

Simple Church - Tony Dale

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

Tony Dale's sermon emphasizes the importance of community participation in faith and the transformative power of personal experiences with God.

Duration: 57:04

Scripture: Micah 2:10, Matthew 6:33, Romans 15:17

Topics: "Radio"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his firsthand experience of preaching the gospel in England during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. He describes going to villages and sharing the gospel with people who had never heard it before. Many would respond by raising their hands and indicating their readiness to surrender their lives to Jesus. The speaker emphasizes the importance of fully proclaiming the gospel where Christ is not known and not building on someone else's foundation. He also references Romans 15:17, where the apostle Paul expresses his ambition to preach the gospel in new places.

Transcript

Welcome to From the Pulpit. Each week we bring you a different message from some of history's greatest speakers in the Christian faith and powerful sermons from modern preachers too. This week we have Tony Dale with his message, Simple Church.

I understand I was introduced in my absence. I hope they said nice things. It's kind of like saying grace before a meal and you have no idea what's going to be served.

It's really good to be here with you folks. I was thrilled to bits to hear those stories. Here's some of the good things that God's doing.

It actually is a very specific introduction to some of the stuff that I'm going to be talking about over the next couple of days. I want to read you a verse of scripture maybe as a justification for why I'll also tell lots of stories because I think that's a biblical way of trying to explain some of the things of God. And this comes in Romans chapter 15.

Romans chapter 15 and verse 17 says this, Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done, by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the

Spirit, so that from Jerusalem all around to Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

I want to sort of start tonight by introducing ourselves to you a little bit because we're strangers really and I find it very difficult to speak to strangers. In fact the whole sort of arrangement here is designed to make us feel like strangers, isn't it? I mean when I was in medical school back in London I loved the opportunity to try and teach something or to get into the words. And we used to go out and do a lot of preaching in little churches and the like around London.

And after one of these occasions a girl called Anne, who was a very close friend of Felicity's, she presented me with a picture. Now I don't know if you've seen sort of the classic English type of old style church, but it would have not really a pulpit like this but it would have a spiral staircase to a pulpit over here on one side. Because in the Anglican church there'd be the altar and that sort of stuff in the middle.

And so the pulpit's over here and you climb up the spiral staircase into the pulpit. And often behind it there'd be a big stone column because that's how the church was built. So she drew this picture of me standing in this pulpit with a chain attaching me to the stone column behind and me like this in front of everybody.

But that's the old style of communication isn't it? One of the things we've learned is that actually it doesn't matter a scrap how good a teacher anybody is. Now full apologies to the real teachers over here, you can tell I'm an amateur. But you know from our perspective as we've been involved in church planting we find that it honestly doesn't matter how good a teacher you are.

What matters is whether or not people are learning anything. And in fact in our experience people learn a whole lot more the less teaching there is. Now I'm probably treading on toes already, I apologize.

I'm kind of like that. But we find that the more people participate the more they remember. Now I am going to get you participating immediately.

Does that sound good? Great! Then we need to get a whole lot closer to the front because unless I didn't put deodorant on this morning I cannot understand why like in a traditional church we filled up all the back rows and the poor guys at the front are left totally lonely. So why don't we come up and fill up as best we can. Anyway there's a saying isn't there that the mind will only, the mind can only cope with what the seed endures.

So we'll give everybody a chance to get a bit more comfortable at the front. This is what Christian gatherings are like. There are people talking and hugging each other and so glad to see each other.

And the whole idea that we have to somehow you know pretend that it's more important to listen to the guy at the front than it is to give a hug to a friend you haven't seen in a year. You know that's kind of a joke so I don't mind at all that you're taking an opportunity to make yourself comfortable. Now I said that I was going to try and introduce myself and my lovely wife over here and our son Jonathan who's got down here to the front.

Let me ask a question because I don't want to bore you with the same stuff that you've already perhaps read or seen. How many of you read on any sort of a regular basis house-to-house magazine? Oh God help you. We are in serious trouble here.

Okay well then you've already heard all of our stories and if you've read from the first issue you've probably even read Where I Was Born and all those sort of terrible things. My parents were missionaries in Taiwan and I tell people you can tell I'm made in Taiwan because I'm a cheap imitation. I don't even look Chinese.

So quite what you're going to get over these next couple of days I'm not 100% sure. But it's an incredibly rich heritage that I had in the Lord. Mom and dad were medical missionaries in Taiwan.

Dad's parents before him were medical missionaries in China and then in Africa. And something is built into your life over a period of generations. Things that we don't know and understand.

But I remember sort of recognizing somewhere in my university years that I knew the scriptures more than most of the preachers I was listening to. And I'd never been to Bible school or anything like that at that point. But you know that there's the heritage of what is put into you by godly parents.

