

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

August 28, 2022

SPEAKER

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SERIES

Reach Sunday

PART

TITLE

Reaching To The Point Of Discomfort

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:24-29



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Well, Providence family, it's great to see you this morning. If you are a guest with us, we're glad you're here. And if you have a Bible in your hand, if you would turn with me to the first chapter of the book called Colossians, we're going to start in just a few moments in verse 24. It is really good to see you. And as we think through some thoughts even about where we're at as a church, you hear the word vision sometimes. And sometimes it can make us nervous. In fact, sometimes it should. I would even encourage you to be very careful anytime a man stands before you and says, "I have a vision from God," because when a vision is baked in a sinful heart and it's packaged so that it's believable and then it's communicated with charisma and then it's forged with God's signature, it really can become, that vision can become, in all of its evil, it can be an unbelievable fuel for all kinds of evil and tyranny and even heresy.

That said, I have a vision from God. I don't mean by that that I've seen something that no one else can see, that I've found some tablets of revelation that fell out of heaven and you're not going to be able to see. I don't mean that I've seen something you can't see, but I want you to trust me anyway. What I mean when I say I have a vision from God, is what I want to do is to direct our attention to help us see something in the pages of scripture that have been recorded for all believers at all times and then to pray that God would use that picture that we see in his word to help us to see with our hope what we might be able to see with our eyes if that hope moved our hands and our feet.

And so let me pray for us. Father in heaven, we bow before you and we thank you for the Bible. Thank you that the Bible is true and right, and that it communicates good things, who you are, who we are and how we're supposed to live in your world. We pray Father that you would be gracious to us by helping us to hold tightly to everything that we see in the Bible that is clear, and that you would help us to hold loosely everything else. And so would you speak through weakness today? And would you use the words in the Bible to help us to see a picture of what could be and how our life can fit into your life? How our story ultimately fits into yours. So I speak through weakness for your glory we pray. In Christ's name, amen.

Chapter 1, verse 24, Paul writes. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles or the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

So in these verses, which I'm going to show you are actually a summary of the whole New Testament. They form a picture of what life is genuinely about. In fact, I'm going to show you, I'm going to speak three different truths that lead to a number of ways that we would be able to leverage our life and lean our life in this direction to participate as a church family of how we can do this together. But before we talk about anything

we're supposed to do, we want to be captivated by just a few central truths. And what you'd find if you have ever read the New Testament through, is you're going to find these central truths are the story of the whole New Testament. We could add more words to them and fill in a whole lot, but this is the skeletal structure of the New Testament, which is why these verses were chosen this morning.

So the first truth I hope would just change your heart, it would captivate our heart as this, is that Christ in us is the mystery of the ages. A mystery is an unsolved, unresolved secret or puzzle. It's an enigma that's beyond our understanding. It's things that we look at when we think that's so interesting, but I don't understand it. How many stars are there? How does personhood, consciousness or the soul, how is it placed into a baby inside the womb of a mother? These are things that are all important. And many of us, there's things in our life today about our life purpose or maybe a relationship or our family, where we look at it and we go, "It's a mystery. I don't really know the answer to that. I don't know how we go about doing that?"

There's mysteries all around us, and yet there is one mystery that's greater than them all. And in fact, in spite of universal interest and investigation and pursuit and writing and reading and hoping and praying "God, what is the answer to this mystery?" we're told in verse 26 that this mystery, which is the greatest of them all, was hidden for ages and generations. It was hidden. It was undiscoverable. It had to be revealed. You say, "Well, goodness. What was that mystery? What was hidden for ages and generations?"

The same Paul who wrote this book, he wrote a bunch of books in the New Testament, a bunch of letters. In 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, he alludes this idea of a mystery again. And there he gives a little bit more color as to what this mystery was really about. He says, "Great indeed, we confess is the mystery of godliness." And now all of a sudden we're like, "Oh, I think I know what he means." And what he meant by that was what is the secret of how in the world can sinners who have a debt before God become godly enough to go to heaven? I want you to know that all the mysteries in your life that you think are terribly important, in comparison to the answer to that question, they all pale in comparison. How do we, who carry guilt within our heart, guilt before our Holy God, a righteous God, what needs to change so that we don't feel that guilt and how we live and it prepares us to change the course so that when we stand before God, there's hope? What's the answer? Because that's the ultimate mystery of all of life.

