

## A Decade of Lessons

Zach, thank you, brother, for leading us in the anthem. It's pretty incredible. We think often of worshiping Jesus as creator.

We think of worshiping him as redeemer. And that's a great reminder that we'll also worship him as Victor, as a victorious king. It's good to be with you this morning.

Our family is out of town this week, along with the Rags. And we were at a family camp in North Carolina with old ministry friends. So a lot of families that we knew while I was going to school, and now scattered throughout various parts of mostly the southeast part of the country.

And from our sending ministry there in Jupiter, Jerry Rag, the senior pastor at Grace Amino Bible Church, was leading the sessions. And we just had a whole lot of fun. We had some competitive games and things and such.

And lots of time in the word and fellowshiping. And it is good to be back. You might notice the Yoder family is here today.

So they were at the camp as well. They made their way back. So they'll be here this Lord's Day and the next.

Coming in for the 10-year anniversary. Just a beloved family who's been training for ministry in Florida for the last number of years. And it's so good to have you guys here with us the next two weeks.

I want you to pray with me. And then we'll give our attention to the word. Father, we are truly needy people.

And we come to you because you provide for us things that we cannot do for ourselves. And we recognize that you are immortal. You're invisible.

You're wise. You dwell in inapproachable light. And all things are from you and through you and to you.

And so we ask now for your great namesake on behalf of your son Jesus Christ, whom you love to exalt by the power of your spirit. I pray that you would use your word to build your church today. And we're just so grateful to you that you continually put up with us.

And you do so not begrudgingly. But you demonstrate your perfect patience toward those who believe in the way that you graciously, graciously treat us as a heavenly father. One even who has compassion on our frame, knowing that we are but dust.

So pray that this morning, Lord, you'd help me to convey the message that you want to share with your people. Lord, I pray that you'd give us receptive hearts. And Lord, we pray that you

would make us like your son now.

In his name we pray. Amen. Well, next week, we will celebrate 10 years officially as a church.

And we'll have Bob Whitney coming to share a message from God's word with all of us out of 1 Thessalonians 2. This morning, as I was thinking of a way to kind of prepare us as we head into next weekend, I was just reflecting on the last 10 years. And as I was doing so, I was thinking about the difference between training and then real life. Many of you could probably experience this maybe in your own professional career.

You went through some training. You learned some things. And then you find, okay, now the rubber meets the road.

And I have to get out and actually put into practice these concepts I learned in the classroom. And sometimes it goes well. Sometimes it goes sometimes a little bit as expected.

And yet, inevitably, there's challenges when you begin to actually implement and live out the things you've been trained. And so, in many ways, part of my training in seminary was preparation for pastoral ministry. In fact, the church that I was trained at heavily emphasizes that.

And so, you don't have one class or two classes or three classes. You have a class every semester for years on pastoral leadership, pastoral theology to prepare men for ministry. And so, I had these lessons.

And then you get into real ministry. You find just like if you've gone through training course at work or perhaps premarital counseling. That's a good example.

Kind of hear a lot of the principles. And then you go to apply them in real life. And they start to mean something a little bit different.

And I realized I felt a lot like Job who said, you know, Lord, I had once heard with my ear, but now I've seen with my eyes. My eyes now see you. And so, the real world experience of the last 10 years of ministry has taught some lessons to me and to our church.

Lessons that I think we kind of know. They're not new, but lessons that I thought would be beneficial to reflect upon. And so, this morning, I want to review with you a decade of lessons.

Really, 10 lessons in 10 years. This morning, we were on our way to church. Griffin had kind of been peeking over my shoulder.

And he saw my manuscript and he said, so basically, we're not going to learn anything today? I said, man, thank you for that vote of confidence, son. So, this is a topical message. It's not expositing one text.

These are lessons that we've already learned. But I trust it will surely be edifying. First lesson

learned over the last decade is that ministry is difficult by design.

Okay, life in the church is difficult by design. If you've been a part of a church for any length of time, you know, it can be challenging to be a part of the body of Christ. And this is not an accident.

And it's various reasons that ministry is difficult. There's many burdens that we bear. Ultimately, one of the primary reasons is because of the interconnectedness that we have with one another in the body of Christ.

And that brings with it a measure of difficulty. We also have the flesh residing within us. We have temptations and tendencies in our hearts.

Not only that, but we have the opposition of the world and the devil. So, we face difficulties on various fronts. You're just to think about some of these with me.

