Effective Communication

Lecture 3

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1. We're coming back around to Rule #9. Social customs matter

a. We've talked about how history matters. We're gonna talk about how geography matters – where the story takes place in the Bible matters.

b. Now we're gonna talk about how social customs matter, and we're gonna look at the story of one my favorite guys. I love this story. I love this man. He is a great man. He's the Ethiopian eunuch.

i. But as we come to this topic, come to this guy, I want to come now around it in terms of the Kingdom. You know, the Kingdom of God is a significant topic. That's the topic of most of the parables.

1. As you get into the parables, Jesus is unpacking the Kingdom of God. He says the Kingdom of God is like this and the Kingdom of God is like this and the Kingdom of God is like this. He's talking about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the goal. The Kingdom is the dream. The Kingdom and nothing less than the Kingdom is the vision of the Lord Christ, which means, practically speaking, that the vision of Jesus is bigger even than the vision of being redeemed people. It's the vision of a redeemed absolutely everything. It's the vision of a new Heaven. It's the vision of a new earth that's inhabited by a brand new people. They're not some people that He makes out in outer space and then brings in to inhabit His new Heaven and new earth. No. A new people that He makes out of sinful me and you through His Son. It's a glorious thought. God is making a new people and He's making us, again as we've said, out of every race, language, nation, color, tongue, the whole deal. Collecting us all up and making us one for confirmation to the image of His Son, Jesus. And so God is calling us to be this new humanity, but He's calling us also to be people who invest our lives in building His Kingdom. And you guys get that. But most believers don't get that.

2. Most believers know that God's building His Kingdom and they're alright with that, and even they're okay with the idea that God's gonna build His Kingdom through the people. They just don't think they're gonna be the people He's gonna build it through. They look at people like you and say, “See, God's building His Kingdom through these people over here. Way to go!” But God wants to build His Kingdom through them, too. And that speaks to me as a pastor and so many of you guys who are pastors and leaders in churches and communities. Our call to the people of God is to employ them in building the Kingdom. That's that principle of reproduction in EE. We want to raise up Kingdom builders, but the reality is that so many people who are believers in Jesus wake up every morning and they look in the mirror and they fail to see what Jesus sees, which is the face of a Kingdom builder. And we need to help them see that. And this story will help you help them see that but only if you understand what's going on societally in the day that this story takes place. You have to understand things about this Ethiopian eunuch and what it would have been like to be him and what he would have faced would be difficult. He is a heroic man.

3. So this is a story, if you're familiar with it, that takes place in Acts 8, and what's happening in Acts 8 is there is this great revival that's sweeping through Samaria, and it's being led by one of the first deacons.

a. Does anybody know who was leading that revival? Philip! It was being led by Philip. Philip is the lightning rod. He is the guy that the Holy Spirit is using to bring village after village after village, hundreds if not thousands of people, are coming to faith in Christ. This great wave of revival is happening, and right in the middle of it, while the wave is cresting, then God reaches in and He grabs Philip and He pulls him right out of the middle of it.

b. It's illogical. It doesn't make sense. And when you're reading these stories carefully and you're asking questions about these stories, you've got to stop at that moment and go, “Whoa! Wait a minute. What's going on here?” He pulls him out to have him witness to one man. So automatically, you start thinking this is gonna be special man. And by the end of the story, you can see just how special he is. He is an heroic man but not in that society. Nobody would have, in Jerusalem, looked at this man and expected anything to be done for God through him. He's not the kind of guy who would have gotten up in the morning and, at least in the city of Jerusalem, looked in the mirror and thought, “That's the face of a Kingdom builder.” But God has other plans for him. He clearly has that face.

2. So Luke says this in Acts 8 beginning if verse 26. What are the colors of the dust of the earth, the soils of the ground. It's black, it's brown, it's beige, it's yellow, it's kind of reddish. Yeah. It's tan, it's white, it's all the colors of our flesh. I think in the very beginning, first few pages of the Bible, God is coming to us and He's saying, “Guys! When you make the thing about this, you're arguing over dirt.” It's absurd. It's wrong. And we've been trained to understand that. God breathes into the man. It's the life of God within us that makes us so valuable.

a. But this guy has been in the city of Jerusalem. And he's been to the temple in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was a city in that day that was famous for its racism. And the reality is that not one of us in here today, including me, would have been accepted in that temple. We're not Jews. And he was obviously not a Jew and couldn't pass for one. So you see it and you understand that culturally, he says that there was an Ethiopian. And then he adds to that 'but a eunuch.' And that's significant, too. In that day, it was not uncommon for royal families to take some of their slaves, men who they wanted to put over their women, their harems, or they wanted to put over their money, they wanted them to be their treasurers and to neuter them, to just put it frankly, like you would a dog. Okay? And why would they do that? Well, it's obvious with the ladies, I think. But with regard to the treasury, they never wanted these men to grow up and get married. They never wanted these men to grow up and have children. They never wanted these men to grow up and develop a family that they had greater allegiance to than the royal family. You see? Because then they might be more tempted to steal. So did this incredibly inhumane thing with these people, and they made them a eunuch.

b. But if you're reading the story carefully, then you've got to ask yourself, how in the world does Philip, or Luke who is writing the story, know that this guy is a eunuch? By looking at his face. He had no beard. You see? When he's been emasculated as a young boy, he never developed the ability to grow a beard and virtually everyone in that culture wore a beard. So he looks at this man's face, and he's finding reasons why the temple would reject him. They would have rejected him as a non­Jew. They would have rejected him as an incomplete being or as a broken man. And Luke wants you to pause and feel, for a moment, for this guy. So you step into the text. You become him for a minute. What is that like?

i. You know, all of us grow up with certain expectations, and one of the expectations that

ii. And so God interrupts this great revival to take Philip out into the desert to evangelize we have and it's not always met, but we have the expectation that someday we'll fall in love, right? And then maybe we'll get married. And if we get married, then maybe we will have children and who knows, if we live long enough and our kids don't kill us, we'll get to see our grandchildren. You know, and we have these expectations and when those expectations don't work out, it hurts. It's painful. It's difficult. This Ethiopian eunuch was denied all of those things when he was just a boy. He never had a shot at any of it. And we know also what people in the first century thought about eunuchs. They mocked eunuchs mercilessly. They referred to them as dry trees. Do you know why? They were trees that produced no fruit. They had no dates. They were incapable of having children physically. In that culture, that was important. A man was judged, in large, part by how many sons that he was able to produce. That's a significant part of this story. This man who, in that day, no one would have expected anything spiritually significant to come from. And all you had to do to figure that out was to look at his face. No beard, right? Not a Jew. But Philip rose and went to this desolate, dry, desert place and there was an Ethiopian and beardless man, a man black in face, a eunuch, a dry tree, but he's a very wealthy dry tree, very, very wealthy. He's a court official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. And it says that he was in charge of all of her treasury.

iii. Ethiopia, in the Bible, is famous for its gold and for its gems. It's a wealthy place. The name 'Candace' is not an actual name, it's a title. It's like Pharoah of Egypt. You know Pharoah, King of Egypt? That's not his first name. I mean, that's a title. It just means 'king.' In Ethiopia, it was said that it was below the dignity of a man to rule and have to deal with all of the administrative headaches of that. And so it was a society that was governed by the women. It was a matriarchal society. And Candace was the queen that ruled, and this man was in charge of all of her wealth. He's a very wealthy man. And it says that he had come to Jerusalem to worship. Which means that this guy somehow had become convinced that the God of Israel was the true Lord God. And he had seen in his work that the place to make sacrifice for sin was in Jerusalem, and he was so sold out to that, that he got in his carriage, probably with a whole caravan of people, guards and soldiers to guard him, and traveled 800 miles riding in a carriage, to come to Jerusalem. And what did he experience there? He was rejected for having been the wrong race. He was rejected for having been broken and incomplete as a eunuch. And in all likelihood, he was taken advantage of at the temple for his great wealth. Treated insincerely, falsely flattered, ripped off. Jesus totaled this temple as a den of thieves. He overturned its tables. He was mocked as a dry tree. He had a heck of time, this guy. Difficult. But you only know that if you understand these social issues. It brings the story to life in a way that you can't see otherwise. And the cool thing to me is that he's still searching. You know? He doesn't go all the way there, get treated like crud by all of God's people, and says, “Okay, God. If this is what your people are like, then I'm done.” Not this guy. He's looking for the Lord. It says this eunuch had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Now how did we know that? Because he's reading it out loud. You see, in those days, the parchments upon which the Scriptures were written out, were so expensive, they were so valuable, that they put no spaces between the words, there were no margins on the page. They had to use absolutely every speck of the page because the page itself was so valuable that the only way you could read the Word of God was to sound it out as you went. You would sound it out loud, and it would help you figure out where the words were. Does that make sense? Because they were all run together.

iv. So this guy's sitting in his chariot, he's reading the prophet Isaiah out loud, and the Spirit said to Philip – which I love because the Spirit speaks, which is awesome – and he says, “Go over and join the chariot.” And so Philip ran to him. He runs. There's an urgency to the Gospel. And he heard him. Do you see it? Reading Isaiah the prophet, and he asked, because he's an adaptable evangelist, “Do you understand what you're reading?” And this guy, who has just been completely humiliated in the city of Jerusalem. I mean, you can almost picture him just throwing his hands up in the air and saying, “How can I unless someone guides me?” And so this man invites Philip to come up and sit with him. And then Luke tells us something very important. He tells us exactly where in the book of Isaiah the man was reading from.

