



Pastor Kyle Mercer  
We Are Missional

May 21, 2023  
Series: The Church and the Home  
Ephesians 3:1-13

## **BIG IDEA – LIKE PAUL, WE SHOULD HAVE A MISSIONARY MINDSET**

God wants to use you in the lives of other people. That's hopefully the second lesson you learn as a Christian. The first thing you need to learn is that God wants to have a relationship with you through Christ, and that should shock you and surprise you, but after that, we hope you learn and understand that God wants to use you in the lives of other people.

I mean, guys, that's the most normal, average, everyday story I've ever heard. A guy named Austin meets a guy named Josh and sees him and says, "Hey, you can sit with us," and the story unfolds, unravels, from there. How do you figure out whose life God wants to use you in? Who has God put in front of you? There are certain people only you see. I'm not saying they're invisible to everybody else, but you know what I mean. Only you really see them.

There are certain needs only you notice. There are certain problems that only bother you. Guess what? Those are your problems. You should do something about them. What I love about this story is it's so simple. If we could talk for just a minute, all of us here... If you're new, a guest, a visitor, welcome. I just want to have a conversation with those who call Two Cities Church home for a minute.

What we're trying to do here, whatever *here* is...on Sunday morning or Saturday night or Sunday night...is what's called *organizational hospitality*. You've heard of hospitality. That's a biblical virtue and value. You know all of the verses that talk about that, and you normally think about your home, but we think about the church. What would it look like for us, as a church, to practice hospitality?

Here's what hospitality communicates. It always communicates two things. "We've been expecting you, and we're ready for you." That's all we want to communicate. With every person here, we want to say two things to a first-time guest or a visitor. "We've been expecting you and we're ready for you, because God has been expecting you and God is ready for you."

So, if you are joining us and are new and not connected yet, and you're kind of on the outside, not the inside...you're part of the crowd, not really part of the church yet...let me invite you. June 2 and 3 is our Weekender, and that's really how we tell you, "Hey, we've been expecting you. We don't just have a seat for you; we have a place for you."

I know how some of you are. You're like, "I don't want to go to something unless I know other people are going." We already have over 50 people signed up for this Weekender, so this is a great time, at the beginning of the summer... Before there's Kids Week, before the short-term mission trips, before all of the vacations start, this is a great opportunity to get connected. So, let me just pray for that, and then we're going to dive into Ephesians 3. Let's pray.

Lord, I just take a moment right now, and I want to pray and thank you for the story of Josh and Austin, a very simple story of noticing a need and doing something about it. Lord, I pray that our church would be full of servants, not critics. A servant and a critic see the same thing but respond differently. A critic says, "Why hasn't somebody done something about that?" and a servant says, "Maybe I can do something about that."

Lord, I pray for a culture of servants. I pray that the way it would feel here on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Saturday night is just a spirit of hospitality, that we are excited as people are coming here, and we want them to know we are ready for them and have been expecting them, Lord, and that *you* are ready for them and are expecting them. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

For me right now in this season of my life, I have an 11-year-old, a 9-year-old, and a 6-year-old. They're all playing soccer, and they're all good. They're good for being 11, 9, and 6. We'll see. It's very interesting. My 9-year-old boy... He's my oldest boy and my middle child. He loves soccer so much, so we started to watch Messi. Do you know who Messi is? Messi is about to sign a contract to make \$400 million a year. I'm going to kill my guidance counselor. I mean, that's a lot of money.

I started watching all of these videos with my son, and it's interesting, because he loves soccer, so what is he looking for? He's looking for the ideal. He's looking for a role model. We're all doing this. Right? If I took your phone from you... That would be uncomfortable, because our phones are not really our phones; they're kind of like extensions of us. If I took your phone, you'd be like, "Give it back."

If I took it from you, and I looked at it and said, "I'm going to look and see who you're following on Instagram and on Twitter, and I'm going to go see the podcasts you're listening to, and I'm going to look at the YouTube channels you're subscribing to," I could tell you, as an adult, who your role models still are.

This is why certain women love to watch these moms on Instagram. It's like, "This mom is perfect. She looks perfect, her kids are perfect, her husband is perfect, and she has a million followers." It's the ideal. The ideal is hard. We need the ideal. You need a role model. You can't help yourself. You're going to look to somebody.

The hard thing about an ideal is an ideal gives us something to shoot for, and, man, do we need that. It's like, "You could be more than you are." But an ideal always, without exception, judges you as well. If a very, very stunning, abnormally gorgeous woman walks into a room, what happens? She makes every other woman insecure, and she makes every guy self-conscious. The ideal has just arrived.

What happens if a very articulate, very successful, very wealthy businessman walks into a room? Every guy is like, "I'm not what I could be. I'm not all that I should be." It's something to shoot for, but it simultaneously judges us. Today, Paul is going to point to himself as an ideal.

Here's a conviction, guys. If you're a Christian (I know not everyone in here is a Christian), here's the conviction: your life and my life should look more like Paul's. We need something to shoot for. I mean, yes, ultimately we want to be like Jesus. Put your "What would Jesus do?" wristband on. That's fine.