What are some of the difficulties that we face in church life? One of them is the spiritual well-being of others. Church life is difficult because if you love Christ and you love people, your soul is burdened for the spiritual well-being of the people that God has placed in the sphere of your influence. You just think about it for a moment.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is said in the Scriptures to have been grieved over hard-heartedness. It means that it caused him emotional pain, according to Mark 3.5, when he saw unbelief. If you remember, when he drew near Jerusalem, as recorded in Luke 19, he wept over the city.

In other words, his heart broke when he saw people rejecting the truth. He wasn't indifferent to that. He wasn't nonchalant about it.

He understood it was at stake in terms of the eternal realities of heaven and hell. The Apostle Paul was no different. When he looked at his countrymen, he would say in Romans 9.2 that he had great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart.

He was burdened. The spiritual state of people around him was a concern. In those situations, it was unbelief among God's people, unbelief among the Jews, hard-heartedness among the Jews.

If you're a part of the body of Christ, you're going to be troubled. You're going to be troubled as you bear the burden, as you see unbelief around you, even at times among God's people. And it might not always be someone who's hard-hearted, but there's the concern about whether or not they may become so.

Kind of the preemptive concern and burden. Do you remember the Apostle Paul would tell the churches in Galatians 4.11, I'm afraid that I may have labored over you in vain. I'm afraid.

I'm anxious. I'm concerned. I have a fear in my heart.

Paul would say in 2 Corinthians that he had daily pressure of anxiety for all the churches. And

so, if you're a part of the body of Christ and you love people and you're connected with souls, you automatically care about their spiritual well-being, do you not? That's why we intercede on behalf of one another. And surely parents know this very well.

And not only that, but part of this interconnectedness is not just the spiritual concern for one another, but just the general burdens and cares of life that we all face. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul told the church in Romans 12.15, not only to rejoice with those who rejoice, but also to what? To weep. To weep with those who weep.

He would say it to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12.26, if one member suffers, all suffer together. And so, interconnectedness in the body of Christ means suffering. There's a sense in which your grief is my grief, and my grief is your grief.

Your spiritual well-being is a burden to me, and my spiritual well-being is a burden to you. Your weakness is my weakness, and my weakness is your weakness. And we don't go through life as the body of Christ unaffected by one another.

And so, as you watch people in the church, you grieve alongside them. You experience pain alongside them. I mean, I would just say it this way.

If you have not shed tears, I mean physical tears with someone in the body of Christ, you're missing out. This is part of what body life is to look like. It's what it means to, in part, bear one another's burdens.

And so, ministry is challenging. It's difficult by design because of the burdens we bear and our interconnectedness with one another for their spiritual well-being and their practical well-being. And not only that, but church life challenges our hearts.

Church life challenges our hearts. Now, if you're a part of the church, at some point, sooner or later, believe it or not, you will be sinned against. You can mark my words on that.

You can highlight it and circle it. If you're part of the body of Christ, you will be sinned against. You're going to be sinned against by other church members.

You're going to be sinned against by, God forbid, deacons and elders. I mean, you cannot help but get away from the reality that we all still live life with the remnant of the old man. Not only that, but you're going to get your feelings hurt sometimes.

You might get left out or maybe your service gets unnoticed or overlooked. Occasionally, you might even be complained against or lied about or slandered, and your feathers can get ruffled, and you'll be irritated by other people. You'll be wounded by some situation.

And so, in the church, one of the challenges is dealing with our own hearts and how we respond to other people. Isn't that why the apostle Paul said in Colossians 3 that you're to bear with one another? What does that mean? You need to put up with each other. You need to put

up with one another.

Well, why would that command be there if there wasn't an actual need to exercise bearing up? Then he goes on, if anyone has a complaint against another, do what? Forgiving one another. I mean, I have to let go of offenses in the body of Christ? You better believe it. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

So, we're to be slow to be offended. That's loving, quick to forgive. And then above all that, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

By the way, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful. Peter would tell the church in 1 Peter 4,8, you need to love earnestly because love covers a multitude of sins. It helps be a balm to the challenges that we face interpersonally.

And in fact, it is to a man's glory to overlook an offense, Proverbs 19,11. So, ministry challenges our hearts. If your heart is not challenged in the body, you're probably not walking alongside others closely enough.

You just show up on a Sunday morning, right before service, you leave right after, you're not engaged in the body. You can probably skate by without experiencing the need to bear up with one another. But if you begin to devote yourself to one another in love, you're going to walk closely.

If you begin to open up your heart to others, you begin to minister and serve. If you begin to speak truth to people, you're going to find you need to deal with your own heart in a variety of ways. And it is challenging.