1. And when you're studying the passage, you have to get that that's important. That's significant. He says, “Now the passage of Scripture that he was reading was this: Like a sheep, He was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. And who can describe his generation?”, meaning his children. It literally says his life was cut off from the earth. And so you can see why this guy would park on this passage. He can relate totally to this person that he's reading about. I mean, he's just been mistreated, abused, humiliated, experienced the injustice of the temple, and he's reading about a guy who did exactly these same things or experienced these same things. He's also a guy who had no wife and had no children as a result of a cutting off. And so the eunuch is really resonating with this particular passage in Isaiah. He says to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?” And then Philip does what all of us are called to do. He opened his mouth and beginning with the Scripture because he's very specific about identifying it, he told him the good news about Jesus, who took all of our sin and faced all of the hostilities in the temple, which put him to death that we might have life. And that He might become for us the true temple of God, the temple that does not reject us when we're broken but receives us. The temple that doesn't send us away as being incomplete but makes us whole. The temple that is gathering together people from every country and making us one people.

2. So you read that and you see what happens is that Philip, preaching to this guy from Isaiah right where he's at in Isaiah 53, brings this man to Christ. And it says, “And as they were going along the road, they came to some water.” So where did we start the story? He went out into the desert, a place with no water, a place that's dead. But all of a sudden now, this man comes to faith and immediately we read of water.

a. What is Luke doing? What's happening geographically in this story mirrors what's happening in the life of this man. He starts out dry and dead spiritually. Then on a desert road, He comes to faith in Christ and immediately there's water, there's life. You see? Very, very careful with the way he writes this. And so the man sees the water, he's excited, and he says, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” So he's gotten a real earful from Philip, it seems. Is there anything, he's asking, that bars me from receiving this free gift of salvation, and the answer is no. It's for everybody. “And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water.” So they walked down into what was probably a [00:19:19???]. “Philip and the eunuch, and Philip baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more.” Why? Because Philip disappeared and the eunuch never went back to Jerusalem. Why would he? He had the true temple living within him. Do you see that? And then he adds I think the coolest part of the whole story. It just says, “And he,” meaning the eunuch, “went on his way rejoicing.” Now how does Luke know that? Luke was not there. He's writing the story, but he's not there. Philip was not there. Philip was gone. He had been carried away. Is this a guess? I mean, is he just assuming that that happened? The Spirit of God revealed it to him? Yeah. He did. He did. But I think He revealed it to him in a very particular way. He knows that this man went on his way rejoicing because this man was reading not a book but a scroll. See, you guys all have books. Books are something you can open. Books are something you can fold a page down and mark. I mean, you can set your book down and you can open it up to a different location if that's what you want to do. You can flip through its pages, go wherever you want. But with a scroll, it's different. You're unwinding and you're winding, you're unwinding and you're winding, you're unwinding and you're winding. Wherever you lay it down, that's where you're going to pick it up. And he's already told us exactly where the man was in the scroll, didn't he? He's told us exactly where he was reading when Philip found him. He told us exactly where it is from the book of Isaiah that Philip preached to this man, the Christ from. And where it is in that book that he came to faith. And so he knows that as this guy, dripping wet, gets back in his carriage to continue his 800 mile journey home, that when he picks that scroll back up, he knows what he's going to read next. So what does he read next? Isaiah 54. It says, “Sing, O barren one.” Do you think that spoke to him? “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor. For the children,” the very thing this man was told he would never be able to have, “of the desolate one,” the dry one, the dry tree if you will, “will be more than the children of her who is married, says the Lord. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.” You know, he's saying, Build a bigger house and get ready, man. 'Cause you're gonna have a lot of kids! Physical kids? No, he's not capable of that. Spiritual kids. And lots of them. So Luke knows he would have read that next, and he would have rejoiced. And then Luke knows he would have read after that Isaiah 55, beginning in verse one. What does he say? “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” This guy is possibly still wet when he takes a stroll back up and reads this. He's just been in the water. “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” He was so thirsty that he rode 800 miles in a carriage to be rejected in Jerusalem, and that makes all of this all the more wonderful. He says, “and he who has no money,” see, he would have been mistreated for his money and taken advantage of there. “He who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” For the Gospel is free, and Jesus has paid the price. And what do you notice he would have read next? And as he continued, and I think this is the clincher. He knows that he would have read Isaiah 56. Isaiah writes this. He says, “Thus says the Lord: Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance will be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.” And then here it is. He says, “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people. And let not the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.” I'm assigned to a life of fruitlessness. I'm assigned to a life of worthlessness. So the Lord is building His Kingdom, and He's doing it through anybody who will give themselves to do it. And He does it hugely through this guy. This man...we don't know his name, but for the last couple thousand years, he's been known to millions of people and is widely regarded as the one who founded the church in that area. In Ethiopia and the southern Sudan, I'm told anyway, that's been the most persecuted church in history, and it has clung nevertheless to the cross. And so as we sit here, about three million of so of these simple believers in Egypt alone. You see? But how do you figure all of that out? You've got to understand the context socially and what is going on in this story. You've got to stop and say, Why did he tell me exactly where in the book of Isaiah he was? And what comes next? You've got to get into the carriage with this guy and go, Man, he's got an 800 mile ride and 30 miles into it, this story happens, maybe? Some reading to come. Hey, he's reading a scroll, so we know he left off and we know where he's gonna pick up and...are you following? Understand what it's like to be that man, and the story comes alive. And you realize this guy, this is a special man. God is using him greatly. Does that make sense? Anybody have any questions about that? Or comments or thoughts?

3. We've said that history matters, but another one is that geography matters. It matters where these stories occur sometimes, and sometimes that's some of the key to the story. It's helpful to study your Bible with a map in your hand, you know? You get some pretty good maps in the backs of Bibles. Use those things. Begin to understand the geography. Begin to look at these stories and figure out where this is occurring and learn the land of the Bible and its layout. And sometimes that can be a helpful thing.

a. I want to look at another story in the life of Abraham, and it's an odd story, but it's a really pretty amazing story. It's in Genesis 18. And if you'll recall, the Lord God comes and He visits the tent of Abraham. Do you remember that? He comes with two angels. So the three men show up at the tent of Abraham, and Abraham runs around and makes them dinner and has everything going and the Lord God comes back and He says to Abraham, “Alright, that boy that I've been telling you about now for 25 years, I'm going to come back in a year and your wife is going to be having this kid.” And Sarah laughs. Do you remember that? And the Lord says, “Why did she laugh?” What is He doing? Is He trying to humiliate her? No. Far from it. He's revealing to her that He knows her thoughts. She laughs in her heart, and He's calling her to believe that hey, this is really going to occur. It's gracious. It's wonderful. So anyway, they finish the big meal, and the Lord and the angels get up to leave. The three men are going to leave, and it says in verse 16, “Then the men,” the Lord and the two angels, “rose up from the tent of Abraham there and looked down toward Sodom.” That's a geographical clue. The land of Israel has a central ridge. It's mountainous in the center. There's like a valley that runs, the Jordan Valley, up the east side. And what's happening here is Abraham leaves with these guys and the Lord, and he goes over and he looks down into the valley. So he's standing there and he's looking down upon this valley, which is a very – in the day of Abraham – a very fertile valley.