But Jesus was the sinless Son of God. We want to be like him, and we want to be the most Christlike versions of ourselves. Yes and amen. But we need sinful, fallen, human examples who are perfect examples of being imperfect. That's what Paul is. Here's what Paul is going to do today. Paul is going to let us into his mindset.

Do you know what a mindset is? That's kind of common talk today. Everyone talks about a mindset. A mindset shapes how you see the world. You can go to places, and you can bring in a business coach, and he'll say, "Do you have the growth mindset or the fixed mindset?" Have you heard of these?

The *growth mindset* basically says, "Hey, you could be different than you are, and your life could be better than it is, and things could change." The *fixed mindset* says, "Well, that's just who you are, and that's just how it is." So you go, "Okay. The growth mindset is better than the fixed mindset."

Then other people go, "Have the abundance mindset, not the scarcity mindset." That makes sense. The *abundance mindset* is "There's plenty to go around and we can all

win." The *scarcity mindset* says, "No, no, no. The world is a zero-sum game. You must lose for me to win, and if you're winning, that means I'm losing."

Those are the mindsets of the world. Paul is not talking about that. Paul, today, has the missionary mindset. I want you to have the missionary mindset. I love missionaries. We spent time with one this week. The missionaries who say goodbye to family and grandparents and cross an ocean and learn a language and give their lives to a people... We want to honor them, but here's the truth: every Christian should view themselves as a missionary where they are.

By the way, this is behind the scenes, if I can remove the curtain for a second. The reason we do so many short-term mission trips... It's expensive, and we help subsidize them. We have to organize. It's a lot of work. Why do we do a short-term mission trip?

There are many reasons. One reason is we know what happens when someone does a short-term mission trip. Let me just tell you. If you've never been on one, or if you've been on one, this is what happens. You go there. It doesn't matter where it is. It could be the Dominican Republic. It could be Africa.

You get there, and about two or three days in, you start saying this to yourself: "Why don't I just do at home what I do here? Here I walk, and I share the gospel, and I'm explicitly a Christian. I'm thinking about lost people, and everywhere I go I'm thinking about how maybe I could tell someone about Jesus. I'm doing that when I'm in the Dominican Republic, but at home, I mean, I'm just at home."

We want to have the missionary mindset everywhere we go. So, what I'm going to do today is I'm going to give us six principles, or six attitudes, or six beliefs, of a missionary mindset that arise out of the most personal section in the book of Ephesians, which is chapter 3, verses 1-13. Let me show you.

## **01 A MISSIONARY MINDSET SEES PURPOSE IN WHERE GOD HAS PLACED YOU**

Verse 1: ***"For this reason I, Paul..."*** Remember, at the beginning Paul didn't really get personal. At the beginning of the letter he goes, "Hey, guys, I'm an apostle by the will of God," and then he's like, "All right. Enough about me. We'll talk about you and Jesus." But now he's coming back to tell us more about himself.

***"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus..."*** He's not going to say, "I'm a prisoner of Caesar" or of Nero or of Rome. He says, "I'm a prisoner of Christ," but he's

in prison. **"...a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles..."** The first principle is the principle that God has put you where you are on purpose.

We see this with Paul. If Paul can see purpose in prison, can you see purpose in the career you don't love, maybe? Can you see purpose in being a mom to two crazy kids? Here's what's happening here, by the way. Paul wants them to know he's in prison, but he waits for a while to tell them.

So, you're getting this letter. This is how it worked. It would be sent to a home church, and these letters were passed around. Almost no one is literate, so the one literate person goes, "Guys, we got a letter from Paul. Okay. He says God loved us before the foundation of the world. That's great. So, we were enemies, and now we're reconciled. Um, guys, bad news. Paul is in the slammer. Paul is in prison."

This is the first time Paul is going to tell them he's in prison. *We* knew that. I told you that week one. This is a prison epistle. They didn't know Paul was in prison. They get a third of the way through the letter, and they're like, "Oh my goodness! Paul, with this high theology, I would have thought you were in some ivory tower, some spiritual retreat. I pictured you sitting next to the ocean and just writing high theology. I didn't know you were chained to a Roman guard while you wrote this."

Paul tells us we can have purpose in every place. Now, this is hard on us. Here's why this is hard for us: because, a lot of times, we don't like where we are. Or you look at your life and go, "This isn't where I thought I would be. I didn't think I'd still be single. This isn't where I thought I would be."

Some of you go, "I wanted to work in Charlotte and Raleigh, and I ended up in Winston-Salem. I tried to go to Greenville, but I couldn't get a job, so here I am. I'm still in Winston-Salem." You're here on purpose. God has placed you where you are on purpose. This is what theologians call a *theology of place*. So often, what we're trying to do is we're trying to get to the next season of our lives, and we don't realize God has something right now for us in this season.

This is just how life is. You don't realize how important every season of your life is until it's over. I didn't realize how special it was to be in college. What a unique season...to be single, to have so much discretionary time, to have such an environment to learn, to be that close to that many people my age. I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you are like, "Those are the best seven years of my life." It was four for me, but it was an incredible time.

