Heritage of Spiritual Growth

## Stewardship of Our Heritage

## By Steve Viars

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### Faith Church

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This month we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of our church which is an absolutely delightful milestone the Lord has helped us achieve together so last Sunday we began a four-week series entitled "The Stewardship of Our Heritage." This really is a marvelous story to tell in a lot of different ways because the Lord has given us a rather unique and unusually blessed heritage and ultimately, I hope as you look around, you would say that this is something that has been entrusted to us by our God. So this month we want to celebrate. We want to celebrate the faithful men and woman who have blazed a trail, some of who are still alive and part of this church family today. Humanly speaking, they are the heroes. They are the warhorses or whatever the feminine counterparts are to those metaphors, the warhorse-ettes or whatever it is but I'm talking to you about men and woman who have been part of this church family for over 30 years, 35 years, 40 years. This church would come to a grinding halt were it not for their faithfulness and we want to commend them and we want to celebrate them.

We also want to pause and glorify our God obviously for making all of this possible. To a person, the men and women involved in this story would say that if they ever did anything right, it was because of the powerful and the transforming work of the Gospel. That was the point that our seminary intern, Lucas L. made at the end of the delightful testimony that he and his wife, Bella, gave last Sunday when they quoted Ephesians 3:20, "Now to Him," there it is, "who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." So stewardship month is all about praising God for what he has done.

Then thirdly, we want to use these presentations of the most important aspects of our heritage, to ask ourselves whether we're being faithful to the trust and think about what greater faithfulness would look like in the days ahead. So the stewardship of our heritage.

The idea of planting a new church on what was then the south side of Lafayette, came from pastor B. Rowe. He was at that time 50 years ago, the pastor of the Kossuth Street, Baptist Church. That makes them our mother church. We are their daughter. We enjoy a friendly and collaborative relationship with them even to this day. That's a good part of the story, by the way, so we for many years have done Christmas for everyone together along with some other great evangelical churches in this town. Kossuth's senior pastor, Don Whipple, and I graduated from the same school along with several other pastors from our church. I knew Pastor Whipple from Kossuth Street long before I came to Lafayette 27 years ago. We still support one another's missionaries. Members of their church are effective teachers at our school. One of their current pastors just graduated from our seminary and on and on. So part of the story is just being thankful for mom which is why anytime we need money, we just call her. It's a good part of the story. It's a good part of the story.

The church started meeting in 1964 in the basement of the Farm Credit Building over on Teal Road. I need to pause right there and correct something that I said last week. What I just said is true that the church started meeting in the basement of the Farm Credit Building but I said last week that the Farm Credit Building is the same as what became the Lafayette Life Building at the corner of 18th and Teal. That is not true. That is not true. I have had that confused in my brain forever. Last Sunday night at our church family night, I was talking to Jerry Jamieson, our longest term member and some of the other old-timers and I asked them, "Hey, did I get the story straight?" And I knew I was in trouble when Jerry and everybody else just kind of put their head down and he said, "Steve," he corrected me on the whole issue of the Lafayette Life Building is not the Farm Credit Building. It never was and never will be. Then he said, "Steve, I tried to straighten that out for you a couple of years ago when you made that same mistake before." Which means we have an 80-year-old man trying to clear up the faltering memory of the 54-year-old pastor. Incidentally, I have absolutely no recollection of me saying it wrong before or of him correcting me before. To make matters worse, the other old-timers who were listening in said, "Well, when we heard you say that last week we just kind of shook our heads and said, 'Well, he's close enough.'" He's close enough and I thought later, "Isn't it sad when the highest standard to which your pastor can be held is, he's close enough." He's close enough.

Well, this group grew. They were able to purchase property and dedicate their first permanent building in 1967. I loved reading through the Dedication Service program in that year and I tried to point out last week that part of what has been entrusted to us, friends, is our heritage of the Gospel. No question about that. In 1967, they had a responsive reading as part of the dedication of our church's first building and the pastor said this, I want to repeat this this morning because it sets up what we're going to need to say and study this morning. The pastor said, "To the purpose of maintaining worship in accordance with our belief in a verbally inspired and hence, infallible Bible." And I'm going to try to argue in a few minutes that wording was chosen on purpose for some specific historical reasons. The congregation said, "We dedicate this church." Then he said, "To the preaching of the Gospel which is the good news of the substitutionary death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, We dedicate this church." Then he went on to say, "To the proclamation of this same Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, We dedicate this church." Then, "To the teaching of young men and women to dedicate themselves to the ministry of the Gospel." Third time you find that word in this dedication, "in whatever way the Lord may lead, We dedicate this church."

