



The Power of God's Word – Part 1

Letting the Bible Use You to Make a Difference

Pastor Mike Fabarez

In 1867, way back when, a Swedish chemist named Alfred Nobel created a substance that would change the world. It was an ordinary-looking invention. It looked like soil, nothing very dangerous and yet this was an explosive substance that really fueled the whole Industrial Revolution. He named it dynamite, as many of you know, Alfred Nobel, and he named it after the Greek word in the New Testament, "Dunamis," which translates into "power," and it certainly was that, although you would look at it and think this is harmless, this is inert, this is not a big deal, and yet you would, if you thought that, be absolutely wrong. You would greatly underestimate the power of what Alfred Nobel came up with in 1867. Well, we carry on something that I think most people underestimate. I would say the world largely underestimates it, and even Christians underestimate it. It's a small data file on your phone or on your tablet or your laptop. It's printed in these leather-covered volumes that we carry around. It may just look inert and harmless as a bunch of words on a screen or ink on a page, and yet this is really the most explosive thing that has ever been created, the Holy Spirit created it and gave it to us. It is our contact in many ways with the God of the universe who has used this book to change the world, to change societies, to change families and to transform lives. And if you underestimate it, which I think sometimes Christians do because the world mocks it and largely underestimates it, we will be in danger of living out a kind of Christian life that is far less than what it ought to be.

Now we ought to have a much higher view of God's Word than we do, and we're going to start a six-week series here in Second Corinthians Chapters 3 and 4 looking at the power of God's Word. And it is much more powerful probably than most of us in this room think, but we need to be refreshed in our thinking about it because if we can think rightly about this it's going to change a lot about our lives, and we'll be in danger if we think less of this book than we ought to. It's going to begin in our series here in Chapter 3 with the first six verses where Paul gives us a very refreshing and a recalibrating look at the ministry that he's been given. And to start by reading this I want you to at least get reacquainted with the context by looking at the last verse in Chapter 2. Second Corinthians Chapter 2, last verse, just before we get to verse 1 of Chapter 3, you might remember he says that he and Timothy, that's the "we" in verse 17, "We're not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ," in keeping with what Christ taught, in keeping with what Christ said about himself all soon to be codified in 27 books of the New Testament. We're saying this New Testament truth to you, and we're not watering it down. That's what the peddlers in the marketplace did. We're not doing that. We're sincere about it and we have been given this commission. It's a commission the Church has been calling for 2,000 years, the Great Commission, and it's about making disciples, utilizing the truth of God's Word, the gospel, to see people brought into relationship with the living God through Christ, and then we're supposed to be teaching them to observe, to keep, or obey all that Christ commanded. That's our commission. That's what we're called to do. We're all ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and the tool that he's given us is this book that is there reflected on your screen, printed on



the pages of your Bibles that you brought into the church today. And it's very important that we understand the importance of it.

He starts now in this first verse of Chapter 3 which might make more sense to you now when he says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?" I mean, I just said we're not peddlers of God's word. We're not watering this down. We're sincere. We're commissioned by God. We're speaking before God in the sight of God in Christ. We're doing this right. And he says are we trying to commend ourselves again? "Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you," for you to think that we are who we say we are, "or from you?" Do you think we have to go now and have you write us a letter of reference? Now, in the Greco-Roman world in the first century, depending on your profession, this is a very important part of you coming into town and taking what you've been educated or trained to do and to do it in that city. You had to have letters of recommendation, very common. And Paul says in my ministry, do I really need that? Do you need that from me? I know I got a lot of critics there in Corinth who have started to spring up since he had left, and they're making fun of him, they're belittling him, they're saying he can't be trusted, he's really not bringing you the true Word of God. And so he's got a lot of critics, and much of Second Corinthians is going to be him having to, and he really stoops to it, saying I'm just engaging in folly here, but I have to defend myself and he does defend himself throughout this book. But he says here, I just wonder, do I really need that? Why? Why would you not need it?