Here's what happens. When you get on the other side of a season, you realize it's gone. It's gone. I'll never live in a dorm again. (Thank God.) That season is just over. There was a season where Margy and I had this great apartment right next to

downtown Greensboro, and we could walk into... We didn't have kids yet, and we had all of these friends and all of these relationships. That season is gone.

Where has God placed you? You just need to say it. Like, "God placed me here. Here I am. I'm the dad of three kids. I'm a banker. I'm a lawyer." Paul says, "I'm a prisoner for Jesus Christ." Then, wherever you are, be all there. This is not something you need to do; this is something you need to wake up to. You don't have to move. You're already there. It's like, wherever you are. Let me give you three things to maybe help you be more where you are.

What if you were just a local? I'm not saying that because I'm trying to be a cool iGen or Gen Z, like, "Shop local" and all that. I mean, what if you went to the same barber or the same barista or ate at the same restaurants, and you built relationships with the waiters and waitresses? What if you were a local at the coffee shop? You'd be surprised how much impact you can have by just showing up and being there and being invested and involved.

Secondly, what if you just went on walks? You know, it's interesting what they say air conditioning plus garages plus back porches plus fences have done to us. Some of us never see our neighbors, and they never see us. We just pop into the garage, hit the button, go inside, and we're in our air conditioned or heated home. If we want to go outside, we go out the back where no one can see us.

What would happen if you were just present in your neighborhood? Not in a weird way but just by walking around. Who might God put in front of you? Then what does it look like for you to belong? The Bible says to be in the world and not of the world. Christians are really good at going, "Do not be of the world." It's like, dude, as much as it's a command not to be of the world, it's a command to be *in* the world, which means you have to belong somewhere. Where do you belong?

I mean, I'm glad you're here, and we want you to belong at our church, but where else do you belong? The Y? For the summer, for us, it's the pool. It's like, man, I am a part of that pool. For me, I'm realizing in *this* season it's going to be my kids and their sports. I'm a dad of kids who play sports. Most of my missionary endeavors and my evangelistic relationships are going to be to the parents of the kids my kids play soccer with or swim with.

## **02 A MISSIONARY MINDSET IS WILLING TO SUFFER**

Okay. That's the easy one. That's the fun one. That's, like, wake up and see God has placed you where you are on purpose. The second one is not as fun. You have to be

willing to suffer. We don't like to suffer, but I'll show you this. Turn with me to the same verse. We'll just reread it and see suffering in it. It's already built in there. You can see it. ***"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles..."*** I love this. "Okay, guys. Look. Bad news. Paul is in prison."

"Are you serious? Why is he in prison?"

"Because of us."

Why is Paul suffering? I know the Sunday school answer. Maybe you know the Sunday school answer. The Sunday school answer is "For Jesus." That's always the right answer. That's always the ultimate answer, but that's not what Paul says there. He'll say that other places. Other places he'll go, "Guys, I'm suffering for Jesus."

Do you see what he's saying here? He says, "I'm suffering for you." We don't like to suffer. Listen. Christians are not masochists. We don't pursue suffering, but 1 Peter says we should not be surprised by it. We should not spend, as most of us do, our entire lives trying to avoid it happening even in the least.

Guys, we are soft. I hate to tell you, as your pastor, I am domesticated. I sleep with three pillows. They have to be Tempur-Pedic. I have ratings of mineral water and how quality I think it is. What's wrong with my heart? I'm soft. We're not used to suffering. Here's what Paul says. "I do suffer for Jesus. I really suffer for other people. I love other people."

I've been thinking, as I often do... As I was writing this, I was like, "How do I encourage us to embrace or to be willing to suffer more?" I could try to paint us a great picture of suffering. I could give us great examples, but I think the main reason you're going to be willing to suffer more is if you love people. That's why Paul suffered. Paul suffered because he loved people.

I went to the dentist a couple of weeks ago, and one of the hygienists there told me... My dentist didn't tell me this, but one of my hygienists said, "Hey, Dr. [So-and-so], the dentist... Do you know he gave one of his kidneys to a patient?" My first thought was, "Does he know he only gets two of those?"

"Oh, yeah, and he used to do a lot of Ironmans, but he can't do Ironmans anymore because he gave away one of his kidneys." I'm like, "Was his patient his mom? Was it his sister? Was it one of his kids?" He loved his patient. I don't know. That's all I know. How do I know that? Because he was willing to suffer and sacrifice for them.

I knew a dad whose son got type 1 diabetes in the beginning of high school. Some of you have type 1 diabetes or know someone who has it. It's like, "Well, chronic illness

for you now." His son had to figure out how to do the whole poking your hand and counting your carbs. You know, you're insulin-dependent for the rest of your life.

I was talking to the dad when he found out his son had type 1 diabetes, and he said, "I wish I could take it from him. If I could, if there was a button I could press, I would have it instead of him." That's love. Love is a willingness to suffer. We have to be willing to suffer.