Not only that, but ministry is not immediate gratification. Okay, this is another challenge. It's not immediate gratification.

We have a challenge. We like immediate payoff. I mean, if I send my son out to spray Roundup, which I used to be the one that had to spray the weeds, but now I have sons, so somebody else can spray the weeds.

I want to find out, right? I have to wait 12 hours to start to see it work. And I want to see the weeds die immediately upon contact of the spray. I want everything to yield immediate results because it doesn't require faith.

And if you're part of the body of Christ, then you're going to serve faithfully. And at times, you're not going to see immediate results. In fact, most often, you're not going to see immediate results.

I mean, just think about Paul described ministry. You know, well, 1 Corinthians 3, 6, I planted and Apollos watered. I mean, what fun is there in planting? Let's be honest.

It's like someone said while we were at camp, I don't like fishing. I like catching. The planting is not the exciting part.

The exciting part is reaping the harvest. And yet, if the Lord has given you a planting ministry or a watering ministry, then you're serving faithfully and you're doing the work the Lord has called you to. You're not seeing the immediate payoff.

I mean, this is important in every human relationship, every dimension of ministry. We don't minister by sight, but by faith. I mean, this is why Paul had to tell the church in 1 Corinthians 15, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, expecting that you will have immediate payoff and fruit to affirm that what you're doing is faithful.

That's not what he says. He says, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. Knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

So, we labor in the church in trusting our ministry to the Lord. I mean, parents, as you're pouring truth into your children, you're not always seeing immediate results. You're trusting that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Beloved pastor friend described ministry in this way. The Christian life and ministry is often lived in the trenches. That does not mean that there are not times of spiritual fireworks to enjoy, but the vast majority of our Christian life is lived doing trench work.

It's why the apostle Paul described the life of leaders with the metaphors of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Most of a soldier, a farmer, an athlete's work is hard and laborious and unseen. It's not just on race day or in the battle or on the day of harvest.

It's all of the hours of work that go in prior to that. He goes on and says, the majority of our lives, may we be found faithful in the trenches, praying, studying, counseling, and loving. All this is by God's design, as I said, because it tests our faith and it teaches us to rely upon God.

Do you know God's design for life in the church is not that you would be able to coast through life in the church, unreliant upon the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember how the apostle Paul described the afflictions that he faced in 2 Corinthians 1? He said that it was to make him rely not on himself, but on God. And so God puts us individually and then corporately into circumstances where we cannot just coast along and rely upon ourselves. Isn't that what we often want? You know, Lord, I'm trying to craft an existence on this earth that requires no faith in the unseen, no suffering, no waiting.

I think it'd be a very good life. And the Lord says, no, that would not be beneficial for you. All of this, of course, then leads to the crucial discipline of prayer in the church.

As you read through the Gospels, you find the Lord Jesus Christ is often before his Father alone praying. The apostle Paul regularly speaks of his even daily prayer life on behalf of the saints,

on behalf of the churches. According to Acts 2, the early church devoted themselves to prayer.

It was to be the constant disposition of God's people. And so part of the difficulty of life in the church drives us to prayer because we recognize we need endurance and perseverance and sanctification and open doors from the ministry of the Word. And we're relying upon the Lord for all of those things.

I just tell you, in 10 years, we've watched the Lord answer prayer after prayer after prayer after prayer. He's rescued wayward children. He's brought unsaved spouses to himself.

He's reconciled unreconciled families and marriages. He established godly elders in this church. He allowed us to purchase a church building.

He allowed us to pay off the church building. He's granted wisdom and spiritual protection and countless untold ways that I don't have visibility into, but we're going to rejoice in heaven. See, all of this is designed by God.

Ministry is difficult. Church life is difficult. And it's designed by God so that he gets the glory and we remain in reliance upon him.

Second lesson, the church is harmed by ungodly people. The church is harmed by ungodly people. And I want to be clear here that we preach the gospel to anyone who will listen.

We evangelize the lost. We allow unbelievers to congregate and gather among us as they would sit under the proclamation of the gospel. But when you have ungodly people that infiltrate the membership of the church, it weakens the body of Christ.

Those who are either tares among the wheat, that is to say they're not genuine converts, or they're genuine converts who are just living in a state of perpetual immaturity. Church is harmed by people who make ministry about themselves. They disrupt.

They damage ministry. They consume energy that could be spent promoting godliness and serving others. And typically what this looks like is someone who comes into the ministry that has an agenda, a personal agenda.

How they would like to see the church go. How they would like to have power and influence or prominence. Rather than be humble servants that are desiring to care for others, they see the church as a means to their own selfish ends.

