

# Introduction

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is going to be a little bit more laid back than Sunday morning and so I do there are going! There are going to be some times where I'll ask you questions and encourage your feedback.

And so I do, there are going to be some times where I'll ask you questions and encourage your feedback. And so I want to begin by asking you a question and now I don't expect that you would know this answer.

Some of you might, but I'm just curious to get your guess. How old do you think a church lives before it dies in the United States of America?

The average age, when a church plants, it started to the point where that congregation no longer ceases to exist. Whether they sell the building off to somebody else or the building just closes down.

How old do you think the average is of a church before it closes down in the United States of America? Any church, it's any church. I, yeah, I think Baptists hopefully, well, I'd say they could last longer.

[ 1 : 13 ] 120 years. 120 years. Okay. 5 years. 60? 5? I know for like the church plants, if they don't, a lot of them die within 5 years.

25? Okay. 45. 45? Okay, so we've got a range. So the average is 96 years. From beginning to end. 96 years. Almost 100 years. So now my next question is for you. How old is Highland Park Baptist Church? Do you know? It's on the wall.

At least our founding date is out there. That's what I'm going off of. Not 28? 84. 84. 84. 84. 84. 84 years old.

Which means that based upon that 96 year average that there's potential for a church of our age to cease to exist in 12 years.

[ 2 : 17 ] Yeah. Amen. See, that's the laid back atmosphere I'm talking about right there. Amen. So 12 years.

There are some churches that have lived obviously long past 96 years. And there are some, as we've talked about, they don't even come close to 96 years. As Cameron said, a lot of new church plants, they don't make it past 5 years.

So the question is, what's the difference? Why do some churches last beyond 96? And why do some churches not even come close to that?

When I was back in Kansas City, I'd meet with a group of pastors. And the demographics of their neighborhoods had greatly changed in the time that they had served there.

One guy had been serving at his church for 40 years. And over that time, their numbers steadily dropped to the point where many of those churches, and again, this is in the Kansas City area, they were down to 20 or 30 people.

[ 3 : 17 ] And they once had congregations in the hundreds, two hundreds, and some even more. The church that I talked about this morning, and I used that illustration of their baptismal being covered, this was one of those churches.

And while I was there with that church as well, one of the things that they had talked about is they, for that year, for the first year, they were not going to have a VBS that summer.

Which puzzled me, because I knew where that church was, and I knew that it was right in the middle of a neighborhood, and there was all kinds of kids in that neighborhood. And I may have shared this illustration before, and it's been a year, so I'm probably going to share it again.

So just get used to it. But, yeah. But anyhow, this church was located in the heart of a neighborhood with kids. And they weren't going to have a VBS.

And I thought that was strange. And I was like, well, I told the pastor, I've driven by your church. I see there's a lot of kids in the neighborhoods surrounding your church. And he was like, well, they're bad kids, was his comment.

[ 4 : 19 ] And so they had the kids there. And certainly, you know, we're all sinners. We all need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Certainly these kids need that. And yet they didn't care to reach out to them because they were afraid of what they might do once they came inside their church.

So why is one church thriving and another church not thriving in the same location? Again, another example.

Using those churches where there's a congregation down in the 20s or 30s. And then they have like a Hispanic congregation or they have another kind of group come in. And the congregations are booming.

You know, you have a church that owns the building and they're down to 20 or 30. And then you have a congregation that rents the church and comes in and has service after they're done in the Sunday morning. They're baptizing people. They're growing in number. And so here you have two churches using one building in the same location.

[ 5 : 22 ] One church is thriving and the other church is struggling. And why is that? What makes the difference? If the church is a gospel-centered church, it will not just survive past 96 years.

It will thrive until the Lord returns. That's the difference to me. If you're gospel-centered, your church will thrive. It will survive and it will last until the Lord's return.

If it's not, then eventually it will close its doors. That's what I would often tell my church in Leavenworth. That our hope should be that when our time here is done, that we've left behind a church.