The Bible speaks of suffering on three levels. The Bible speaks of *deserved suffering*. That's not what Paul is talking about here. *Deserved suffering* is when we suffer because of our sin. That's the hardest suffering on people, psychologically, because you'll wake up at 2:00 in the morning and go, "Oh! My life and my family are in this mess because of me and the foolish decisions I made." It's hard to forgive yourself. That's a whole other sermon, but there's grace for that.

There's a second type of suffering, which is *innocent suffering*. If you haven't heard, Tim Keller, the great Tim Keller, God bless him, died this week. He was a very famous, well-known pastor. He died of stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Tim Keller didn't do anything wrong. It's suffering because we live in a sinful, broken world.

Sometimes (this is my observation of 15 years of pastoral ministry) the worst things happen to the best people. It's called *innocent suffering*. I'm just suffering because the world is broken. Romans 8 says the whole creation groans, and sometimes some of the godliest people groan under the suffering.

But Paul is not talking about deserved suffering or innocent suffering. He's talking about a third category, which is *missional suffering*, which is the suffering we go through as we bring the gospel to other people and tell them about their sin. Do you know how we got here? It's 2023, and there are 516 church buildings in Winston-Salem alone. All things considered, we're able to worship freely.

Do you know how we got here? From the Bible's perspective, we are the ends of the earth. When you read the verses, it's like, "Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." That's us. I mean, there are more places to go, but we're the ends of the earth. You go, "How did we get from twelve apostles to a billion people?" Do you know the answer? Suffering. That's it. The way the gospel breaks through into a new area is always suffering.

One of our desires is one day (and we hope to do this) to plant a church in East Winston. We'd love to plant an autonomous church and for it to be a multiplying church and for it to meet the felt and forever needs of East Winston. Do you know what I think about when I think about planting a church in East Winston? Suffering, if you're really going to do it, because the pastor is going to have to live there, and so



are a lot of people. The problems of East Winston are going to have to become our problems.

I know a guy who planted in downtown Atlanta. He has six kids. He moved to downtown Atlanta. Wherever he lived, he was planting this church in the worst part of Atlanta, and then he sent his kids, all six of them, to the public schools in the worst part of Atlanta.

We're not saying you have to do this, but I'm just telling you what he did. We're all sitting there... We're all of these young church planters, sitting at his feet, going, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Because I realized until the problems of the people around me became my problems I wouldn't care."

How are we going to reach...? Some of you know about this, what are called *unreached people groups*. They're the people who have yet to hear about Jesus. They have no Bible, no building, and no believer. That's how you can think about an unreached people group.

Why haven't they been reached yet? Do you know why? Because it takes so much suffering. You have to love them so much, and you have to be willing to suffer so much. Bringing the gospel to Saudi Arabia, to any of the "stans," to North Korea... To bring the gospel, the amount of suffering you will have to go through... Let me just tell you, that's the only way.

I'm not trying to make myself the hero of my own story here, but I did college ministry for 10 years, and here's what I realized. Hopefully this brings it down for all of us. To bring the gospel to the college campus, there's no shortcut to suffering. Zero. If I was going to bring the gospel to the college campus... Not just me...anybody.

What do I have to do? I have to work a night job. I didn't want to do that. I have to go raise my own money. I didn't want to do that. I have to be misunderstood and made fun of by 18- to 22-year-olds who think what I'm doing is ridiculous. I had to eat cafeteria food. There's no other way. There's no shortcut. When you go to people because they can't come to you, it's all suffering.

One of my favorite things that would happen, because I'd see all of these guys come to faith in Christ... It would take six months or a year or two and they would go, "That's why you were in my dorm. That's why you came to the cafeteria." It was like, "Yes, man. I loved you before you even knew it. I came to you, and you're right. I did make some sacrificial decisions to reach you." That's what Paul is saying. Jesus is the great motivation. Where does he get this from? Jesus was willing to suffer for us because he loved us.

### 03 A MISSIONARY MINDSET SEES THE NEED TO STEWARD GRACE

First, we need a theology of place. God has placed us. Secondly, we need a theology of suffering. Thirdly, we need a theology of grace. Look with me at verse 2. **"...*assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace...*"** What? Grace is something I steward? **"...*that was given to me for you...*"**

Do you see that? I steward grace, and grace is given to me. I'm not to be a cul-de-sac for grace; I'm to be a conduit and catalyst for grace. Stewardship is a big theme, guys. Hopefully you know that. I talk about that here. There are two themes in the Bible: *stewardship* and *salvation*. When you die, those are the two questions. I'm giving you the final exam before you get there.

The two questions are a stewardship question and a salvation question. The salvation question is "What did you do with my Son?" The stewardship question is "What did you do with my stuff?" Here Paul goes, "Guys, listen." This is what a missionary does. A missionary mindset always asks, "How am I doing at stewarding God's grace?"

What does that mean? You can waste God's grace. I don't know how that works, but you can. Why would you be told to steward? Why do you steward things? You steward things so you don't waste them. You steward things so you can leverage them, so you can invest them, so you can multiply them.

