

TCC on Its Seventh Anniversary

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Well, today is a remarkable day in the history of our church. I can't believe the truth of what I am about to say, but today marks the seventh anniversary of the first meeting of Truth Community, today meaning this weekend, it was February 11 and February 12 of 2012 when we first met in the name of Truth Community. Now it is not the culture of our church or the culture of my family or the culture of me to really mark occasions like that, for better or for worse, but I think it's useful for us to stop for a moment and reflect on some things as we are at the beginning of our study of the book of Philippians and think about a little bit about the life of our church that has led us to this point in our corporate history. I think that sometimes it is useful, it is edifying, it is good to step back and to realize that something special has happened in our midst.

When Truth Community first started in its most embryonic form, there was a small core of original families. I would have you know that over seven years later 80% of those families are still with us today. That's a source of great encouragement to me. When a little bit later, a couple of years, 2 ½ years down the road, we established our charter membership after a lot of teaching and laying a doctrinal foundation, we established our charter membership and 75% of those individuals are still with us today. Of the remaining 25%, half of them no longer live in the region. That is encouraging to me.

It was three years into our existence basically, roughly, that we geographically relocated our meeting place. We moved 30 miles down the road into another state even, and those numbers held along the way. After coming here, we endured a year of, several months at least, of remodeling in this worship center and we had none of the comforts that we enjoy now as we were basically meeting and worshiping in a construction zone for a long period of time. Now we have this beautiful worship center in which we meet and we have this enduring body of believers that have come together that have stood the test of time.

Now along with that, let me hasten to add that we are grateful for the many of you that have joined us along the way and we receive you and accept you and think of you and interact with you on completely equal footing with those that have been with us from the beginning and so we just have so much to be thankful for, and I want you to realize that in this day of transient commitments, this day of superficial approaches to ministry, that this is testimony to an enduring work of God that is taking place in our midst. It is contrary to human expectations to think that people would stay with one group of believers for that long, especially in the midst of a significant geographic location right in

the middle of the work. That is contrary to human expectation and human experience. It is contrary to natural motivation that people would do that, and now as we've added many other brothers and sisters in Christ who share our love for the word and that have stayed with us, we recognize also that we have many people that come from great distance at great personal inconvenience to be with us week after week, sometimes twice a week, and so there's just this wonderful spirit of things that I was reflecting on as I was preparing to be in front of you here this morning.

Personally, I am blessed to be the pastor of such an exemplary body of believers like you. We are blessed to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to have his inerrant word as our guiding source of direction, but I would have you think about this in another way as well. Beloved, we are really and this is not false modesty in what I am about to say, we are really just now getting started. We are just now getting started into what it means to be a functioning church. Even though seven years to some of you sound like a very long time, it's not a very long time and the truth of the matter is that Truth Community Church is just a little tiny sprout that is just starting to take root in the soil. It is so critical for you to understand that. As grateful as we are for what the Lord has done in our midst, as grateful as we are for the wonderful relationships and the unity that we enjoy in Jesus Christ, as wonderful as all of that is and to have such a committed enduring group of believers that are manifesting by your ongoing commitment the commitments and the convictions and the affections of your heart, as wonderful as all of that is, beloved, we need to realize that we are young and we have, in a sense we have barely accomplished anything and I say that by way of encouragement, not discouragement, and here's what I mean by that. We are not yet marked as a body of believers by abundant conversions to Christ. A lot of our growth has been horizontal as people have come from other places to join us in our preaching of the word. We should not be satisfied as long as that is the case. We should be committed all the more to praying again and again and again, "God, bless your word with saving power on the hearts of those that are here that do not know Christ, many of whom are our own flesh and blood." We are not marked by abundant conversions, as I said to a fellow pastor one time who lives in the Dallas area. I said, our baptistery is largely arid. It is dry. It is not frequently used in manifesting the reality of someone testifying to saving faith in Christ, and that's humbling to me as a pastor, it should be humbling to us as a church, asking, "Lord, give us new life," not simply an extension of the life that we already have.