b. Do you remember the story of Abraham when he goes down to Egypt and comes back up from Egypt with Lot, his nephew? And they both have all kinds of herds and cattle and whatnot? They come up into this valley, down by the Dead Sea, that he's looking into in this story, and it's fertile. It's plush. It's nice. And Abraham and Lot can't get along, thinking it's not big enough for the two of them apparently. And so Abraham says to his nephew, You choose it. And his nephew chooses this valley that Abraham is now standing with the Lord and looking down into. And it's compared in that earlier story to the garden of the Lord. What's the garden of God? The Garden of Eden. So it's like paradise. But what was in the Garden of the Lord? What was the problem? The serpent. There's a problem with this garden that the Lord and Abraham and the angels are looking down upon, and it's Sodom, and it's Gomorrah. It's the central cities of these valleys. So they're standing there now looking down upon this place. And the Lord is going to make a statement. He says, “Then the men arose from the tent of Abraham and looked down toward Sodom.” And here it is. And Abraham, as would have been the custom, was walking with them to send them off. And the Lord says, out loud is the idea, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” So what's God doing there? Why would he say that out loud? He's pulling him into the conversation. I mean, you know, if you're walking with God and God says, “Do you think I should tell \_\_\_ what I am about to do?” You know, you're gonna be like, Well, yeah. I mean, I'm standing right here. He wants Abraham to engage in this. He wants his curiosity piqued. He wants him to jump in and listen carefully. “Shall I hide from Abraham,” He says to the two angels with Abraham standing there, “what I am about to do.” To who? To what? To the city of Sodom. That they're all standing there looking at. “Since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation. And in him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” Now, we talked a little bit about this earlier today, but who is the great and mighty nation that Abraham would become and is still becoming? Who is that? It's us. It's us. It's the Church. We are that great and mighty nation. We have that resurrection faith of Abraham. And we're a blessing to the nations and make Abraham a blessing to the nations as we tell people about the Lord. So He says, you know, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do to this city of Sodom down here since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?” And He goes on and says, “For I have chosen him,” meaning Abraham, “that he might,” do what? “Command or direct or instruct his children.” So Abraham, our father, is connected to some instruction. That's the idea. He's saying, I've chosen Abraham to command or instruct his children. That's us. And his household after him. That's the Church. To keep the way of the Lord. How? By doing righteousness and justice so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him. So what in the world does all that mean? He was saying, Abraham, you are going to be a blessing to all the nations through your spiritual children. This nation of all the peoples that I'm going to gather up through faith in Jesus. Okay? But you need to command your children. You need to instruct your children. You need to provide an example for your children of what is righteousness, of how to live, what to do. And that's what this story is all about.

i. So our spiritual father's gonna give us a lesson through this story, and we need to listen. Verse 20, “And the Lord said, The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great and their sin is not just grave. It is exceedingly grave. And so I will go down now and see if they have done entirely according to the outcry, which has come to me. And if not, I will know. And God already knows. The sin of Sodom is a capital offense. It is deserving of death. And according to God's own law, two witnesses...okay? It must be established by two witnesses. You always see the Lord sending two witnesses into the cities that he's going to destroy. You see it in Jericho, you see it in the book of Revelation, you see it here. So God Himself appears to His own law, establishes the two witnesses, and it says the Lord said that the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is exceedingly great and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now and see if they've done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to me. And if not, I will know. And then these men, these two angels, these two witnesses, turned away from there and went toward Sodom to investigate while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. Now here's the deal. Abraham already knows what those two guys were going to find. He knows what Sodom and Gomorrah are like. He has relatives living there. He knew when Lot chose that land that Sodom was a wicked, wicked place. It says in Genesis 13:13, so five chapters earlier, Now the men of Sodom were wicked, exceedingly in sinners against the Lord. Okay? And you know what their sin is or at least their most famous sin, do you not? It's where we get the word 'sodomy'. But that's not their only sin. And that's something you need to look for in the Bible. What is the sin of Sodom? Well, Ezekiel had something to say about it too. He says, Behold! This was the guilt of your sister, Sodom. She did not help the poor and needy. And God judges that too. That's a serious statement.

ii. So Abraham's going to instruct us now. And we need to heed his instruction. Verse 23, Abraham came near to the Lord, already knowing what the witnesses were going to find, and he says, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? And please notice who he's begging for here. Because he's not just begging for the righteous. He doesn't come to God and say, You know what? I already know what you're going to find. You don't even need to send the witnesses. But here's the deal. Just get the righteous people out of there and wipe out the rest. He doesn't say that. He pleads for everyone. Everyone. This man is a man who has seen God bring life out of death, isn't he? God brings life out of death every time a person comes to faith in Jesus. That is a miracle to bring life out of death. Life out of death, life out of death. It's magnificent. This man has such great faith in the power of the witness of God's people, even when they are so incredibly outnumbered, that he pleads that God will stay His judgment and give the Gospel a little more time. It's awesome. That's our Father. And Abraham has experienced this in his own life. You know, when you start at the beginning of the story of Abraham, he's living in the land of Ur. Ur is famous for the worship of the moon god. Think about that. His dad was named after the moon god. His wife was named after the moon god's girlfriend. He's an idolater when the Lord God comes to him and calls life out of death for him and brings him to Himself. You see? So he has hope that God would do the same thing for these other people.

iii. Listen to what Paul says to the Christians of Corinth. In First Corinthians 6, he says, “But do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God.” But then here's the amazing part. He then says, “And such were some of you.” And I think we forget that. You know? It's like we get into the kingdom and then we because pastors, and it's like we forget how screwed up we used to be. It's funny, you know, we should be the least self­righteous people on the planet, we Christians. We who understand the Gospel that we deserved nothing and Christ brings everything. That should give us hope for anyone, and we should never feel above anyone. It is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourself, right? It is the gift of God lest anyone boast in anyone but Jesus.

iv. This Abraham our father is not a spiritual leader. It's an old man. He's a pretty amazing guy. So he doesn't say, Okay, Lord, wipe them all out. He starts negotiating with God for their salvation. He wants them to be saved. Abraham came near the Lord and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” And then he starts negotiating. It's almost bizarre. But it's exactly what God wants him to do to teach us. That's the idea. He says, “Suppose there are 50 righteous within the city, will you indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the 50 righteous who are in it?” Or will you, instead, give that 50 a shot? Let them go and let's see what happens. Let them be salt and light. Let them live in such a way as to prove that Jesus is more valuable and more satisfying than the gods of this world. He says, “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?” Doesn't that all scare you? I mean, he's talking to the sovereign Lord of the universe. This is a man bold in prayer, powerful in prayer. I tremble at the thought of saying such a thing, and yet this is exactly what God has elicited from him. So the Lord said, and it's so cool, “If I find 50 righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.” He's saying, I won't just pull them out and then wipe out everyone else. No, I'll leave them. Oh, I'll spare everyone for their sake. And Abraham replied because he knows that there aren't 50, “Now, behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord although I am but dust and ashes.” That's right. That's part of his lesson to us, too. That's who we are. “Suppose,” he says, “the 50 righteous are lacking five.” So now we're down to 45, God. “Will you destroy the whole city because of five?” And the Lord said, “I will not destroy it if I find 45 there.” And the grace of God should grow bigger in our eyes this morning. And Abraham spoke to God yet again and said, “Suppose 40 are found there.” And the Lord said, “I will not do it on account of the 40.” And things were going so well for Abraham that now he jumps by 10. He says, “Oh, may the Lord not be angry and I shall speak. Suppose 30 are found there.” The Lord said, “I will not do it if I find 30 there.” Again, His grace is magnified. And Abraham says, “Now, behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord. Suppose 20 are found there.” And the Lord said, “I will not destroy it on account of the 20.” And Abraham says, Okay, one more shot here. “Oh, may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once.” So now he's come down to his final number. This is it. This is the number I think he started with in his head. This is where he wanted to go. He's thinking Lot, his wife, his daughters, maybe their husbands. He's down to 10. He's thinking, Surely there must be 10. So he says, “Oh, may the Lord not be angry and I shall speak only this once. Suppose 10 are found there.” And the Lord said, “I will not destroy is on account of the 10.” And as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham, the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

v. What's telling about that to me is that what if Abraham had just said 'one'? I mean, he was on a roll, and he stopped the negotiation, not God. You see? God left off where Abraham left off. Not the other way around. It's not like God said, Okay, that's it! No more talking. Abraham said, No, I'm down to my final number. This is it. I'm not gonna as anything else after this. How about 10? God said, Okay. That's your final number? And it is. But there aren't 10. But what's the 'so what'? Because you've got to answer that. What is the lesson? What is the attitude of our spiritual father toward the most famously wicked people that have ever lived in all likelihood? The people of Sodom. He pleads with God for their salvation. He desperately wants the Gospel to be heard and experienced by them. Give them some time, Lord. Let's send in some EE teams. Let's do that.

vi. “...and I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly bless and multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore. There is a heavenly city. And your seed shall possess the gates of their enemies. That means that your seed will dominate over their enemies. The gates are strategic. To possess the gate of a city is to possess the city. They will possess the gates of your enemies. In fact, you might say that the gates of hell will not prevail against them. In your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, and right in this moment, we are a witness of that. That's what this is that we're doing. Because you have obeyed my voice. And so Abraham returned to his young men and they rose and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham lived at Beersheba.”