And part of that heritage was a great hunger that we'd see something real. I guess being a missionary kid I hated pretense right from the beginning because I saw so much of it to be honest. Anyone else here sort of either a preacher kid or a missionary kid? Am I the only one? Did any of you see any pretense or was it all totally real where you were? The laughs tell me the truth.

Okay. And there was something about this facade that called itself Christian but which bore so little relationship to what I read in the Bible that you know I went through really significant struggles trying to figure out if Jesus was for real. I knew he was for real for my parents but I didn't know if he was for real for me.

I remember one thing. It's funny how these silly little things shape your life. And I hope you don't mind me introducing myself like this but it'll give you some idea of where I'm coming from and then maybe some of the things as we get into the scriptures will make a bit more sense.

I went to a boarding school down in the middle of the island in Taichung and mom and dad ran a clinic up in Taipei which is in the north. So I didn't get home that often. Maybe one weekend every six or eight weeks something like that during school time.

I remember this particular weekend actually we'd gone up to Taipei to play Taipei American school soccer as you call it or football as we do. Now you've probably already gathered I'm English. Okay I may come from Texas and you know the Texans think they're proud people.

You know they have stickers on their cars saying I wasn't born here but I got here as fast as I could. Now you know do they do that in South Carolina? I don't know. You know the Texans have all sorts of idiosyncrasies and I'm still trying to figure them out.

One of them is that they're absolutely obsessed about this game that they call football where they don't even use their feet to work with the ball. I don't understand it. The rest of the world of course is watching real football tonight and the Americans are getting even more confused because this morning they saw their team lose only to discover that that advances them to the next round.

So you know it does get kind of confusing at times but this isn't an opportunity for us to talk about soccer much as I love the sport. But I remember a time I was about 14 years old. We'd gone up back up to Taipei to play Taipei American school and that meant that the Saturday was completely blocked out with sports

activities.

Now I don't know a lot about you so I'm sorry I'm giving away some stories about myself but in the sort of family I was brought up in there were certain things that we were not allowed to do on a Sunday. And one of those things was that we were not allowed to go to a movie on a Sunday. Now I still haven't completely figured it out but maybe that's because I'm kind of slow but I was allowed to go on other days of the week but not on a Sunday.

But there was a movie I really really wanted to see. Now you're probably not like this but you know if I find if I do anything naughty I remember every little detail of it. Yeah anyone else like that? You know it just sort of is trapped there in your mind.

Anyway it comes to Sunday we go to church in the morning you know with mom and dad and after church we have lunch and I tell my parents that I'm going to go up to the Grand Hotel to go swimming. Now I was allowed to go swimming but I wasn't allowed to go to movies. Okay I still don't understand that but those were the rules in my house.

And it's hot in Taiwan so you need to swim. And so I get out my swimsuit and I put it on the back of my bike and I cycle off in the direction of the Grand Hotel. But as soon as I'm out of sight of the house I sort of change direction.

I head off downtown and I go to see this movie. It's a really wicked movie. It's called The Parent Trap.

If you haven't seen it I strongly recommend it. If some of you have seen it you know these two twins and you know this is the original version back sort of you know in the 1910s or however old I was then. And I can still hear the music that was on in the movie theater when I walked in on that Sunday afternoon.

They were playing for those of you who are musical they were playing a baby elephant walk and I remember going and man did I enjoy this movie. Now of course I was kind of shrewd because I told them I was going swimming so I'd actually brought the swimsuit into the theater with me. And at the end of the movie I went into the bathroom and I soaked my swimsuit and splashed water on my towel and then cycled home and I hung up my swimsuit on the line to dry.

Now I really deserved an Oscar. It was a fantastic performance but there was a problem. You see I hadn't reckoned on what the Holy Spirit might do.

Now that night I was in my bedroom and this is how sort of schizophrenic you can be. You know I might even have been reading my Bible. I have no idea.

You know I was a good kid basically. And so I'm in my room and my mom comes in and she has the sort of look that only mothers can have. You guys are young enough to sort of picture what I mean.

And she looks at me and she says she says Tony this is going to sound really strange but this afternoon when you went out to go swimming she said I went to visit a friend and she described the part of town. And she said I drove through downtown and when she said downtown my heart's starting to go pitter patter. And she said I drove past this and she named the movie theater I was in and now my heart is really going.

And she said I don't know what to make of this but I felt when I drove past that building the Holy Spirit say to me that you were in there. Whoa what do you do? I mean everybody needs a mother like that. So I mean what can you do when you're caught red-handed.

So you know I had to confess and put it right and you know all this sort of stuff. But do you know what it told me? It told me there was a God who noticed when 14-year-old Tony snuck out and went to movies on a Sunday afternoon. I don't think the issue had anything to do about sneaking out and going to movies.

It had everything to do with respect and obedience to parents and all of that type of thing. But it said to me that God knew who I was. It was maybe a year or two later I was coming up to the beginning of my junior year at high school and I fell seriously ill with hepatitis.