And we've prepared the next generation to lead that church. And our hope should be that they continue on and they can do the same and the same and the same. That by the time the Lord returns, that church is still there. It's still on its mission.

It's God-given mission. And so that should be the hope for our church as well. Obviously, nobody here wants to see us hit this average. Obviously, I'd say all of us want to be that church that when the Lord comes, bam, Highland Park Baptist Church is in Bartlesville.

[ 6 : 29 ] And it's continuing to do the mission that it began to do 84 years ago. So what does it mean to be a gospel-centered church? Three primary things.

First of all, in a gospel-centered church, preaching the gospel is the priority. This is our priority. Preaching. Teaching the gospel. Our communicating the gospel is paramount to all that we do. In our groups, Sunday school. In our men's and our women's studies on Monday night. On Wednesday night. When we have our Bible study and we have Juana and we have youth group. In our worship. The songs that we sing on Sunday morning, they are all about the gospel. They're gospel-centered. We're not just singing a song because it sounds good, you know.

Listen to the lyrics. Dan picks out good music. It's gospel-centered. Again, with the preaching, you know, it's going to come from the Bible. The teaching that we have, they're going to come from God's Word.

[ 7 : 29 ] It's not going to come from some good article that we read in a magazine or a good book that we picked up or something like that. It's all going to be grounded upon the gospel. So in a gospel-centered church, preaching the gospel is the priority.

Because we understand, again, it's the gospel that the Lord uses to save people. And again, we can go out and we can do engage. And we can let people know how nice and loving and caring we are.

But if we're not communicating the gospel to them, then we're not accomplishing our mission. Because what we win them to is what we have to keep them with. So if people are coming to church because they want to be entertained, in order to keep them to keep coming, we're going to have to keep entertaining them.

That's not what we're about. We're about the gospel. It's the gospel that saves people. So that's the priority. Number two, in a gospel-centered church, the emphasis of the message is more on what Christ has done than what we are to do.

The emphasis is more on what Christ has done than what we are to do. So we're avoiding what I call checklist Christianity. You know, you read your Bible.

[ 8 : 34 ] Did you pray this week? Did you go to church? Okay, you're a great Christian. That could be the case. That could be the case. But that's not what we're after. It's more about what Jesus has done for us.

Through grace, we've been saved. Through faith in him. And so the emphasis is going to be more upon what Christ has done for us than on what we are to do, though that is important as well. But the emphasis is always on what Christ has done. Third, in a gospel-centered church, the members demonstrate the beauty of the gospel in the community.

So we are both, in our church, we have an inward focus and we have an outward focus. We can't be just outward focused because then we would neglect our responsibility within the church to equip and to train disciples of Jesus Christ.

So we've got to be inward focused as well as outward focused. And I think that our vision statement clarifies that pretty well. We're outward focused in the fact that we're engaging and we're enlightening.

[ 9 : 36 ] We're going out to our community. We're seeking to reach unbelievers. And as we do that, we're hoping to enlighten them with the good news of Jesus Christ. So that's our outward focus, but it's also an inward focus.

And we're also enlightening people inward, internally in the church. We're training, we're teaching, we're wanting to equip you so that you can better live the Christian life, that you can better give glory to God with your life, that you can better reach people and make disciples yourself.

So we're doing that. We're also encouraging and we're also equipping. And so we have an inward and an outward focus. And again, in a gospel-centered church, the members demonstrate the beauty of this to their community.

And so when we have things like Engage, when we go to the lighthouse, even when we're playing church league softball, wherever we're at, that's our place.

That's our opportunity to be witnessing to those people and to let them see the beauty of the gospel through us and the way that we interact with each other. Case in point, we moved Jean on Saturday.

[ 10 : 44 ] That's another great opportunity. You know, people are seeing that. Neighbors are coming in. And that's an opportunity for us to show them this is what being a part of the fellowship of the body of Christ is all about. And so those are great opportunities.

And I encourage you. That's why we have, like, our in-house Engage and these different things that we're doing. It's opportunities for us to live out the gospel before our neighbors, before our community, in their eyes, so that they see that those Christians are different.

