

## FOUR TENSIONS WE NEED TO RESOLVE TO ADOPT JESUS ORIGINS SERIES - PART 1- THE WAY CHURCH SHOULD BE

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Good morning Life Fellowship. It is so good to see you here this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts Chapter 1 where we will be this morning. As we said in the announcements, we are starting a new series, and it is time to get into it. Acts is such a great book of the Bible. I mentioned last week that Acts holds a mirror up to us as a church.

And the reason we titled this first nine week section of the book of Acts as ‘The Way Church Should Be,’ is because it will help us as a church to walk into what we believe God wants us to do, and then to ask ourselves how we are doing with this. What are some things we need to confront? What are some things we need we need to change?

Even though we talked about vision last week and we shared the vision for Life Fellowship, the reason that we want to start with the book of Acts this year is to make sure that we all have Jesus’ vision. Here is what I know. We get so excited talking about vision, but all of us are walking into a history with a relationship with church, this thing that we call church. Now some of you have had great experiences with church, others of you have had exciting experiences with church, others have had transformational experiences with church, but some of you have had hard experiences with church that have been frustrating and challenging.

So if I were to stand up here and ask you what your relationship with church is, some of you might say, ‘*It’s complicated.*’ So yes, we get excited when we think about what God could do, but we also realize if we are going to leave these doors every single week as a church sent by God to every man, woman and child in Lake Norman, to represent Him and to share with them the good news of Jesus with one singular vision, then we are going to have to confront some things in our own lives to make sure that we are all on the same page.

And one of the things that I have seen over and over again, the challenges I have had with churches, even as a pastor who has been on ministry staff for almost twenty years, is that the churches that have the greatest movement, the greatest excitement, the greatest production with things getting done, have less personal agendas.

So we need to come to the book of Acts and make sure that when we read this that we are making sure to align our hearts and our minds. When we talk about vision that is great, but I am here to tell you that we can leave here every single Sunday talking about vision but if we are not aligned with the way God commissioned us to be with the church we are never going anywhere. We are not going to see God do the things that we believe God wants to do in our church.

And I believe God wants to do some things here at Life Fellowship so we are going to be looking at the book of Acts. Today we are going to look at the first eleven

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verses as the introduction to the book of Acts. The title of my sermon this morning is 'Four Tensions We Need to Resolve to Adopt Jesus' Vision For His Church.'

Now I am going to be comparing two personal pronouns this morning. The pronouns are 'His' and 'My.' And if we look inwardly this morning I think there is a lot of stuff in our lives that would be 'My,' and not 'His.' So if we are going to move forward as His church we have to confront some things in our own hearts.

Let's look at Acts Chapter 1. This book follows Luke's gospel, and Luke was an incredible historian. He has done all his research and he has written his account of the early church post Jesus. You will see that it is called 'the acts of the apostles.' Let's begin in verse 1 and read through verse 11 and then we can talk about these four tensions.

***"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."***

***"And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, 'You heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"***

***"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"***

***"And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.'"***

This is Luke's introduction and it is very important because it is going to give the filter in the paradigm by which we see the rest of the book. How many of you have ever read a book but you didn't read the introduction first? Anyone? Be honest - okay there are a few of you. I will admit I have done this a lot. I just want to get into the book and I start reading in Chapter 1.

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But here is what I realize. Reading the introduction of a book is very important, because many times in the introduction the author is telling why they are writing the book, and this book was written out of this season of their life. They tell us what they are going to be talking about and what they mean by some of the things that they say. So it is important because it gives us the filter to see the rest of the book.

And these first eleven verses of Acts give us the filter to see the rest of the book. There are so many things right here in the introduction that we cannot miss, because if we miss these first eleven verses we will miss what the rest of the book is about. There are some tensions here we see because Luke is telling us what Jesus started, this is what Jesus wants to do, and this is what we are going to see Him do at the end of this book.

So the first tension is this - His work versus my work. The very first line of this book is fascinating to me. ***“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”*** Does that raise any red flags to anybody? ***“Jesus began to do and teach.”*** Wait a second, why did Luke use that word ‘began?’ A great way to study the Bible is to bring your questions to it. Sometimes when we read the Bible we just kind of assume things and we don’t really ask questions. And the Bible was written for us to ask questions.

And here is the question I had when I read this. Why does Luke use the word ‘began?’ Where is Jesus going to be? Where is He going? He is going up to Heaven. In fact it says in the next line - ***“He was taken up.”*** Jesus is not walking around during the history of the book of Acts. He is up in Heaven seated at the right hand of the throne of the Father.