In every place I've ever been, which now I think is 46 different countries, in all those different cultures, the law of God is written on everyone's heart. And when they sin against that law, even if they don't even have a Bible in their language, it cuts their heart and their heart feels guilty and shameful. Every culture in the world asks the same question. "What must I do?" This is the mystery that's hidden. It's been hidden for ages and generations in spite of everyone looking for solutions to it, it had to be revealed.

It's interesting. You look around the world and what you find, although this is too simplified, this is generally three big buckets through which all humanity seeks to resolve the problem of guilt in their heart and how they can imagine themselves having a good day when they stand before God in heaven. One category that

people choose is to escape. Some religions in the world and in other places where it may not even be a religion, it's just a way of life. It's to escape guilt by perhaps even elevating above our consciousness to be able to not feel the guilt. And so there's a lot of religions in the world highlighting mysticism and meditation in the hope of not feeling the guilt and rising above the guilt.

It's interesting, is that even if you're not a religious person, every one of us from time to time, we indulge in escapism. It may be that we indulge in a drug or it may be that we indulge in something that's simply trivial and we give our life four hours of football or four hours of video games. And all of a sudden we come out of it, but for those moments in time, we don't have to feel about how guilty we are. A lot of people escape as the solution. And then all of a sudden they're reminded again.

There's another course of action that happens all over the world that happens maybe even here this morning and it's trying to be devoted. There's different religions, Islam, Christianity. There's a lot of them to where people simply look at the reality of the world and say, "If I would pray more, if I would give more, if I would go more, if I would serve more, if I could help more people across the street, then suddenly that scale before God of my debt, I would have more good works on one side than the other." And so you look around the world and even in this room and many of us, we feel like, "Man, am I doing enough?" We imagine that our righteousness is still on our hands, that it's something that we're controlling.

There's another way that we seek to absolve the guilt within our heart, and that is through affliction. There's something called penance that you've probably heard about, which is, "Man, if I could simply show God how sorry I am, then he might forgive me of the bad things that I've done. And to show him how sorry I am, I need to not only feel sorry where my heart, I need to feel pain in my body." There's all kinds of different ways. Self lashing. There's a practice. We even go to a place down in South America to where once a year people make this pilgrimage to a church. In the last two miles as they go there on their rock is you find a lot of people and they're walking on their knees, bruising their knees, bleeding their knees in order to show God that, "I mean it, that I am sorry about my sin."

Other people engage in the practice of pouring hot wax over their body in order to burn and scald, and yet the problem is the guilt remains. But what we find in our text is something that is not only mysterious, it's glorious. And that this mystery that was once hidden is no longer hidden, for he tells us in verse 26 and 27 that the mystery that was hidden for the ages has been revealed. The mystery, not only through the Jews, but also to the Gentiles have been made known. You say, "Well, what is it? What is the secret to get rid of the guilt to make me godly enough to go to heaven? What is the secret?"

In Romans chapter 3 we read these words. He says that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. And then he says the righteousness of God through faith in Christ for all who believe. In other words, is that there is a righteousness that comes from God almighty that comes to us and it's apart from our law keeping, our ability to keep the law, to keep the rules. And it's a righteousness that comes from faith in

Jesus Christ and it's for all who believe, anyone who believes that this is available for us.

You say, "Well, how does it work?" What he says next is remarkable. This is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. And in Romans 3:23, he says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith." Now there's a lot of big ideas there so let me unpack them one by one. First, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That means we've all sinned and therefore we all feel guilty because we all are guilty. We have a guilt before a holy God. It creates a debt we can't pay. It has to be redeemed. How is that going to happen?

In fact, the primary question that Paul is seeking to answer in this chapter is if indeed we're all sinners, how can God acquit sinners and maintain his status as a righteous judge? I mean, if someone takes the life of your loved one, they go to court and the judge says "Guilty, but you're acquitted." We wouldn't let him judge anymore. Or we wouldn't want him to. So how can God forgive us when he says that the wage of sin is death? And then he tells us how. He says that God almighty and his tremendous love for us sent his son, the Christ, that's the promised one. They gave him the name Jesus on the earth, which means savior. And he became a propitiation. That's a big word we don't use a whole lot. It means substitutionary sacrifice.