A way of making the bride of Jesus Christ be about them. These were the kinds of people that James warned about in James chapter 3 when he said that if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom does not come from above, but it is earthly, it is unspiritual and demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder and every vile practice. So selfish ambition is at the heart of so much disruption to the body of Christ. People who insist on

the way that they're regarded, insist on having their own way, insist on seeing people become who they want them to be.

And this is not a new issue in the church. In fact, John would write and warn the church of geotrophies in 3 John chapter 9. He was a man who liked to put himself first. He loved the first position.

And interestingly enough, what was paired with that was he did not acknowledge apostolic authority. And he would talk nonsense. And he would not welcome the brothers, but he would put them out of the church.

And it's over the years that we've watched that there are, at times, people who want to be a part of the ministry and yet they're ungodly and they're not repentant. And what inevitably happens is that ministry is hindered and people are harmed. In fact, the way that Paul would describe these kinds of people is that their talk spreads like gangrene.

And they swerve from the truth, 2 Timothy 2, 17 through 18. They've fallen off course. So, selfish ambition is a great enemy of the church.

And in nearly every relational conflict, it's somewhere at the source. It brings tension into relationships, causes discontentment. And yet, by God's grace, what we've seen over the last decade is a ministry primarily characterized by people who have a vision for the church that's bigger than them.

They understand that the church is about the glory of Jesus Christ and not their own position, not having their own way. They want to see the cause of Christ progress, whether it's through them or through someone else. I mean, it's very Pauline, that attitude.

That even in pretense, as long as Christ is preached, I'm thankful. They're happy to serve where needed versus where they desire. Easy to work with, hard to offend, minimal in their preferences.

Prideful and selfish people harm the church. Church is harmed by people who lack godliness. Third point, third lesson that has been on display over the last decade is ecclesiology matters.

It has huge implications over the long haul. It's kind of a mouthful. Ecclesiology matters and has huge implications over the long haul.

Paul wrote to the church in 1 Timothy 3 and he said, If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. What was Paul's burden? Timothy, I want you to remember your ecclesiology. This is the church of the living God.

It's his ecclesia, it's his assembly, it's his people, it's his family, it's his household. And so he's given his household a playbook with very specific instructions, how it's to be organized, the



spiritual priorities, the methodologies, the do's and the don'ts. And yet, there's always a pressure in church life to depart and to drift away from the playbook.

I remember we were in our first year and we'd sat down, the group of us that were there, and thought it'd be a good time to debrief on the previous year of ministry. And I don't remember which one of you guys spoke first, but it was kind of like, well, guys, what do we think of the year? And no one really wanted to admit it, but essentially the group was the exact same size at the end of the year as it was at the start of the year. And that's not what we were expecting.

And so I remember kind of the first guy sheepishly was like, well, I mean, you know, I think I'd expected that we're going to be faithful to the word and teach the Bible and love one another. And there's going to be such an appetite for it that surely it's going to catch on like wildfire. And I mean, I didn't have an exact number in mind, but surely more than the exact same number of people.

And it wasn't because we didn't have visitors. People would visit regularly, almost every Sunday. They would just never come back.

And so in that moment, there's that little temptation to think, hmm, maybe we need to reconsider how we're doing ministry. There's a temptation to pragmatism, to rely on human wisdom. Paul reminds Timothy there, it is the household of God.

It's the church of the living God. And he wrote Timothy to say, you need to know the playbook. You need to know how you ought to behave in the household of God.

And so we were tested in those early years. I remember showing up at the men's training and there'd be one guy there. And I remember even talking to him and starting to realize he didn't want to admit it, but I think he was there just because he felt bad for me that if he wasn't there, no one else would be there.

And so over the years, we've had to stand our ground on convictions and say that our practice and our doctrine has to be grounded in the text of Scripture, regardless of the effects. And it has huge implications over the long haul. Things like adopting church membership.

Things like waiting for God in the appointment of elders until we saw qualified leaders. The character of people serving and leading. That would be a priority.

And there have been the temptations, the times that we failed, where we filled a slot and we compromised. And there were ramifications down the road. And so within the church, we find that ecclesiology matters, and it has huge implications over the long haul.

I look back at God's grace and his protection over us, that although we are oftentimes weak in it, there was amongst the core group of men at the nucleus of this church, a commitment to say, however we understand the Scriptures best, that's what we're committed to doing. And then you look at the cumulative effect of all of those little decisions over the years, and you just

begin to say, wow, God blesses following his game plan. Ecclesiology matters, and it has huge implications over the long haul.