1. Jesus comes to these guys that have quit, and he says, Guys, the Old Testament tells you all about all of this stuff. My death, burial, and resurrection. And that's exactly what we have in this story. Jesus comes onto the scene and John the Baptist says, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb of God. In the mount of the Lord, it will be provided. What mount? Mount Moriah. This same region, this same area. See, the innocent Son of God carries the wood of His sacrifice up this hill, and the Father puts Him to death for He is the Lamb by which sins are forgiven and the Father's wrath is satisfied. But when you train your heart to see Jesus like that, you recognize, hey, those patterns are there. It's awesome. I mean, when somebody started showing me this stuff, for me, it's like I feel like I've been in the Old Testament I've been walking around a darkened house, bumping into the furniture. Knowing that there's furniture but not really understanding how it all fits together. I don't see the pattern. And then what this does is it starts turning on the lights in the room. And all of a sudden, you go, My goodness. From beginning to end, this Bible is the Gospel. From beginning to end, it's teaching you for all of its characters about one character, and that is Jesus, and for all of its stories about one story, and that is His life – death, burial, and resurrection. So hopefully, that will be helpful to you.

2. You have the fall of man, and then you have God coming and remember, He makes the clothing for them. We talked about that. He kills the innocent animals and he covers over them. And he curses the man and he curses the woman and he curses the serpent. And He says to the serpent that there is coming the seed of the woman, and through the seed of the woman, your head will be crushed. He says, You will strike his heel, but he will crush your head. But the bite of a poisonous snake on your heel will kill you, too, won't it? So in both cases, it's a death blow. The Lord crushes the head by dying Himself, but then what you see happening in the book of Genesis, and you have all of these genealogies, and you wonder what are all of these genealogies for? You know. We skip to the end, you know, 'cause it's like what's that all about? It's very important. It's the Word of God. Like we said, every word is important, every name's important, every genealogy is important. Everything is important. What developed out of that is the seed of the woman and the see of the serpent. There are bloodlines. So immediately after God comes and says to the man and the woman, You're going to have a child. From you will precede a seed. By the way, seeds are not found in a woman, are they? The seed is in the man. So it's speaking of a supernatural conception even from the very beginning. It's very interesting. It's very careful. It's very detailed.

3. But what is the first thing Adam and Eve do? It says, And Adam knew his wife, and they gave birth to a son. In faith, they start trying to give birth to their own savior. Does that make sense? And they have Cain and Abel, and Cain kills Abel, and then God replaces Abel with Seth, a godly man. So you have the seed of the woman, and you have the seed of the serpent. You see, and then that runs through the generations to Noah. And you get to Noah, and Noah has three sons, right? But then you have Shem, Ham, and Japheth. You have the Shemites, the Semahites, the Semitic people from which Abraham descends. That's your seed of the woman. You follow? Alright? Then you have Abraham, clearly. But Abraham has Isaac. Abraham has eight sons. Did you know that? After Sara, his wife, dies, he remarries and has six other kids. But he has one son of promise. Take now your son, your only son. There's just one. There's your seed of the woman. Alright, Isaac has Jacob and Esau. Who is the seed of the woman? Jacob. Jacob has 12 sons. The seed runs through Judah, runs through, David. You see, all of these genealogies are running, ultimately, up to the New Testament, where you get to Matthew and to Luke and they give you the genealogies of Christ, right? One from Adam and the other, I think, is from Abraham or something. I can't remember. There's a reason all those are in there. They're creating a chronology from Genesis 3:15, where God makes this statement to them, a statement of the Gospel in seed form, all the way to Jesus, and they're saying it's fulfilled in Him. And that's what all this is about. But the cool thing is that through Jesus, we then take the Gospel to everybody. Everybody.

4. Okay, moving on to the next point, and the point is that history matters. History really makes a difference. All of the Bible versus all of the Bible stories happened within a particular historical context. They happened at certain points in history. They happened at a certain place in history. There were certain rulers in place in history. There were certain customs in place in history. And so forth. And all of those things are very, very helpful in understanding what the Bible is saying, what the author of the story is trying to reveal to you. And basically, what I use to illustrate this...really, this is the sermon that I give on Christmas Eve except I spent about 20 hours looking at you before I got to it, but I want to talk a little bit about the importance of history as you see it in the Christmas story, and it will help you understand why it's significant.

a. One of the things that I've done the last couple of years, and it's really a privilege to be able to do this because I've led trips to the nation of Israel with another pastor friend of mine in town, and he's a seminary professor also, so that just makes it extra wonderful because the man's brilliant. But he gathers up a group of people from his church, and I gather up a group of people from our church and then together, we have flown over to Israel and we have toured the Biblical land. This last time, we also went to Egypt, so we were actually in Cairo three months ago. Thankfully, we're not there now. It's very interesting. We've been in Jordan and so forth together but we go and we go on this tour and one of the places that we get to go is to the little town of Bethlehem. We all grow up with these images in our mind of what the little town of Bethlehem looks like. I would tell you it's still a little town. It's small enough to put a wall around, and I can say that for a fact because as we sit here today, there is about a 20 foot cement high tall wall with barbed wire on the top, guard stations, surveillance cameras, that completely encircle the city of Bethlehem. There is an Israeli controlled checkpoint that you have to pass through, complete with guards with machine guns, in order to get in and out of there. And the reason is because Bethlehem is under the control of the Palestinian authorities. And so as a result of all of the conflict that you guys might have heard about in the news between these two peoples, the Israelis literally walled off the entire city so that they can control who is going in and who is going out and what's going on, and that is not what you're thinking about when you travel to Israel and think, Hey, man, I'm going to get to see where Jesus was born. You know? I mean, you're not picturing walls. So you get up in the morning and you're thinking, This is the place where Jesus was born. It's gonna be awesome and amazing. And if you're me, you're up early. If you're Willy, you're up even earlier. And you're on the bus, ready to go. And so you get on your tour bus, and everybody else in your group gets on the tour bus, and you have this guide, and you begin to travel out of Jerusalem to Bethlehem, which is only a few miles away. And on the way, your tour guide is talking and teaching as you go, and he or she will say something like, If you look to your left, you'll see the Shepherd's Fields on your left. Well, how cool is that? I mean, that's where the shepherds were. That's where the angels announced the birth of Jesus. It was also the fields of Boaz. Did you know that? If you look at the story of Ruth, the fields of Boaz that Ruth went to glean in? It's the same fields that the shepherds were in, much later when the Lord's birth occurred and the angels appeared and announced the Good News to the shepherds. So anyway, you're all excited about going to Bethlehem and then you get there, and you go to pull into this military checkpoint and you're looking at these walls and people with machine guns, and that doesn't look so fun. But then you have to get off your Israeli bus and get on a Palestinian bus and go in with your Palestinian guide through the guard checkpoint and then now you're in the city, and you're thinking to yourself: A) this is not the way I imagined it and B) is this actually a good idea. Now, I will tell you the Palestinian people are wonderful. There are some great Christian people in that Palestinian group. There are bus drivers and tour guides that have gone in and out of that city, so wonderful people, so appreciate us being there, so desperately in need of the tourism, but you don't know that the first time you do it. So you head in there and you're consoling yourself with the idea that you're going to get to see the actual spot where Jesus was born and you pull up in front of this church called The Church of the Nativity. It was built in the year 313, so do the math. That's like 1700 years ago. And it was built by Constantine's mother, Helen, who came to the Holy Land at the request of Constantine, the emperor then of the Roman Empire, to mark the actual spots where certain things occurred. And so what they did is they built churches over these locations. It's not real cool, but it does mark the spot. So this church has stood in some form or another for 1700 years over the place where Jesus was born, and the place where Jesus was born is in a complex of caves that run underneath the church. He was not born in a barn or a stable the way you or I think of barns or stables. It wasn't a free­standing building. It was a cave. That's where they kept the animals. So you're thinking to yourself, Okay, this is an odd experience. It's not what I expected. And you get into this church, and you have to duck to go in because the door is very short. They call it The Humble Door. You have to bow, you see, to enter into this place that marks the spot of the birth of the Lord. And you stand there in a line forever waiting to walk down this staircase into this little part of the cave complex that they called a grommet. And that's the place where they believe anyway that the Lord was actually born. And so you're thinking to yourself, Alright, well, whatever. But you're consoling yourself because you're thinking that finally when you walk down those stairs, what you're going to see is authentic looking, and that's a big change. Until you walk down the stairs and you realize that it doesn't look anything at all like a cave.