Well, he says in verse 2, here's why. Because "You yourselves," you Corinthians there in Corinth, you "are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts." You're special to us. We know we've watched what we did when we were among you. And we know other people see it. It's read by others. You're "known and read by all." You are our letter of recommendation. Do you want a reference? You're our reference. You're a reference in our own hearts, special and dear to us, because God used me, as he says in First Corinthians, to become the father in my relationship with you, so to speak, because I brought the gospel to you. I've become your father in the faith because I was there planting this church, sharing the gospel, the whole trajectory of the lives and families of the people there in Corinth who were reading this letter, Second Corinthians, their lives had been changed because Paul came to town and shared the message of the gospel. In many of the letters of the New Testament we learn that. He comes to a city, he shares the gospel, we read about in the book of Acts. He writes them letters later and we read about them in the New Testament how he was the agent of God, commissioned by God to speak the truth and these people received that. They embraced it and it changed their lives, and it changed the whole community in which they live.

And he said you're our letter of recommendation. You should be able to look at your life and see that what we brought to you was powerful. It changed your life. "And you show," you continue to show, because you're Christians, you follow Christ, "that you are a letter from Christ," God did something in your life, Christ did something in your life, "delivered by us." Yes, we were a part of this. We are delivering this message to the world, "Written not with ink," it's not something you'd find on a parchment to say, yeah, this guy's really legit. No, you're not "Written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God." God's gotten ahold of you. "Not on tablets of stone," even that would be a big deal, "but on tablets of human hearts."



Your lives are changed, your hearts are changed because of the ministry we had among you. Now, "Such is the confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that our sufficiency is in ourselves. "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us," right? Because remember back in Chapter 2, if you glance up at it, it says there in verse 16, "To one," as we continue to share this message of Christ, we're "a fragrance from death to death," a lot of rejection, people don't like what we say, but "to the other a fragrance from life to life." And then he says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And we looked, at least in memory, we looked at Luke Chapter 1 where Christ was the one dividing people into two groups. For the rise and the fall of many in Israel. You get an encounter with Christ and you're either going to be put into this camp, you're going to be raised up to have a right relationship with God or you're going to hate him and you are going to secure your place in punishment. This distinction.

Now, Paul says that's what we're doing is we're echoing the message. We're reiterating the message of Christ and we're dividing people into two groups and they either love this, they get right with God, or they hate it and they move further from God. Now, "Who's sufficient for these things?" He says, well, our sufficiency, verse 5, is not in ourselves, "but our sufficiency is from God." We are sufficient for these things, but only because of God. He's commissioned us to do this. And "He has made us," verse 6, "sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant." New covenant, by the way, is just another way to say New Testament, right? This is a New Testament truth. It hadn't been fully written yet. We don't have it penned in the 27 books yet, as Paul writes this in the mid-sixth decade of the first century, but it's soon to be by the mid 9th decade of the first century, by the 90s, we're going to have the whole canon of the New Testament filled. And he says we are now ministers of this new covenant message before it's all written. Thank God we have it now written for us, "not of the letter but of the Spirit." Now he's making a distinction between the old covenant and new covenant, between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Now we're not just giving you the Old Testament, although we desperately need it. We cannot unhitch Christianity from the Old Testament. We need it, we got to have it. It's essential, right? "For the letter kills, but the Spirit brings life." Now here's the thing, you're never going to want the life the Spirit will give you unless you've got the letter doing its work to make sure that you understand something about your position before God.

Now these six verses are great. Now I've read it with some commentary, but it's a great truth and it's steeped in all these analogies about letters of recommendation, God writing stuff on your heart. I mean, being an agent of that kind of change in other people's lives, and the series is going to be much about how the power of God's Word does so many things, but in these first six verses, ultimately about how Paul has used the message of the New Testament to change people's life in Corinth. And I hope that we can get in his sandals today and say that's what I'd like to do. I'd like to see the power of God's Word use me, as the subtitle of this sermon says, to do something powerful, to make an impact, to make a difference in people's lives. That'd be great.

But before I do that, I just want to start with the first sentence of this whole discussion in verse 1, when Paul says, "Do we need a letter of recommendation to you, or from you?" Do we



need that? I mean, is that really what we need? "Are we beginning to commend ourselves?" Do we need that? Now this theme is going to go throughout the book. All the way to Chapter 13 when he's going to say this, he says, you know, you need to test yourself "to see whether you're of the faith." And we want you to pass this test. You need to question whether or not where you stand with God. But he says, you know, we've passed the test. He's confident that he is right with God. He knows his life has been changed. And who can read the book of Acts, Chapter 9, and not know that? Here's a guy who, when we meet Stephen being martyred in the Christian life earlier, in a couple of chapters earlier, Paul's the one holding their cloaks and kind of cheering on the people stoning Steven to death. He's in Chapter 9 heading to Damascus from Jerusalem with letters to authorize the imprisonment and the killing of Christians. Do you want to talk about someone who has his heart rewritten? Do you want to see the Spirit of God doing something in his life? The guy who was the expert in the Old Testament letter, the old covenant, and he's on his way to being in the Sanhedrin, the top ruling class of the legal minds of Israel and he was against Christianity. He saw it as a threat to Judaism. And now he's the number one advocate of Jesus the Christ from Nazareth. That's a huge, talk about a transformation. Talk about how the work of the Spirit changed this man, he's changed.