I would point something else out to you as well as we mark our seventh anniversary and, again, I say this by way of being realistic. You know, it would be easy to come up and just, you know, have a whole false sense of bravado and how great seven years are. It is a great seven years and it has been a great seven years. I hope to be here another 17-20 years if the Lord gives me that kind of strength. I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck with me. As long as you're here, I'm not going anywhere. But I want you to think also with me about this, is that we as a church, as a corporate body, we have not been tested by any kind of meaningful persecution externally. We have known the protection of God and the blessing of God and I'm thankful for that, but we should realize that a church that is untested by persecution is in no position to boast about where it's at, right? We have many faithful men in our church for which I'm grateful, but our leadership base is

relatively narrow. And so we're mindful of these things, I'm mindful of the fact that for all of the wonderful start that the Lord has blessed us with, that the things that would mark a mature church, the things that would mark a church that has gone from being an acorn to being an oak, the things that mark that are things that are still in our future. They're not the mark of what our present experience is.

So, beloved, while we have many reasons to give thanks today and I do give thanks for every one of you and thanks for this church, I'm so grateful, what I want you to see is that the balance to that is to realize that there is no room whatsoever for spiritual pride at Truth Community Church. We realize that we are young, we realize that we are untested in many ways, we realize that we are longing to see a river of conversions that has been just a bare trickle up until now. So it's with joy that we look back, we glance back in a sense at the prior seven years, but there's also this sense where we roll up our sleeves and realize there's much to be done. We have an expectation of more from our God than what he has given so far. We have an expectation from God that pertains to a verse in Philippians 1 that we normally associate with individual salvation. Philippians 1:6 says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." We're used to looking at that verse and saying, thinking individually that God will finish the work that he began in me and therefore I'm secure in Christ, and we believe in the perseverance of the saints. Praise God. Amen. That's it. What I'm saying is that we expand that in our expectation of what we want God and what we look to God for in our church and we realize that we are trusting him to do more than what he has done so far. We're only getting started.

I've taken to telling people from outside our church that have known me over the years, sometimes within people, I have a sense that we are just now coming out of our corporate infancy, our bodily infancy, and we're starting to be a little bit of a toddler, and I think that that is the way that we should think of ourselves as a church because it will place us in a sense of gratitude for sure because it's great to have new life, it's great to be together like we are, this is really really good, this is really wonderful, this is a great group of people to go through life together with, to face birth, life, sickness and death together with, to look forward to eternity with, to worship Christ with, all of that's true but to do so with a perspective of dependence and humility before our God as we go forward. And it would be no surprise to those of you that are familiar with our church, that our way forward at Truth Community Church over the years that lie ahead as we've glanced back at the years that lie behind, our way forward is in the word of God and the next chapter in the unfolding life of Truth Community Church is going to be defined by the book of Philippians and I invite you to turn there with me as we continue our introduction of that study, that introduction to this book found in God's word.

Paul addressed this letter to the Christians who were at Philippi. Look at the first two verses with me.

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you read those words in 15 seconds but there's something about history and context that just as we've considered the history and the context and the early days, the early birth of Truth Community Church and what I was saying earlier, there is something for us to think about in similar ways as we come to the book of Philippians.

Look at that verse 1 with me again, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi." Who are in Philippi. Now what does that mean? What is Philippi? Who is Philippi? Or where is it? All of those things. Beloved, Paul was writing to a real church, in a real city, with real people that he had known in ministry in years gone by and he is writing to them and so he is writing to them and there is a context, there is a relational context in which Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians and conversely, there is a relational context in which the Philippians would receive this letter from Paul. There would be embedded in their consciousness, in their presuppositions, sometimes not even a conscious memory after the passing of years, however there would have been embedded in their history the reality of where this church started and the role that the Apostle Paul played in it. Paul was the founding apostle of the church in Philippi. Paul was, in a sense, Paul was humanly speaking their founding father, if you can put it that way. Paul was the source, Paul was the human source by which God brought the Gospel to this city and brought it to this congregation and resulting in the conversion of those that were there.