Now over here hepatitis is not usually a desperately serious condition at least hepatitis A. But in Taiwan it's probably the leading cause of death. Certainly it leads very frequently to cancer of the liver and that is the primary form of cancer that you see out in the far east. And I knew that people we'd actually just had a missionary friend who had been recuperating in our house who'd been ill for over a year.

And so when my dad came in that day and told me I had hepatitis you know my little 11th grade world fell apart. I was going to be captain of the soccer team. You know I was planning to be elected you know president of our class.

All the things that are so important to you at that age. And all of a sudden it all crumbled because this was just two weeks before school and I knew I wasn't going to get back to school. And over the next few days I really did become seriously ill.

Deeply jaundiced. I was much more of a sort of skin and bones in those days than I am now. But what little weight I had was falling off me dangerously fast.

Dad was worried about me. The hospitals weren't very good in Taiwan in those days. So he began feeding me intravenously at home.

Set up the intravenous drip and all that sort of stuff so that they were getting some nourishment into me. And you know the sort of five or six days there as I fell ill with hepatitis are pretty much a blur in my mind. I just remember all the time vomiting vomiting and just feeling terrible.

It all began on a Saturday afternoon. By the Wednesday everything I've described to you had happened. I was losing weight dangerously quickly.

They had begun feeding me. I really was sort of semi in and out of fever and delirium all the time. I remember on Wednesday night mom and actually that same friend that she was going to visit that afternoon of the previous incident.

This lady's name was Pearl. I remember mom and Pearl coming in to the bedroom. Actually I'd taken over their bedroom because there was more space there and they'd put me in there.

And I remember her coming in and pulling out the Bible and saying that she and Pearl had been at a prayer meeting and that there were people all over town that night who were praying for me. And they opened their Bible to Mark chapter 16 and they read to me these signs will follow those who believe. And one of the signs that they read was that they'll lay hands on the sick and they'll recover.

And they asked me if they could pray for me. Well to be honest I felt so sick I didn't mind what they did. So there was absolutely nothing of me that was involved in anything that might have happened.

But they prayed for me just very simply asking Jesus to touch me and heal me. I don't remember feeling anything except that I did go almost immediately to sleep and I slept right through that night. And when I woke up in the morning the jaundice was completely gone and I was ravenously hungry.

God had healed me. Again it was just another indication that God notices individual people that he cared about Tony. Now I'd never really planned to do anything except become a doctor when I grew up.

That was you know I didn't want to be an airline pilot or you know president of the United... well certainly not president of the United States. But you know any of these other things that people get excited about. You know the only thing I'd ever really wanted to do was to be a doctor like my dad.

And so it wasn't an issue that I particularly thought about or prayed about. In fact sometimes there in the back of my mind you know I'd realize that Christians are supposed to ask God what he wants. And so I justify what I was planning to do by saying well Lord you know I'm becoming a doctor that's sort of non-negotiable but if I have to I'll be a medical missionary.

And that was about as far as my seeking... you know my seeking the Lord about what he wanted me to do had gone at that stage in my life. And so a couple of years you know after the incidents I've told you about I was on my way back to England to start medical school. But I didn't know that God was in the process of beginning to grab hold of us and begin to transform our lives.

I remember it was right at the beginning of my second year of medical school that I met Felicity. It was... I won't confuse you with how the British system works but although it was her first year she came into the same classes that I came into at the beginning of my second year. That basically tells you how dumb I am doesn't it? Okay so you know she had already caught up and she hadn't even been there.

Anyway on her first day at school the first class that we had was a histology class. Now I don't know if you know what histology is. That's looking at things under a microscope and you might think of it as pathology.

It's where you're looking at the tissues of the body under a microscope trying to figure out what's gone wrong with them. And it really helps if you're kind of artistically inclined because then you have some idea what you're looking at. But I look through these microscopes and I don't see anything.

I mean nothing. I see blobs and I have no idea what they represent. So I'm very rapidly getting bored and I turn around.

There is this gorgeous apparition behind me. The apparition's name was Felicity. What was even better was that she came up to me immediately following the class and said, are you Tony Dale? And I said yes.

And she said well someone told me that you were one of the few Christians here at the medical school and I wanted to get to know you. Well needless to say we got to know each other pretty well over the following years and you'll get to know her a little bit and some of you will be in the seminar that she'll be doing. She's the real brains of the family.

If you want to hear anything of you know the real depth type stuff talk to her. If you're happy with the simple explanations then you can put up with me. I wish I was joking but that's the truth.

You know it's really intimidating when your wife's winning all these scholarships and you're just hoping you'll pass but you know that's the way sometimes it is in life. So we began a spiritual adventure because she had just begun to learn and explore something of what God was beginning to unfold in England back in those days. This was in 1968.