And so Paul knows that, obviously. He knows he's right with the living God and he knows his life is transformed. And then he's going to talk about how he's been used to transform their lives. So I just think it'd be good for us to start in looking at this whole passage, all six verses, as you can see on the outline here, the first point, I just want to encompass the whole thing. As Paul is changing other people's lives, I just want to make sure that we catch that he knows and he's saying that he knows, and he doesn't need a letter of recommendation because look how God is using him. God clearly has gotten ahold of his life. I just wanted to make sure that God's gotten a hold of your life. And I make no apologies for this because the Bible does it often. Among Christians who have claimed to be Christians for a long time, and it's the most dreadful verse in all of the New Testament in my mind, when Jesus says after death they're going to stand before Christ and many are going to say, Lord, Lord did we not do this, that, and the other, and he's going to say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." So I don't apologize for this but please write it down, as dreadful as this is, you need to make sure, you need to "Make Sure God Has Transformed Your Heart."

Now that's a strategic phrase, that God had transformed your heart. Would you agree just by reading this with a little bit of commentary, that's what these six verses are about. The hearts of the Corinthians have been changed, and certainly Paul doesn't need a letter of recommendation. His heart has clearly been changed. We read about it in the book of Acts. We see it throughout his ministry. He is an agent of God in this world to throw this powerful message into the lives of other people because it's already taken root in his own heart. The Spirit of God has radically transformed him. He is a letter himself that is known and read by all. And I just want to sit here today and say I want to make sure you are and that God has transformed your heart.

In the middle of all the old cities of the ancient world, they'd have a street called the Kardias. The Greek word "Kardia" means "heart" and also means the center road. It's like Main Street



we would call it today, in a town. There was the center. And the kardia, the heart, became an image of the center of who you are, the interior of your life. There are lots of words for the interior of your life. Heart, soul, strength, mind, we can use a lot of different words. But the reality is there's something on the interior of your life that God does some radical explosive changes in. And it's not about the outside. And that, unfortunately, is one of the nuances. It doesn't seem to be a nuance as I say it out loud, but it seems to be nuanced in people's minds because they think, well, you know, I think I'm a Christian. I mean, I go to church. I go to a small group. I'm pretty good. I try to pay my taxes and not cheat and I don't steal and I'm an upstanding citizen. I do the right things, I sing worship songs, I even have a ministry post at church, I am doing the right things. I'm not asking about that. I'm asking about the transformation of your own heart. That's what this text is about and that's what the power of the Holy Spirit does through the book that he wrote, he changes the interior of your life.

Turn with me to Romans 10 for me to make this point. As we read Romans 10, you can't read anything in the second half of Romans without understanding the theology of the first half of the Romans. You've got to know the first eight chapters of Romans and explain everything in your own mind clearly about the gospel before you start reading the second half and reading little verses like verse 4 and blowing it completely out of context. We've got to understand verse 4, which is where we're going, but let's get a little bit of what starts here, as Paul is writing a letter to the Roman Christians that are made up of both Jewish background believers and Latin background believers. We got these Westerners, these Romans, and we've got these Jewish folks who have now put their trust in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and they're all there trying to coexist in this church. And as Paul has just talked about the amazing things that God is going to do in Israel and he's going to unpack it even more in the next couple of chapters, he is going to say, look at verse 1, "Brothers," he's talking about his brothers according to the flesh, as he puts it elsewhere. We're talking about Jewish people now, people descended from Abraham, like him. He's a Hebrew of Hebrews, as Philippians Chapter 3 says. He says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them," my brothers, "is that they may be saved." He wants them to be saved. He wants God to forgive their sins and secure them a place in eternity. That's what he wants. "For I bear witness that they," that is some of these Jews he's thinking of as he's praying this, as he thinking this, as he writing this, "they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."