So for us to fully enter into the meaning of Philippians, to put ourselves in the sandals of that church in Philippi that was receiving this letter, I want to do something this morning and it's this, I want to set another bit of context for the letter calling this a threefold context that will help us think rightly about this letter as we go forward, it's the context of God and it is the context of the church at Philippi that give us a sense of the great big picture even outside the four corners of the letter of Philippi, the letter to the Philippians, I should say, the great big context that is going on because what is going on in the Gospel was greater than the church at Philippi, Paul was just applying things to them in their individual situation. For us as a young church, it's helpful for us to remember that we're a small speck in a much greater worldwide work of God that is at work by his Spirit calling men to Christ. It is important for us to realize that, to think beyond our walls, to think beyond our setting lest we become so self-centered and so self-absorbed that we lose sight of the greater context in which this church takes place, in which our own individual spiritual growth takes place, in which the Gospel advances in our day and age. All of these things will be healthy for us to remember.

So I want to set forth a threefold context for the book of Philippians for you this morning and we'll treat it in this manner. First of all, I want to set forth this context for you, first of all, it's a context of promise. It's a context of promise. There is a great promise that undergirds this book to the Philippians. There is a great promise that undergirds the progress of the Gospel. There is a great promise that undergirds the whole of biblical history and the unfolding of the church today and in the ages to come. A great promise and that goes all the way back to Genesis 12. I ask you to turn back there with me to Genesis 12, and even in setting forth promise, you're kind of being selective in what you

do here, but I just want to remind you of something that we studied a few years ago on Tuesday evenings as we spent time looking at God's promises to Abraham.

In Genesis 12, going back now from our day some 4,000 years ago, four millennia, 4,000 years before you and I were born, God spoke to a man named Abram and he said in Genesis 12:1, he said,

1 ... "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. [Here it is at the end of verse 3] And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

God declared to Abraham, made a covenant with Abraham, declared promises to him, said, "Abraham, in you and in your seed I am going to bless all the families of the earth." That is a foundational promise to Abraham and there is a sense in which all of unfolding revelation since then is simply an outworking of that great promise that he made to Abraham.

Now, over time, I'm not going to walk through all of this biblical history with you, some of what I'm immediately about to say we'll talk about on Tuesday, this Tuesday. Over time, the nation of Israel came forth out of Abraham's loins and developed. They grew into a nation. God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, planted them in the Promised Land, and eventually gave them a king named David to whom he also made great promises in 2 Samuel 7. We're going to look at that passage on Tuesday. So there's this promise made to Abraham that over time starts to unfold, it works itself out in time. A nation rises from the loins of him and his sons. David is established as the king over that nation and God promises to David that he'll give him a throne that endures throughout all of eternity, meaning to David and his son and seed.

What happened except this, that Jesus Christ came forth as the Son, the seed of Abraham, as the Son of David, and in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection for sinners became the means by which Jews and Gentiles alike could be reconciled to God by faith. The opening of the New Testament as we have it in our English Bibles, in Matthew 1:1, "Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David," tying those great promises together that God was working out over the course of thousands of years and, beloved, what we need to remember is this, is that the outworking of that promise to David goes back even further into God's eternal plan before the beginning of time. This is what he had planned all along before he ever spoke the words of, "Let creation come into place," in Genesis. So this is rooted in, this context of promise takes us all the way back before the beginning of time. We see God making promises to individual great men in the course of his grace, and it has all culminated in the person of Jesus Christ.

What does Christ do at the end of his earthly ministry shortly before he ascends into heaven? He gathers his disciples and he tells them, "Go and make disciples of mine in all

the nations. Go into all of the nations and make disciples." So he disciples go out preaching this Gospel, preaching Christ as the one and only Savior of sinful men, the one and only way by which men can be reconciled to God. In the course of that great outworking, Christ as we saw last time, appointed this man named Paul to be his apostle, to be his representative, to go out and to proclaim this saving Gospel in a particular way to the Gentiles, Acts 9, Acts 26. So beloved, when we think about context, we're talking about a context we're usually not accustomed to thinking about, talk about context of interpreting Scripture, you know, what does the prior verse say? What does the next verse say? And letting that guide your interpretation. That's all really important. I'm glad we do that. I'm glad you do that here. But we need to have an even more mature perspective on the nature of biblical revelation and to realize that these individual books that we have written by Paul in the New Testament are tied to a commission that Christ gave to him personally to go out and proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. Christ was the fulfillment of promises that God made to David and made to Abraham according to a plan that he had developed in his own mind, according to his own will, his own purpose, his own good counsel before time began.