God almighty says, "My justice demands that there must be death because of sin." And yet in his love, he says, "I'm going to send my sinless son to cover that debt." And he died and he shed his blood for our own sin. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus, by saying, "Christ, I see and believe that I'm a sinner. I know that I am, I cannot take it away. I can't punish myself enough, but I believe that you sent your son to the earth. I believe that he died for my sin and was buried. And he rose from the dead. I confess him his Lord." You have faith, you place it and you point it directed at Christ, he says something happens that is absolutely remarkable. He says it's a gift of grace that this happens. We don't deserve it, and yet because of his love and grace, he gives it and it is to be justified, to be made righteous. And then for God almighty to declare us righteous. Jesus comes to us after he dies and rises from the dead and he says, "You have not lived as you ought, but I have. But if you put your faith and trust in me, I will take your sin. I will impute or give my righteousness to you as your record and you will be declared righteous. And I will come and live in your heart by my spirit," which is why Paul in our text in Colossians 1 summarizes the entire message of the hope of glory. The entire revelation of this mystery is this, Christ in us. When Christ is in you, when he lives in you by his spirit, what that means is you now have a righteousness that is a part from your performance, which means that you have a righteous standing before God that cannot be adjusted on your worst moral day or your best.

When God wants to look at the righteous standing of his children who have trusted in Jesus, he doesn't look to see how we're doing. He looks to the right and he sees his son whose righteousness is the same yesterday, today, and forever more, that has been accrued, it's been imputed to our account before him. This is the mystery of the ages. It is the only way for someone to stand before God. And it is the only way for sinners to live on the earth without being absolutely crushed by their guilt.

Do you know Christ? You see, if you feel the weight today of your guilt, I encourage you to put your faith and trust in Christ. It would be important for you to stop listening to me and start talking to him. "God, I believe. I confess I'm a sinner. I believe that you died and rose from the..." He will save you. And for those of you who have already placed your faith and trust in Christ, let me invite you to feel the weight of glory, the weight of hope. So that's the first point. It's the biggest part of the New Testament that Christ in us is the mystery of the ages.

The second thing we find here is that Christ sent us to proclaim the mystery of the ages. See, the fact is that Christ accomplished what he accomplished. And yet there are billions of people today on the globe who are still trying to solve the mystery because they don't know that Jesus solved the mystery. Within our own city of 1.1 million people, roughly 70% of our city has no saving relationship in Jesus Christ. 7.9 billion people in the world, less than 75% of which do not know Christ. And every one of those individuals is important to God. Every one of those individuals, they feel guilt. And every one of those individuals are guilty just like me. So what's the solution? How are they going to find out? Well, that's what his whole passage is, that God gave him a stewardship to make known Christ in us is the hope of glory. This is the mystery. And then he says, "It's not just for me to tell and he exercise strength with his strength that he gives me." Look what he says in verse 28. In verse 28, he says, "Him we proclaim." We. That's you. Me. You're a Christian. We get to proclaim something. "Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ." You notice in this sentence it's literally introducing people to Jesus Christ and growing them up to love and worship him. That's what we seek to do, introduce, proclaim and grow. And this is ultimately what we seek to be about. The question is, are we going to be faithful?

The third thing I want you to see here is this is that there is a joyful discomfort that comes to those who proclaim the mystery of the ages. I wish that I could tell you that if you would lean your entire life and leverage it on the cause of making Christ known that it would bring you no pain, but I would be lying. It really is an interesting thing to be a pastor, to put something in front of us, that if I could inspire you well enough and teach it clear enough that we would look at the pages of the scripture and go, "That is how I want to live. I'm guaranteeing you and me pain, discomfort, inconvenience." And yet that's the message of the New Testament. You read the New Testament and this is what you're going to find. Okay? It's really these same three points in a different way. Jesus is the point. Those who learn Jesus is the point, share that he's the point. And when they share that he's the point, People don't like it. Some people don't like it. That's just the reality. It's the reality of the world that we live in and yet it is so important, which is why Paul, Paul was actually writing what we read. He's writing it from a prison cell. Which is why in verse 24, he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings. And in my flesh, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body." He is hurting.

Now, I recognize that these are interesting words, okay? First of all, what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? And second is, how in the world can another human being fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Well, Paul would tell us if he was here and then he would point us to everything that he has written about the sufficiency of the death of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of

Jesus Christ. And he would make an appeal to us to say, “There is not another sacrifice that is needed. What he did was sufficient.” So the question then is, well, what is lacking? And how in the world can a human being help fill that up?