b. (Reading of Daniel) Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he prayed to the king. No. He didn't pray at all. No. He went and prayed with his windows shut. No. He changed nothing. He changed nothing about his obedience to the Lord. It would have violated his conscience to do so. That's profound. We can sure rationalize some things away, can't we? This guy is something. So he entered into his house and in his roof chamber with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he's praying toward the temple and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day. Remember three. Three periods of time. Three times a day, praying and giving thanks before God, as he had been doing previously. This time, of course, they capture him on videotape and they take all the evidence down to the king and they come again in a great throng before the king, and they demand that the king put Daniel to death. And you can almost hear them saying, Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him! And the king, all of a sudden, realizes, Oh, wait a minute. This is what this was all about. So he sees through it, but there is an unalterable law. There's a higher law that must be enforced even though he tries to figure out a way around it, he can't figure out a way around it, and Daniel is committed to death. He's put into a pit. It says, And then the king gave orders, verse 16, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lion's den. And the word is literally it's a pit. It's an underground container that houses a group of lions that are intentionally starved so that when they dropped you in, it was game over. To be in the pit is to die. There's no escaping that apart from God. You don't come out of the pit. And the king, it says, spoke and said to Daniel, Your God who you continually serve, will Himself deliver you. So who will deliver Daniel from the pit? God will deliver Daniel from the pit. And a stone was brought, so you picked up on that, and laid over the mouth of the den. And the king sealed it, you picked up on that, with his own signet ring. And then the king arose at dawn. When is Daniel delivered from the pit? When is the stone rolled away? It's in the morning. It's dawn. Right? Deliverance comes at dawn. All throughout the Bible, and that's a pattern, too, you see deliverance in the morning. It's training you to look for the Lord. The king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lion's den. The unalterable law had been satisfied at this point. He had been thrown in just like the law had said he should. If he were to be delivered, then so be it. The stone was rolled away. And when he had come near to the den, to Daniel, he cried out with a trouble voice, and the king spoke and said to Daniel, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you continually serve been able to deliver you to the lions? And see, if I was Daniel, I would have just waited a little bit. No, that would be cruel.

i. Daniel spoke to the king, Oh, king live forever! My God sent His angel. Who frees him from the den? I mean, how is he delivered from the hole? By an angel, right? My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths. Death has no hold on me. They have not harmed me inasmuch as I was found innocent before. And why is he saved and delivered from death? Because he's innocent. Death cannot hold an innocent man. It says, because I was innocent. And also toward you, O king, I have committed no wrong. And Daniel was taken up out of the pit, and he exalts Daniel to the right hand of the king. You see that? Second in command and he judges all of Daniel's enemies. The lions get to eat after all. And then the king writes a decree, which he sent out to the entire area he ruled. And it's the Gospel. Verse 26, I, King Darius, make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom, they are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel for He is the Living God and enduring forever. And His Kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. He delivers, rescues, and performs signs and wonders in Heaven and on earth. Who has also delivered Daniel from the pit of death, from the power of the lions? It's Christ. It's Jesus. The Son of God who left heaven and came to earth, which is a foreign land, if you will, to Him. And He comes as a slave, doesn't He? And as a Jewish prophet. Do you see the parallels? And He is favored by the King of the heavens and of the earth. And that favor is so clear that the religious leaders of His day are envious. And so they try to find something wrong with Him, and they can't find anything wrong with Him. There's nothing to be found against Him. And so they decided to put Him to death. But they're not able to do it on their own. They don't have the power. They have to get the Romans to do it. They have to get Pilate to do it. They don't have the ability to put people to death. But Pilate, at some point, sees through all of their envy, and he doesn't want to put Jesus to death but he can't find a way out of it because there is an unalterable law that says that Jesus must die. It is the higher law. It is the law of God. Listen to what Peter says in Acts 4 verse 27. He says, For truly in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your [meaning God's] hand and your purpose predestined to occur. Jesus was predestined by God to be put to death. There was a higher law. But He remained, not just His death but also His resurrection. Okay? And you saw that, too. His body is placed in a pit, a cave. A stone is rolled over. On the morning of deliverance, the angels move away the stone. The Lord, who was innocent and death has no hold on Him, He comes forth alive is the idea. And then having gained the victory over all of His enemies, what does Jesus command? He commands that the Gospel be proclaimed to all the world. That's what you're doing. It's awesome. You're following the command of Jesus.

ii. So I preached on Daniel in the lion's den on Easter one year, and I know everybody was thinking, Good grief! What is he doing with Daniel and the lion's den? It's Easter!!! It's Resurrection Day!!! This is all about resurrection. And the Lord trains us to look for resurrection in His Word all the way through. But in His nature, too. Every day the sun goes down in the west, does it not? Every day the sun goes down and when you watch it, it sinks down into the earth and what happens? Everything gets dark and cool. It's a picture of death, is it not? Every morning, it comes up on the other side. It comes up and it heats. It comes up out of the earth. You can see it breaking on the horizon. You see the light begin to spray out. It makes everything light and warm. It's resurrection. Every day of your life, there's been a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. Every night, we talk about sleep. Every night, you go in your room, you bury yourself to your covers, and make it nice and cool if you can, right? You slip into a state of unconsciousness from which you expect to wake up in the morning, and so far every day you have. What is that? It's death, burial, and resurrection. You go and you eat breakfast, and what you eat has been cut off from its life source, and oftentimes it has endured all kinds of things like emblems of judgment, emblems of death, and yet from it, you derive life. It's life out of death. So you go out to get the paper, and a butterfly goes by. What is a butterfly? What was a butterfly? It's a caterpillar. This ugly, little earthbound thing that spins its own shroud and comes forth from it transformed, beautiful, able to fly. Death, burial, and resurrection. It's everywhere. Look for it. A whole world cries out. The created word cries out. And the Word of God, every story, cries out death, burial, and resurrection. So we're resurrection people. We just need to train our minds and our hearts to look for it and see it and appreciate it.

1. We recently at our church did a series of messages out of the book of Colossians. I just preached through the whole book. And this is Part One of that series, much of which I wish I had deleted, but some of which I think will be helpful to you. But one of the things that I think is going to help you as a communicator is if you can take a book like this, and I really believe in teaching through books and/or sections of Scripture. Large literary units, if you will. So the book of Colossians is very short. I just did the whole book in five weeks. I've preached through the whole life of Abraham, as an example. It was like 18 weeks long and we traveled story by story all the way through the life of Abraham. I almost cried when it ended, Abraham was so much my friend that I was just almost afraid to leave him behind. I thought, What in the world am I going to talk about next? Whatever it is, it isn't going to be nearly this good. Anyway, one of the things that I'm going to do is just run through my introduction to this particular series of messages with the hope that they will help you. And I want to explain to you why it is that I say what I say because I'm talking to a group of people in 2011. A lot of this group of people in 2011 are having a tough life. They know that it's old, and they wonder, Does this really apply to me? How can this book so old apply to me? So on the front end of the whole deal, I just took that off. You know, let's just put down on the table. Let's deal with that up front. One of the things that will help you identify with an audience is when you say what they're thinking. You ask the questions they're asking. You espouse the same doubts you know that they're having and you deal with it. You talk to them and you answer their questions. It tells them first of all, Hey, this guy's a regular person like me. And you are. He thinks like I do. That's good. You're identifying. Maybe it's worth listening to. So you want them to do that.