Here's the principle of stewardship: I steward so I can share. That's it. This is why people who don't understand stewardship cannot be generous, in general. It's like, "Well, I'm trying to keep up with the Joneses, and I don't understand compounding interest, and I'm upside down on my house." Okay. You need stewardship before you can share.

Paul is saying we steward the grace of God. Now that's interesting. He's not talking about the forgiving grace of God. The forgiving grace of God is the grace of God that we tend to think of. The forgiving grace of God is "You messed up and you sinned. Ask God for forgiveness and he'll forgive you." That's the forgiving grace of God, and thank God for it. I'm not making light of it. But there's the transforming, empowering, enabling grace of God. That's why he said it's a power that works in him.

Here's a way to think about it. If you are lazy and slothful, yelling at your kids, and lying on the couch, watching season 6 of *Breaking Bad* again... You're like, "What am I doing with my life?" and at the end of the day you feel really guilty, and you go, "Oh my goodness. God, forgive me for wasting my whole day." That's the forgiving grace

of God, and it'll be there. But the grace of God was there seven hours ago for you to get off the couch. That's the transforming grace of God.

How do we get access to the grace of God? Isn't that what you want? Christ bought it. It's free. It's undeserved. That's what grace is. How do we get access to it? Through the means of grace. Those are the spiritual disciplines. Christians call the spiritual disciplines the *means of grace*.

Why does Paul start Ephesians, and every one of his letters, with "Grace to you..."? Because he believes that when he's writing the Bible, the grace of God is coming. Here's what I want you to know: grace is real. It's not ethereal. It's a real thing. It's talked about in the Bible as an energy or a power God gives you. It's the supernatural strength to do what God has said.

There's something that happens when you read the Bible and believe it that you receive the grace of God. You can receive the grace of God by just asking for it. The Bible says he gives greater grace to the humble. There's more grace available, and sometimes grace shows up as another person. Sometimes the grace of God is a person in your life who God places to help you get to that next place.

What I love about Paul is he says, "The grace of God is given to me for you." We'll get more into this in chapter 4. God gives us grace for other people. You need to go to God for grace so you can give that grace to your spouse. You need to go to God for grace so you can give that grace to your kids. You need to go to God for grace so you can even, if you're wise enough, give grace to your enemies.

#### **04 A MISSIONARY MINDSET WANTS TO MAKE KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST**

We have to understand place, we have to understand suffering, we have to understand grace, and we have to understand the gospel. Let me show you here. This is the fourth one. Verse 3: "***...how the mystery...***" This is what we're going to focus on: the mystery. Paul calls the gospel a *mystery*. I'll explain this. "***...how the mystery was made known to me by revelation...***"

Paul says, "Guys, I didn't make this up. I didn't invent this. I didn't discover it. It was revealed to me." Here's what he says: "***...as I have written briefly.***" So, "It's revealed to me, and I write it down." "***When you read this, you can perceive my insight into...***" There it is again. "***...the mystery of Christ...***" We'll talk about what that is.

***"...which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is***

***that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."***

Okay. What is a mystery? Now, when we think of a mystery, we tend to think of something we can't understand. That's how we think of mysteries. Like, "It's a mystery. I don't know how it all works together." We use the word *mystery*... It's incomprehensible, undiscoverable, and unexplainable.

That is exactly not how the Bible uses the word *mystery*. In fact, a lot of translations will translate this word *mystery* as *secret*. That's probably a better translation, because here's what a mystery is every time it's used. By the way, Paul uses this word 27 times in the New Testament. It's something we did not know and now know.

It's something we could never have discovered but has now been revealed. It's something that was not clear in the Old Testament. It was concealed in promises and prophecies and types, and all that, and now it has been revealed in the New Testament.

Paul is so excited about this. He's like, "Guys, listen. It's the mystery of Christ." Now, what is the mystery of Christ? It's the gospel. To be clear, every time... You'll see this word used different times. When Paul is talking about the mystery (this will be kind of a lens to understand the New Testament, because you'll see it all over his epistles), it always refers to either the entire gospel message or a result or new reality because of that message.

So, here, if we're getting really technical, he's saying, "Guys, let me tell you the mystery." He's like, "The mystery is that the Jews and Gentiles would be brought together, and the Gentiles don't need to become Jews to become Christians. God is not saving people two different ways and creating two different communities. God had one plan and one person he was going to save everybody through."

Here's what Paul basically says: "Guys, I'm so excited, because my job is to reveal what God has revealed." That's the missionary mindset. The missionary mindset is that we are not God's editors; we are God's messengers. All we're supposed to do is to say to other people what God has said.

I've told you this before. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, that famous preacher, said man's greatest problem is not that he's a sinner. It's not that he's going to hell. It's not that he has the wrath of God on him. Man's greatest problem is he does not know these things. Theologically speaking, man's greatest problem is his ignorance. We are part of helping people no longer be ignorant by letting them know what God has said.