Well, the obvious theme was their passion, their commitment to believe and to live out and to faithfully proclaim the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection and the new life that is available through trusting in him. They sounded an awful lot like Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 when he said, "Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, not in cleverness of speech so that the cross of Christ would not be made void for the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." Then a few verses later, "For I determined," Paul said, "to know nothing among you." That's a strong statement. "Except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Friends, I hope we're all incredibly thankful for our heritage of the Gospel and I hope that discussion last Sunday motivated us to consider how closely tethered our lives are and our ministries are to believing and to living out and to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. You can get busy doing all kinds of stuff, do you know that? Even in the church house but the question is what does that have to do with the mission? What does that have to do with the Gospel?

Now, to understand what is probably the second most important aspect of our heritage, here's a note from the minutes of the business meeting on October 24, 1976 where our minutes state, "There is a recommendation for the board that we purchase shirts for the basketball team at a cost of approximately $105 plus allowing extra for insurance and gym rental for a total of $250." Pretty exciting stuff, huh? Yeah, and why the players couldn't just buy their own shirts or chip in for the gym rental remains a mystery to me but then after that, there was this little tidbit in typical Indiana fashion after the important basketball decisions had been made, we read in our church minutes this, "We also voted to invite the Christian Counseling Center and Training Program to become part of Faith Baptist Church and to invite Dr. Bob Smith to prayerfully consider this move." Oh yeah, that little detail. And it's no exaggeration to say that that was one of the most significant decisions our church family has made in its entire fifty-year history.

This morning I want to think with you about our heritage of spiritual growth. With that in mind, please open your Bible now to Colossians 1. Please don't make the mistake in your heart of thinking, "Oh, he's going to talk about counseling all hour." No, I'm talking about spiritual formation. I'm talking about soul care. I'm talking about progressive sanctification which is for all of us. Our heritage of spiritual growth.

This book, Colossians, is known as one of the prison epistles. It was written along with the book of Philemon about A.D. 60-62. Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Colossae was near the city of Laodicea. Did you know that? Which contained a church which was famously addressed by the Lord in the book of Revelation about 30 years later as a church that was so lukewarm that the Lord wanted to what? Spew them out of his mouth. Well, that church at Laodicea is actually mentioned specifically several times in the book of Colossians. In fact, Paul instructed the folks at Colossae, "When you're done reading this letter, send it down to Laodicea," which tells us when you compare it to what Jesus said about the Laodiceans 30 years later, it tells us what happens when churches don't listen to truths like the ones we're going to study this morning. This is that important.

Now, please follow along carefully as I read beginning in Colossians 1:24 where Paul said,

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. [we'll explain that in a minute] 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship [there's our word] from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, [that's crucial] 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery [second time that word is used] among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Now, focus on these last verses,

28 We proclaim Him [Christ], admonishing [I wonder what that means?] admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

We're talking about our heritage of spiritual growth and with the time that we have remaining, let's divide this passage into its four main emphases. There is the context of spiritual growth both for Paul and also for this church. The tools of spiritual growth, there are two very clear ones noted here. Then the goal of spiritual growth, where is all this supposed to be heading? Then, better talk about the cost. So the context, the tools, the goal and then the cost of spiritual growth.

First of all, the context of spiritual growth both for Paul and us is suffering and controversy. In Paul's case, he's currently enduring what students of Scripture refer to as his first imprisonment. This is also, by the way, the time when the book of Philippians was written and he said to the people in that church, "I have you in my heart since both in my imprisonment and in defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me." Well, if you connect that, Paul's now in prison, with what we studied last week, his emphasis on the centrality of preaching of the cross, what we're learning is that resulted in him being imprisoned in defense and confirmation of the Gospel. That's what he meant when he said in the first verse I just read to you, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." I probably need to push the pause button right there because I realize you might say, "What is lacking in Christ's afflictions? What's that?" Well, the idea is those who hated Christ were not satisfied simply by putting the Savior to death but they also chose and those who followed them, to persecute his followers as well. Do you notice, follow the logic of the text: Paul saw that, his imprisonment, as an opportunity. In fact, what did he call it in verse 25? "According to the stewardship." His imprisonment was something that was entrusted by God for him for their benefit. For their benefit, how? Follow the logic of the text. How? "That I might fully carry out," not just the preaching of the Gospel but, "the preaching of all the word of God." Now here's the point: yes, they had heard and accepted the Gospel but his imprisonment allowed Paul to slow down and write to them in the very crucible of suffering additional truth from the word of God that they needed to continue to grow in Christ. Boom.