So what did Luke mean when he said, ***“Began to do and teach?”*** Well, here is what he is saying. *‘Listen, I am about to share with you a lot of stories. Or really just one story with a lot of characters. You are going to be hearing about guys like Peter and James and Paul and Philip and Cornelius and Timothy and Silas. There are all of these characters in this book, okay?’* But Luke is saying this is not a book about people; this is a book about Jesus. Because any work, any accomplishment in the history of any church is really a history of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not about us.

You know a lot of times our church history only goes back as far as when we first walked into church; we don’t understand the grand narrative of church history for the last 2,000 years. But one of the things that we know is that there have been great movements of God in history over the last 2,000 years. There have been great churches. There have been great pastors. There have been great mission movements. There have been all these great things that we can look back to over the last 2,000 years and see what has happened in the church.

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Luke is trying to tell us that anything that we hear about ever happening with a group of people we call a church, any movement of the Spirit, any movement of God, any advancement of the gospel is credited to Jesus alone. And if we think that all of the vision that God has given to us is about us, is about our abilities, is about our credit, we are sorely mistaken. So we have to confront these things.

Here is what I know. We love to label fruit, don't we? John Chapter 15 and verse 4 says this: "***Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.***" And here is what I notice. What I do, and what a lot of us do, is when we are abiding in God, and all of a sudden our life is fruitful, we start seeing God doing some things in us and through us, or we are involved in a ministry and when we see some ministry growth, our natural inclination is to claim that fruit for ourselves. '*Look what I did.*' '*Look what I accomplished.*'

We can do some things and then all of a sudden we find ourselves doing things for that recognition, doing the things for the credit. But here is a true test of our motivation. If we do things because we want people to notice us, or because we want people's praise, we will stop doing things when we stop getting the attention and praise. So we have to confront our own hearts and that can be hard for us.

My desire is that every single one of us in this room will be able to really hear from God, to seek God, and to understand how God wants us to partner with Him in His mission. But the truth is we can very slyly be very involved in ministries in a church but secretly want credit for ourselves. And we have to confront that even though it is very hard for us.

I remember hearing a sermon by one of my professors in Bible College, Dr. Colin Smith. He is with the Lord now, but he was a brilliant Hebrew scholar. He got his PhD from Cornell University. He was teaching on the passage in Numbers about Balaam and his donkey, which is one of the most fascinating stories in the Bible. There is nothing like reading about a donkey talking. When I would tell Bible stories to my kids, they always wanted me to tell them the Balaam and the donkey story. They loved to hear that story over and over again about the talking donkey.

So my professor was teaching in chapel one day and he was telling the story about Balaam and the donkey. He was speaking to a room full of young people who were going into missions and into fulltime ministry. And this is what he told us at the end of the service, '*Never be surprised that God speaks through you, because God uses everybody. Don't be shocked or surprised that God uses you. Be surprised that God loves you.*'

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And that has stayed with me for a long time in ministry. Listen, I hope God uses every single one of us in this room, but we should never be surprised when God uses us. And we should never look for the credit for it, because where would we be if not for Jesus? So the first tension we have to resolve is whether it is 'His' work or 'my' work. As we see God do some things in this church, and as God calls us to partner with His mission, and maybe He will use some of you to help start a church in Mooresville, we have to be very careful that we are just continuing the work of Jesus Christ.

The second tension is this - His kingdom versus my kingdom. Look what it says in verse 3: "***He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs.***" And we saw that through the synoptic gospels. And the verse continues, "***appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.***" So Jesus is consumed with talking about the kingdom of God.

Now it is called the kingdom of Heaven in Matthew while Luke calls it the kingdom of God. The reason why it is called the kingdom of Heaven in Matthew is because the Jews didn't really like writing down the name of God a lot, but the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God are the same thing. Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom. He used parables about the kingdom, He taught about the kingdom because it is all about the kingdom. He goes to the cross, He rises from the dead, then when He sees the disciples what does He talk about? The kingdom. For 40 days He taught them about the kingdom of God. Jesus is completely consumed with talking about the kingdom of God.