Now, here's our problem. All Paul wanted to do, and he suffered greatly for it... Paul said, "All I want to do is reveal to other people what has been concealed for far too long." The language, by the way, is "It *has* to be revealed." It was concealed. It's time to let the lid off and let it out.

Here's the problem with us, if we're honest. Most of us are not revealing to others what God has revealed. In fact, we're not just... I mean, that would be bad enough. It's like, "Hey, listen. You're not revealing to others what God has revealed to you through the Bible." Most of us are probably, if you watch yourself... And you have to watch yourself like a stranger, like you don't know yourself. Watch how you act.

See how many times you don't only not reveal but intentionally conceal your Christian faith, your Christian beliefs, and what you know God said about something. Why do we do that? Well, in large part, it goes back to the second point. We're afraid to suffer. For many of you, there are two people at work who know you're a Christian: you and Jesus.

Here's a principle of revealing and concealing that is very true. You'll know this right away. The longer you conceal, the harder it is to reveal. If you got to know your neighbors, and it's like, "We've known them forever," or classmates or coworkers, you know, anybody you know...

If you're like, "Oh, we talked about every Netflix show we liked, and we talked about every sports team we liked, and we were over at their house, and they were over at our house. Man! It has been three years, and I've never, ever told them anything..." My encouragement would be to begin to reveal early so that it becomes a pattern and part of who you are with that person.

"I'm just somebody who talks about my Christian faith in normal, natural ways, and I talk about God. I'm trying to reveal, not conceal." I have a friend who's great at this. He works for a big company here in Winston. He just decided, "I'm going to be explicitly Christian." In fact, every week he shows up at our Community Group and goes, "Guys, it's really cool. I've started to tell everybody I have Community Group on Tuesday nights, and they've asked me a lot of questions about it.

I just want people to know... In the same way they might know my kids have a soccer game and my kids play soccer, I want them to know Community Group is a huge part of my life because I love the local church." He said, "I'm having all of these new conversations." Why? Because he chose to reveal instead of conceal.

## **05 A MISSIONARY MINDSET IS HUMBLE**

We need a theology of place, we need a theology of suffering, we need a theology of grace, and we need a theology of the gospel and evangelism. This is all the missionary mindset. We need a theology of ourselves. How do I understand myself? Paul tells us. He helps us. Let's look at verse 7.

***"Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power."*** When you become a Christian, you get a new relationship with God and a new power. It's called *grace*. This is interesting. Here's the effect grace has on a person's self-image. Verse 8: ***"To me, though I am the very least..."*** It's interesting. He makes up a word in Greek. It's literally "leaster," or "less than the least." That's what he's saying.

***"To me, though I am the [leaster] very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ..."*** Paul, do you really think you're the least of the saints? Is Paul just doing that hyperbole thing we sometimes do? Is he doing that false humility thing we're so good at doing? Have you ever done that before, where you say to somebody, "I'm not very good at..." and you say something, and you're thinking in your mind, "Please tell me I am good at it"?

That's not what Paul is doing. Here's what's interesting about Paul. The reason God saved Paul is because, at different times in Paul's life, Paul was the best, and at another time in Paul's life, Paul was the worst. God wanted to communicate forever to people, "Whether you think you're the best or the worst, I can save you."

If you go to Philippians 3, Paul goes, "If you want to play the 'Who's better?' game, I win. If you want to play 'Who has done more religious rituals?' I was circumcised on the eighth day. If you want to do 'Who's more Hebrew?' I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. If you want to do 'Who's from the better family?' I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. If you want to do 'Who has done more effort?' according to the law, I was faultless and blameless. So, if you want to play the game of who's more religious and who's a better person, I win every time."

Paul learned he had to repent of his goodness. Some of you have to do that. Some people need to repent of their badness; some people need to repent of their goodness. Some people need to repent of their rebellion; some people need to repent of their religion.

Then, in a later time in Paul's life, he says, "I'm the worst." Paul talks about this often. He knew the grace of God, so he could forgive himself, and he knew God forgave him, but Paul never got over that he was a persecutor and a blasphemer of the church. He mentions it on multiple accounts. On one of his accounts he said, "I made other people blaspheme God."

Some commentators think maybe that was the darkest moment of his life when he looked back. "I was the kind of person who not only blasphemed God; I made other people renounce their faith before I killed them." If you want to play the game of "Who's the worst?" Paul wins. If you want to play the game of "Who's the best?" Paul wins. He needs the grace of God. On your best day, you still need the grace of God. On your worst day, you're not outside of the grace of God.

Paul says something interesting. He says he's the least of all the saints. Now, Paul writes Ephesians in the middle of his ministry. The first letter we have from Paul in your New Testament is the book of 1 Corinthians. It's the first time Paul tells us about himself.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, "Guys, I need to tell you something. I'm the least of all of the apostles." You might go, "Aw, we feel so sorry for you, Paul, the least of all of the apostles." There are only 12. They wrote Scripture and saw Jesus face-to-face. It doesn't sound like a bad deal.