Number four, progress and maturity take time. Progress and maturity take time. Remember the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, and he said that that time they were milk drinkers who were unable to eat meat.

And we've always said that if you start out as a baby, milk is totally appropriate to be drinking. It's appropriate for a season. Yet at some point, you're to put milk away, and you're to begin to eat meat.

And so one of the key lessons in ministry is that progress in the Christian life and maturity in the Christian life growing up into our head, which is Christ, takes time. People take time. Individuals take time.

Ministries take time. And if you were to think about it, of all the ways God could have designed the Christian life or the church to function, He designed it to make slow incremental progress over time. Patience then, of course, is required.

Patience. Patience. If you think through Scripture, oftentimes those who are serving never saw even in their lifetime the full fruition of what was promised.

Abraham and Moses. They did not get to see the full fruition. Rather, they were awaiting that which would come later.

So you and I are to recognize that progress and maturity take time. Peter would write to the church in 2 Peter 1 that they were to make every effort to grow. He would say in 2 Peter 1 that the church is to make every effort to supplement their faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge.

And knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness. And steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love. And he says, For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fail.

The perspective there that Peter had is that the church is going to be ever and always in the pursuit of godliness. And the acquisition of these virtues takes time. I mean, how long does it take to grow in faith? To grow in virtue? To acquire knowledge? To gain self-control? To grow in godliness and brotherly affection? All of these qualities take time.

They take time to make progress in. And so in part of understanding that progress and

maturity takes time causes us to be patient with one another in the body of Christ, does it not? It means that we're hopeful. And that as we weather the course of life that God has designed for us as a ministry, we get to see him do sometimes unexpected work in unlikely places.

Remember John Mark, of course, frequently brought up in Acts chapter 15. There's a sharp disagreement that arose between Paul and Barnabas over whether or not to take John Mark. Because John Mark had deserted them.

It means that he lacked a conviction at some point in ministry and he ran away. It would seem from the context that there was a fallout, a cost to ministry as a result of that. And yet when Paul, in God's masterful, wonderful, ironic plan, is at the end of his life in 2 Timothy chapter 4, he says, send for John Mark because he's become very useful to me.

You see, part of our understanding that progress and maturity takes time is we remain hopeful. We remain hopeful that even someone who's beset in a long season of immaturity is not too far gone so long as they have breath. People need time in the Lord sometimes.

This is why Paul would tell Timothy that when he was to preach, he was to do so with great patience and instruction. 2 Timothy 4.2, why is that? Well, that's because there are very few of us who respond in the fullness of faith and obedience the very first time we hear a principle. And so you can expect the need for patience.

And it's so ironic, I think, at times it's even laughable in the body of Christ. We get impatient with one another at times. I think, what is your current assessment of yourself right now? How long have you taken to deal with some issues? Let's talk right now.

How many years have you been at that particular area of your Christian life? And yet, in the body of Christ, there's to be great patience. I love Paul's words in Philippians 3.1. He would say, it's no trouble to me to say the same things to you again. I don't have any problem repeating myself over and over and over and over.

Why? Because it's a safeguard to you. Fourth lesson is progress and maturity take time. Fifth lesson, human motivations only take you so far.

Human motivations only take you so far. There's a lot of motives that people have in attending church, a lot of motives they have in serving in church. Do you remember the Pharisees actually were known because they loved to be doing their deeds in such a way as to be seen by others.

In other words, they got satisfaction from other people esteeming them as they would observe their good deeds. And what does Jesus say in Matthew 6? You better enjoy it because you've just received your reward in full. You got all of it.

There's nothing more to give. The Lord's not going to reward that. It was done for the praise of man.

And yet for the believer, we put our hope according to Matthew 6 that what is done in secret, the Lord rewards. What isn't done for the glory of man, but that which he sees, your sacrifice, your labor, your service, your prayers, your denial of self. He sees that and then he promises he's going to reward it.

And it suddenly ought to make us prioritize doing service that no one knows about, that no one sees. Paul would phrase it in this way in Colossians 3.24, It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom you serve. You know, when people struggle in their attitude in serving in the church, when I struggle in my attitude in serving in the church, it's always because I've gotten very horizontal.

I've lost sight of the fact that it is the Lord Christ whom I serve. The very one who gave himself up for me to be done in the fear of the Lord. And so now this is what breeds useful service in the church.

It's what breeds faithfulness. It's what causes people to be faithful in the little. To serve with great diligence.