But now look again in verse 6 what the disciples asked Jesus: "***So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'***" What? I can just picture Jesus thinking, '*Are you kidding me? I have been talking to you about this for three years. I have been with you for 40 days now talking about the kingdom, the kingdom of God, and you want to talk about the kingdom of Israel?'*

But this shows how strong their ideas of kingdom really were. The average Jewish person in that day totally understood the kingdom. The constant use of 'kingdom' is found throughout the Old Testament. But what the Jews thought of when they heard 'kingdom' was a political, earthly rule and reign of a king just like David. In fact there were people walking around in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judea saying, '*Make Israel great again.*'

This was the problem. They cared more about their nation, the greatness of their nation than the greatness of God's name. And we have to confront that today in our own hearts because there are times when we want our nation to be great. But a nation cannot be great apart from God as the foundation. No man is going to be able to do that, no president is going to be able to do that, and no political party is going to be able to do

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that. We are believing lies if we believe that we could somehow elect greatness into our nation. (*Applause.*)

One of the things we need to understand is that the mindset of the Jews was wondering when the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel. And Jesus was like, *'You have no clue.'* Yes, Israel was a part of it, but this was about the whole world. This was about the millions and billions of people in the world. The story of Acts is about the movement of God where we see this small group of people in Jerusalem taking this message of a risen Messiah to the ends of the earth, and turning the world upside down with the message of Jesus.

So just as the Jews were struggling with understanding kingdom, we have to confront our own hearts to understand the idea of kingdom as well. For three years the Jews have heard all of Jesus' stories, they have listened to His teaching, they have heard Him talking about the kingdom of God over and over again; yet they go right back to thinking about the kingdom of Israel right before He goes to Heaven. It shows us how deeply rooted our ideas of kingdom are. *'God, here is what we want you to do. Here are my plans, God. Here is my kingdom. Here are my expectations. Here is what I want you to do, God. Here is my kingdom and I want you to do it.'* *The disciples asked Him: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* That is not what Jesus was about.

One of the stories in Scripture that I absolutely love, and it is one I think we need to go back to continually, is the story that contrasts the will of man and the will of God. It is the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. The Tower of Babel in Genesis is profound for many reasons. It is after Noah and the flood, and it is when the world is populating again. Remember God's commission to both Adam and to Noah was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Well, these people had settled in the Plain of Shinar and weren't spreading out to fill the earth.

They decided to gather together, build a tower and make a name for themselves. And let me tell you, if there is anything that is natural to the heart of man, natural to all mankind, it is that we want to gather together and build something great and make a name for ourselves. That is my kingdom. And it runs in contrast to a God that wants us to multiply and to fill our world with His glory. We need to desire 'His' kingdom and not 'my' kingdom. The 'my' needs to die when it comes to our kingdom, and we need to adopt 'His' kingdom.

The third tension is - His timing versus my timing. In verse 7 He responds to the kingdom question with this: *"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority.'*" The Jews asked Jesus, *'When*

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*are you going to do this? 'When?' We have a lot of questions for God but I think one of the questions we struggle with the most is 'when?' 'When are you going to do this?'*

And Jesus confronts their understanding of the kingdom and then He confronts their understanding of time. We will never understand God's timing for things. One of the things I have learned over and over again is that when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit and that patience part, I continually get a failing grade on that. I am not good at patience. I am not wired for patience. When I want to go somewhere I want to get there fast. For me to wait and for me to have to live by someone else's timetable is very hard. I am just not wired that way.

I live in Denver and when I go on dates with my wife we have to go someplace other than Denver because there is nothing in Denver. So we usually end up going to Mooresville or Huntersville or Cornelius. And we are always on 73, and if you get behind someone slow on 73, it is just painful. There is no way to pass for ten miles and I am just having a fit. And my wife reminds me that we are on a date. Besides the Holy Spirit my wife is the one who speaks truth to me the most. She tells me that God is going to keep doing this to me because He knows I need patience, but she has been telling me this for 20 years. She tells me I am not passing the test, that I need to relax, and they are not going to penalize us when we get to the restaurant. But in my mind we have to make it in good time.

Listen, if you want to make God laugh, show Him your calendar. He is not going to buy it. So we have to learn to confront our own timetables instead of telling God here is how I want you to do this and when I want you to do this. Jesus uses two great words for time here. He says, "***It is not for you to know times or seasons.***" Now these two words are *chronos* and *kairos* in the Greek. The Greek word *chronos* for time is kind of like where we get the word chronology from.

Jesus is saying that we are never going to fully understand the process of how He does things, but He does have a process. We want our process to be my process and not His process. When we have a process in our mind of how we think God is going to work things out, and He doesn't work them out in our expectation we get frustrated with Him. *'I have been praying and praying.'* Yes we may have been praying, but we want God to use our timetable and not His.