They really do practice what they preach, and that gives testimony to the fact that the gospel that we believe in is true, that it is transformational. So what is the gospel?

Well, in the Greek, euangelion or evangelion, however you want to pronounce it, it's a Greek word, and it means good news. William Tyndale, I like his definition. He says it's a Greek word signifying good, merry, glad, and joyful news that makes a man's heart glad and makes him sing, dance, and leap for joy.

As Tyndale points out, the gospel is not law demanding that we pay our own way. The gospel is a welcome announcement declaring that Jesus has paid it all.

[ 11 : 56 ] So the message of the gospel is to be proclaimed and believed. We see this from Scripture. The message, the gospel is a message, I should say, that is to be proclaimed and believed.

Mark 1, 14 through 15. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. So the gospel is a message to be proclaimed, and it's a message to be believed. The gospel is also the point of the Bible. What's the Bible about?

Good news of Jesus Christ from beginning to end. Galatians 3, 8. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed.

So the gospel is the point of the Bible. Thirdly, the gospel is not an invention of man, but it comes from God above. This is not our man-created message.

[ 13 : 01 ] This is not a man-centered message. Galatians 1, 11 through 15. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. So the gospel is not an invention of man.

And then, also, the gospel is worthy of our utmost. The gospel is worthy of our utmost. We were here not all that long ago.

Philippians 1, 27 through 30. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your own opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. For it has been given to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

[14:11] So the gospel is worthy of our utmost. This is the essential message that Bible-believing people rally around.

This is the central message that Bible-believing people rally around. It's this. God, through the perfect life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, rescues all his people from the wrath of God into peace with God with a promise of the full restoration of his created order forever, all to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Salvation from the judgment of God into fellowship with God is all of God, and it's not of us.

That is good news indeed, and this gospel is widely known and sincerely preached in our churches today. The point here that I want to make is that in a church that is not gospel-centered, the bad news often drowns out the good news.

This is often what happens in those churches that don't make it to 96 or die soon after 96. In a church that is not gospel-centered, the bad news often drowns out the good news.

[15:40] If a message so good lies at the defining center of our churches, why do we see such bad things happen in these very same churches? And we think, where is the saving power of the gospel?

Why is it not on display there? In his book, *Witness*, Whitaker Chambers tells of a young German woman whose father had been fervently pro-communist.

Then he became strongly anti-communist. And so the person asked her why, and she said, you will laugh at me, but you must not laugh at my father. One night in Moscow, he heard screams.

That's all. Simply one night, he heard screaming, and he stopped being pro-communist. I heard a story recently from someone, not pertaining to this church, but they went to another church.

I didn't ask for all the details, but they have young children. And so they were visiting a church, and you know, as parents with young children, you know, your children are valuable to you, obviously, and you want to look out and protect them.

[16:52] And hopefully, when you come into the church, you feel like you can trust strangers to watch them. But when you're going into a church for the very first time, and you don't know people, some parents, they just feel more comfortable just keeping the family together.

Because as we talked about this morning, it's hard being a visitor. And for some people, they're not very outgoing, and so they want to come in and check things out, and then they want to leave right away. And that's just the way some visitors are, and that's okay.

And so that was the case for this family. They decided that they were going to keep their two-year-old with them. And during the midst of the service, their child didn't go to nursery, obviously, or the other one to children's church, somebody behind them, they heard whispering, saying, I wish they would have just taken that kid to the nursery.

So things like that happen in the church. And when things like that happen in the church, it does not testify to the fact that we have been changed by the gospel, that the gospel is good news.

They see Christians as being not very nice, not very joyful people, not being who they claim to be. And so we've got to be aware of that, that we've got to be gospel-centered people, that when people come into our churches, and again, we can all go around and share stories of some of the things that we've encountered both personally in the church, or that we've seen somebody else go through some testy business meetings, or some people saying some things after or before church that just were not very much like Jesus would talk.