Well, let me tell you what’s lacking in Christ’s afflictions, and that is the recipients of those affliction don’t know what he did for them. There’s people around the world that were still trying to crack the knot of their guilt. “How do I figure this mystery out?” And we know, and they don’t. To give clarity there, “Are you sure that’s really what he really meant by that?” Let me give you one other example where Paul uses these same words to try to describe what he’s really saying here. When Paul was still in this prison in Rome, there was another church that was in the city of Philippi. If you’re brand new to the Bible, there’s a book in the Bible called Philippians, which is a letter that he wrote to this church. Well, in that letter, he tells us something about a man. What happened was this, the church in Philippi heard that Paul was in prison. And so they took up a love offering. They were very poor people, and yet they still gave out of their poverty to be able to help another person.

So they sacrificed in order to bless him, but there was something missing. And that was, it had to be presented to him. He was a long way away. And until it was presented to him, he wasn’t going to enjoy or even know about the sacrifice that had been made on his behalf. So the church, they looked around the church and they go, “We need someone to take it.” And they entrusted to a man named Epaphroditus. Some of you, you should name your son that. That’d be awesome, right? Epaphroditus. It’s a pretty remarkable trust. A bunch of poor people entrusting their offering to go literally, I don’t even know how long it was, it was a long, long way walk it there. And we’re told in Philippians that he almost died bringing it to him.

But notice the words that Paul mentions, they sound very similar to our text. He says, look, “He came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life,” notice, “to complete or fill up what was lacking in your service to me.” Now, let me connect these two dots. There were a real people group that sacrificed to give a gift to Paul, but its presentation was lacking until there was another Christian who is willing to endure discomfort in order to bring the gift to him. And in the same way, Jesus Christ, when I say the same way, in a superior way, Jesus Christ gave his life as a blessing for sinners. And yet sinners don’t know until we are willing to endure the discomfort to go and bring the blessing to them. Unless we think that all of this road of pain is a joyless one.

You notice in verse 24, he says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings.” Now what that means is that when we see a picture of the hope of glory and that hope moves our hands and our heart and our feet in such a way that we choose sacrifice over convenience, we’re making a decision for our joy. And so being motivated by these truths, that Christ is the hope of glory, the answer to the mystery that everyone in the world is looking for, that we who have found it are called to go and tell people, going to telling them is going to cause discomfort. I share again something that we’ve been talking about over the last year, and we’ll talk about it for four more years, it’s simply called REACH. What we want to with our eyes is everyone at Providence extending them-

selves to the point of discomfort to help others become disciples of Jesus. Not just a few of us, but each one of us would be willing if it called for it to be made uncomfortable for a time in a conversation, for a week, to make sacrifices with our time, energy and resources to help other people see and learn the mystery that has been revealed, that our guilt can be taken away.

We framed it around three different areas and it's important for us to talk about why. Acts chapter 1 verse 8 tells us something very, very important. And he says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem." That's really close to where they were." And in Judea and Samaria," that's a circle that broadens like a ripple in the lake, "And to the ends of the earth." Some of us are inclined to say, "Man, there's just so much need in Raleigh. Why don't we just point all of our attention right here?" Or there's others that say, "Man, there's so many people around the world. Let's not care about anybody in Raleigh. Let's just go there."

But you notice what he says, the word and doesn't include the word and then. He doesn't say, "Look, finish Raleigh, and then move on." Now he says, "We labor in Raleigh and we labor in our state and we labor in our nation and we labor in the nations of the world and we do so simultaneously." And so let me encourage you with a few things as a church family to say, "Okay, how do I participate?" For those of you who are inspired, even at the risk of being uncomfortable to say it's worth it, I want to lean my life in that direction. What could we do together?

First part of this, we call it Reach our Four, Our Four. And there's a few parts here. Let me encourage you. Would you consider first to pray that God would expand our heart for people? This is the very first thing. And the most important thing is that many of us, when we look at people, we see somebody that is either a challenge for us, a burden for us, or perhaps an opportunity for us. But oftentimes, what we don't see when we look at people is a soul that has a reckoning with God. We might see a future sales call. We might see somebody that might be able to bless me, maybe able to ask. You're all looking at me right now, somebody in this room should be asking, "What is his standing before God? I wonder if I should go tell him about Christ." Our neighbors, our friends, the people we work with. You go to a ball game and you see all those thousands of people. At some point, while you're sitting there, just imagine everything going black and white except a little dot of blue. And that blue is their soul. And I say, "Look, I see thousands of people. And all of those people have a reckoning with God. I wonder where they stand."