Then Paul gets to Ephesians. Ephesians is right in the middle of his ministry, and he writes, "I'm the least of all the saints." What's he saying? "I'm the most sinful person I know." That should be true of all of us. I don't know anybody else's inward thoughts. I know *my* inward thoughts. I know *my* inward motivations. I know that my motives are always... I don't know if I've had a pure motive in my whole life, a purely pure motive.

Then in 1 Timothy 1, which is one of Paul's last letters, he writes, "This statement is true: Christ came to save sinners of whom I am the chief." Do you see that across time... People notice this. Paul's view of himself goes to the place where, across time, he sees himself more and more as a sinner in need of God's grace. That's what spiritual maturity is.

Now, we normally think of the opposite. We're like, "No, no, no. The longer I'm a Christian, I shouldn't be struggling with these temptations anymore, and there are certain sins I just don't do anymore. I have all this godly character. I'm a godlier version of myself, and I'm more like Jesus." All that's true, but what happens when you become a Christian is you realize God is holy and you are sinful.

We don't even realize how small of a view of both of those we have. Can a 6-year-old, 7-year-old, 8-year-old, or whatever, come to faith in Christ? Yes, I believe that can happen, but their view of sin is going to be so small. "What did you do?" "I was mean to my brother, and I didn't obey my parents." It's like, "Well, you're 8, so I guess that's the biggest thing in your life right now."

It's like, "Wait till you get married. Wait till you hit puberty. Wait till you start making money. Wait till you have kids. Wait till you suffer." We've all had that experience. You're like, "Dude, I'm more sinful than I even knew." Then, at the same time, you're learning about God, and you're like, "Wow!" You're reading Ephesians 1, and you're realizing how big God is.

What happens is you have this massive view of God and this view of yourself as a sinner, so across time, you see there's a bigger gap between you and God, and the cross gets bigger in your life. You can say without any kind of false humility, "I need Jesus more today than I did when I first became a Christian, and I understand myself as even more sinful at 38 than I did when I was 16."

## **06 A MISSIONARY MINDSET LOVES THE CHURCH**

We need a new view of ourselves, of place, of suffering, of grace. Finally, we need to love the church. I want to show you how Paul ends here. We need a new view of the church. Here's what he says. Verse 9: ***"...and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan..."*** Paul is like, "Okay." I told you guys Ephesians is deep. He's like, "Guys, I'm going to take you really deep again." We're going to go back into the eternal plan of God and how he wanted to reveal this mystery.

Here he goes. ***"...and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God..."*** It's like, "What are you about to tell me, Paul?" So, what was God's plan to get this mystery out to everybody that has been hidden in him for ages? Look. ***"...who created all things, so that through the church..."*** How do you think of the church? Look at what it says here.

***"...so that through the church the manifold..."*** Literally, multicolored, multilayered, multifaceted. ***"...wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."*** "I want everyone to see, even the seen and unseen realm, even angels and demons. I want them to see this."

***"This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."*** Paul says God had this massive plan to reach the world and to make the mystery of himself known, and he decided to do it through the church.

How do people think about the church today? A building, sadly. It's like, "Oh, yeah, steeples and stained glass. That's the church." Or "I know what the church is. It's the most boring hour of my week that I don't go to anymore." Or, if you're a little more



sophisticated, "I get it, Kyle. I know what the church is. It's a nonprofit. It's a great nonprofit that meets a lot of needs in the city."

Paul is like, "Guys, wake up." The most important institution on earth is the church. It's more important than the US government. Whatever you think is important, it's way more important than that. Again, there's the universal church, and there's the local church. The universal church is invisible, and it's every person who has ever believed or ever will believe.

In the universal church, there's C.S. Lewis, and if the Lord tarries, there's some person who will be born in 100 years who's going to believe. That's the universal church. It's every person who has ever believed or will believe, and it's invisible. We can't see it all at once.

That's not the main way the Bible talks about the church, although that *is* a way and that's mentioned. The main way the Bible talks about the church is the local church, which is a visible gathering of believers. There is nothing more powerful than a local church when it's working the way God wants it to work.

It says it's through the church the manifold wisdom of God will be seen. I know what you think. When we read it, we think, "The church? A bunch of sinners like us?" You can almost hear all of the critiques of the church. "Oh, yeah, you're talking about the hypocritical church? *That* church?" Yeah. God actually is going to be more glorified by working through sinful people like us somehow.

We're going to get to heaven, and we're going to watch the film, or however it works, and it's going to be millions of years of story after story after story after story of the progress of the gospel through the church. We're going to see, "I cannot believe God worked through jars of clay like us. I can't believe God hit a straight shot with a crooked stick like that. That's amazing."

Guys, I'm just telling you, the local church... Most of you probably already know this. I just want to tell you. It's so special. There is nothing like it. When I look at even just the basic church calendar across a month or two, I'm like, "There's nothing like the local church." It's like, "Okay, in a couple of weeks, let's just go baptize a bunch of new believers and celebrate that as a church." Great. Check that off.

Then how about all of the new families with all of their new kids... We'll bless them and commission those parents as they start their journeys. Then someone is just outside after the service. "Hey, we're getting married. Could you guys help us get married?" "You've got it."