To serve without personal expectation. To be reliable and consistent is there's a divine motivation to be a blessing to others around you. Human motivations only take you so far.

But serving for the Lord Jesus Christ breathes life into the servants and the service of the church. Lesson number six. Picking up the pace here a bit.

The Lord honors those who honor him. The Lord honors those who honor him. 1 Samuel chapter 2. The Lord says to Eli who was a priest.

Those who honor me I will honor. And those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Eli was a priest.

He was also a father. And in many ways Eli was faithful and yet his sons were worthless if you remember. They abused the priesthood.

And what Eli would do is he would talk to them about their behavior. But he never took decisive action. He allowed the behavior to continue.

He was permissive as a father. He was all talk. He failed to take corrective action.

And so we know that verse. For those who honor me I will honor. But the verse before that is God saying to Eli.

Why do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling. And honor your sons above me. By fattening yourselves on the choiceless parts of every offering of my people Israel.

What was Eli's problem? Eli was honoring his sons above the Lord. And of course Eli was serving under the old covenant with specific promised blessings. And cursings associated with various

actions.

But this principle abides. That the Lord honors those who honor him. Can I just tell you watching this play out over the last decade.

It has been one of my most enjoyable highlights in ministry. I mean the blessings that God gives to his people are manifold. They're manifold.

They're far better than any earthly blessings that you could receive. I mean he blesses your coming in and your going out. He is before you and he is behind you.

And far more than just physical health and earthly treasure. Easy circumstances which that may be. He blesses the lives of those who honor him.

They're the blessed people according to the psalmist in Psalm 119 too. That means they're the happy people. The people with whom things go well they just have divine blessing.

And you watch it. You just see families where God's just pouring out blessings. And at times there's two tails.

There are those who are honoring the Lord. And those who are dishonoring the Lord. And you can just watch it.

You know how it is going to play out. And you can see it on display over the long haul. Children if I could just encourage you for a moment.

Children in the room just listen to me for a moment. You're to seek to honor God knowing that God honors those who honor him. And even when it is difficult.

When obedience is costly. When it is costly the Lord honors those who honor him. They put God first.

They seek first his kingdom. And rather than seek the blessings of God on their own terms. They just seek to see him exalted at that expectation.

And then he gives back to them that honor. Number seven. Listen number seven.

Teachability is like gold in the church. Teachability is like gold in the church. We use that word a lot.

And for good reason. It's a biblical concept. Proverbs 9.9 says that if you give instruction to a wise man.

He will be wiser still. And if you teach a righteous man. He will increase in learning.

That means even wise righteous men get wiser. Because they remain teachable. It's an attitude and a disposition of the heart that is open and receptive to wisdom and instruction.

You just heard it last week from Ian. Fools on the other hand. Proverbs 1.7 despise wisdom and instruction.

Fools are wise in their own eyes. Proverbs 12.15. And so there are those in the church who want to be taught. And those who don't want to be taught.

And when I say those who don't want to be taught. I mean they still come in through the doors. And they sit under the public proclamation of the word.

But they don't really want to be corrected. They don't really want to be admonished. They don't really want to be confronted.

They don't really want to be shaped without qualification other than Christ likeness. Their disposition is I want you to tell me the truths that fit my current framework. And don't disrupt life how I want it.

And at the very point of teachability is. That you're gaining wisdom. You're changing your thoughts.

I mean if the wiser get wiser still that means that even wise people have their perspectives shape. Even wise people need their minds renewed. It's not static in the Christian life.

And so I would say we've watched God over the years pour grace out upon those who are humble and teachable. You just see the trajectory of individuals and entire families based upon this issue. What does teachability look like in the church? Well these are the question askers.

These are the people who open up their lives and let other people speak into what they're thinking and operating. They don't try to cloak everything. They just put it on the table.

Proud people kind of keep others aloof. They seek their own desire. Proverbs 18.1. That humble disposition of a learner.

Someone who's not afraid to be seen as needing help. Someone who's transparent. Those people are soft to the word.

And then they apply it. They're doers. They don't blow it off.

So you see this teachability when you're given an admonition then you watch the reaction. And I know that the first reaction to an admonition is typically rejection. There is a struggle there.

I'm on the struggle bus with you. I gotta remind myself to get off at the next bus stop. Nobody really relishes and loves admonition that I'm aware of.

But a teachable person receives admonition. And what you watch is this. You admonish a wise person and they come back and what do they say? And I've been reflecting upon that principle.

Thank you for bringing that to me. I've been studying the scriptures on that issue. God has

started to make connections to other areas of my life.