Sorry for those of you who weren't even born then. I apologize you know talking about things sort of before Christ but you know I'm trying to put this into a historical perspective because it's going to make some difference on some of the stuff we're going to look at in a moment and as we began to explore just how God was working into our generation. God began challenging me in all sorts of ways.

I'd already tasted for example in the story I told you of how he healed me but I hadn't even begun to think about what implications that might have about what I do and the fact that I was going into medicine. I'd gone to visit a church. I guess it was a Pentecostal church.

I'm not really sure. They actually met in an accountant's office and God was doing some good stuff there. I knew the presence of God was there in a very very real way and I heard that one of the guys who was taking a lead was doing a meeting down in the west end of London and I was going to be free that night so I went down and while there at the meeting again I watched God healing people and my skeptical eyes were trying to understand but I knew what I was seeing.

Now the guy who was speaking at the front he didn't mean this seriously. He literally meant it as a joke but he's sort of laughing. He says I guess if there are any doctors here tonight they'll be looking for a new job but you know sometimes God just hits you with something and I heard it and it was like the Holy Spirit said to me Tony you never asked me about going to medical school and something began really troubling me in my heart and I went home that night.

In fact I went home. I'd gone to this meeting with a friend. We went home by our by our party that some of the were throwing and we began telling all the nurses and others who were there about what we'd seen God doing at this meeting.

It completely destroyed the party but we had a great time. It ended up with a great sort of prayer time and all sorts of good things going on but I went to bed that night with this deep unsettledness inside. Lord I know I've never asked and yet this is the only thing I've ever really wanted to do.

In the morning I got up and I just you know opened my Bible to the regular place for my quiet time. It was in the book of Micah chapter 2 and I must have read the first few verses but I don't remember you know today I couldn't tell you what the first nine verses are about but when I got to verse 10 again God just hit me. It says arise and go for this is no place for you to rest because of unweariness that will destroy the soul and I just knew he was telling me I had to leave medical school and and you know all over again the way the Holy Spirit begins to shape any of us in our character.

God was working on my life to see if I was willing to be obedient. I'd love to tell you that you know I got up that day and said thank you Lord and you know left the medical school. I didn't.

I struggled really deeply over that question for the next almost nine months for the rest of that academic year but finally I knew that I had to obey the Lord and I had to leave. Now it's a completely different story to tell you why I happen now to be a doctor and we'll get to that okay but that was probably the most difficult thing I've ever had to do in my life. I remember when I went in to see the Dean and I told the Dean I tried to

explain to him what I felt that you know God was saying to me that I had to leave the medical school.

Now where we went at Barnes Hospital was a very snobby sort of place. Do you use the word snobby? You know sort of nose up in the air you know whatever it is and I mean just to give you a perspective on history I think you guys became a country in 1776. Is that right? Am I getting that right? There is a rebellious streak in this room.

Is that true? No I take it all back you know. Well the hospital that we trained at was founded in 1123 by monks on their way providing a resting place for people who are on their way to the crusades and so you know this is the sort of place steeped in history I've never heard from that day or to this of anyone who quit in the middle that they ever let go back. So when I quit I knew it was keeps and went down to Bible school spent a couple of years you know getting more training in the word and just the Lord shaping me getting involved.

I supported myself through school by working in a pharmacy washing bottles and you have no idea how it hurts every day to be in a hospital when you were training at you know one of the most prestigious medical schools in the country and here are all the doctors wandering around in their white coats and you're the nobody who works in the back of the hospital pharmacy washing bottles. But God uses that. God shapes you.

Something begins to seep into your life. It's like the verses I was reading there in Romans 15 where Paul says I can only share with you basically what I've experienced myself because if we're going to earth in reality some of the things we're going to think of and some of the things we're going to talk about over the next two to three days are going to be huge in their suite. We believe that God is doing something in this generation in this country that would the scriptural way be that when people hear about it it's going to make their ears tingle.

You know that the potential of what is going on the possibility of really seeing Bible-believing Christians all over this country having their paradigm of what church is about totally transformed within a generation. I believe that can happen and you're going to hear some of why we believe it can happen because of things we've seen God do and so if God's preparing people for something then just like a diamond in the rough he's got to form them under the pressure and the pressures of the way God works is that he deals with all those things that are priorities before him until he can bring us to a place where we're honestly saying not just grudgingly but longingly out of our hearts that you know the only thing we can do is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. I've been down at this Bible college I guess you'd call it Bible college we we met in a home it was a very nice home it was the home of Sir Tom and Lady Faith Lees.

They got swept up in the good things the Lord was doing in England in the 60s and they opened up their home to become a center for young people to be trained.