Now, most people in this room would think that if you have a zeal for God you must be a Christian. If you got a zeal for God then you're a Christian. Matter of fact, some people's theology is so bad they think it doesn't matter what you call God, it doesn't matter what kind of group you're in, if you're all about God, then you're surely good with God because God likes his cheerleaders and if you're cheering on God then you are good. And then you get to a church where you have people who are cheering God on, they're zealous for God, they like God, they're singing worship songs to God, they read his book, they talk about him, they hang out with his people. Well, surely that person's a Christian. I mean, that's a church that names the name of Christ. Of course they're Christian. And this is the problem. There are a lot of people who have a zeal for God in this room even, that you need to stop and ask yourself, but has God transformed my heart? I can have a zeal for God. But I can have a "zeal for God that is not according to knowledge." What kind of knowledge? Well, you can put next to that



Romans Chapter 1 through Romans Chapter 8, the knowledge of the new covenant truth in Christ. If you don't have that, you got a problem. You can have a zeal for God all you want. There are a lot of people who show some devotion to God, however they define him, and even people who define him biblically, as is in the news today. There are a lot of people zealous for God, or so it seems.

But the problem is verse 3. They are "ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own," their own what? Their own righteousness. "They did not," here's a really hard word, "submit to God's righteousness." Now there are a lot of people in this world who are zealous for God. There are some people in this room who are zealous for God, but they have not yet submitted to the righteousness that comes from God, and the righteousness that comes from God is not the righteousness that you can amass. As Paul put it in Philippians Chapter 3 as he gives his autobiographical testimony about him as a Christian, Hebrew of Hebrews, circumcised on the eighth day, he had it all of it going for himself. But he says at the end of this testimony, what I'd like to do is to "be found in him," in Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from keeping the law," but to have the righteousness that comes from God that is by faith. That's the key message of the first eight chapters of Romans and that's what we need. We need the righteousness that comes from God because our righteousness is never going to cut it. And if you read the third chapter of Romans you certainly know he makes that point. In the second chapter he says it doesn't matter if you're a Jew and you know the Old Testament scrolls, you can be zealous for God, or you're a Gentile and you got the law of God only written on your heart. You don't have it written on scrolls that you've read. All of us by Chapter 3, "we all fall short of the glory of God." That's the punchline.

So all of us don't have enough righteousness, even if we're Jews trying to live out the law as he makes clear in Chapter 7. I didn't even know what coveting was until God's Word says you're not supposed to covet. And once that happened, I realized I'm a coveter. So I keep reading God's law and I realize I can't keep it. I fall short. All you got to read is the narrative of the Old Testament. Read the first 39 books of the Bible. And all you'll get is this story of God treasuring this one group of people, giving them the law. They invited people to proselytize themselves into Judaism and say, okay, now keep the rules, and they couldn't do it. They failed, they failed, even the most heroic heroes who take up all this time in the pages of the Old Testament, they get all this ink spilled on their lives, we all learn that they're all sinners. They're all liars. They're all cheats. They all fall short of the glory of God. Sinners. So trying to establish a righteousness of your own through some sacramental system, through some set of rules, through the precepts of the leader, through even the Old Testament itself, you can be zealous to try and do all that, but you're not going to get there.

Now verse 4 is often misinterpreted by people who read it. I used to run college ministries and people sat there in dorm rooms sitting around a circle reading the book of Romans asking what does this mean to you? And I know exactly what those college students say. I've heard them say it about verse 4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." They say, I love it. I just have to believe in Christ and I don't have to keep any of the rules. That's so good. I love that phrase in the Bible, we're not under the law, we are under grace. Yay! We can do whatever we want. Where's the kegger tomorrow night? I mean,



that's how this worked for people because they misread this. Please understand what this means. It has to be understood in light of the first eight chapters of Romans. Notice carefully, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." What in the world are you talking about? Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. If you try to pursue righteousness by the law, if you try to establish your own righteousness, and then you refuse to submit to the law of God, he's never going to get there. But if you carry this out to the full extent of what the Old Testament is trying to get you to see, even though plenty of hints of the gospel are there and plenty of calls to throw yourself on the mercy of God are there. But if you try to do the rules that God has given you, you will realize that when you get to the end of that, you'll be begging for a Christ. You'll be begging for the right arm of the Lord to provide righteousness and salvation for yourself. You'll have to say, I need Christ. That's what the law does. The law brings you to the place of exposing your sin. You see your sin and you say I can't measure up. I need God to do this himself for me.