We have to understand that God is in charge of the process and He is also in charge of the timetable. He is over the process and He is over the moment. And we have to turn over our calendars, turn over our plans and turn over our timetable to God and let Him do it when it is best for Him. *'I have been married for ten years and my spouse is still an idiot. We have gone to a Weekend to Remember. We have read the books, we*

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*have gone to Two Becoming One; so what is the deal?’ We have this timetable of how we expect God to work and move in our lives.*

The ‘my’ that needs to die is this idea of control. *‘Here is how it is going to look.’ ‘Here is how my life is going to go.’ ‘Here is how my kids are going to be.’ ‘Here is how my career is going to look.’* And God just chuckles. We need to let His process, let His timetable be in charge, and we just need to be obedient.

The fourth tension is found in verse 8. The Jews are asking about the kingdom of Israel but it is not about the kingdom of Israel. It is not about our timing of things. What I will tell you is it is about ‘His’ mission versus ‘my’ mission. The fourth tension is - it is about ‘His’ mission versus ‘my’ mission.

Verse 8 says, ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*** That is ‘His’ mission versus ‘my’ mission. We talk about verse 8 a lot in church, but this is actually an outline of the book of Acts. In fact if you read the book of Acts you will see these major shifts when the gospel is planted in Jerusalem and then the church gets bigger and it goes into Judea and Samaria. And then starting in Chapter 13 the church goes boom to the ends of the earth where we see the first great mission movement with Paul and Barnabas.

So this lays out the guidelines for what they are going to see the church do through the power of the Holy Spirit. But it required something very simple, and if we overlook this one simple thing, we will miss it all. And here is the simple reality - this movement, this movement that went from a little over a hundred people in the small city of Jerusalem, which in the grand scheme of world politics and world history was not even on the radar, becomes an international, multi-ethnic movement of God that turns the world upside down. And the book ends with the gospel and the church being in Rome.

And here is how it happened. I know Peter does some great things, Paul does some great things, and Philip does some great things, but here is what I love about the book of Acts, the church and the gospel are advancing not by these superstar apostles and leaders. When Paul shows up in Rome who is there to greet him? It was the church that was there to greet him. Who planted that church in Rome? We don’t know.

In fact you are going to see over and over again how the church is just expanding by people that are not named. And it happened because ordinary, regular people took the mission of God seriously. They saw themselves as witnesses. Jesus said, ***“you will be my witnesses.”*** I think that is so important because we have the Great Commission in Matthew 28 where we are told to go and make disciples, teaching them and baptizing them. Those are all action words and we need action words, but what I love about this

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passage is that Jesus doesn't say, *'this is what you are supposed to do, but this is who you are.'* We are His witnesses of who He is and what He has done.

And that requires something. In order to be a witness we have to have experienced a life transformation. We have had to be a person who has been touched and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. And let me just say that in a room like this, we cannot take that for granted. And maybe someone here in this room has never had their life be transformed by the person of Jesus Christ and what He has done for you on the cross by dying for your sins, to save you from eternal damnation, and to give you life eternal with Him. Maybe you have never transferred your faith from yourself to Him, and if not you have not been transformed by the gospel. You can't be a witness to something you have not experienced yourself.

So we have to first confront if we are even a witness. And then if we are witnesses then we have to ask ourselves if we are a good witness or a bad witness. We don't get the option once we are called to follow Jesus to be a witness or not to be a witness. He says we are His witnesses, but we can either be a good witness or a bad witness. That is the choice that we have today, that is the response we have to this commission of Jesus. We are either going to say, *'Okay, I am going to be obedient and I am going to be a good witness,'* or we can say, *'I am going to ignore you and disobey you, Jesus, and be a bad witness.'* But we cannot opt out of the commissioning. There is no opting out of being a witness if you have been transformed by the gospel.

I wrote down this question: 'Do we fit God into our plans, or do we fit into God's plans?' Do we try to fit God into our plans, or do we fit into His plans? When we are on His mission we need to ask where does He want us to go now and who do you want us to talk to now. It is not about us, it is not about our comfort or our agenda. These personal agendas that we bring to God that tell Him what we want to do for Him and expecting Him to help us do it.

This is one of the reasons we are doing this 'One Life Initiative' we talked about last week. I have my band on today, and you can get yours this morning as well. There are tables out in the lobby and we want you to pick up your band as you think about who that one person is who is close to you and far from God, and that God has called you to be a witness to them. And we want to know how we are doing as a witness, how we are engaging and embracing the Great Commission as a church.

All you have to do is take one of these contact cards, fill out your name and the name of the person you are praying for, turn it in and you will get your band. We have to start taking this seriously, because we do not want to just be a church that is providing religious goods and services to people to enjoy.