I was one of nine people who turned up on the first day of this new Bible school and God did wonderful things I'd love to tell you stories of those years but but there isn't time if we're going to get into anything with any meat you know because this is just sort of travelogue at the moment but I I hope it's not boring you you know looking at other people's slides I mean doesn't it drive you nuts so I you know if this if you feel that way about this you have my full permission to walk out but if you do I'm going to catch your name I've done that okay so I was about 18 months maybe more maybe 21 months into this two-year Bible school course and really seriously beginning to say to the Lord Lord what should I be doing next now I don't know how you understand the Lord speaking to you I I

don't know if I've ever really heard the Lord's voice but if I've ever heard it it was on this occasion I I was washing bottles in that hospital pharmacy and just sort of thinking about what happens next knowing that it was only about three months until I'd graduate and really needed to know what the Lord had for me and just as plain as day I heard you're to go back to medical school I sort of like uh-uh now that's me you know Lord I'm so I'm so sorry Lord I repent you know I I'm sorry that that's still inside me you know Lord I've been trying to deal with this stuff and but there was nothing I could do to shake it I knew I'd heard something I didn't know for sure it was God but I knew I'd heard something and so I said a couple of things that I thought would be impossible the leader of

the Bible school was just a very sort of fiery a totally committed person who I knew would be very very opposed to any idea of me going back and doing something that tied up with the world if I can put it in those ways and so I said well Lord Lord if this is really you then you've got to get Elmer he was his first name the the president of the Bible school you've got to get Elmer when I speak to him to say that that he would be willing to endorse that this might be what the Lord wanted for me now I said Lord if that happens I'm going to speak to the medical school and they've not only got to let me come back but they've got to let me come back with my scholarships because my parents can't afford the money and they've got to let me come back without having to do any of the work again well

I went to see Elmer and he said I've been waiting for you to come he said I've known for months that God was going to take you back to medical school I'm so glad that finally you've heard him I'm thinking like wow you know and there's part of me hoping that this is really true because you know it's still sort of in there however much you've dealt with it it's still in there some of these desires because sometimes they're God-given desires it was something that he had birthed into me okay but I wanted to make quite sure that I wasn't missing his guidance and so I made an arrangement to go back and see the dean it was the same guy that I'd seen to explain that God had told me to left so I was trying to figure out how to tell him that God had changed his mind you know it sort of leaves you

with a bit of a dilemma theologically doesn't it and I get in there and you know he looks very stern and everybody's in three-piece suits including me you know in those days I mean we're so casual now we had to wear suits and ties in the anatomy dissecting lab can you believe that out of respect for the dead that's what they told us as far as I could see the only thing it did was mean your tie always stunk of formalin but anyway that's life I apologize those of you squeamish you know just forget these stories okay now I'm sitting there with the dean and and he looks at me and he he looked and he says well Dale he said uh I I can see you did pretty well but you've been away for two years uh he said you know in two years you've forgotten a lot of this but he said your your dad was here and

your and his father before him they were all here at this medical school he said we'd like to take you back but he said I'm gonna have to ask you to do the last year again and I'm thinking but lord my condition was that if they accept me I don't have to do anything again so I sort of gulp and I I look at him and I uh I say well sir uh do you remember your summer vacation between first year and second year uh second mb which is a type of exam and and he looked at me and he said yeah and he's sort of smiling uh and I said well sir did you forget most of what you learned in first year first mb in that summer and he laughed and he said yeah I did and he said and I said to him well look I'll study real hard for the next three months before I come back but I've got to start exactly where I left

off and he said okay that's a deal now that was god doing something you know god opens doors I I had no idea in those days what god was going to want to help me I have no idea that one day we'd be working

with doctors and nurses all over the world and helping them learn how to move in the power of the holy spirit in their daily professional lives how to pray for your patients how to cast out demons in the medical office how to have the expectation that many would be coming to christ right within the professional context okay because we don't see the end from the beginning but what god asks of us is a willingness to be obedient with each step that he's asking us to take now you probably notice I don't wear a watch that's because in my experience all preachers preach too long would you

agree with me yeah I see a lot of people nodding their heads and some of them are even preachers so you know this is like tonight is obviously honesty night man I don't know if I can cope I haven't stood behind a pulpit in I mean it's almost ungodly okay look how do you do this you hold your notes you hold your glasses you hold your bible I I really can't cope with it I if it doesn't work I'll go back there but we're family together we're going to look at some thoughts and ideas together we're going to be exploring what would it take for god to transform his bride and I'm not talking about oh that's perfect but I'm not going to burst into song thank you so much that's wonderful what would it take to turn the church around in this country now we don't have time to argue all sorts of points

of theology over the next couple of days so you're going to just have to take me the way I am you don't have to agree with me and you'll probably be right in fact people sometimes ask me what I think about a subject and I tell them well I can tell you what I think right now but you know by this time next year I may have changed my mind all over again so I'm afraid I'm not of the sort who's very dogmatic but I'll try and explain things about our journey that lead us to believe that god can dramatically transform his people two years ago in February of the year 2000 we began seeing reports on the news of the floods that were happening in Mozambique I don't know if any of you remember that Mozambique's down in southern Africa and was hit by terrible terrible floods they had three sort of