And "the righteous," dies, "for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God." If you want the righteousness that comes from God? It's found in Christ to all, to everyone, "Jew, Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free," for all those who believe. There's our word, "Pisteuo." All those who put their trust in him, they trust him. So the end, and even the word that's used here in Greek for the end, the end of the law, you get to the end of the law, you want to find righteousness at the end of this. Well, the only place you're going to find it is in Christ. You get to the end of this pathway. Keep the rules. Keep the rules. Keep the rules. What you find is you're done. You can't! And so you get to Christ. And then you need to embrace Christ. You've got to trust him by faith. Then do you know what you're doing in that? You're submitting to righteousness. And that's the hard thing for people to do. Particularly when I say things like this, which is good to say as long as it was 2,000 years ago, you could be dying on a cross next to Christ, you being a complete criminal, condemned to die, trust in Christ, and he'll say to you, "today you'll be with me in paradise." The end of the law for you. You're a lawbreaker, hanging on a cross, being crucified for your sin, trust in Christ and you're good. All that works, and maybe even in your mind, it hurts a little bit, but you put that in modern terms and you talk about somebody like Jeffrey Dahmer or whoever you want to think about, the worst person you can imagine sitting there in prison before he gets killed in prison and he puts his trust in Christ, I know you're going to struggle with that because we all want our righteousness the old-fashioned way. We'd like to earn it, and that's the problem.

Christianity, unlike any other religion in the world, says that's not how this works. The end of the law, right? Do you want to know where this all goes? It's Christ. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. Do you want righteousness? It is in him. That is the gospel, and it's very hard because you can't earn it. And it doesn't matter how good you are. You could be the Apostle Paul, knowing the Old Testament, you know the thirty-nine books, you know all the rabbis and what they wrote. You know so much. You can sit at the feet of Gamaliel and learn all about it. But if you reject Christ, which should be the end of the law, you don't get righteousness. You fall short and you have to be punished. Or you can embrace Christ. How does that happen? What we read about in our Daily Bible Reading, are you keeping up with our Daily Bible Reading? In John Chapter 3, Jesus says something about seeing the kingdom of God. Do you want to get into the kingdom with God, then you got to be righteous. How are



you going to be righteous? You can't be righteous on your own, you can't establish your own righteousness. You need to be, here's the word he used, born again. And Nicodemus' head spun around. And then he rebuked him. Jesus rebukes Nicodemus. He says, how "are you a teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things?" You need a new birth, you need a new start, you need a fresh start. The old you needs to go away, the new you needs to happen.

Now, the reason he condemns him, and I give a pass to a lot of Christians who just read the New Testament and don't know the Old Testament, I get that they don't understand it, but they need to be enlightened by reading the Old Testament and being taught to understand the new covenant promise embedded in the old covenant. Nicodemus should have known that. There are plenty of passages, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel Chapter 11, but let me take you to one in Ezekiel, later in Ezekiel, Ezekiel Chapter 36. Let me just read it for you so that you understand that you need to make sure your heart is transformed. Another way to say that, new birth. How do we say it theologically? Regeneration, right? "Regenos," to be born again, to be born a second time, to have a new start. Your life ends and you get a new life. How does that work? Well, in Second Corinthians 5, we'll get there, "If anybody's in Christ, he's a new creation." What is that? That's just an unpacking of what the Old Testament said the New Covenant promise would be. Look at verse 26. Ezekiel 36:26. Did you find that? Here's what's going to happen in the new covenant to look forward to it. "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh." Now of all that steeped in analogy because you don't have a stone heart. But we're talking about the kardia of your life, the kardia of your life. The interior of your life. That's why this phrase is so carefully drawn up on the screen, transformed heart. The interior of your life needs to change.

There are a lot of people sitting among us with a zeal for God. They think they're Christians because they're conforming to the church community standards. They come into the church. They don't drop F-bombs in the lobby. I just noticed that. I don't usually hear the F-word out there, it's amazing because they are at church. And that's how this often works. People live in a particular way, and they may even take that standard into their workplace, into their homes, and they try to live up to that standard. But their heart has not been transformed. This needs to happen. A new heart. I need a new interior life. Lot of words for that. How about this? New spirit. That's a good way to put it. I'm going to remove your old stuff, put in new stuff, and then, verse 27, here it comes: turbo church, "I will put my Spirit within you." That whole talk about the Spirit's WITH you, but now he's going to be IN you. The whole thing that happened in Acts Chapter 2, something was going to change about what's going to happen with you in the new covenant age where you're going to have the Spirit of God, not just a new spirit, but the Spirit of God within you, and he is going to cause you to "walk in my statutes, and be careful to ... obey my rules." Sorry, college students reading in a round circle, what does this verse mean to you in Romans Chapter 10 verse 4? Christ is not the end of the law in that you don't care about the moral law of God. Of course you care about the moral law of God, because the Spirit who wrote the moral law is now in you, causing you, I love that, causing you to "walk in his statutes, and being careful to obey his rules."