2. So anyway, so I get into this series of messages out of this book, which is not really a book. It's really a letter. So what we're talking about is a letter when we come to this so­called book of Colossians. Or any of the other epistles. They're letters written by a particular person and to a particular people. And those particular people in this case comprised a particular church, which was located in a particular city, which had its own niche and particular culture. And then here's the biggie. Paul is writing to these people 2000 years ago to address their unique and particular issues. So then, how in the world is this ever going to speak to me. And everybody in the church is going, Yeah, that's what I was just wondering. How is this going to speak to me? What are we going to do with that? I mean, why are we going to spend time studying that? I said, you know, if you stop there, if you think about that for a minute, not only do you lose this letter, but you lose the whole Bible. Because what I just said about this letter applies to every document in the Bible. How does this book speak to me? How does this work? And I think in part, that's what's happened. It's happened to us as a Christian people. It's happened to us as a community. Certainly, in our country it's happened, and it's happened to us as a nation. We have lost the book that we call the Bible, and that's tragic. As I said yesterday, or maybe it was this morning, that Book, the Bible, has been, throughout history, our friend, our mentor, our guide, our counselor, our comforter, the instrument through which God inspires faith in us and then grows our faith as we grow in our understanding of it. That's the value of doing what we're doing, if you grow in your understanding of Scripture. And it just opens up new horizons for you and establishes the horizons of your imagine.

3. That Book becomes the lenses, the glasses if you will, through which you see all of life, through which you see the people that you pastor, your husband, your wife, your kids, your business, your mission, your God who is empowering this mission. I mean, why shouldn't I build my own city for crying out loud? Because you have a God who tells you to go forth and says that He'll cover you. Why shouldn't I try to build a name for me? Because you have a God who has forgiven you. And yet the book has escaped this in part because it was written by a particular people to a particular people who lived in their own particular churches and cities and so on and so forth 2000+ years ago, and we make therefore the mistake that it cannot speak to us today, and that's wrong. The reality is that this is not just some book. It's the Word of the Lord, and we ignore to our peril. And yet when we open it and hear its voice, we realize that actually this transcends time and culture and circumstance and languages, and it speaks to the heart of man, which as we said today doesn't change, does it? All these other things change, but our hearts don't change. They're still the same, and His voice speaks to us.

4. So anyway, we started the series on this book, which is really a letter, and one of the things that I tried to do at the beginning of this year, is establish a goal for my church. The beginning of the year is a great opportunity for you guys who pastor churches or lead ministries or lead teams of people, whatever it is. The beginning of the year is like a new leaf. Everybody turns it over. It's an opportunity for you to start afresh and anew. No matter what has happened in this past year, it's a new year. That's why we make resolutions and so forth. You know, you have that great opportunity, so what we try to do each year is seize that opportunity for our people and for our church and say, Alright, guys, we have a goal this year, and we're gonna talk about it for the first five weeks of the year through this series of messages, through this study of this book. And what I did was I took the whole of the book and then I said, Okay, the whole of that book comes down to this statement. To know the Word, live the Word That's the goal for this church this year. We are going to return to our roots as a people. We are going once again to take up this book and make it to be our guide and our counselor, our comforter. We are going to become again a people of the Book. And we unveiled classes. I'm teaching our whole church through a systematic theology. It's crazy. They're reading systematic theology. If you drop this book on your toe, you're going to scream. It's intimidating. The first night that we did it, we had so many people packed into the room that we did it in that we had to bring chairs in. That's just the Lord. I mean, I was in tears when I saw them all show up. I had two or three elders come to me literally crying because has blessed it. Know the Word, live the Word. So we do Bible 101, Bible 201, Bible 301. That's the systematics class. And I just unveiled this, gave everybody the calendar for the whole year, and said, Guys, this one thing we will do. And so this one thing we will do. As we said, it's not an academic discussion. Don't leave off the last half. It's know the Word, live the Word. But whenever you can do that for your people, come up with language like that, it's catchy. We've got other language. We call it find your thing, do your thing. Find your thing, do your thing. Well, what does that mean? If you ask somebody at our church, they'll know what it means. What it means is figure out your spiritual gifts and use them. Find out how God has made you, resourced you, positioned you in this season of your life. Build His Kingdom in this season of your life and for His glory, get out there and by the power of His Spirit, do it. Find your thing, do your thing. Whenever you can come up with that kind of language, it sticks, and people get it and it resonates, and it's right and it's Biblical. If you can do that for a sermon, do it. If you can do that for a series, do it. If you can come up with a goal for your people, do it. And when it goes well, celebrate the goal. Celebrate the win. We're celebrating the win already. I'm getting up half in tears going, I can't believe how many of you people showed up. It was unbelievable. It is awesome. God is doing a great thing. Celebrate the win. Okay?

5. So we come to this book and we say, Okay, here's what this book is going to tell you. It's going to say over and over and over again. We're going to go to this book and in all kinds of different language, Paul is going to come to us as the apostle of the Lord, and he is going to say, Guys, here's the deal. Know the Word, live the Word. And then after he says it, he's going to say, Know the Word, live the Word. And then when he's done with that, using different language, he's going to say, Know the Word, live the Word. Know the Jesus of the Word. That's the key. That's the takeaway. So we come to the beginning of the book, Colossians 1:1, and we find that this book begins, a letter, and follows the same pattern of a letter that was written in the first century.

a. So if you picked up some other letter out of the Bible in the first century, it would follow this same pattern. So in one sense, it's ordinary, and in another sense, it is incredibly extraordinary. Paul comes and he says, Paul. That's the common part. Back in those days, they didn't sign their name at the bottom of the letter. You know, you've got to flip three pages to see who it's from. They started by introducing themselves. This is a letter from Paul. Paul, there's the common part, and he says, an apostle of Christ Jesus. You've got to pause and say, That is incredibly uncommon. It's what separates this letter from every other letter ever written unless it's also included in the book that Paul is coming to us and telling us to know him better. This is a unique man. He is a uniquely called messenger of God who personally saw the risen Christ. Jesus appears to this man and specially gifts him to carry forth His unique Word and not just to the Colossians but to us today. And when we pick up the book and hear his voice, the Spirit speaks to our spirit and tells us that in fact, that's true. So Paul says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, a specially called messenger of God, by the will of God, meaning by God's choice, and Timothy, Paul's protégé, our brother, and then he tells us to who he's writing. And it's important and significant that we see to whom he's writing because it's a description that doesn't just apply to these people in the first century. It applies to me. It applies to you. It applies to everyone who calls Christ their Savior. He says, To the saints. The word means, literally, 'holy ones', and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. And then he says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father. He's saying, Look, if you're a believer in Jesus, you are holy. You've been made holy by the Lord Jesus. It's awesome. It's amazing. And you're family. You've been made family by a common faith in this common Savior. And then I keep coming back to the idea of where do you find all these things. In the book. Know the Word, live the Word. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. And then he continues this rather ordinary and yet extraordinary greeting with a thanksgiving and a prayer and that, too, was a common pattern, but it's extraordinary. He says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. But why does he thank God when he prays for them? It's because since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. Pause for a moment. That's awesome. He's not saying, We heard about the fact that you made a profession of faith. No, no, no. He's saying we've heard about the way that you are living out your profession of faith. We've heard about the way that you people love one another in the name of Christ, the way that you sacrifice for the benefit of one another, the way that you meet one another's needs, the way that you're there for one another, the way that you encourage each other, the way that you pray for one another. All of these things. And thereby portray the love of Jesus. He's saying, We pray and we thank God every time we think of you because we've heard of your faith in Christ and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you've heard about in the Bible. Of this you have heard, it says, in the word of truth, the gospel found in the Scriptures. He's saying, I'm so excited about what I hear that every time I pray for you, I'm thankful to the Lord. What a great commendation. That's an awesome deal. They hear that in the gospel He says, The gospel, which has come to you, as indeed it has in the whole world and it's bearing fruit and growing, as it does also among you. It says, Since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth. What Paul is saying about the gospel word of God is the same thing that Jesus says about the gospel word of God and that is that the gospel word of God is like a seed, and that seed is made to bear fruit. But it only bears fruit when it finds, when it's planted in a good heart, right? When it finds good soil. In other words, if there's no fruit being borne, the problem is not with the seed but with the soil. And so he continues, and I'm going to move through my notes on this. But what I did at that point, at the beginning of the year, is I stopped and I celebrated some wins with our congregations. I think often times our people feel like we're coming and asking and asking and asking and asking and asking and asking of them and we never pause and say thanks. We never stop and say, Hey, God is really doing something in this ministry. And if your ministry is anything like mine, the reality is that all kinds of things are going on and most people know about that much of it. We sat around at our staff meeting getting ready for this week and we just were talking about all the things that the Lord is doing. I didn't know half of it. I mean, I was stunned. So I told the staff, I said, Send me a list. Tell me what's happened in your ministry in the past few months or maybe even over the past year. Give me a list of did you know. Hey, Tom, did you know this, did you know this, did you know this, did you know this? And I sat up on the stage with our people and I said, Let me tell you some of the things that God has done through you this past year. And just went through a small list of all the things that were sent. Do that for your people. That's such a blessing. I can't tell you how many folks came up to me afterwards and went, I had no idea. I said, I didn't either. I mean, I knew some of it, probably more than you did, but I was as surprised as anybody. That blesses your people. That excites them. That helps them to see that God's at work among them. They're excited about that, and now they want to go out and do more. And that's the idea, isn't it? Let's go do more for the Kingdom. So know the Word, live the Word.

