I want to defeat all.

I'm like he-man now, except I don't know what if he-man was a Christian, but anyways I want to know the power of his resurrection and I want to participate in his sufferings. Amen? Yeah, we're like the power, yes the sufferings. I don't know, but Paul said I want to know Christ and if I'm going to know Christ, that means there those moments when I feel his power and there those moments when I walk through hard things, when I don't feel good, when I don't feel happy, but God's growing me because life in those moments is about carrying a cross and suffering with him. He says I want to know him, I want to know the power of his resurrection, I want to participate in his sufferings, I want to become like him in his death and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead, not that I've already obtained this he said or have already arrived at my goal.

Hallelujah, doesn't mean I've not arrived, not arrived, but I press on he says to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. He says, "I've not arrived yet." He's planted churches and written letters and we would say he's successful, but he would say I'm not done yet, I'm still alive and breathing, I got growing to do, I need to know Jesus more, so I'm living with a vision for the future of what I can become and not just what I've done or what I've been, so I want to realize everything for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Then he says, "This brothers and sisters I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

I've not arrived yet, but one thing I do, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Paul always liked to write long sentences and that's one of those long sentences, but look at it again. Forgetting what is behind, some of you, none of anything else I said today makes sense, vision of the church, sure, whatever, I'm not sure I'm ready for that, but this you need, forgetting what's behind, forgetting the past. Not forgetting intellectually like I don't remember anymore, but forgetting in terms of the past is no longer held against me because of the grace of God in Christ.

All the parties I went to and the people that I've slept with and the things I've done in my past, God has forgiven it. I'm forgetting the past and in Paul's case, forgetting his past accomplishments, right? He was religious, he was scholarly, he was successful, he had a high honor in the military in Rome, he had all of that and he says I forget all that, I forget all that because I got a new goal and my new goal is knowing Christ, forgetting it all I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Wouldn't you say at this point like Paul you got it in the bag? You wrote half the New Testament man, planted churches all around the meta, you've been in jail, you've been beaten for your faith.

We know that Paul eventually loses his head before Nero in Rome and that Paul is this catalyst for the spread of Christianity. Paul you got it in the bag man, the trophy is yours, but he says and I press on the prize is still before me. Let me give you very quickly 10 things, okay, 15 minutes per point, just kidding. Very quickly 10 things. This could be a 10-week sermon series, but I'm going to rapid-fire this at you and I'm going to invite you to go and search the scriptures for these things later, but they all flow out of this passage. It hints at them, but these are found elsewhere in the Bible and I just want to give you and just a big, big lesson about your life in a very short amount of time, 10 things God has for you today in terms of your vision for your life.

Number one is this, God has a destiny for you to envision. Heaven is before you. Christ's likeness is before you. Maturity is before you. Freedom is before you. Becoming what God wants you to be is before you, it is your destiny, okay. It is your destiny. I sometimes will tell my my boys. I'll look at them

and I'll say. "You and I must rule the galaxy together as father and son. It is your destiny." If you've never seen Star Wars, it makes no sense and the boys are like, "Stop it dad," but the truth is you've got a destiny and by destiny, I mean that God has an ideal for which you should rise and become, spend your life in a significant way on this planet.

That's your destiny. He has that for you, press on toward it, and I don't care if you're still in high school or you're in retirement. If you're alive, your destiny is still unfolding before you and it involves everything you've done so far, but it's not over yet, okay. Number two, God has a race for you to run so between where you are right now and your destiny that's still unfolding, God has a race for you to run, and this is very important. This has been very important for me because anyone else in here ever struggle with comparison? Okay, I'll move on then. Of course, we struggle with comparison. There's Instagram, right? We compare ourselves all the time and sometimes we compare our kids or our spouses or our jobs or whatever.

We compare, but back up, God has a race for you to run. You don't have to run my race. I don't have to run your race. You don't have to run the race of someone you might envy. You run your race and it's unique to you. The school you might go to or the person you might marry or the job you might work, that is a unique situation that no one else in history is ever going to live except you, and you have a race to run so run it faithfully. Good news is number three, God has guardrails for you to keep you on the path, right? Scripture filled with wisdom about how to do this. Should I grab a credit card and rack up a million dollars in debt to fulfill my destiny? Probably not today if you're working minimum wage, okay. That's a scriptural wisdom.

He has guardrails for you to run your race in, okay. Number four, God has an example for you to follow and it's Jesus. It's an example for you to follow. If you want to know what the right thing to do in a given situation is, you look at the life and the testimony of Jesus, what is written about him, how did he love people, how did he interact with people, how did he make decisions, what did he say, in the sermons that he preached, what did he teach me about my life. You have an example and it's Jesus. Number five, God has a gift for you to use. If you're a believer, if you follow Jesus, you have a gift and it's not humble to say oh I'm not gifted. It's actually disagreeing with God, right? Because he says if you follow him, you're gifted.