You see, many times what we imagine I'm asking you to do is to identify four people and make them the target. Actually, what I'm doing is I'm saying this is, "What if we ask God, 'Would you make this thing the target?'. And all the apathy that I feel towards people who are far from you, would you remove that from me?" And once God begins to warm my heart, let me encourage you to identify four people to bless. Four people who may be far from the Lord. Bless. You begin by praying for them, listening to them, perhaps eating a meal with them, serving them in some way. I hope that you would be able to share with them the hope of glory. And wouldn't it be amazing if we also prayed that we would all have the opportunity and privilege to lead

one person to faith in Christ this year, and to have the opportunity to continue to invest in them and so that they were trained and had understanding and encouragement to go and make a disciple themselves? And so reach your four. There's a lot of people at Providence who need encouragement in this. They need ideas with this. And so we created a resource. In fact, they're at your chair. Let me explain what this is. This is the third service so I hope people didn't take them. But if they did, that you should find one, but there's a little QR code. And if you take out your phone, you don't have to do it now, okay? You just pray about it. But if you want this, and if you point your camera at this and you hit on the little link, you can sign up if you desire to receive one weekly text a week that gives just basic ideas, encouragement about how do we bless somebody. You can just delete it if you don't want it. If you need that and would like that, we encourage you to sign up in that way. The second area that we want to consider, and I would invite you to participate is we're going to reach our city. One way we do this is each one of us finds a way to participate in serving the city. We've identified the fact is that if each one of us would give eight hours to serving for the good of the city. Whether it's serving a school or a park or just helping people in need within our city is that it would amount to over 10,000 hours in one year of just acts of service, to be a blessing to the city in which we live.

On October 1st, we have something called City Serve where a lot of us, hundreds of us gather in this place. You'll hear a whole lot about it. We come into the room, eat a donut, get inspired for about five or 10 minutes. And then we go to different service project opportunities all over the city. We would invite you to participate there. I would also ask you to consider praying for God's grace and reaching people on Monday nights. That last year we started a Monday night service because we know so many in Providence and our city have to work on the weekend. Every single week, even though it's a very small service, there's usually right at a hundred people. Sometimes a little less, sometimes a little more. The fact is, is every single week that we've done this over the last year, we've had people who are brand new to Providence who've come. There's been people who have trusted Christ.

And at the very same time, a few months after we started that, God opened up a door to where we had all these refugees fleeing Afghanistan being flown into Raleigh, and they're living right down the road. And so we said, "What would happen if we opened up another room next to the service and had a service for them after feeding them dinner?" And so tomorrow and every Monday, if you happen to be sitting there at your home, you've already been here on Sunday and you think, "You know what? That's happening right now." Just pray why you're eating your meal. Or as you pray over your food, you say, "God, would you just bless the people there at Monday night?" In either of those two services, "God, would you help people to understand the gospel?"

And then the third thing here is we want to pray. And I would ask you to pray in progress and planning a church. You know that our city is growing faster, not only in population but its footprint, than the churches are able or currently reaching. In fact, we found this heat map right here of our city, where roughly in here and most of us, we know that we live in this area. I'm not saying that there's lot. I'm sure some of you are like, "No, I don't." But a lot of us do, okay? A lot of us do. And what these blobs of red and orange are is they're

areas of concentration to where permits have been submitted to build a house. It's the area where our city is exploding. And a lot of these areas, it takes a while in order to get here to Providence. And so we feel like the Lord is calling us to plan a church in our city. It's end goal, that it would be an autonomous church from Providence.

Over the last year, we've identified the strategy. It's been approved by the church family. And this year we want to move to it. And the hope that at the end of 2023, we would be able to plant that church. A strategy is autonomy, but it wouldn't immediately begin by "I was just saying goodbye." Instead, what we want to try to do is to imitate what we believe is a healthy parenting process, right? To where in the beginning, they're an infant. And so parents have authority and provision and protection because they're small. And over a period of time, they move into a season called childhood where we expound the boundaries and we give them independent and opportunities to make decisions in their context. And yet, while we're doing that, we're reinforcing the family's DNA, the mission and values of the church.