[18:31] And so we've all been through it. And so when that happens, the bad news overshadows, silences, the good news. And so we've got to understand that as a church, I believe the church is an institution of grace.

We are an institution of grace because the church has been founded on grace, the church is fueled by grace, and the church should be a distributor of grace. And so for all these reasons, we are, as a church, an institution of grace.

However, again, often the opposite holds true for God's people, as I've mentioned. Now here's the thing. This is not a new problem for God's people.

God's people have struggled with this problem for all times. Case in point, Isaiah 5, 7. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed. For righteousness, but behold, an outcry. So here we have people again not on the Lord's mission.

[ 19 : 34 ] Many people have left the church as a result of them going to hear the good news, but having it drowned out by conflict and troubles. And so they left. A lot of times, I've heard stories of people after a church split, they won't go back to church for years because they've been hurt so bad by what they've encountered there.

And so a gospel-centered church is a church where the bad news does not drown out the good news. A church with the truth of the gospel and its theology can produce the opposite of the gospel in its practice.

So we can know the Bible. We can know as Christians how we should live. However, we can have a theology that is on point, but it can still produce the opposite of the gospel in practice in our fellowship and our reaching people.

To the church in Laodicea, Jesus said in Revelations 3.17, For you say I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing but realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

The problem for this church was not what they believed doctrinally, but what they had become personally, and they didn't even realize it. Yet it was obvious to the Lord.

[ 20 : 46 ] He says, I know your works. I know what's going on there. I see it. So they needed to repent and they needed to go with Christ with a new humility, a new openness, and a new honesty.

Okay, the second thing. Is that the test is the test of the gospel-centered church. Okay? So we see, first of all, that the bad news can drown out the good news and that we don't want that to happen.

And now here's the test of a gospel-centered church. Again, not long after his life-altering crisis of faith brought on the personal ugliness in his denomination, Francis Schaeffer wrote an article entitled How Heresy Should Be Met.

And here was his main point. He said, The final problem is not to prove men wrong, but to win them to Christ. Therefore, the only ultimately successful apologetic is first a clear intellectual statement of what is wrong with the false doctrine, plus a clear intellectual return to the proper scriptural emphasis in all its validity and its relation to a total Christian faith, plus a demonstration in the life that this is correct and vital scriptural emphasis meets the genuine needs and aspirations of men in ways that Satan's counterfeits does not.

So this is what he's saying. This is what it boils down to. The test of a gospel-centered church is its doctrine on paper, plus its culture in practice.

[ 22 : 16 ] Man, it's incredibly important what we believe in our doctrinal position. That's vital. But, it's also incredibly important that we put that into practice in our culture and people see the good news not just in our words but in our deeds.

Matthew 23, 37 through 40. And Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Acts 4, 32 through 35.

This is how we're seeing this doctrine on paper and culture and practice. Acts 4, 32 through 35.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own but they had everything in common.

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need.

[ 23 : 37 ] If a church's gospel culture has been lost or was never built, the only remedy is found at the feet of Christ. The church needs a fresh discovery, rediscovery of his gospel and all of its beauty.

It needs to prayerfully reconsider everything it believes and practices. Nothing is gained by merely repackaging the church in forms that are more attractive to outsiders. So as a church we're not thinking about hey, we'd like to grow here.

How could we grow? Well, let's see. There's a lot of Oklahoma fans and Oklahoma State fans here. Maybe maybe as a pastor I'll start wearing Oklahoma t-shirts on Sunday morning or something like that.

You know? Or maybe we'll do a tailgate on Saturday and that would never happen by the way. But you know, or maybe we'll do we do all these different things and we make it like about entertainment. Let's get rid of all the pews and let's put in stadium seating and let's put fancy lights and smoke and let's do all these things to make people want to come.

That's not what we're about here. That's not what we should be about here. That's not the type of culture that we're trying to create to draw people in because again, what you win them to is what you have to keep them with.

[ 24 : 50 ] And so, those things aren't important to us. We care about lost people. We care about their salvation. We care about doing what the Lord has called us to do. So, first and foremost, the gospel of Christ must be fully believed and embraced by our church.