So as we come to this text in Philippians, we realize that we are coming to something great and high and lofty and holy that is furthering purposes that God had been working out for 4,000 years at the time Paul wrote these words, and now as we come and study them 2,000 years after that, we are in a flow of the purpose and the eternal plan of God that has been working out for 4,000 years. That should humble us. That should make us teachable. That should make us realize that, you know, I want to come as a learner here and to realize that as we study the words of Scripture, we're coming in a context that far transcends our individual lives. It is a serious mistake for people to approach the Bible in a sense that is only concerned about what it can do for me. That's a mark of great spiritual immaturity that we need to grow out of. We want to come and submit ourselves and to humble ourselves and say, "God, help us understand the big picture in what you're doing here. Help me understand the big picture of what's going on, the big picture that was going on long before I was ever even born." And realize that we are a part of a much greater plan rather than thinking the plan is all about us and putting ourselves at the center of our thinking about God's word.

There is a whole context and the beauty of this is, as we've been saying, there's a context of promise. God's promise to Abraham was a promise of blessing, of bestowing benevolent goodness upon people through the seed of Abraham who we now know was fulfilled ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ. God's purpose was to bring blessing to many throughout the world and God has brought blessing to the church at Philippi when Paul was writing this, and now here we are even further removed chronologically and we're on the receiving end of that promised blessing as believers in Christ. We are in a position of great privilege, a position that promotes gratitude and humility in our hearts.

Beloved, here's what I want you to see, this context of promise, just to summarize this. God had purposed to bless the world through Abraham's seed. That seed was Christ and now in Christ Paul was going to be a crucial instrument in the even further outworking to that end. We saw his testimony last time, the call that Christ placed on him. It's a context

of promise, a context of blessing, a context that gives us a sense of anticipation as we come to the word saying, "If Philippians was an outworking of the ministry of Paul and Paul was appointed by Christ and Christ was the promised seed of Abraham and David through whom God promised to bless the world, then there must be blessing in this letter for us to find as we come to it as believers in him." So there's promise, there's anticipation, there's expectation, then, as we come to the book of Philippians in light of the great context of promise.

Now let me move on to a second aspect of context, what I've called the context of Paul. The context of Paul. Last time, we looked at Paul's individual testimony through his own words as he testified in a legal proceeding of his call from Christ and his faith in Christ, what I want to do here this morning just touching ever so briefly on things that I haven't said here at Truth Community Church, just to keep things in mind for you, Paul as an apostle preached Christ and that's recorded for us in Acts 12 through 28, roughly speaking, and in the book of Acts you find this about the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Maybe one day years down the road I'll do a long series of messages on the life and ministry of Paul. That would be a worthy goal but I'm a long way from getting to that in light of other things that are going to precede it, so here we just touch on it briefly to give you a sense of perspective of his ministry, every so briefly, and to also just give you a sense of context in which his interactions with the Philippians took place.

The book of Acts teaches us, records for us by the hand of Luke, the beloved physician, that Paul went on three missionary journeys during his life as it's recorded in the book of Acts. We're not going to turn to these passages. I just want to mention it ever so briefly. His first missionary journey where he went out and preached Christ where had not yet made known, his first missionary journey is found in Acts 13 and 14. Acts 13 and 14. Later, he went out on a second trip, a second missionary journey, that begins in Acts 15:36 and goes through Acts 18:22, and at that point Scriptures pivot and describe a third missionary journey that began in Acts 18:23. Paul was a man of travels throughout the known world at the time, and in any study Bible you can find maps that declare and show for you the exact geographic chronology of that based on the narrative that is found in the book of Acts. It's pretty interesting to trace those things out sometimes in your study.