I have some follow-up questions. Help me understand how I can apply this and take the next step of faith and obedience. Maybe here's how I've already started to act on that principle.

What's an unteachable disposition? I'm sorry. I forgot to think about what we talked about last time when you admonished me. It's been kind of busy.

I have a lot going on. Or maybe if they were really indicted, Hey, I want to talk about how you admonished me. I'd like to pick apart the admonishment process and talk about that rather than the content that was brought to me.

They show you that unteachable people just spin their wheels and they never gain traction. I've watched this for years. People struggling with the same issue due to lack of teachableness.

And then on the other side, watching individuals and families flourish in Christ because they have a teachable disposition. It's a beautiful thing. It's a valuable thing.

That's why I said it's like gold in the church. And it results in spiritual leverage, makes you a grace to those around you. When you're teachable, you become incredibly useful in the church.

You're useful to Christ and you're useful to others. And you're a grace to the church. Principle number seven, teachability is like gold in the church.

Lesson number eight, belonging to the church is an inestimable privilege. Belonging to the church, and I would say ministering to others, is an inestimable privilege. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27, you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Is that not astounding? Imagine how weird it would be to say you're part of anyone else's body. So you're a Republican. You're part of the body of Donald Trump.

What? Weird. Gross. Doesn't even make sense.

You're a part of the body of Christ. You have union with Christ. And that means that if you're in Christ, you belong to him.

And as the head, he's given you a purpose and a role to play in the body. He's gifted you for service, for the benefit of others. Paul would say over and over, for the common good, you belong to Jesus, and you're now representing him on earth.

You're his hands and feet. You're a member of his body. And you then have a role to fulfill, a purpose of spiritual and practical benefit to others.

Your gifts have been given for the common good. Too often we just think lightly of being a part of the body of Christ, even as we say that. We don't regard it highly.

The importance of committing to the body of Christ, of serving the body of Christ, of utilizing

the gifts God has given us for the betterment of others. People lose sight of that. They become entitled.

They become bent on seeing the church look the way that they would like to see it. And if you're a part of the body of Christ, to be counted among the saints, it's a great privilege because you are under the great shepherd. Peter would describe him as this in 1 Peter 2.25, the shepherd of your souls.

So if you're in Christ, you're under the particular specific right now, watch care of Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing? You have a shepherd who's looking out for you, a wise shepherd, a powerful shepherd, a good shepherd. And so it is a privilege to be a part of the body of Christ.

We lose sight of that sometimes, do we not? We're like, man, how long is the church service going to go this week? How many times are we supposed to be getting together this week? I know there's a spiritual need over here that I have an opportunity to meet, but I don't really feel like meeting it right now because it's challenging. Or we can become indifferent to the body or resent serving. As in, it is a privilege, an inestimable privilege to belong to the body of Christ.

You know what a privilege is? Privilege is undeserved advantage that's only available to a particular group. Just watch that take place. It is a privilege to be a part of the body of Christ.

It is a special advantage, and it's only available to a particular group. Lesson number nine, the word always wins. The word always wins.

10 years in and so far it has never been wrong. It's never been wrong a lot longer than that, but as a church here so far, it's batting a thousand. It's never erred in diagnosing an issue.

It's living and active. It's fed the church. It's the means by which we access the bread of life and living water.

It alone convinces, shapes, exposes. It accomplishes. That's why we preach it in season and out of season.

If you remember, Paul would tell the Thessalonians to remember back to their experience with the word. And he said, when you receive the word of God, you received it not as the word of men, but as what it really is. The word of God, which is at work in you who believe the word that is at work within us.

It means if you believe the word of God is, is powerfully shaping you by God's design. And according to Isaiah 55, 10 and 11, as the rain and the snow come down from the heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The Lord says, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. And what happens when rain and snow precipitation come down



from heaven in the dusty desert of the ancient near east produces things grow. I mean, I marvel yet one long rainy day in the middle of the summer.

What happens to the dead yard that you've been trying to keep green with your sprinkler? Suddenly things are sprouting. The picture here is that the word comes down out of heaven. It is a message from God and it produces and it produces nourishment.

The idea of, of seed to the sower and bread to the eater is I have my immediate bread for today. That's the bread for the eater. And then the longterm provision that I need, that's the seed.

I get both from the word of God. Never returns to God empty, but it accomplishes that which he purposes. Jeremiah 23, 29.

His word is described as a fire and a hammer. It breaks stuff. It melts.

What does it break? It breaks hard hearts. It breaks resolved wills. It melts them.