The purpose then of these messages will be to seek to show how the church is to portray the beauty of Christ. And I think for a lot of us we know this but it's a good reminder.

The church possesses the gospel alone. We are the only institution in all the world that has this wonderful message. God's wonder working resources for the display of Christ among us and we are to go along and I hope that by having these messages you will be revitalized or you will rediscover for yourself the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So again, these sermons are about the gospel but more specifically about how the gospel can shape the life and culture of our churches so that they portray Christ as He really is according to the good news of the gospel.

A.W. Tozer once made this quip a generation ago and it still holds true today. This is what he said. A widespread revival of the kind of Christianity we know today in America might prove to be a moral tragedy from which we could not recover in a hundred years.

[ 26 : 14 ] And I agree. I think more so than ever the church is in need of another reformation. Especially in the United States of America. Our churches are in need of another reformation.

We've become too attached to man-centered theology, man-centered worship, and man-centered preaching. We need to return to a gospel-centered theology, a God-centered worship, and a God-centered preaching.

Any church of any denomination today that falls short of the gospel of Christ in either doctrine or culture will inevitably collapse under the extreme pressures of our times.

The gospel alone works with the power of God. Romans 1.16 Everything else, everything less, will be swept away and rightfully so. So, let's all be prayerful before the Lord, rediscovering His power in the gospel for you, for our church, for our community.

Amen? Amen. Okay, so these are what the sermons will be about moving forward. We have some time. And so I'm curious to know if you have any feedback, comments, what are things that you have seen in the church, not our church, but in the church in the United States of America that are discouraging to you?

[ 27 : 31 ] What are some things that you're hoping will change? How as a church can we do that? So, I have a microphone here. Let's hear what you have to say.

Pastor Mike, that was on point. You nailed it. But you see that there is a, there is, especially I've noticed in the seminaries.

The seminary that I went to, good school, great doctrinally. I love my seminary. And it is cranking out good men. But what I'm concerned about is many of them, they want to be church planners. And you know why they want to be church planners? Well, because it's the cool thing to do. Why? Yeah. They don't like the traditional church. And, they know that they will step in when they step into a traditional church.

A lot of time that church has past history that they'd rather not have to deal with. And so, it's easier. I think they do it because it's hard to plant a church. But they have the thought that it's easier.

[ 28 : 44 ] You know, I'll go and I'll start my own church and I won't have to deal with any of those past problems. I won't have to have battles over, you know, what I wear on Sunday morning or what music we play or any of that stuff.

You know, I can start out fresh. I can have church my way and people will either come and that's great because then they'll want to have church my way and if they don't then they'll just go somewhere else. And so, I think a lot of, for a lot of church planters, that's their thought process. And so, a lot of seminarians have that view, at least I've seen, as they go in, you know, to seminary and they think I'm going to be a church planter and I'm going to have this big giant church and everybody's going to do church my way and it's going to go wonderfully.

But a lot of church plans fail because of that reason. You know, so that's one of the reasons too I think is they try to avoid what, the bad news, some of the bad, the difficult stuff and that's wrong. Worship, traditional verses, Dan and I were talking about this, what do we call it? Contemporary, but that's used to, that's used to what they would call traditional.

[ 29 : 54 ] So, what was once contemporary is now referred to as traditional. So, I don't know if there's, seeing the same verse over and over again with flashing lights is what I call it.

I don't know. Yeah, so there is a lot of times now churches will think, well, if we're going to grow, then it's going to be, then we've got to, we've got to change all these different things about us. Sometimes it does result in growth, but again, what you win them with is what you have to, what you win them to is what you have to keep them with. And ultimately, you know, when we have people coming to hear the gospel, we want them to come for the gospel.

That's why you're here. You know, and again, our worship isn't, our worship, now this might sound hard for some people to hear, our worship isn't for you. Our worship isn't for you.