Now just stay with me here. We're just setting context. During those missionary journeys, Paul established churches in many of the cities that he visited. For example, we see that a church was started in a city called Philippi in Acts 16. There was a church established in a city called Thessalonica in Acts 17. A church in a city called Corinth in Acts 18. A church in a city called Ephesus in Acts 19 and 20. So that the New Testament epistles that we have written by Paul, 13 epistles written by Paul beginning at Romans and ending in Philemon, are in many cases written to churches that he had previously founded that knew him by face, that had experienced his ministry personally. Not every church was like that. He hadn't been to every church that he wrote a letter to. We saw that in Romans in our opening statement. Paul said, "I long to see you," indicating that he had not yet been there. But in the narrative of Acts, you see Paul traveling about as an apostle of Christ, going to cities, founding churches, and then as you read on in your New Testament, you see a letter to the Philippians, a letter to the Thessalonians, two of them

actually, two letters to the Corinthians, a letter to the Ephesians, for example. It helps us to realize that there is a history recorded for us in Scripture that is behind those letters that is found in the book of Acts, and so what the chronology here is this, is that Christ calls Paul to be an apostle, sends him out to be the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul travels on three different trips around the known world at that time, and along the way establishes churches in those areas in ways that are recorded for us in Scripture. Later, years later in some instances, Paul would write to those churches when he had heard reports about them, he would write to them to help them, to admonish them, to correct them, to strengthen them, and those are the letters that we find saved for us and recorded for us, preserved for us in the latter part of the New Testament.

So what's all this have to do with us today in the book of Philippians? Well, this, just wanting you to see that this letter to the Philippians which occurs in a context vertically of great promises from God, also occurs in what we could call a horizontal context of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. He founded the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey, which occurred in the greater context of other missionary journeys, which occurred during his apostolic ministry, which had been appointed to him by Christ and which is recorded for us in the book of Acts.

Beloved, stay with me here, all of Paul's missionary work came in the context of Jesus Christ building his church. He said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church," and so here we see Christ, the promised seed, Lord of his church, sending out Paul and using Paul to build his church to bring people to faith as the Holy Spirit worked through the message that was preached, and Christ is building his church through the ministry of Paul, including in one place the church at Philippi, and this building of the church comes in the context of God's promises made thousands of years earlier and those promises were part of his plan made before time began. Wow. Do you know what all that means? The eternal plan of God is at work. Never forget that. Never forget that. Though the church universal may be battered at times, may be humbled at times by heresies distressed as the hymnwriter said, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed, though it may seem that the progress of the church is slow and plodding over seven years or 50 years or 2,000 years, though it may seem like there are setbacks along the way and that the light of the church is somewhat like a candle flickering in the wind almost ready to go out, beloved, it is so important for us to remember that the light of the true church of Jesus Christ can never be blown out because the march and the burning of that flame is guaranteed by the eternal power of God who planned it and who is working it out in ways that transcend time, that transcend our observation and our powers to observe.

And beloved, as I'm going to talk to the men on Saturday about, that does something else for us as we contemplate these things. When we come into a true church of Christ where the true church is operating, we need to realize that we come not as owners, we come not as those to assert our own agenda, we come to a body of believers that belongs first and foremost to Jesus Christ and that belongs first and foremost to him and that are the object of his saving eternal love. That's really important to remember and as we come into a church, then, men, as you contemplate your future position in service and even leadership in the church, to realize something really important, that church leadership is given to

men not for their own sake, not for their own prominence, not for their own agenda, but to serve that as a steward, as an undershepherd of Christ, and to provide the care for his people that Christ has commanded to be cared for. Leadership in the church is given to those and only to those in the true church who have a love for the flock of Christ and seek to minister to them on Christ's behalf. Leadership in the church is a place of service and humility, not of domineering and not of self-advancement, and you can understand and appreciate all of that spirit when you realize that there is a context to the whole church. There is a context of Christ and his death on the cross. There is the eternal plan of God. There is the outworking of this over thousands of years. We have been entrusted for a very brief short window of time, men, for the briefest of times to receive what has been given to us, to tend to it carefully on behalf of Christ to his own in a spirit of love and ministry to them, not for our own sake, and then our time will quickly come where we step off the stage and someone else picks it up and carries it on, all while Christ is silently, quietly working it out by his own plan, by his own promise in which he said, "I will build My church."