b. Anyway, I took some time and I did that with them, and then I came back to the text, and I told them how thankful I was, like Paul was saying, for them. Paul expresses his appreciation. He says, Hey, guys, on the front end I'm gonna tell you how thankful I am for what I hear about your faith and for the love that you have for all the saints and for the way that you guys are expressing your faith in your life. You know the Word and you're living the Word. And he says this even though he's not their pastor. He's not the guy who brought them the gospel. Verse seven, he says, Just as you learned it [meaning the gospel Word of God] from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, another protégé of Paul. He says, He [that's Epaphras] is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. Let your people know that you notice what they're doing and thank them. Send them notes and cards and letters. That's what this man's doing. But it's not the end of his letter. It's not mission accomplished. He's got a message. It's not even the end of his prayer and the reason it's not is because yet enough. He's greeting from the gospel. He's saying, I'm so glad that we've got something going here in this church which you're a part of, and I'm so thankful for it that here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pour gasoline on the fire. I want more logs. You know, if you've got a couch you don't need, bring it out of the house. We'll throw that on there, too. I want to start a gospel fire in your church that's so big you can see it from space. He has a big vision. And so he continues his prayer. He says, And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled

with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit – there it is again – in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Know the Word, live the Word. There's the idea. And what struck me as I was reading through that text a month or two ago is that he ties the words 'wisdom' and 'walk' together in the same sentence.

c. Because that reminds me of Proverbs, and the word 'wisdom' in Proverbs refers to a skill that one develops for living. How does one live skillfully? How do you develop that skill? By taking the Word and storing it up in our hearts and living it. It's know the Word, live the Word. Proverbs presents us with two different paths. The word 'walk' refers to one's life. There's a path that leads to life and a path that leads to death. And it says, in a sense, truth lived out leads to life, but lies lived out lead to death. And we see that play out in people's lives. You know, if you believe the lie that you're worthless and you live it out, it leads to death. What does the Bible say that you're worth? The Bible says that you are precious; God shed His blood for you. If you believe the lie that getting married is going to make you happy and solve all of your problems or that divorce is going to make you happy and solve all of your problems or having children is going to make you happy and solve all of your problems or having your kids leave the house finally is going to make you happy and solve all of your problems or retiring is going to make you happy or collecting up enough whatever, money or whatever it is, is going to make you happy and solve all of your problems. If you believe those lies and live those out, they lead to death – of relationships, of integrity, of hopes, of dreams. We're placing our hope on the wrong things. We're asking the wrong things of our relationships when we do that. So truth lived out leads to life, and lies lived out lead to death. The truth is found in life.

d. So Paul thanks God for how these people know and live the Word and then he prays that they'll do it all the more, but he knows that it's not going to be easy, and so he prays that God gives them strength. He says, May you be strengthened with all power. So he's calling to mind the power of the creative God. We just talked about the creation story and how when He speaks, it says and the stars too, and it spins off the galaxies. That's the power of the God who lives in you. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, because the Christian life, at times, requires endurance and patience. Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you through Jesus to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. It's a different kind of literature, isn't it? You know, what we've been dealing with together for the last two days have been stories. Stories upon stories upon stories. The human heart is written to respond to stories. It's far more engaging, I think, in many ways than this kind of literature. Yeah, this is Scripture and very, very important. You know, as you preach through these kinds of passages, I think you need lots of commercial breaks if that makes any sense. Purposeful commercial breaks, not meaningless breaks. But you need illustrations, you need to be able to stop and talk about these principles and hey, this is why this matters and how it applies. You know, let's stop in the middle like in this one, for example, and let's talk about what God has done and celebrate that. That gives a little bit of a break. It's heavy stuff.

6. You know, God has given us these stories, and He's made our hearts respond to the stories. The human heart responds to stories. We all love a good story. What's interesting is that every culture of people in known civilization has had some version of the Cinderella story. Are you aware of that? What is the Cinderella story, if not the gospel? It's the outcast. It's the ugly made beautiful. You know, it's the one who gets to go to the ball. It's amazing.

a. So God has given you, those of you who communicate God's Word, He's given you stories. Tell the story. The power is in the story. You know, I know that there are certain customs and traditions within certain churches and so I can do some things that maybe you can't do or maybe you can do some things that I can't do. But one of the things that I will not do is I will not read, you know, this whole story, which is very long, and then get up and just talk about it. I won't do that. I know that's very common. Most pastors do that around the world, so I'm in the minority camp when I say that I don't do that. And I'm not critical of that, but I feel like that robs me of the story. All of these stories that we've been going through, I've been telling the story and then picking up at key places, where the points are, because I want you to see those from the Scripture. And even as I'm going through the Scripture, I'm stopping and I'm annotating it. I'm adding and I'm talking about it and feel that and think about it for a minute, and then I pick the story back up. What I'm doing is I'm taking you from where you are when you came into the church and I'm taking you to a very clearly defined place that I've determined in advance. A sermon is like a journey. You're taking people on a journey with you, and the story is the bus that you put them all on and the vehicle by which you take them on that journey. And there are various stopping points on the journey, to be sure, but there's one destination. On Saturday night, your wife or husband, whatever, if you're preaching, should be able to wake you up in the middle of the night and say, In one sentence, what is your sermon? Know the Word, live the Word. People matter to God, and He needs to matter to people. Find your thing, do your thing. Jesus Christ is not just a little bit greater than Jacob. He is unfathomable greater than Jacob. Now don't wake me up again. Every Saturday night, you need to have refined your message to the point where dead center in the middle of the night, I can wake you out of the deepest sleep and say, What is your sermon about? And you can say, Blah, blah, blah, blah. Thank you very much. And go back to sleep. Because you've worked on it. I give one point messages. One. Now there are a number of things I talk about and a number of things I comment on along the way and you know, there are a number of little stops where we go to the bathroom, but mostly, we are on one road, we're taking one trip. We might take a picture out the window if it gets scenic, but we're going to a destination. One destination not five. And that helps make your sermons memorable. But use the story. It speaks to the heart of your people.

b. I went to a church that we planted and a young man that I'm working with, a young pastor in Fort Lauderdale. Great guy. Grew up in our church. Love him. Very talented. Surround yourself, by the way, with talented young people. It keeps you young. It keeps you fresh. And do not, please, ever assume that they're the only one who is going to learn in that relationship. I promise you will learn as much from them as they learn from you. But I went to his service. Nice service. Good sermon. He had somebody read the text in advance and then they did a few other things, and then he got up and just talked about the text. And then you kind of remember when the story said and then this, and let's talk about that point. And then that was one point. And then so then you kind of remember, and let's talk about that point. And that was one point. I wanted to say, Look! Pick one point. He gave five sermons in one. There was a whole sermon series in that one message. Pick one point. There's plenty other Scripture to talk about with that one point. Just talk about that one point, and don't let somebody steal the story from you. Get everybody on the bus of that story and you, pastor, tell the story. Tell the story, man. The story is the inspired of God. It's written from the heart of man. In the story, as we've seen time and again, is the Gospel. It's the Cinderella story that every man has been made to long for. Use the story. Get them on the bus, and take them to one place, and end it and say, Know the Word, Live the Word. That's what we're going to do this year. That's what we're going to do this week.