hurricanes or typhoons whatever you might call them in a row and all this water from South Africa and from Zimbabwe and that hit their own land it all tunnels through a few rivers through Zimbabwe and just over a very very short period of time almost 50 percent of the country was underwater and some friends of ours a couple called Roland and Heidi Baker run an orphanage out there in the just outside the capital city of Maputo and we got an email just describing the desperate plight of the nation and of their orphans they look after about a thousand orphans one of their orphanages had been totally buried underwater the other one was waterlogged but functioning functioning everywhere they're all over the country there there were people in imminent danger of starvation and an email went out

as a cry for help and I looked at it and I thought well I am a doctor I could do something and so over a period of a couple of weeks we just completely cleared the decks and I went out there to see what I could do to help and you know the United Nations was taking any and all of the help it could get they they would fly us into remote villages and you know we'd fly out for a day we would treat as many patients as we could we'd dump as much food as we could we'd come back and over the course of those days we began to see God doing incredible things we'd go into a village where these people have nothing I mean nothing you'd have to know a little about Mozambique it's had 20 years of civil war when it got its independence from Portugal I think it was back in about 1974 something like that it

came under communist leadership they were even worse than the Portuguese were they totally raped the country and destroyed it in all sorts of ways civil war broke out that devastated the country so by the time 1995-96 came along that was the poorest nation on earth they had nothing and then you have these floods and we'd go in I take a team of people with me from the orphanage and we do medical work and

then perhaps during the lunchtime we'd share the gospel and the people you know were gathered anywhere where high ground was so there were large concentrations of people and you know during the breaks that we were taking for the medical workers we'd share the gospel we'd explain that we were there because Jesus loved them and in very simple ways try and communicate the Christian faith and

then we'd ask is there anybody who hearing about this feels that they understand enough that they're ready to surrender their life to this God to Jesus who's the Son of the Living God and everybody would put their hand up and so I'd say you know obviously through an interpreter no no you don't understand and I'd explain again that that this means a complete break from your old life that you have to give up the witch doctors you have to give up the worship of spirits and trees you you have to give up all of these old things and that you completely turn around and give your life to this this God that you're only just beginning to understand about who's going to ask you to follow him whatever the cost and I'd say now if you understand clearly what I'm saying are you ready to give your life

to Jesus and again everybody would put their hand up and this would happen in village after village after village and you could be in a place maybe 48 hours and you could leave and there'd be a hundred maybe 60 maybe 150 people who at some measure at least have begun to respond to the word of God I remember those evenings sitting under the usually in the center of the village there'd be a big tree and you'd have church under the tree oh and the presence of God and the way the Africans sing and dance is just so amazing and you would know that God was birthing churches in days and your heart begins to cry out Lord couldn't it happen here Roland and Heidi in the last email that they sent us said that over the last three years now as best they can count and they have no idea whether this is

accurate or not but by their definition of a church which they define I'm not saying this is biblical or whatever I'm just telling you what they use they define a church as when 50 believers are gathered together but by the best estimates they have there are now over 3,000 churches that they're involved with in Mozambique that's God now that's God that's God's time for a nation here's a nation that has hit rock bottom where the spirit of God is sweeping across it in such incredible ways it'd be fun to tell you more stories but but I'm just trying to begin to to raise our concept of what can happen and then we're going to look in a little bit of depth at what did happen in a country and we're going to try and draw some principles before tomorrow we're going to start looking into the

scriptures and ask whether we really have a biblical foundation for daring to ask God to do something dramatic in our generation a few months after that first incident Felicity and I went back out there this time with two of the kids and we just saw the same thing again day by day the the power of God moving a people so hungry we'd go into a place maybe for 24 hours maybe for 48 72 hours by the time we leave there's church there Roland and Heidi would follow up with people who are going through their bible school to to help out but something could be established every day that you went somewhere can that only happen in a devastated country like Mozambique it was later that year it was the October of that year that we first went out to India so it was lovely hearing you share a in the

center of the country and we began seeing something quite extraordinary they'd invited us to go out there to to teach about home church you know I hope this isn't a problem to anyone I actually struggle with the term home church now maybe that that sounds weird coming from you know the supposed editor of house to house let me confess they just put that there because I got doctor after my name you know the real guys who do the work of people like my son and my wife and I can barely spell I mean thank God for a spell check on the computer so you know if you want to know who really edits it just talk to us privately and

we'll we'll help you figure that out but I struggle sometimes with the term house church struggle even more with the term biblical house church because it kind of implies

that everything else is unbiblical and I'm very very cautious about us saying that about other people in the body of Christ because you see in Mozambique we had under the tree church in India we had mainly in small hut church I've been in amazing huge catholic cathedral church and seen God touching people by their hundreds and we need hearts that that so love the bride of Christ that we're never gonna bash her we need the sort of spirit that while we long for something more authentic more biblical is going to be very very cautious before implying that what other people do with the light they have is somehow of lesser value than what we do the body of Christ doesn't need to be tearing itself apart it needs to be building itself up if you're a prophet then live within 1 corinthians 14 verse