You're gifted, the Holy Spirit has moved in your life, he has given you a gift, and he wants you to use it and invest it for his glory. He has a gift for you to use. Number six, God gives you the hunger and thirst to keep going. He gives you the hunger and thirst to keep going. How does he do that? He dangles before you heaven and completeness and total freedom and he speaks of it in scripture in such a way that my appetite stays wet for it, right? I'm hungry and I'm thirsty, and that hunger and that thirst was put in your heart by God. That pull that you feel toward your God-given destiny, that was put there by the God who created you. Eternity is set in your heart as Solomon would say.

Number seven, God gives you healing when you're hurting, so you're running the race and you're going to hurt along the way. Yesterday I don't know what it was, but physically I was just wiped out from doing very little, and I ran all the way up the steps to the second floor of my house and I got up there and I'm going [inaudible 00:37:25] and Angie's like, "Are you okay?" I'm like, "No, I think I'm going to die," so that's my pain. Some of you can like run a marathon, right? We have any marathon runners, 31-milers? No? I'm glad, thankful, that 29 point whatever it is. Anyways, God gives you healing when you're hurting,

when you're sore, and when you're in pain and if you're watching on video and you're a marathon runner, shame on you, but no.

When you're hurting and you're going through hard times and your muscles are aching spiritually speaking, when you're hurting and you're exhausted, God comes along and he gives you rest and he gives you care. He has healing for you. Number eight, God gives you the energy you need to run your race. The New Testament says he gives us the will and the desire to do what pleases him, right? He feeds me with the energy that I need, the ability, the power that I need. When he calls me to do something, I can't do that, I can't be involved in that, that's that's bigger than me or somebody asked me to do something for them, and I don't know if I'm up to that. Well, God's the one that gives us the energy, the ability, the power, he does that for us.

Number nine, God gives you his presence and runs right beside you. He gives you his presence. You're never running alone, never. You're always in the company of a Jesus, of a Holy Spirit who runs right alongside you. The Holy Spirit, the Greek word that's translated helper or comforter that refers to the Holy Spirit, that word is the word Paraclete and para means alongside over with okay. He's the one who comes alongside of us. He comes right up beside me and he runs my race with me. We're going to spend after our made four more series, the next series we do is going to be all about the presence of God and what that looks like in my life every day, what that looks like in a church, but it's living in God's presence, okay.

He gives you his presence every day and number 10, God gives you people to run with. He gives you people to run with and if you don't know who they are, look around, okay, look around. Amazingly, I've said this before, the church shouldn't be here. We shouldn't be here, we shouldn't exist. The reason I say that is because for all intents and purposes in the first 100 years of Christianity, all of the odds were against us. There were no church buildings in the first 300 years of Christianity. There were no bound Bibles for hundreds of years. The books were not even solidified until about 390 AD. For the first couple hundred years of the church's history, it was illegal persecuted, no collected together bound Bible, no church buildings and somehow or another, it thrived.

Like salt out of the salt shaker, Christianity spread everywhere and now in Northwest Arkansas and in Benton County, there are over 200 churches in this county praised Jesus for every last one of them and around this world are hundreds of thousands of churches. You can look around and go God has started and planted this thing called the church and it has thrived against all the odds. He has given you people to run with, right? He wants you to plug in and be a part of that. It's miraculous that were here today and yet we're here today, and we get to do this together. We get to lock arms together and face outwardly and go find more hurting people together, go find more lost people and tell them about the love that Jesus has for them. We get to work hand in hand.

I don't have to do it alone. God is with me and you guys are with me, and I think that's a lot, like you all boost my confidence in this. I can do this. Why? Because I got friends here and we know what this is like together, and this is a safe place where people are going to know my hurts and they're going to pray for me and they're going to walk with me through those things. They're going to run my race with me. They're going to run with me and I lean into you guys. Now you might be here and you've got some church hurt. Almost everybody I know that's a Christian for 10 years and more has got some church hurt, okay. All of us have done that. We've walked through difficult situations.

Maybe something went wrong in a business meeting and everybody was offended and it was like Thunderdome, right? That happens sometimes even among God's people and we carry the hurt, the rejection, all that. We carry Church hurt. Now here's the hard news, the hard truth is that if you want to be healed of your church hurt, the healing is probably only going to take place in a church. The only place you're going to rebuild trust with God's people is among God's people, okay. That's where the healing begins and occurs, so we get to commit and we get to say all right, it's not perfect, I'm all-in. I have a friend named Artie on the East Coast Pastor's Church. I don't know if you knew this, but occasionally someone in a church complains about something.

I know that's almost impossible to believe, but there are churches out there who's somebody's not always happy. Can you believe that? He says, "Somebody will come and they'll be like the volume's too loud or the air's too cold or the coffee's too strong or the seats aren't that comfortable or I don't like the way you run this place or you're ugly or whatever people might say to a pastor or a leader," and I'm like, "Artie how do you deal with that?" He goes, "We've got a 20 rule." He said, "We need you to be happy with 80% of what you find here and if you got a complaint, put it in your 20," and he said, "If you're comfortable continuing to be a part of this church family, putting some stuff in your 20, we want you in our family."