That's the context of the church. That's the context of the Gospel and so there is a sense in which we take our shoes off when we enter into the realm of the people of God because we realize we're standing on holy ground. We're standing on something that belongs to Christ and therefore, therefore we're careful about how we live and act and speak in the midst of such a sacred enterprise as this. We're careful. We're careful not to inject disunity where unity has prevailed. We're careful not to inject error where truth prevails. Why? Why? Not primarily because of the human consequences but because we are participating in something that is not our own. We're participating in something that belongs to the eternal Son of God. There is a sense of respect and love and deference that we bring to it that says, "I must be one who does not harm the advance of that great work, that does not harm the little lambs for whom Christ died." There is a sense of respect and deference and love and care that informs everything that takes place in the context of a true church and a sense that comes for those that would lead in the church, a sense of responsibility to protect, to realize that Paul says that we're in the midst of a battle in Ephesians 6; to realize that there are spiritual forces looking to slay those little lambs, looking to harm; Satan prowling about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour; to realize that Scripture warns us that many antichrists have arisen and therefore it is the responsibility particularly of the men in the church and of men in leadership in the church to take on a responsibility to protect that dear flock of Christ, to protect his little lambs in the way that Christ commanded Peter, "Feed My sheep. Tend My lambs. Feed My sheep." John 21. Men, this is what I'm going to be talking about on Saturday. You're getting a preview.

So there's a context to all of this. We're not our own. We were bought with a price. There's a sense in which we approach this and say, "Oh, this isn't about me, is it?" Right. That's it. When you start to think that way, you're starting to think rightly about the context of the church of Christ. This isn't primarily about me. This is the one place on earth where consumer advertising has no place; where catering to the individual has no place, as if the customer were king. No. No. Jesus Christ is King in the realm of his church and because we love him, because we revere the work that he did and revere in

saving our souls, we gladly accept the responsibility to say, "I want to protect that which is precious to the Lord who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

You see, when you consider the context of all of these things, it overturns everything that you've been conditioned to believe about the church in years gone by, and it overturns the way that we've been conditioned to think about each other in the church, and we realize that there is a need for protection and sometimes protection means you guard against those who would do harm. There is a protection against error, even if it is promulgated unknowingly, say, "No, that's not what we teach. That's not true about Christ."

Look at 2 Timothy 4. But beloved, this is just so important, how could I not emphasize it? How can I not stay here? How can I not park it here when I had just said that we're a little sprout of a church just barely taking root, the wind could come and easily uproot, how can I not emphasize this? How can we do anything but other than to take these things seriously? So in 2 Timothy 4, Paul now writing at the end of his apostolic ministry, he is soon to die in these words that he says here and he speaks to Timothy who was present with him when he wrote the letter to the Philippians, whom the Philippians themselves knew personally, he writes to Timothy. Paul is about to leave earth and Timothy will be left behind to carry on the baton, to carry on the flame in a human sense, and Paul says,

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

He says, "Timothy, in the name of God, in the name of Christ, I invoke their presence with this command that I am about to give you. I charge you, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction." Why?

3 [Because] the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

You see, beloved, the church is precious to Christ, not just as a corporate entity, a body entity, it's individual. As I say many times, quote many times, Galatians 2:20, Paul said, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." The people for whom Christ died, Christ has a persona love for, and what does that mean as we gather together as men coming up on Saturday to talk about church leadership in a way that I'll explain more on Saturday? It means that the men who are in the church, the men who would aspire to leadership and service in the church, have this mindset that, "My responsibility in the realm of the people of God is to be an instrument of extending the love and protection of Christ to those for whom He died." That is the only legitimate reason for a man to be in church ministry, in church leadership, whether it's vocational or just in a so-called lay capacity.

We must think like this. There is a context in which these things take place. This is in furtherance of the promises of God. This is in furtherance of Christ. This is the plan of God. This is the love of Christ by which he laid down his life in that dark, desperate act at Calvary in order to bear the sins of his people that they might be forgiven and reconciled to God.

The question isn't what do I get to do here, the question is how can I be a part of extending the love and care of Christ for his sheep? That's a completely different mindset, a completely different approach, and for some, some need to learn that, that when we benefit from the body of Christ, that we have a responsibility somehow to return to the body of Christ with our time, with our resources, whatever that may be, that Christ brings people into a church not that they might just get, get, get, whatever it is that they came to get, get, get, but that we're to have a mindset of love and service around.

Beloved, I want to tell you, I was going to take my glasses off, but I had already taken them off, so what good did that do?