So of course we care about living right. But some of you are defining your Christianity by living right and I'm going to talk particularly to those who grow up in church. I grew up in a church, I knew what it was like to be conforming to a community standard and it was taught from the Bible. And I conform to it and many of you have, and maybe because of your parents, maybe because you went to church from the time you were a little kid, maybe because you wanted to please your Sunday school teacher, your youth pastor, your grandparents, who knows who it was you were trying to please. Maybe you're trying to please yourself because you thought, well, this is the right road and you'll prosper on this road and it'll be good. I mean, just think about God's Word, Psalm 1, and you'll be blessed in all that you do. Whatever your motivation was it was an external conformity to a standard of trying to be righteous. And the problem is your heart was never transformed because this experience had never happened to you.

And when it does happen to you, look at your relationship to the statutes or the rules and the ordinances of God. It's going to have to happen from the inside when you get a new heart, a new spirit, call it whatever you want, new interior life, and the Spirit of God is going to get in there and he's going to push you, he's going to drive you. He's going to woo you, he's going to discipline you, he's going to move you to keep his rules. Perfectly? Never perfectly, you're still living in a sinful body. You're still living in sinful culture. You still got an enemy who is trying to attack you by dispatching his demons into your life. I get all that. You're going to have a lot of opposition. We're all going to "stumble in many ways," but you're going to see something different. Your pursuit of righteousness will no longer be external, it's going to be internal.

And some people who don't know the difference between those two sit here today and unfortunately will hear, "depart from me, I never knew you," because their hearts have never been transformed. Do you catch that? Paul was concerned about that, and he offended people, I'm sure, by having them test themselves to see if they're of the faith. And some people think, well I know what that means, look for fruit. I get it, but some fruit can be plastic. Why is it plastic? Only because you're just trying to conform to whatever your motive is. You need to have this be organic, real, from the inside out. Now I could have said this all simply from the beginning but some people they've heard it from this platform so many times, you have to be changed from not the outside in, but from the inside out. You can't be changed just on the outside. You need your heart rewired. You need a new spirit put within you. You need God's Spirit put within you. And that is dramatic. It's dramatic, not in the sense that you're going to see angels dancing around or hear voices or whatever or roll around on the floor. That's not going to happen. What's going to happen is you know something's going change from within you that's going to say, you know what, you need to do this even if no one knows about it, even if no one sees it. You need to do this because you know you live before an audience of one and God is now within you wanting you, moving you, causing you, drawing you to keep his rules because you know it pleases the Lord. That's different. It's different. And if you're raising kids in the church just make sure they know the difference. Because it's really hard when you grow up in a church. It's really hard when your wife dragged you to church for 10 or 20 years. Please know, it has to be something interior. The Spirit's work written upon the tablet of your heart, if you want to put it in terms of Second Corinthians Chapter 3.



Go back to our passage again in Second Corinthians Chapter 3. Paul definitely is a transformed person from the inside out. No one should argue with that. We see the fruit of it and it's real. Now he says, let's put ourselves in his sandals. He is now creating letters of recommendation about himself by seeing other people's lives change. Now we're thinking about the Corinthians' hearts who are changed. And he's saying, you know, "You show," verse 3, "that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us." That's a great line. I hope you have a few letters from Christ delivered by you. I hope that you can see people who have hearts that are changed, not written with ink, but written by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, not on tablets of parchment, but on tablets of the human heart. Are there people who could look to you and say, yeah, you're the agent that God used to deliver the powerful, life-changing message of the gospel, this "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword," Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 12 reality, this thing that pierces down into the interior of people's lives, divides "the thoughts and intentions of hearts." It convicts me from the inside, this God who we live our lives before, who sees everything bare and naked before him, and he's the one I've got to give an account to, and God starts to work within my life, in the cardo of my life. That reality, yeah, that guy was the messenger of all that. He was a minister of that, as it says later, they came in with this confidence, verse 4, "to be ministers", verse 6, "of a new covenant" message.