3 which says that when you prophesy you edify you exhort and you encourage leave the tearing down to the jeremiah's God will raise some of them up we need them but in the normal course of events our job is to build up so anyway in India where we're there and we're supposedly teaching about house church you know it's scary being asked to teach about stuff do you have any idea what it's like being considered an expert on something on which you know nothing you know i i used to experience that all the time in my medical office now you might think oh that's that's scary no it's better to know what you don't know right i i had a whole bunch of books on the shelf behind me and i knew where to find stuff and i was always saying to my patients man do you think anybody could know everything in

here and they'd say no way i'd say you're right and that's why i'm gonna pull this book off the shelf let's try and figure out what's going on here in fact what i did even more than that in the drawer of the desk i kept my bible and very often i'd point at all these books and i'd say oh you know there's so much i've learned in these books but then i'd pull out the drawer but i'd say oh you know in this book i found more wisdom than in all of those put together and we'd start talking about what's going on in their lives and it's just so precious seeing how God will touch people anyway i'm digressing we're in india aren't we i'm i'm hopeless i apologize but okay we're in india and we're teaching about house church and it's really disturbing because people are believing what we're telling

them and by the time we're getting a week down the road we're hearing stories of people back at where the first seminars were held who are going out to neighboring villages and are starting churches they invited us to talk about rapid church growth we had experienced at that point really rapid growth in austin we'd grown from one to three in a period of about two years okay i mean you know like this is impressive within a month of getting back from india we'd had emails or messages one way or another from people telling us about 40 different churches i think we counted up that had been started we were beginning to hear stories from other sources many of you may have read a little booklet called church planting movement put out by the southern baptists and there were stories in there of

ordinary housewife starting 50 churches in a year and i'm thinking lord you know if i could even count 50 people i'd be grateful but 50 churches i mean this is incredible we you know we heard about someone who in the first year following his conversion was involved in starting 42 churches and something in our hearts is saying lord lord is this only over there wherever over there is you know i think it's in deuteronomy maybe it's chapter eight or wherever it comes but it says the word of faith it's not so far away over a mountain or the other side of the sea that you have to say i have to go over there to get it no the word of faith is near you even in your heart and in your mouth and it's quoted again in romans 10 isn't it you see god is trying to stir us up to dare to believe that he

could begin to do something of significance over here and i want to explain what i mean by significant i know it's significant when your friend comes to jesus but it does not transform your community or your city and it leaves this country lost and going further and further downhill and i think we need to raise our sights up in such a way that no more we we content with the idea that that somehow what we have is it's so good praise god the presence of the holy spirit in our times is so real our sharing is so precious the fellowship is so deep you know the ministry of the word is so excellent that somehow we can be satisfied with that while we still have basically zero impact upon the nation in which god has put us and for which we share responsibility i don't know if any of you ever look

at george barnard's website he's a christian researcher in this country uh his website www.barnard.org b-a-r-n-a.org but he puts all sorts of statistical stuff up there i am told i can't verify this but my understanding is that he has on there that there is not one county in the whole of the united states where the body of christ is experiencing positive numerical growth that there is not one county you say what about this mega church basically growing by the other christians going over there from other places are there some places that are seeing hundreds come to christ yes but it's a drop in the bucket of the need and yet we read a poll we're going to look at this tomorrow but when he had spent some time and so all asia was reached with the gospel we've become we've become content we've

been squeezed into our box over the last particularly over the last generation particularly because of the increasing sort of decadence and lack of relevance of the church at large including our churches okay don't start thinking everybody else start thinking us the the basic irrelevance of what we do to society in such a way that we get conditioned to thinking that as long as we have a good praise and worship time or get into the word or occasionally someone gets saved that that we're somehow fulfilling our calling in god and yet you could go back as far as uh excuse me exodus chapter 19 just before the giving of the 10 commandments where where god speaking through moses to the people says don't you understand that you were called to be a kingdom of priests unto god a holy nation god's

intention way back then was that his priestly people would somehow display the glory of god to the world and you know at least in this country what we're doing isn't cutting it at the moment and i think god god maybe wants to challenge us and that's part of the burden that's on my heart for over these uh next three sessions that we're going to look at together now you've all traveled a long way it's quarter to nine i started on the road myself this morning at 5 30 and with various delays for accidents and whatever that we seem to encounter in uh where did we land i'd say austin it was atlanta wasn't it uh we didn't get here like most of you until what five or ten past seven or something so how much strength do you have can you listen to a little bit more you can well that's good because