Now, he used that term "mystery" twice in the next verses, not in the sense of a mystery novel. That's not the way the word "mystery" is used in the Bible but it's a principle that was previously unrevealed in the Old Testament, that those who believed the Gospel, both Jews and Gentiles, would then be brought together in local churches where they could continue to mature in Christ and as counter-intuitive as this might seem, Paul saw his suffering as an unusually effective context in which this message could be delivered. The crucible of suffering.

Now, go back to the years just prior to this church being founded and all of a sudden, the specific words that they chose in that Dedication Service make a whole lot more sense and I can't do this part of the story the justice that it deserves this morning except to make these two important points: by the 1960s when this church was founded, the great conservative liberal debates in religion or the fundamentalist modernist debate, you can pick your words, that was essentially over in this country and our mom, Kossuth Street and the people that were scooped out of Kossuth Street to start our new church, they were clearly identifying themselves with those who chose to believe in the inspiration and the inerrancy and the infallibility of Scripture and all the doctrinal truth that flowed out of that belief which is why they even printed in their dedication brochure the so-called fundamentals of the faith because they were birthed out of the context of great theological struggle. Well, praise God for that part of our heritage that there were men and women who were willing to stand for the truth of the word.

Now, think about this logically: what if you don't? What if you jettison Scripture? What if you decide that God's word is not God's word? Where does that leave the theological liberals? I'm not trying to be mean-spirited here but I'm just trying to help us understand historically why we are what we are. Where does that leave the liberals if you no longer believe the authority of the Scripture? And I would suggest to you that if you understand the answer to that question, you will understand a lot of what's even occurring in a community like ours. There are two essential answers: one is you're left with the social Gospel which means doing good works in the community with no particular interest in proclaiming the importance to those you're serving about their greatest need of admitting their sin and placing their faith and trust in Christ. So it's good works without the Gospel. The second haunting answer to that question: if you no longer believe in the authority of the Bible, is an acceptance of secular theories when it comes to handling the problems of everyday life. You see, if the Bible is not truly God's word, then you have to look at so-called other sources of truth which was the complete abdication of what the church previously saw as her central role in the cure and care of souls.

Now, set aside the liberals for a minute. We'll come back to those folks in a minute. But what about those on the other side? What about, let's call them the fundamentalists or the conservatives? What was happening in the 1960s? Well, they had their setbacks like the Scopes Monkey Trial, no question about that. But there was so much evangelistic zeal, so much missionary fervor that conservative fundamental churches in the US and around the world were growing at a dramatic pace. I mentioned an example of that from our church's early history where you've got a small group of adults who said in their church business meeting that they hoped to have eight buses by the end of 1972. So you're bringing all of these children to church which is good and bad. The bad in the sense that the adults have to be out watching other people's children so there's no time for them to receive instruction from the word about spiritual growth. So now you have the fundamental church that is abdicating its responsibility for soul care as well.

Now, I said a lot there. Let me summarize that to be sure that we're on the same page. You've got the liberals who are doing good without the Gospel and trying to achieve sanctification without the Scripture. You have the fundamentalists who are too busy winning people to care a lot about spiritual growth or spiritual formation or soul care. Where does that understanding then, fit into the history of this church? Well, when Pastor and Mrs. Goode first came here in 1975, he was just becoming acquainted with what he would later like to refer as ministering the word of God seven days a week or biblical counseling or biblical soul care. It was based on these twin doctrines. If you're going to understand this church, you have to know this: it was based on the doctrines of sufficiency of Scripture and biblical progressive sanctification defined as this: Scripture, not secular systems, that's all we need for life and godliness. That's what sufficiency of Scripture means, and progressive sanctification emphasizes that our sufficient Bible contains understandable principles for how people like you and me can change and grow in the practical everyday issues of life seven days a week.