Our worship is for the Lord. You know, that's a tough one for many people to swallow, but it is for me. You know, I need that time. I'm not saying that you don't benefit from it. It's great to worship the Lord, but our worship is to God.

[ 31 : 01 ] And so we've got to keep that in mind when we worship. You know, we're doing this for our Lord who saved us. So yeah, there is, there's, that's part of it too is churches think we've got to change.

I encountered that in my church growing up is, as more traditional church, about three or four hundred, probably four hundred. And, and they were concerned that they weren't keeping up with the times.

And so what they did was they split the church into two services. And you had a traditional service in the morning and during Sunday school class. And then while everybody else was having Sunday school class, you had the second service, which was the contemporary service at the time.

And that, that church never recovered from, from that split. I mean, it was like two different churches. And, and it caused more problems than it solved. And, you know, people felt like they were, cared less for.

And in a way, I think they kind of were. And so a lot of people left in that church that was, you know, again, around 400 or so, dwindled down to, less than 100. And I think they've got a new pastor now.

[ 32 : 11 ] It seems like things are doing better, but it's just, it happens. Those types of things, we got to be careful because we think, well, this is what's going to give us the boost. It's not going to give you the boost, you know. We've got to be gospel-centered.

And I don't think that that was a gospel-centered decision. It's just trying to appeal to the world. And as we try to appeal to the world, we lose that appeal because the gospel is not a message from the world.

It's not a message produced by the world. It's a message from God for us, good news of Jesus Christ. And so we've got to be careful. I've read, somebody posted this on Facebook. I can't remember if it was one of you, but somebody said something about, you know, the mission of the church is to try to win the world, but too often these days it's the world that's winning the church. And it's sad, but I think that is the case a lot of times. Cameron? So I was talking to a girl at work and I straight up asked her, I said, why do people, you know, our age, kind of millennials, why do we kind of steer away from traditional churches?

And I'll never forget the word she used was judgmental. She said, we find it too judgmental. And so I think a lot of times with millennials, you kind of see this almost backwards thought of the gospel needs to accept them, not them accepting the gospel.

[ 33 : 33 ] And so unfortunately, I think you see churches kind of bending that way of just kind of watering it down, I guess, so millennials don't feel so uncomfortable coming to church because they want to be the cold church that accepts everybody.

So I think you see kind of churches really watering themselves down to kind of pan towards these younger generations. Yeah, that's true.

That's another hot topic in, you know, denominational circles, leaders talking, you know, how can we get the millennials to come to church? Well, what they've been doing, I don't think has been working because, you know, like Cameron said, they're trying to appeal to the millennials, that looks like anything else that they could have anywhere else, you know, that's not going to do it.

Again, that's not the gospel. But I do think part of what Cameron said is true is for some younger people going into a church that's more traditional is it doesn't feel so much like their church as it feels like other people's churches.

And that's a tough one. And I've been there before because you think, well, I know, this is my church, you know, like my church growing up, I was dedicated in this church, I was baptized in this church, I was married in this church, this is my church, you know, and it's good to take ownership of the church in that way, but it's bad to think that it belongs to me and nobody else.

[ 34 : 59 ] And so when new people come in, you know, you want them to have a part of that too. You want them to feel like, you know, this is your church too, this is our church, not just my church, but it's our church.

And I want you to feel like when you come in here that you have ownership in this place too. So I think that's important as well because, you know, you'll have some new people come in and they'll feel unwelcome because, you know, our terminology, legacy hall, what does that mean?

Or, and that's kind of a new thing, but you know, where's the bathroom at when I come into this place? Things like that. We just got to think about, you know, if you were a visitor in a church and the questions that you would have and some of the things that we just take for granted, I know because I've been here.

Like, Johnny Sawyer knows every nook and cranny in this church. If we're going to play hide and seek, I'm going to go hide with Johnny because he knows this church so well. And others of you do too, but you know what I'm saying?

And that's, there's nothing wrong with that. I think it's great, especially in today's age when you have so many church hoppers. To see, like, in this church, this is one of the things that when I, you know, was praying about and, you know, talking with the search team is that this is a, this is a group of people, they've been in this church for a long time.