Beloved, this is the soil in which the tiny little sprout of Truth Community Church can take better root and to grow and start to be a place where people can find shade. I love our church. In a proper sense in which I say this, I'm proud of our church. I'm proud of you. When I go back to my friends in California, I gladly speak of the great faithfulness and the great spirit of the believers that God has brought together in this body of believers. As we understand the nature and purpose of church leadership and involvement, then I trust that we will not only be shade to ourselves, so to speak, where we each have a place of protection in which we rest our spiritual lives, but that we would grow and become a tree that bears fruit for the sake of others, for others to come and eat of, so to speak; to others to come and find their nourishment. But the way that that happens and the spirit in which that takes place is in the spirit of recognizing the context of promise that God has made to his church and to realize that there is a context of ministry and a context of love where we come as servants to participate in a greater whole rather than to be those who would inject trouble and difficulty into a body.

Now, where does that leave us for today? Well, it leaves me unable to finish the notes that I brought in but I would just leave you with this: those of you that have made Truth Community Church your home either as members, pursuing membership, looking forward to that, to have in mind, to view the church as that which belongs to Christ and let that filter through every attitude that you have, every relationship that you develop, every tone of voice that you use in speaking to someone else, is to realize that these are Christ's lambs. These are his sheep. These people belong to Christ and let that condition you toward love and unity in all that you do as a start, and if I can just be dangerously candid here in what I'm about to say, men, there's room for men to step up at Truth Community Church who want to serve Christ like that, who want to be instruments of protecting his sheep, of feeding his sheep, of putting the interest of the sheep at such a high priority in his life that he arranges his life around the ability to do that. There's room for men like that at Truth Community but the need is not just for men to fill slots on an assignment sheet, that's the last thing we need. That's the last thing we need. You know,

if this were just an assignment sheet of things that needed to be done, this is what I would do with that. That's the last thing that we need. We don't need men to do tasks. That's the last thing we need. What we need are men who love Christ enough to love his sheep, to protect them, to feed them, to guard them, to help them as their priority in life. That's what we need and ladies, for you to support the men who are in your life who do that, a great place to start for you to contribute to the spirit of a church like that, a great place to start. But men, there's the call. That's what it looks like. I wonder what God would do as we consider these things going forward. I can't wait to find out.

Let's pray together.

Father, we only got to two of the threefold context. We trust that that was in Your providential way of speaking to us. Thank You for what You've done in this church. Thank You for the people in front of me, O God, who have loved Christ, who have been loyal to Christ, who have shown such love to each other and love and kindness to such an unworthy pastor. Father, thank You for people like that, dozens and dozens, scores and scores of people gathered together over the founding of a church in its first seven years. Thank You for that. What a blessing they all have been.

Thank You for those newer to our church, those who come alone, those who come without any friends necessarily to encourage them on the way but who hunger after Your word. Father, I pray that in Christ they might find that there is a Shepherd who loves their souls individually, loves them perfectly, and will care for them even if they walk this lane of life by themselves. Father, may Christ be their great comfort and this church a place of refuge for them.

Father, I pray for our men. God, You know more than anyone how we need men with a heart for Christ and a heart for His people to love and protect and feed them, how we need men like that to rise up and step forward, maybe leaving behind some of the more selfish pursuits of life for the sake of a greater freedom to serve Christ in a place like this. Help us as we look to that in the days to come.

Father, for our ladies, for the women, young and old, married and single, widowed, Father, thank You for the love, the spirit, the affection, the kindness that they bring to flavor our life in addition to their other areas of service.

We are greatly blessed here under the hand of Christ, O God. We thank You for everything that is ours in Christ and in this place and yet, Father, we realize that there is a vast area before us where we can grow and excel still more and it's that further excellence for which we pray, it's that further service for which we seek, it's that greater blessing, that fuller blessing, that greater visible manifestation of the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in unconverted hearts, Father, that's what we pray for.

Father, isn't that a prayer that You Yourself would want to answer? Isn't that merely our desire to see You extend what You promised to Abraham and to David? That You brought forth in Christ 2,000 years ago? O God, take these feeble words that we have spoken

today and use them for Your glory in ways that go exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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