Now, at that same time, the Lord was also working in the heart and life of Doc and Leona Smith. Doc grew up in a pastor's home. He was hoping that he and Leona could go to the mission field but when that was not possible in their case, he started his medical practice up in the Lowell, Indiana area. Pastor Goode, before he was here was up in beautiful Gary, Indiana. That was their connection. I will tell you when I'm making jokes, okay, so no reason... I heard that left over at Faith West and I'm not interested in that laugh. But anyway, back to the story, Doc Smith would tell us and has said many times that what surprised him as a physician was that he had all sorts of people in his practice who were in fundamental type churches who were all about winning people to Christ and all of that but when it came to how they were responding to their medical problems, it wasn't a whole lot different than those who don't know the Lord. He had also, by the way, been exposed to some Freudian theory as part of his medical school training. Can you imagine Doc Smith a Freudian? And he just rejected that out of hand because he saw it as unscientific. Well, he too became aware of the new biblical counseling movement and so before either of them came to Lafayette while they were both up in the region, the Northwest Indiana area, they received biblical counseling training up in Chicago and then they started a biblical counseling center in beautiful, to which we owe a great debt of gratitude, Gary, Indiana, right? Do you want me to sing the song? It just flows off your tongue, doesn't it? With joyful thanksgiving for sure. Well, that is the biblical counseling center after Pastor Goode came down to this church. That is the biblical counseling training center that our church family invited to locate here in 1976.

Now, you need to understand this: Pastor Goode saw this church as the perfect place to attempt to build a church that not only called men and women to believe in the Gospel but also to live it out in their practical lives and families each and every day. It was the grand experiment. In fact, the first Sunday of Pastor Goode's ministry in this church, he preached all day long from Matthew 18 and if you know your Bible, that probably just caused you to skip a breath because what he was saying to the church family on day one was that, "We are going to be serious about solving problems around here. We're going to be serious about communication. We're going to be serious about getting our hands dirty in the everyday issues of life. We're going to be serious about growing and changing." You might want to talk to Jerry Jamieson who was here on that Sunday about how quiet it was in the church auditorium that particular day.

Doc Smith was the perfect balance because he was there to cover the medical issues, the truly not false theories, the truly medical physical side of the counseling or the sanctification process and these two men were a marvelous ministry team. Where the pooch fits in, I'm not exactly sure from that picture but praise God. Now, this is a very important piece to add logically: I really wish I had a picture of the entire church family at that time. That's what I mean by the warhorses or the warhorse-ettes, the men and women who have been in this church 30 or 35, 40 years and longer because that's the story. People who decided, "We're going to get serious about progressive sanctification. We're going to get serious about spiritual growth." Pastor Goode used to love to say that there is a difference between counting noses and counting disciples. He also used to love to say, "I don't want to just preach the word of God on Sundays, I want to minister the word of God seven days a week," using the tools of spiritual growth we saw in this text.

Colossians 1:28 is one of those verses that every one of us ought to have memorized so if you say, "Well, I don't," there's some homework. I love yah. Do you feel the love? Write that baby out and memorize it this week. Colossians 1:28 where Paul said, "We proclaim Him," Christ, "admonishing every man," what does that mean? "and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man," look around the room. Think about Faith West. Look around that room, "so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Did you see the tools? One of them is teaching. That's why it was so humorous to read about our first pastor's problem with the one hour services. That would have driven me crazy too. I mean, pastors love to teach the word and God's people love to hear it, huh? Thank you for your joyful acknowledgment of the truth of that point. That's why it's also so delightful to hear about those Sunday school teachers talking over one another in the basement of the Farm Credit Building which, by the way, I've always said the Farm Credit Building is not the Lafayette Life Building, alright? Don't believe Jerry Jamieson on that because he's confused or something like that.

But friends, that's not enough. It's not just the teaching, it's also the admonishing, the counseling. This is from the Greek word noutheteo which is a very important word in the Bible. It's a compound word: nous/mind, tifame is a verb, place or put and we're talking about placing God's word in the mind which means this is not behaviorism. When I talk about spiritual growth, don't think about law, don't think about legalism, don't think about rules. We're talking about taking the time to sit down with a brother or sister in Christ and finding out what's really going on in their hearts, what's really going on in the inside and then comparing what's occurring to the sufficient word of God and then linking arms and helping one another change. Oftentimes, that's done best in the context of a warm, personal relationship.