And then they become adults. And when they become adults, what we want to do is we want to recognize their autonomy and independence. And yet, because of the way, we hope, that we treated one another over the years, is that we want to partner together in life, in this case with churches, to plant another church in our city together. And this is our hope. And so I would ask you, I cannot tell you the number of things that I think about. I think I don't have an answer for that, but I just believe God does. So I want to ask you to ask with me. And then the last thing is to reach our world. To reach our world, there's a number of things that you can do to participate. You can pray, you can give, you can serve, you can go. You're going to hear these again in November. We're going to spend three weeks when we're just talking about missions of how we engage. The fact is though, there's a whole team of people here at Providence who have signed up to receive a weekly email of confidential request from missionaries and partners all around the world who trust us that we'll be praying for them. There's others in the church family that God has blessed. And in addition to the fact that you give the Providence so generously and over 20% now of all of our budget is directed actually to go towards missions, to leave this place, the fact is some of us have... I still have other resources.

And so we have identified different needs from people, our partners and church planners, missionaries around the world who are partners with Providence who have left this place to go and say, "I don't know if anyone would have the heart, but this is a need that we have to help try to connect those." Today we have 52 international church planners and over a hundred missionaries that we support around the world. Now, those international church planners, I just want to show you one picture. It's just the coolest thing to me. Just a few weeks ago, I was in a place where all of these people had to flee for their life from Syria. And they landed in... Well, they had to leave Syria, okay?

I had to block out some of their faces for the camera. But the fact is when they left, they were put into villages of tents. One of these individuals comes to faith in Christ. He hears the gospel. He believes. He begins sharing the gospel. And literally, over 200 people come to faith in Christ, but it's not legal. And so they meet

in house churches. He was pastoring all of these little house churches. And over a period of time, he began to disciple a number of leaders. And now all of a sudden what this is, is we had the opportunity to gather the church planners in this region of the world, bring them to a place. And I got to teach him about marriage and family, why you're doing ministry, just to encourage them.

But what you see here is, is a number of families who are all first generation believers, former Muslims, who trusted Jesus Christ, their savior and Lord. All of them are leading over five churches. It's a remarkable thing of what the Lord has done. And so some of the resources we support each and every one of these families, it's just a beautiful thing for us to be able to do.

In addition to that, there's ways for you to serve. Packing bags and maybe loaning cars when we have all of our partners come back for their state side. They have needs. And so it's one way for us to do it. And then the other thing is to go. It's to say, "I'm willing to go. I'm willing to go on a short term trip, or maybe even for longer."

As we close, one mistake that we often make, and I know that I've made it before even in past things and big decisions at Providence, is to pit friends against each other. We don't have to do that. Some of you are already thinking, "Man, if we focus all this attention on reaching, then we're going to ignore the pains. We're going to ignore growing deep ourselves. We're going to ignore our own kids, because it's all about those people." But the fact is our mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ and grow people up to love and worship him. Which means that as a church, we're going to continue to invest in discipling and teaching and training us as a church family to worship together, to be in the word together, to sing together, to pray together, to teach our children, to instruct and to grow in the areas of our brokenness and the areas of our relationships so that they are distinguished.

We have to reach people because they don't know. They don't know what we know. And all of this reaching and all of this discipleship, all this growing, it requires power, spiritual power we don't have in ourselves. It requires the Holy Spirit. So the very next series that we're going to begin next week is a series on the Holy Spirit. It's called God in Us. Who is the spirit who lives within us and what does he do? And how do we walk with the Holy Spirit?

Before we do anything else, I want to give you a moment right now to pray. And as you pray, what I want to ask you to do specifically... You say, "Man, you just ask us to pray about a number of things." Let's just start with the first thing. No matter how big your heart is for people who are far from the Lord, would you pray to him now and say, "God, would you help it to grow even more? Would you expand my heart for people in my community and around the world who do not know the hope of Christ?" So let's take a moment now and pray.

Father in heaven, I thank you for your grace in our life. I pray for those who perhaps don't even have a relationship with you or simply exploring Christianity or exploring Jesus and what he did and what he said and what he accomplished. I pray God that you would open up their hearts and help them see. Help us to be patient with them, to have time to sit with them and to serve them and answer questions as best that we can. But God, would you help them to compartmentalize, to internalize these ideas that they've heard that are true? And I pray for us as a church family that you would expand our heart so much by the picture we see within scripture that we would be willing to face and experience discomfort to help other people hear the amazing truth that we have heard and that was brought to us because somebody was willing to be uncomfortable that we would be able to hear. And so we asked that you would help us in all these things and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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