you're gonna have to okay we're gonna think a little bit about the experience we had in england through the 60s and 70s and 80s because that's something that i can give you some first-hand experience of now i'm going to give you my version and then you can get the real version from beresford but you know we all look at things from slightly different perspectives in 1968 when uh well 67 i started 68 plus he did at bart's hospital things were beginning to stir in britain in a way that is somewhat analogous to where i believe things are here in the united states at the moment uh the church was in serious decline in britain i mean very very serious here you still have the veneer of spirituality uh churches are full there are lots of churches you know this type of thing uh but if you ask

anyone statistically the numbers are dropping again barnard says that 52 000 people a week am i correct am i getting the numbers right you can correct me if i'm wrong i think it is 52 000 a week are leaving the

church in north america never to return the church is in serious decline that includes europe okay so uh north america and europe i mean these are huge numbers uh in the part of london we were in at that point maybe one percent of people would have called themselves christians and maybe half that number one half of one percent would have understood what a christian was okay that's a post-christian culture in spite of the veneer of christianity over here i would suggest even here in the south you're already into a post-christian culture statistically there is no difference when you

look at the major social indices the amount of divorce the amount of illegitimate pregnancy the amount of looking at pornography on the internet all these sort of measurements of character there is no significant difference between christian and non-christian in this country what a tragedy that what we call the gospel has such a minimal impact upon people's lives in this land and so we're already into a post-christian culture in this country okay that's where we were in britain in the late 60s and god began to stir and pretty much spontaneously all over the place little things began to happen for example at the medical school where we were we're a bunch of 17 18 19 year olds okay we begin reading books like watchman needs the normal christian life or watchman needs the normal christian

church life or books like roland allens the spontaneous expansion of the church and the causes that hinder it or missionary methods st paul's around what prompts 17 and 18 year olds in medical schools to pick up books like this and read them the spirit of god okay i don't remember anybody recommending those books to us but the same sort of thing was happening all over the country now where we were in the medical school that there was a christian group in england we call the christian group in a university the christian union and in those days we didn't have an intervarsity group and a campus crusade and a nav group or you know a baptist group and a methodist group all the christians just clumped together as a christian union and we were exploring these things and we saw that what god was

doing among us was church and so we began calling ourselves church and we began taking just simple things like 1 corinthians 14 26 actually has a pattern for when god's people get together when we started calling ourselves church that caused an absolute uproar in the evangelical community in britain because a christian group in a university can't call itself a church oh it can be parachurch you know almost church or something like church or nothing like church in fact the truth is the nothing like churches are much more like church than the churches are and we began to experience that in terms of what we were living i remember that that summer just after we had got married when a girl worked her whole summer three months and at the end of that summer came and laid the whole sum of money

she had earned at our feet so that we could have a car because she felt that it was more important that we were able to get around with the work we were doing with all the christians in the university than that she have her summer's work i mean that's people sharing their lives i remember that church sending us out into the east end of london uh we were sent into bethnal green you know you've heard of cockneys haven't you they're people who are born within the sound of bow bells well you have a true cockney here jonathan okay in fact all of our kids were born within the sound of bow bells they're true eastenders now you're probably too spiritual here to watch the eastenders program aren't you but you know one night when you're not feeling so spiritual have a look at eastenders and you'll

know where we were working and it was amazing what god began to do and patients began getting saved i remember a six-week period where every day for six weeks one of my patients gave their lives to jesus over a period of a few years it got to the place where on 17 contiguous you know adjacent streets whatever the correct word would be we had a house church formed it got to the place where virtually any

patient who came to me when they had a problem or a need and i would share something very simple like you know have you ever thought about praying about this and very often they'd say yes but they had no idea if god was there they had no idea if god could hear them uh and i'd say look we don't have a lot of time to talk about it now but would you like me to arrange someone to talk with you

and they'd say yes i could find someone in their street wherever they were within my patch of london who'd come and talk with them about jesus and hopefully lead them to the lord i mean god was doing something and it was so precious when people would walk back from mile end tube station the opposite the tube station entrance was about 200 yards from our home they'd come out of the tube station they'd come up aloe road they would pass a christian home in aloe road we were a t a t to aloe road there was our home in street okay then they would kitty corner across the road uh into the next section of road there was a christian home there then the next i mean these are all just a few hundred yards from each other and there was another christian home there in litchfield road and and this was

god was doing something in an area that really hadn't seen any type of church growth of a meaningful sort in god was doing something we were sharing out we never had any idea for years on end how many people we were preparing stuff before you've been listening to from the pulpit this week you heard tony dale with his message simple church tune in next week for another powerful message from god's word on from the pulpit

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