Now, before you say, "Yeah, and that is the pastor's job." You didn't think that did you? Because here's what Scripture says about that. Romans 15:14, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced," of three things, "that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to," what? Able to all of you, all of us, all God's people, "able to noutheteo, able to admonish one another." Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of what his ministry among them had been like. He said, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day," not just Sunday, "night and day for a period of three years, I did not cease to," do you want to guess the Greek word? Noutheteo, put God's truth into your mind in the practical areas of everyday life, "admonish each one of you," not in a harsh way, "with tears." Friends, I'm suggesting to you that emphasis. We're not just talking about accepting the Gospel, we're talking about the Gospel helping us grow and change in practical areas every day.

That emphasis absolutely transformed this church which is why it's still central to our church's mission. The mission of Faith Church. I don't need to read this because everybody here could say it, right? I'll read it. The mission of Faith Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples. You have to have both. That, by the way, is the essence of the Great Commission rightly understood where Christ said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." There is a huge difference between teaching all Christ has commanded and teaching them to observe and many times it's the teaching to observe piece that is left out of the mix.

That's also why we make it clear to every person considering membership here that our first core value is growing stronger, believing that God has a plan for every Christian's growth and that he wants godly lives and families built. Listen, your life could be all messed up. You could bring your baggage in boxcars, no question about that. God will meet you wherever you are but he has no intention of leaving you there. He wants you to come to Christ in repentance and faith and then he stands ready to help you grow. That's why the text says that the goal of spiritual growth is maturity in Christ for all of us. Did you see that? Not just the super saints, not just the cream of the crop, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

God's goal for us is that we be changing and growing to become more like his Son and over time, that emphasis has had an impact inside this church. Now, we are far from perfect, huh? My oh my, you've got to see the vantage point I've got right now. I can see imperfection over at Faith West and I realize you might say, "Well, you ought to see our vantage point." Okay, imperfection all around, right? We are far from perfect but this church has a reputation about being serious about changing and growing. Again, bring your baggage in boxcars but once you get here, we're going to get to a better place together, right? In fact, one family visited this church for a couple of weeks and then they were gone. That's fine. That's fine. There are a lot of good churches in our town but about four or five months later, they were back and they stuck and so I eventually got into a conversation with the husband about their experience and I don't say this to fault other churches, again, there are a lot of good churches in our town. I'm just telling you what the man told me. He said, "You know, when we first came to Faith, the porridge was just a little bit too hot." That's exactly what he said, "The porridge was a little bit too hot, I did not like, especially as a man, the way you were up in my fur. You made it clear that if I was going to become a member here, I was going to be expected to grow. I was going to be equipped to grow but I was going to be expected. There was going to be friendly accountability. You expected me to be a better husband. You expected me to be a more authentic man. You expected me to raise my kids in the nurture and admonition of Christ." What he said was "the porridge was too hot." He said, "So we went on a search for porridge that was just the right temperature." Again, I know I'm just telling you what the man told me. I'm not saying this to fault anybody else but he said, "We went around to some other churches and the porridge was pretty cold. In other words, we could go there without being challenged or equipped or being held accountable to growth so we kept going around looking for a church that had porridge that was just the right temperature." Then he said, "One day it dawned on me, maybe the problem here is my taste for porridge. Maybe I needed a little warm. Maybe I need a pastoral staff that's going to love me enough to get up in my fur from time to time because," he said, "I recognize that I’m stubborn and I need some men, I need a church family that's going to hold me accountable in order to help me grow." That's exactly what we're talking about here. We don't want to just have a counseling center, we want to be a counseling center where these doctrines have impacted and permeated everything that we're doing.

Well, how does it work structurally? Think about just the plan. Well, we provide biblical counseling or biblical soul care for any member of our church who wishes to receive it in whatever setting or context you would like it so if you're struggling in some way, we have hundreds and hundreds of men and women who have been trained and are ready to spend time hearing your story and then trying to connect you in a loving way to Christ and his word. But it's a lot more than that because we've been emphasizing this for so long, we've provided training in so many different ways, we want and understand this, we want these doctrines of sufficiency of Scripture and biblical progressive sanctification to penetrate and permeate every facet of our church's DNA. So what do we want happening in our youth ministries today? We want our young people not just to be entertained and not only to be taught facts, we want them to be given the word of God in a way that helps them change. We want this to permeate the way our deacons function with their deacon's care list. We want this to permeate the way we have a Christian school. You name it: ladies' Bible studies need to be penetrated with these ideas; men's point man groups, all of that because you understand, everybody needs to be on the same message, otherwise and this happens in many churches, you have one approach to sanctification presented from the pulpit and then you've got something entirely different presented in the ladies' Bible studies. Well, that ain't so good and so we're all on the same page because of the uniqueness and the power of our heritage.