[ 36 : 13 ] This church means a lot to them. And in times where people are hopping churches, I think it's amazing that you look at people who have been in their church even for more than 10 years.

That's becoming more rare these days. And then you have churches, people who have been in their church for decades and that's wonderful. I remember when I took my first church in Leavenworth, my parents weren't far away and some of the people were asking me, are your parents going to start coming to church with us now?

Because they'd, they'd, it wasn't that far away and I was like, well, I hope not because their church really needs them. And they've been in that church as long as I've been alive, longer than that. And so, you know, that's where they need to be.

Now, I love my mom and dad and of course, if they would come, I'd be, it'd be good but it'd be kind of, kind of weird. But anyhow, you know what I'm saying? You know, that's where they need to be and I think that's amazing. That's amazing that they've, because the church in that amount of time goes through so many ups and downs and that, that commitment is something to be proud of. Something to, that should be honored, I believe. So we've got to have both where we say, man, you know, we've got people here who have, they really have been through a lot at this church and they've been committed.

[ 37 : 32 ] When times were tough, they could have left but they didn't. And when you've been a member of a church for that long, you've usually come across the time or two, like in my parents' case where they thought about leaving but they didn't.

And so that's wonderful to have that kind of stability, to have that kind of backbone. But we want to have people coming in who can be that stability when our time comes.

And so we want them to be that next group that's here for 30 or whatever, 20, 30 or more years. Yeah, share your church.

That's the bottom line. Share the church. Any other comments? Willard. To me, it boils down to two things. Relationship, and these are backwards, relationship and the power and presence of God.

If a church in their worship service is so geared to being conducive to the presence and power of God, it doesn't make any difference what people are looking for when they come in here.

[ 38 : 38 ] If they sense the presence of God and the power of God in the service, it's going to radically change their life. Relationship is the way to reach.

The day of you build it and they'll come is over. It's built on relationship. I'll never forget a number of years ago.

There was a church in Ponca City that annually would have the Bible, a conference, basically for pastors. I went a few years. They would always have a group of the staff of a very large church in California come and, you know, be in charge of that conference, moderate it, always have a question and answer period the last day.

I'll never forget, and this is, you know, I'll not name the church, but it's well known internationally. And, you know, they were talking about all of the things, the do's and the don'ts of ministry and all of that.

I asked them a question. I said, I've never been to your church, never seen it, but I, you've got to believe it's a very large church plant wherever you're at.

[ 39 : 57 ] I said, other than that church plant being there, if I were to come, would there be evidence that I could see that you're in that community?

It took them a while to respond. They looked at each other with silence. And then the first thing they said, well, you've got to understand, over this cross street is this segment of people.

Over on here is another segment of people, both tremendously high crime areas. one of the guys was telling me that, yeah, my car was parked in the church parking lot and somebody broke into the trunk of my car and stole my brand new golf clubs.

You know, so, in essence, he was telling me, no, they're not reaching the community. You know, people drove 40, 50 miles every Sunday to come to their services because of the internationally known pastor and all of that.

but the relationship was not there with their community. Thriving, yes. Bible preaching, yes. So, you even have to put that in perspective.

[ 41 : 15 ] We can be a Bible preaching church, gospel centered church, but if we're not dealing in relationships and the lives of God's people in the church are not so geared to be conducive to the fullness of Christ in each life, then the power of God's not going to be present.

Those are the two things I believe are vital in a church being the church. Amen. Yeah. Thanks, Willard. Yeah, I agree completely and one of the things I've heard is, and I can't remember where I heard it, but it stuck with me, is if your church ceased to exist in its community, would your community miss your church?

You know? And I've always thought about that because, you know, yeah, it should miss our community or are we just a building that people drive by every day and they don't give a second thought to or are we a place where we are reaching, you know, and people know what we're about because they know who we are because we're going out there and they know what Highland Park stands for and they know what we believe and that's clear by our words and by our deeds.