I love that. It's so easy now people coming like I don't like this, I don't like the shoes you wear, whatever and I get to go, "Does it fit in your 20?" "Yeah." "All right, let's do this, let's keep moving together," because I know and I've watched and I've seen families torn apart and seen hurt go on, and it stalls the mission and it slows us down in finding more people to love. At the end of the day, I want to challenge you here. Now if you're here for the first time, your next step might be come another Sunday, right? It doesn't mean you go all in today, unless God's telling you to but your next step might just become another Sunday, hear it again, check it out, see what it's all about.

If you've been attending for a while and you feel like yes, my church home but I don't know what to do next, well just take one of the cards out and say I want to take my next step, it's down at the bottom, I want to come to Discover Grace Hills. At Discover Grace Hills, we'll tell you all the next steps or when you walk out of this room, go to the next step's table, talk volunteers there or I want to be in a small group or whatever it is, but I just want to ask you what is your next step. Now I want to turn my focus for a second. With all of that teaching behind us, I want to get personal for a moment and go back to what I said the beginning is message. I really believe Satan hates this place. He hates what goes on here.

He hates our prayers. He hates our worship. He hates all of our evangelistic efforts and he'll do anything to discourage us, to slow us down, to stop us, and his attacks are personal. His attacks are felt. They are real, but for a couple thousand years now, he has promised us victory, that if you walk with Christ, you win already. You're the winner. You maybe walking through a moment of defeat, but in the end, you are a winner when you follow Jesus, right? We are more than conquerors through him that loved us and the way that we win is ultimately in prayer. We win in prayer. That's the weapon that God has given to us to fight spiritual battles is in prayer, that when I pray, things happen, that prayer is like a war room.

Prayer is this place where I go and talk to the God who moves the pieces. Charles Spurgeon 150 years ago said prayer moves the arm that moves the world, that God has things he wants to do here, but those things happen as a result of prayer. I want to challenge you, here's our big next step as a church, okay, and we'll go to multiple services, but that's just the details. That's just a logistical thing, right? Here's what really matters. We're going to start rising up and being a praying church, okay. Now don't

get scared. don't think I'm going to call you up on stage right now to lead us all in prayer. I understand, we're all at different places with that, but here's what I want to challenge you to do.

Some of you can go home and find a spot in your house and reserve that spot and go that's my prayer closet, and that's what I'm going to do there every day, I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray for my kids in my church my friends and I'm going to do that. Some of you can lead others in prayer. In January, we're going to have a 21-day period of fasting and prayer. We're going to spend concentrated effort and times as a church family pray, but I want to challenge you to start this today. Just to say I want to support my church and the churches around us and the kingdom and the family of God, all around the world and the missionaries we've sent, and the kids that we released to go to college in school and the people that we send out of this place and the churches we've plant.

I want to support them all in prayer because prayer is where we engage in the battle, okay, and that's where we fight them, that's where we fight them. I want us to start right now and just pray together as a church family. Let's bow our heads. In fact, I want to invite you as the musicians make their way back out here to feel free to move from where you are and come to the front here. There's a lot of room on this front row. It's empty, there's floor space and you don't have to. You can definitely stay where you are, if that's what you're most comfortable with, but if you feel so moved, I just want us to pray in concert.

I'll give you a moment right now to slip out where you are and just line across this front row and for us to just as a church family talk to Jesus together for a few moments. As some of you come to do that, if you're sitting here in this room today and you are discovering for the first time that the Christian life is for you, that Jesus is for you, that he has a plan for your life you've not embraced yet, that he wants you in a relationship you don't have yet, and you want to come to know him, then I want to ask you just right now to say to him God I trust you, I believe in you, I want to turn from my sins, and I want to put my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal savior, and give the rest of my life to you and watch you work in my life.

God saved me and when you pray that prayer, he says yes and he saves people daily all around the world. If you you're and you're a believer, as a church family, I just want us to pray for a few moments. Father touch our hearts, show us what to pray for. God some of us know somebody in our family. We know somebody in our neighborhood, our workplace doesn't have a relationship with Jesus yet. God we named them in our hearts before you. We asked you to direct them to Jesus, show us how to love them, how to reach them. God some of us are hurting. We pray for healing. Some of us are bitter, resentful, angry. God please give us relief. Some of us fight depression, anxiety, mental illness, bipolarity.

God give us strength every day to welcome some sunlight into our life. God some of us are in relationships that are struggling, marriages on the rocks. God break our hearts, break our hearts. God for our church, I pray, we pray use Grace Hills or there are tens of thousands of people in Northwest Arkansas don't have a relationship with you yet. They don't know the church. They don't like the church. They may not have any idea what the church is all about. Most of them think that's just not for me. God I pray that we would have the ability to show them what it's like to know you, to introduce them to you. Father in larger coasts, let us send more people to more places to share the message of your love, the good news of the gospel to those many people on this planet as possible.

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God thank you for the way that you love us. We'll do it all for your glory, all for your honor. You have done so much for us. You have given your son Jesus on a cross for us. God we'll give ourselves back to you. Help us to run our race with energy and vision and vitality knowing you will bring us home. Thank you lord. We love you. We love you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.