It doesn't stop there, though. It ought to help every person in this church go deep in the things of God practically but not just that, it's also a very effective outreach. We have a community-based biblical counseling center and so on Mondays, several of our pastors and several medical doctors, some other godly men and woman come apart from our responsibilities and at Faith East and at Faith West, we make biblical counseling services available to people in this community free of charge. We've been doing that for over 30 years. Thousands of hours are made available every year to people in this town. Many of the men and women who come from our community for counseling, they don't know the Lord and it's a marvelous opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. In fact, last Sunday night if you were with us in our Church Family Night and I hope you were, by the way. What in the world would you have been doing if you weren't there? But anyway, if you were with us in our Church Family Night, you heard testimonies of men and women coming into the membership of the church and two of those families said that their first connection with us was the door of the biblical counseling center and through the counseling, through the context of a deep problem in their life, they heard the good news of Christ. They placed their faith and trust in him and now they are growing and they want to be part of this church family. That's exactly what we're talking about, using this even as an outreach tool.

John Piper wrote a blog the other day, "Biblical Counseling for the Great Commission." You may know that we've done a fair amount of biblical counseling training at his church up in Minneapolis and Piper said this, "This is a simple plea that those of you whom God is calling to be biblical counselors, consider your counseling as a way of reaching the unreached peoples of the world with the life transforming Gospel of Christ." He said, "I was prompted to write this because of my recent trip to Japan." He went on and talked about a preaching tour that he had just been in and he said, "It's well-known that Japan has historically not been very responsive to the Gospel." In fact, .6% of Japanese persons would say that they believe in the evangelical Gospel. Not 6% but .6%. Then he said this, "In talking to Brent Ryle who is part of the executive leadership team of the group that took them, the conversation turned to biblical counseling." He said, "There is virtually nothing of this kind functioning in Japan for the good of the Japanese people. The counseling that we're talking about is not for missionaries, it's for Japanese people. Brent believes as do others that the social dynamics and the growing stresses of family life in Japan that is of such a nature that many desperate and wounded people would turn with thankfulness to a loving and listening person with some competence in helping them cope with the brokenness of their lives." That is exactly right. If we're interested in proclaiming the Gospel, what is the setting through which we do that? Often it's just making services available to those who are hurting. That's why we believe in this key verse, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

Now, one more piece of this and Paul practiced full disclosure and I want to be sure that I do that this morning too: there is a cost to this. At whatever level you want to get involved in this, there is a cost because Paul went on to say, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Friends, the men and women who have gone before us worked tirelessly to implement this philosophy of ministry in their personal lives, in their families and in the various ministries of this church. One of the questions for all of us would be: are you being a faithful steward of our heritage of spiritual growth? If you're not growing spiritually here, I'm honestly not sure where you could grow spiritually and I would just remind you of what Paul said to Timothy, "But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old woman." By the way, don't fuss at me about that verse, okay? That's from the Bible, I didn't write it. I kind of like it but on the other hand, "discipline yourself," here's the point, don't spend the rest of your time being mad at me about that, "on the other hand," here it is, "work," gymnazo is the Greek word from which we get our word "gymnastics" or "gymnasium." "On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." I would encourage you to look at your Stewardship Commitment Card and be thinking about the stewardship commitments you should make to God and to your church family and some of them involve spiritual growth. If you would say, "You know, I've not made this the emphasis that I should which is why I'm so stuck," well, maybe this is the time to say with the help of God, "I'm going to get the resources necessary in order to be unstuck."

Well, the work doesn't stop there. From the earliest days, Pastor Goode and Dr. Smith believed in the importance of training others. You say, "What does that look like?" Well, every Monday, we have an 11 week biblical counseling training program where pastors, missionaries, key lay people from around the Midwest come and they receive this training so that they can go back and be a blessing to their communities. We have a number of people even in this current class, people from this church, who took 11 Mondays off. You say, "Why would they do that? Do they want to be professional counselors?" No, in many cases they just want to use these principles in their Sunday school class or in their ladies small group or in whatever ministry God has called them to but it is labor but it's good labor.