So, you know, the hope and prayer is that we will be a church like that in the community where, you know, if we for some reason cease to exist that people would mourn because of what we do in our community and what we do in the name of Jesus Christ for our community and so, you know, like with the Engage events that we've had, man, I'm so thankful for you all and how you have gotten on board with those events and how you have given your time and you've done it willingly.

We haven't had to twist people's arms to do things. If we've needed something, people have just been right on board and that means a lot to me and so, we've done some good events and I know that that's encouraging but yet I know in doing these things you think, okay, we're reaching out, we're letting them know where we're at, where are they?

[ 43 : 23 ] Where are they at on Sunday morning? And so, I just want to say be patient because as long as we are obedient to what God has called us to do, it's in His hands. You know, and you think of the casting seed, you know, right?

In Jesus' parable of that, you know, the farmer, he goes out, he's got the bag of seed and he's tossing seed wherever he goes. He's just tossing seed and then he goes home and he goes to bed. That's us.

We're tossing the seed but the seed taking root and it growing, that's all of God. So, our job is to toss seed and then we let him do what he will do and we trust that he will do that.

All right, go ahead, Willie. When we drove up to church this evening and got out of the car, my eye caught a bird squawking.

My ear caught the squawking but my eye saw the bird and it landed on top of the steeple. Just squawking on top. I'm thinking, boy, I hope we squawk louder than that called attention to the church.

[ 44 : 31 ] It did not have a red shirt on, by the way. Oh, we need to train that bird. That's funny. That's great.

Maybe on our next shirt we can get a picture of our steeple with a bird on top of it. And people could ask. I'm kind of only halfway kidding. Why is the bird up there? Well, because we want to squawk louder than that bird.

Go ahead, Shirley. How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation and says to Zion, your God reigns.

That's Isaiah 52, 7. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Shirley. That's it. Any other comments or questions before I close in prayer?

That might be a good way to end it right there. Let's do that. Let's pray. Lord God, I thank you for your gospel. It's your message, Lord. It's your truth and it saves us.

[ 45 : 37 ] It has saved us. And Lord, we are so thankful to you for what you have done. God, each person in this room tonight has heard the gospel from somebody else. You communicated those words to us through someone.

And so, Lord, we pray to you and we ask that our desire would be the same. That you would use us to share the gospel with somebody else. And Lord, we pray that as a church we would continue to be doctrinally and theologically sound in line with what your word says, unwavering in any way from that.

But that also, Lord, we would be your people not just in word but in practice. And so, Lord, we pray that what we believe, that we would live that out and we would do that amongst one another.

God, that we would have that kind of deep bond, that deep fellowship. I know that it already exists here but Lord, we pray that you would add to our number those who will experience that deep bond and fellowship as well.

That we would continue to be people who have been marked by the gospel. That we would bear one another's burdens. That we would love one another, Lord, as your word calls us to do. And that as we go out into our community that people would see that.

[ 46 : 51 ] That it would be on display for them. That they would know that Highland Park Baptist Church is a community of people who believe in Jesus Christ with all their hearts. And that they love each other and they love me too.

And so, Lord, we pray that they would see that and they would know that the reason why all of this is happening is because of the gospel. It's because of Jesus Christ. And that you would receive the glory from it.

Lord, we thank you for the engaged events that we've had and that we are stepping out into our community. And we are seeking to be used by you to reach the lost.

And so, Lord, we pray that we would just continue to do that. We would continue to be faithful to what you've called us to be as far as going and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, Lord, and that what results from that, that we would trust those things into your hand and that we'd be patient and that we'd know that no matter what, as long as we are going and we are sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, we are being successful in what your word has called us to do.

Lord, we pray that as we continue on through these messages, as we talk about the gospel, that we would be reminded or that we would rediscover, if need be, the beauty of the gospel of what you have done for us.

[ 48 : 01 ] And again, Lord, that this would spur us onward to reaching our neighbors, our community, Lord, with this wonderful news of Jesus Christ. And we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.