Then we're walking with someone else as they're dying, and then we're sending people all over the world. This week, I had a missionary back from Turkey, and I'm investing in him, while yesterday I get a text and one of our college students is in London at Thomas West's church, while last week we sent two or three girls to Mumbai for the summer. We are not messing around.

Monday night, we gathered here to pray for every age and stage in our church while we have 450 kids next door. That's the next generation we're investing in. It's like, "Get it!" Paul is saying, "Get it, and get in." The local church should be your favorite community and your favorite club. Whenever someone is like, "Oh, my daughter is going to the University of Michigan; I hope there's a good church there," it's backward.

Church is the most important community, not education. Church is more important than your workplace. Church is more important than your country club. Church is more important than your goofy kickball team, *way* more important, and it needs to show up that way, because if not, you're not part of God's plan and what he's doing in the world. That's why we're like, "Get in. Get connected."

Paul ends in verse 13 by encouraging us. Look at what he says. "***So I ask you*** [in light of how God is working through the church] ***not to lose heart...***" "Don't be discouraged. Don't get burned out." "***...over what I am suffering...***" "I know you're hearing that I'm in prison. I don't want you to get discouraged." "***...which is your glory.***"

"What does that mean, Paul? Why do you make it so hard on us? Why do you say things we don't understand? What do you mean your suffering is for our glory?" Here's what he's saying: "It's working and we're winning." That's what he's saying. "It's working. There's purpose in all of this. Look. You're believing. Look. A letter is coming to you. Look. God is moving in my life even while I'm in prison. It's working and we're winning."

A couple of nights ago, my family and I went to our first ever Wake Forest baseball game. I thought, "Well, this isn't going to be very crowded. They're good this year, but this won't be very crowded." So we showed up. I get there, and there are people everywhere. We can't park in *this* parking lot. That's full. And *this* parking lot is full. "Go down to the Coliseum." I'm going all the way down to the Coliseum, and I'm just seeing people and people and people.

We get inside, and they make an announcement. "This is the highest attended Wake Forest baseball game in history." I said to the guy next to me, "It's because we're winning." There's nothing that builds momentum, nothing that encourages like

winning. Paul is saying, "Guys, it's working. You're believing. I'm in prison. God is using me. It's working and we're winning."

Paul is like, "Look, guys. Suffering is all part of the plan." Jesus suffered for us. Why do we have to suffer? Because there's something that happens when we're willing to suffer that it powerfully authenticates the gospel. You have a nice big house, and your life is easy, and everything is great, and your car is awesome, and God has blessed you. No one is impressed by that. That's what the world wants.

When through suffering you're able to say, "God is good," or even "I'm doing this because I love you, and I want to reach you. Jesus means a lot to me, so you mean a lot to me..." There's this missionary story I love. It's a true story of this missionary. He's a brand-new believer. He's out in some village in the middle of nowhere, and he's like, "I've got to reach the next village."

He just comes to Jesus and says, "I've got to reach the next village," but it's, like, 30 miles away. He's too poor to afford shoes, and he's like, "What am I going to do? I've got to get there, but I can't afford shoes. I need to reach people for Jesus." He says, "Well, I'll go anyway." He doesn't have shoes, and he goes 30-some miles, running, walking, and all this.

He gets to this new village, and he sees the tribe there. He gathers them around and tells them about Jesus, and they laugh at him. They mock him. They make fun of him. He's so discouraged. They see him walk away, and he's so discouraged he falls asleep under a tree. He wakes up. He doesn't know if it was an hour later or two hours later. He wakes up, and there's the whole tribe standing around him.

They said, "Hey, after you preached to us, we saw that you fell asleep under the tree, and we realized you must have come from a long way, because you could barely stand." They said, "Then we came over here and we saw your feet are badly bruised, and we realized you came a long distance to share this message with us, and we'd like to hear it again."

There is something that authenticates the gospel, and it's our willingness to suffer...mostly, in America, being misunderstood. I'm willing to do that because I love Jesus, I love you, he suffered for me, and I believe it's working and we're winning. Let's pray.

Lord, it's hard to build this type of church. That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to build a church here. We're trying to *be* the church. It's very difficult to actually live the radical flavor of Christianity that the apostle Paul is the ideal of. So, would you help us, Lord? Would you wake us up? This is where we are. This is why I have the job I have or the neighborhood I live in.

Lord, would you help us to stop trying to get to the next thing and be where we are for Jesus? Lord, would you help us be willing to suffer? Paul begins and ends with suffering. Lord, we don't want to suffer. We admit that. We want to love people and be willing to suffer because, Jesus, you suffered for us.

Lord, would we steward grace? Would we not be stingy with your grace? Would we say, "I want it so I can give it to other people. My spouse needs it. My kids need it. My friends need it. My enemies need it." Lord, would you help us love the church? We're confused. Christians are confused about the church.

Americans are confused about the church. The church is how we connect our lives to your global and eternal purposes, Lord. May we see and may the world see your manifold wisdom as you work through the church in the world, Lord, and as you work through this local church. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.