We also have a conference here in February that's called the Biblical Counseling Training Conference. Over 1,900 people were here last February for that conference from around the world. It takes a ton of work in order to pull that off as a local church and many of you do that. Why? Because of your commitment to this philosophy of ministry. We also travel around the country and I appreciate the fact that you're willing to be patient with the fact that your pastors are off in different places. We just had a team in Toledo that just got back late last night but you want to share whatever God has given us with other local churches so they were teaching hundreds of people in another place those same principles.

The way you supported our seminary. We had an accreditation team here this week. Can you believe we're even using the word "our little seminary" and" accreditation" in the same sentence? One of the reasons and one of the ways the accreditation team was just so impressed with what they saw here was our students are able not just to study theology but they are actually learning how to take that theology and apply it in the lives of counselee's as part of their seminary training. Well, a number of you have had to work and sacrificially give in order to make that kind of graduate education available and now it's paying dividends around the world.

There's also the issue of traveling to foreign countries. The reason that there are so many people from other countries coming here or so much interest in us going there is because many mission fields are in the exact same position that we were back in the 60s and 70s and what people around the world are saying is that we've planted churches but we need help with resources to help the people inside our church grow and handle the practical issues of everyday life. So I was just thinking, it's just me, one guy on our staff but right now I'm scheduled to be in the Dominican Republic next year. I'm scheduled for the first time to go to Cuba next year. I'm scheduled to be Brazil twice. I'm scheduled to be in Albania. They're trying to put a trip together to get me into China. Again, I'm just one person and the interest is incredible and this church family has been willing to say, "We're so excited about spiritual formation, spiritual growth, that we want to go deep in the things of God and then we want to make it available to as many people as possible."

God gave us Vision of Hope. We're not afraid of young ladies who might be struggling with alcohol abuse or drug abuse or unplanned pregnancies or eating disorders. Why? Because we believe in the power of progressive sanctification and we love having those young ladies as part of our church family. They are absolute trophies of grace. Next Saturday there's going to be a tree planting party at Bethany Farms. You say, why? Because you said in your five year plan that you hope to develop a companion ministry for men at Bethany Farms. You say, "What are those guys going to do?" Apparently harvest a bunch of apples as part of their counseling training and the bottom line is, bring it on, huh? Bring it on because of the sufficiency of the Scripture and the power of progressive sanctification.

One thing and I'm going to be done. Think about the end product. Think about the way this impacts lives. This is a picture of Josh and Annie Hill and their family. You may not know why they're here or how they got here. Let me tell you quickly. Josh wrote this to me after hearing me speak last week about the Gospel and he said, "My family moved to Brevard, North Carolina in August 1987. I think the first February conference at Faith my dad went to as a pastor was the next year. There were only about 50 people there. They met in the fireplace room. There weren't many handouts or notebooks back then but when I asked my dad how it went, he showed me about four legal pads full of notes from the week. The concepts my mom and dad were introduced to that week would come to revolutionize the ministry at Bethany Baptist Church in Brevard. Bill Goode made such an impression on my dad that he became one of the men that helped strengthen Bethany Baptist Church through counseling concepts and scriptural principles." Then he said this, "My dad gave Annie and me a trip to the February conference for a wedding present. That's how important he thought it was. Annie he met with Bob L. during that conference. He offered her a job as one of the sixth grade teachers after graduation. We spent three years in Lafayette then moved away for six years while I was in college coaching. One of the reasons we moved back is because this is where we wanted to raise our family even though we didn't have any family members of our own here. So with no job, no house, we moved back to make it work and we are glad we did. You could say that Bill Goode and a whole lot of other people had an indirect hand in that decision." Then he said, "My dad has been in full-time mission work for six years now traveling all over the world teaching the same principles to young pastors that he was introduced to at Faith over 25 years ago. While I may not have lived in Lafayette my entire life, I feel like I have grown up here spiritually speaking."

Now, I don't say any of that to magnify us. I say all of that to magnify our Savior who made it possible for us not just to accept the Gospel but to live it every day, to go deep in the things of God and as we choose to do that as a church family, we're going to have an opportunity to be a blessing to others around this world.

Would you stand with me as we pray?

*Father in heaven, thank you for the heritage of spiritual growth that you have given us. Lord, I pray that you would help us to think carefully about what increased stewardship of that heritage means for each of us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*