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I mentioned last week that there is a difference between being a gas station and a locker room. We can be a church that you are attending as a consumer wanting to be filled up, *'I need some Jesus juice for my week, but then I am going to go home and do my own thing. I have my own agendas, my own plans, and hopefully God will bless them, but I have 'my' stuff to do.* Or we can be a church that is about His plan. Instead of being a gas station where you come to be filled up once a week and then go do your own thing, we need to come here to get the game plan of what He wants us to do now. To find out how He wants us to represent Him this week. To find out who He wants us to talk to this week. And to live for His glory and His name this week.

This becomes the half time and the game is played out on the field where we live, learn, work and play. We need to engage in the mission of God and we have to ask ourselves, *'Are we going to be a church that takes this seriously?'* If we have a bunch of us that are only interested in 'my' mission, we are not going anywhere, we are not doing anything. We have to confront the 'my' in our lives and submit to 'His.'

This is so important for us if we really want to see the vision that Christ has for us, to accomplish through us. There is a key here and I don't want us to miss this. Do you have this title in your Bible, the words, *'The Acts of the Apostles?'* I really think it should say, *'The Acts of the Holy Spirit.'* Look at verse 2 again. ***"Until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit."***

And now look at verse 4. ***"And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, 'You heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" Verse 8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."***

Now you may be thinking, *'Ben, you are right, but I have my own agenda, my own plans, my own expectations, and my own timing.'* And you just have this 'my' in your life. So how do you go from 'my' to 'His? Are you just going to try harder? That is not going to work. It comes when we submit everything to the Holy Spirit. It comes when the Holy Spirit has His fingerprints on every single part of our lives. You can't do this apart from the Spirit. We can have great plans, we can have great vision, but we are powerless apart from Him.

I said this last week, the thing that scares me the most is what we would accomplish apart from Him. He requires us to humble ourselves, yield ourselves and submit ourselves. He needs to put His fingerprints on it because when I have my fingerprints on things they fail and they are messed up. We need Him to do it.

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The Holy Spirit is the main character in the book of Acts. It is not Paul, it is not Peter, it is not anyone else, but the Holy Spirit. And we need to be a church that is shaped, molded, formed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. If we are going to be the church that we should be, the church that God intended the church to be, the Spirit has to have His fingerprints on us. We need His fingerprints on our careers, on our kids, on our plans, on our marriage, on our abilities and on our plans.

There are many exciting stories that we are going to be reading in the book of Acts. Stories that we would love to see in our church. And listen, it could happen. We aren't supposed to just read the book of Acts and feel awe. It is not a history book. It is to show up this is what it could be. But it is never going to be that way unless the Holy Spirit is in control.

So I want to leave you with two questions that I want you to wrestle with today. What is the 'my' that needs to die right now for you? Is it your work? Is it your kingdom? Is it your timing? Is it your mission? What is the 'my' that needs to die? What is the thing that you need to put to death so that Jesus can have His will and His way in you?

The second question is this - what in your life has the Holy Spirit's fingerprints on it right now? Seriously, if you are going to evaluate yourself, what percentage of your life has the Holy Spirit's fingerprints on it? And how are you going to change that? How are you going to submit and yield to that? We could do so much as a church if we are completely controlled by the Holy Spirit.

So we have to confront our hearts because if we want to be a church that adopts Jesus' vision there is going to be some tension that needs to be resolved. And it begins today. Please bow your heads and close your eyes. We are about to have a response time this morning. I don't know what God is calling you to do, but maybe the take home is going home and talking over with your family some things that need to change. Maybe there are some plans, some dreams, some expectations that need to be readjusted.

In a moment as we sing some songs, maybe you want to come forward and pray at one of the crosses, yielding some things to the Lord, asking the Holy Spirit to take more control of your life. Maybe you just need to talk to someone because there are things going on in your life, and you have never experienced that transforming power. Maybe you can't be a witness because you don't know who you need to witness to.

We have some people up here to my right, and if you want to pray with someone or talk with someone about questions you have, they will be more than happy to talk with you or pray with you. But don't leave here if you have questions. Maybe you want to come and partake of the Lord's Supper and remember the body and blood that was shed

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for you. Whatever God is calling you to do. Maybe it is getting that band this morning to remind you to pray for that one person that is close to you but far from God. May we represent Him well, and truly be His witnesses.

*Jesus, we are so grateful for your provision, your power, and for your Holy Spirit. I love how you said in the gospel of Luke that your Father knows how to give good gifts to His children because of the Holy Spirit. Lord, I just pray that we would be a church controlled, led by, guided and filled with the Holy Spirit. God, we want to put our 'my' to death today so that it is your kingdom, it is your mission, and it is your timing. God, help us to yield with two open hands in response to all that you are. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*