And so the word always wins. Just this past week, I was talking with some dear friends of ours and heard the news of my friend's mother-in-law moving. She's going to be moving in with them.

She's in her seventies. And he said, you'll never believe what happened this summer. My mother-in-law who's lived in unbelief for over 70 years got saved.

To tell me more, how did it happen? Well, she heard something and thought, I need to read the Bible. And she opened up the Bible and she started reading the gospel of John and she got saved. No one came and knocked on her door.

Wasn't that she heard just the right sermon at the right moment. It was God's purpose to accomplish through his word, that which only his word can do. And like that, it granted new life in her heart.

His word always wins. And so it is not our sophistication. Parents, it's not your pressuring of your children that causes them to be Christ-like.

It's not our sophisticated argumentation. It's not the fact that we just want people to change so bad. Rather, it is God's sovereign work through his word.

John 17, 17, Jesus said, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. Over and over.

We see the church throughout Acts. Apostle Paul would go into the synagogue as was his custom. He would reason from the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

And some people would hear that message and what would happen? They would get saved. For others, they would be hardened. But in all of that, the word always wins.

Brings us to lesson number 10. Lesson number 10. God's grace is the indispensable reality in the church.

God's grace is the indispensable reality in the church. There is no replacement or substitute for God's grace in a person's life or in the church. It is only by God's grace that we are here.

It's only by God's grace that our faith is sustained and not shipwrecked. It's only by God's grace that the church perseveres. Apostle Paul would tell the church in 1 Corinthians 15, 10, it is by the grace of God that I am what I am.

It is by the grace of God that I am what I am. Paul did not trust in himself. He did not congratulate himself.

He didn't think that all of his previous ministry training and experience was what was causing him to be steadfast and immovable. Rather he understood it is by the grace of God that he was what he was. He would describe it in Romans chapter 5 as the grace in which we stand.

And in fact, when he would say goodbye to the elders on the shores of Miletus, the Ephesian elders, he commended them in Acts 20 verse 32, to God and to the word of his grace. You embrace an understanding that God's grace is the indispensable reality in the church. That none of us deserves to be here numbered among the saints.

None of us has merited divine favor, but God granted it to us. Why? 1 Corinthians 1, God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. For what purpose, Paul? So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Do you understand that there is to be no boasting? No self-congratulation. No sense that our gifts, our power, our wisdom originates from ourselves. I mean, I know what it's like in the Christian life.

I mean, I hear so often, pastor, I feel so inadequate and so unworthy. And I just think, yes. Is that not the point? To him be the glory now and forever.

So we never move on from this principle of God's grace to us as a ministry. It's very important as a church. It's very important as you make progress in the faith.

It's very important as our ministry even continues to mature and deepen by God's grace. Do we never begin to act as though we're not utterly dependent upon the grace of God? Churches that forget this become haughty. Start to look down on other people whose doctrine is not as tight.

There's an air of superiority or self-reliance. You understand? God's work in the church is never

to be a testament to us or to any human effort or to any human contribution. Rather, from the beginning to the end, it is always by grace and grace alone.

You know, one of our prayers that we prayed most often, there were two of them. You've heard me say it before in the early days of the ministry here. We're, Lord, protect this work.

Protect this church. Not just generically, but protect it from us for your own namesake. And we prayed, Lord, don't let the congregation grow beyond our ability to shepherd faithfully.

We didn't add a single person that first year. I clue in. That was God's grace.

And then to recognize that even today, our existence, our progress, and any ministry success, the fact that we would still have a lamp stand today as a church, is ultimately because of God's grace and His sovereign will alone. So we're thankful for God's grace to us here at Cornerstone Bible Church. It is on display in manifold ways.

Could have given you another 50 lessons, but we didn't have time for that, so I picked just 10. But it is a privilege to be a part of this church. And I just want to urge you to take these to heart and to excel still more.

Father, we commend all of our efforts to the word of your grace. We recognize that unless the Lord builds a house, they who build it labor in vain. Lord, we recognize that you're the one that is to get all of the credit, as the psalmist would say.

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name be the glory. Lord, I pray that that would be true in our hearts. That we would exalt in you and not take credit for ourselves.

Lord, I just thank you for your particular kindness. I thank you for your sovereign work and the souls that you've brought here over the years. The ministry that you've allowed us to enjoy and share.

Lord, it is simply by your kindness and we're so grateful to you for it. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for allowing us to be numbered among your people.

We pray that you would continue to protect your work here. Lord, cause us to abound and flourish that in 10 years we'd be doing the same things that we're doing now. But just more faithfully.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.