7. I have one question at the end of every sermon, and it's never, Did you like it? Every week, I say to my wife or whoever – as a pastor, you don't want everybody's opinion. I honestly don't care about a lot of people's opinion. I hope that doesn't offend you, but let me explain what I mean by that. As a pastor, I'll have people come to me and they'll say, Hey, Tom, you know a lot of people are saying...And I just say, Stop right there and tell me every name of every person that 'a lot of' is. And I want to explain why. Because #1) I want to know how many is 'a lot of'. Usually it's him and two other people. So that defines for me what 'a lot of' is. #2) If they are patently unspiritual people, I'm not going to spend my time worrying about it. If it's one of my elders who I know loves me, and he comes to me and he says, Brother, I love you, but I've got to tell you something, I want that. That helps me lead. So you don't want everyone's opinion. Figure out whose opinions matter. And you know who they are. It doesn't take a scientist to figure that out. Choose a few of them and people who you know love you, who you know support your leadership, who you know want to see you succeed in every way, and who are strong enough and relationally in tune with you enough to tell you the truth. Because there are always gonna be people who fit that description who are always gonna say it was wonderful. There is an amazing couple in our church and every Sunday, like clockwork, he comes up and he says, Man, I just got to tell you, that was the greatest sermon that I've ever heard in my life. And then his wife sends me an email. And I love that because it's very encouraging, but I'm not going to ask their opinion on what they thought of the message. I want someone who can be critical and deliver a hard word to me if that's what I need. Because it's not about me feeling good. It's about me doing the best job that I can do for the glory of God and the Kingdom of God. That's it. It's not about me. It's about the message. So I have one question. I like for it to be entertaining. I like for people to enjoy it. But that's not what I'm mostly concerned about.

a. The question is, Was it clear? Did you get my one point? And so you determine that one point, and you tell people, This is what we're talking about. And then, as you take them on the journey of that story, you might stop and talk about this, but you only stop and talk about the things that feed into that one point. Look at what Paul is saying here. He's saying this and this and this and this is cool, and this is how it plays out in your family. Feel that. But what's the bottom line of what he says? Because I told you at the beginning of the message what this is all about. It's know the Word, live the Word. Now we're going to move forward in the text a little bit further. And you talk about that and flesh it out. I don't mean to say that it's unimportant. It's significantly important, but it feeds into the one thing, and then you say it again. Know the Word, live the Word. And by the time you get to the end of the message, they've heard 'know the Word, live the Word' ten times and they've seen how the text feeds 'know the Word, live the Word.' And here's what you can't do. You can't make a text feed something that it doesn't actually feed. You can't say that you want to talk about know the Word, live the Word and then choose a passage of Scripture that has nothing to do with 'know the Word, live the Word' and try to get creative about making it work.

i. I came to the book of Colossians, studied the book, and said, What does it say? It says this. Perfect. That's our goal for the year, and that's what we're going to talk about for five weeks. And we talked about all these other things that it talks about in the book along the way, but all along the way, it's 'know the Word, live the Word', 'know the Word, live the Word', 'know the Word, live the Word'.

ii. So you tell them what you're going to tell them, and then you take them on this compelling journey of Scripture that tells them, and then you get to the end and you tell them what you just told them. Does that make sense? And then they're less likely to leave and say, Wow, we heard this amazing story. I don't know what the point was. Seriously. And one of the things that encouraged me is Paul in Colossians 4. He says, Devote yourself to prayer. So he's signing off with these guys. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, praying at the same time, he says, for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have been in prison. And then he says, That I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. He's saying, Pray that I can find ways to take this gospel message of Jesus, the mystery that Christ, the Jewish Messiah, did not just come for the Jews but for all who put their faith and trust in Him, and that we are the true Israel. He's saying, Help me, pray, that I may make it clear because clear is how I ought to speak. Strive for clarity. You want it to be clear. And what happens when you're putting the sermon together is that you want it to be clear and then this awesome illustration comes up and you're thinking, Oh, Lord, help me find a way to somehow get this in here because it's funny and compelling and powerful. But it doesn't quite fit. Don't use it. Don't use it. Save it. You preach every week. It will be sitting there waiting for you. And when the moment comes that it actually serves the purpose of the sermon, the one point that you're trying to drive home as you talk people along this journey, oh, you'll be so glad you save it because the Holy Spirit will go, Hey, do you remember that story that you wanted to use? This is your week. Then it will hit home and people will go back talking about that point that was driven home by that illustration. They'll never forget that.

8. We're going to talk about the Joseph story here in a minute, but I want to read an email to you before we do. One time, I did a message on Joseph, and if you can use actual tangible things, it's very helpful to remember what's going on. So I talked a little bit about a puzzle piece yesterday with you guys, and that's what this email is about. I'll explain it. But I literally got a 1000 piece puzzle and at the beginning of the message, I said, I'm going to start the message here in a second but before I do, what I want to do is have the deacons come forward, and they're going to give you, they're going to pass the baskets and in the baskets are all these tiny little pieces of a puzzle, and I want every person here to take one. And that whole message I had that puzzle in my hand. And I'm talking about the life of Joseph and how nothing inside the life of Joseph was making any sense to him and yet there was a bigger picture. And you get to do that in Joseph's life before he dies. It makes perfect sense. You know, you plug in the puzzle pieces.

a. I had a guy come to me two years later and he was leaving a huge job. He had a big time position to go be the pastor of a big church. So the bad news was that he was leaving us, but the good news is that he was leaving us to go into the ministry. So that's the way I like to lose people. I said, Bless you. This is awesome. Do you know what he pulled out of his pocket? That puzzle piece. He said, Let me show you something. He pulled out his wallet and opened it up and took old that old puzzle piece. He said, I carry this with me everywhere that I go. One day, on Father's Day, we bought these cheap little plastic compasses. I mean, cheap little plastic things. They probably cost two cents each or something like that. But every man there got a compass. And the name of the message was 'Compass.' And the point of the message was: Dads, you set the direction for your home. And every guy walked out with a little compass. And some of those guys will never forget that, probably still have it. Now, that compass is worth a lot more than two cents if they still remember the message. And that's the idea. You know, one Christmas Eve, I did the passage that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And you know, you've got to get creative around Christmas or your just doing the same stuff every single year.

b. And so I did a series on why did Jesus come. I did all those passages where Jesus said, I came to seek and save the lost. I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. I came. There are all these passages, so I chose those and I used them for Christmas. And on Christmas Eve, it was to seek and save the lost, and I took a $50 dollar bill, and I taped it under somebody's chair in the sanctuary. And I got up at the beginning of the message, and I said, Okay, here's the deal. It's Christmas and blah, blah, blah, a little bit of introductory comment, and I said, Before the service, I took a $50 dollar bill and I taped it under one of your chairs. And everybody started looking. And it one of the services, it was a little girl that happened to be the daughter of the guy that did all of our finances, so we all got a big laugh. But she got $50!! That's a big deal, man. That's like the lottery if you're eight years old and you get a $50 dollar bill. And I paused, and I said, Okay, why did every man, woman, and child here, no matte how you do in life or how old you are, why is it that every single one of your got out of your chair, uncomfortable as it is, bumped your rear end on the person next to you, had to get down on your hands and knees to look for that $50 dollar bill? Because it's valuable. Jesus, we will learn tonight, came to seek and save that which is valuable. And it's the lost. Right into the story.

c. They don't forget that. But you've got to be creative. Preaching, particularly every week, is very, very difficult. Very, very difficult. And I have a lot of advantages because I have a lot of people who do a lot of the work that you guys, in many cases, have to do all by yourselves. So I have a lot more time to think about things than you guys do, which is why it's helpful to get other people's materials because sometimes they've done thinking for you and you can take and adapt it to whatever situation you're in and run with it. But preaching every week is tough, man. I told our congregation that it's like having a baby on Sunday and getting pregnant on Monday. As soon as you're done with the one, if you're like me, you're on to the next. It's not a marathon. Marathons end. There is a finish line to a marathon. I can run a marathon. It will take me 26 days to do it, but I can do it. A mile a day and I'll finish. And I'm preaching every week, every week. It's a heavy load. It's a hard thing.

i. If you're not called to do it, it will kill you. And if you are called to do it, it might kill you. And if it energizes you, it's your thing. Find your thing, do your thing. It's beautiful. And what you do every week is you bring God's Word to God's people. You're taking the Bread of Life and you're giving it to the people of God. Like Moses in the wilderness. You're like Joseph who stores up the bread and distributes it. It's beautiful what you do, so be encouraged in that. But to the degree that you can figure out how to make it clear, even if it feels a little gimmicky. Hey, man, it cost me $100 but it was worth $10,000. It really was. Does that make sense?