I hope that's true of you, and if not, let's just write it down that we'd like it to be. Number two, "Become an Effective Instrument of God's Word." Do you see the subtitle? This is the core of what I'm trying to get to. I want the Bible to use you this week, this month, this year, maybe this afternoon, so that you become an agent of the message. You become an instrument of this gospel. You start to be someone who delivers a biblical message to the world around you. I know you think that's hard. And in fact, it may be costly, but it's not that hard. If you have a changed heart it just means you being authentically you everywhere you go. And by you, I don't mean your fleshly you, I mean your spiritual you, I mean that you have your distinctive life on display. Let me quote a passage I know you know, Matthew Chapter 5, you can jot down the reference, verses 13 through 16. He first talks about salt, and he says you're salt, and if you're salt, you should be salty. You should be able to put a grain of your life on someone's tongue, so to speak, and they know it's not a grain of sand. That your life is distinctive because he says if the salt no longer is salty, what's it good for? "Good for nothing except to be thrown out and men trample it underfoot." It's good for nothing. That's a sad commentary to get from your Father.

And then he says, it's like light. Let me just use another analogy. Jesus says you're like light, "You're the light of the world." Like a city set on a hill, it "can't be hidden" at nighttime. If you're going toward an ancient city you can see it, all the torches, the torches on the wall if it happens to be a walled city, the villages, they have their torches in the walkways between all the houses and all the merchants that have been shutting down. Oh, you can do it, you can go, no one has to give you a map. You can just walk toward the light and you'll see it. Then he gets into the domestic areas. It's like a lamp, like an oil lamp. You have an oil, lamp. Right? You just put it on a stand so everyone can see it. You don't put a bucket over the top of it. Why would anyone put a bucket over a lamp? Your lamp is supposed to shine. So "let your



light shine before others," still in the analogy, but here I'll become very concrete, "that they may see your," what are the next two words? "Good works." For what goal? For the same goal we're talking about in our passage, that they might be transformed one day because your distinctive lifestyle was clearly distinctive. That's the first step. Don't get too excited, because there's more to it than that. But that's the first step. "That they may see your good works and," then one day they will, "give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Now, sometimes your distinctive rule-keeping, ethical, high moral ground that you have at work is not seen as something they go, oh, let me applaud the Lord for that. They don't even know the Lord. But it's a first step, is it not? They see your distinctive life.

When I used to play golf before my arthritis got so bad, it was too painful, not worth it. I used to go out there and play golf. Sometimes I would go to the golf course and they'd pair me up with three guys I didn't know. And about the fourth hole, that's always when they say, "So what do you do for a living?" I think, oh my goodness. Here we go. I know it's coming, right? How do you hide it? You don't want to lie, after all, I'm a pastor, so I don't want to lie to you. But I hate to ruin this round of golf. So sometimes I used to say, "I'm an ecclesiologist," (audience laughing) just to see if they would leave that alone. Because I am an ecclesiologist, but they don't know what the word means. So sometimes I just see how that landed. One of them was honest enough to ask, "Well what does that mean?" I reluctantly say, "Oh, a pastor." What? "I'm a pastor of a church. I preach the Bible." They respond, "Oh, you're a man of the cloth. Oh, yeah." They have no clue what that means, right? They say, "Oh, you're a parson. You're like a clergyman. Wow." And what's interesting about that, when we're on the fourth tee-box talking about our professions I've just spent three holes with them, listening to them curse and cuss and tell their bad jokes. And now two things happen. Sometimes they start saying, "Oh, sorry, sorry Parson." And they'll start saying, "I hope we haven't offended you by our colorful language. Pardon my French." They say all those kinds of things to me. But every now and then one of them who's been participating fully in all the off-color jokes and yelling all the profanity will say, "Oh, I'm a Christian too, man. My uncle was a pastor. I go to... I go to a church here in Dana Point." And my thought is, well, there's been no sign of that in the first three holes. (audience laughing) I've had no hints of that here. What you need is a distinctive life that you don't put on when you come into the lobby. You need a life that is distinctive every single day of the week.

Turn with me to Ephesians Chapter 5 real quick. Your job is to be like Christ everywhere you go. Who wasn't laughing at off-color jokes. He wasn't entertained by the stuff that the people of this world are entertained by. He wasn't using the profanity, the vulgarity of his generation. He was very different than that. Look at verse 1 of Ephesians Chapter 5. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." You know, there's a word for that in Christian vocabulary. We call it being godly, that adverb, godly. What does that mean? You're imitators of God. What would God do? Now, of course, the incarnate God, that's easy, we can point to Christ and try and imagine it. I'd like to do what Christ..., I don't think Christ would be snickering at what he just heard. I don't think he would be joining in with everyone else on their sin. They'd be known for verse 2, "Walking in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God," making sure he's always thinking vertically. What does God think? Just as we said last week, living our lives before God. The things that wouldn't be a part of it:



"sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness", wouldn't even be named among the saints, the Christians who are living like God. "There'd be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking." They're out of place. "Instead, they'd be known for giving thanks."

If I went to your workplace, number one, and just said, are they Christians? Well, I'm not sure. I would hope everyone in your workplace would say, yeah, yeah, we hear about it all the time. Yeah, they're Christians. And then if I said, what are they known for? It'd be amazing if they said, always giving thanks to God for stuff. Really annoying. Well that's what you're supposed to be known for and that you're not laughing along with everyone else. "You may be sure of this, that everyone who's sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous, (that is an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Covetousness, by the by, that's what most people are chasing for when they go to work. That's what they want. They're covetous. They want all the stuff. They want to be able to buy the big house and travel in style. All of that. Nothing wrong with that. If you can give me a first-class ticket, I'm going to use it. But if that's my whole ambition in life, then I'm an idolater. I have "no inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ." That's not what a Christian does. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." You're not a son of disobedience. But you can "not be partners with them," verse 7, for at one time you were darkness, but now you're light in the Lord."

If you don't think Paul has in mind the words of Christ and the Beatitudes here, he does. The idea, not just the Beatitudes, but the Sermon on the Mount, he does. This concept of light. You're supposed to be light. Walk as children of light. Live that way. Verse 9, "(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)." It would be good for you to meditate on that tomorrow morning before you go to work. What is it that it would be good and right and true, "and try to discern what's pleasing to the Lord." Sit down and think and pray and ask God what would please you here. How can I live for you at work? "Take no part in the unfruitful deeds of darkness," which, by the way, that first phrase in verse 11 summarizes the whole first ten verses.

And if I stopped at distinctive living, some of you would be okay. You'd still be breathing, like, okay, I can do this. But the next line in verse 11 shifts the whole emphasis here from living distinctively to speaking words of life. "Instead expose" the unfruitful works of darkness. That means when your co-workers are chasing the dream like everyone else, you're saying it ain't about that. You know, I read this book called Ecclesiastes, and it really isn't going to do what you think it's going to do. Or your weekend parties you're talking about, or the affair you're discussing, you know, that's really not..., it's not going to..., you're going to expose the unfruitful deeds. It's not going to do what you think it's going to do. As a matter of fact, it's going to pile up wrath for you on the day of God's judgment. "It's shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light," your job is not just to shine and let people see your distinctive behavior, your good works, your job as light is to expose the dark. To expose things that are hidden in the crevices. Expose them. "Anything that's exposed by light, becomes visible," and that's the part they don't like. According to John Chapter 3, we just read it, people don't want to come into the light because their deeds will be exposed. That's the problem, that's a hard job. "Anything that becomes visible is light."



Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" Now, there's a good line right there. They'll probably think you're from the mid-ages if you just quote this verbatim to your non-Christian coworkers. But this is the goal. Not only a distinctive life, but a message that says, you got to stop being who you are. You got to stop, you need a new heart. Wake up, O sleeper, you're dead in your transgressions. You need Christ to shine on you, you need Christ.

I just wonder, how many of your coworkers, if I went to your office today and said, do they know you're a Christian? Let's just pass that, I hope they'd say yes. Do they live a distinctive life, are they different? I hope that they'd say yes. And if I said, have they talked to you about Christ? I hope they'd say yes. And if you're just barely making it through the most receptive, it's time at least to say, this is my job, to be an agent of God's truth in my generation, in my sphere of influence. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead." It's not an invitation. This is a command. Christ will shine on you. "Look carefully then how you walk," as you live, "not as unwise but as wise." And you know what a wise person does, verse 16, "Making the best use of the "Kairos." I've made the distinction for you, haven't I, between kairos and "Kronos? Kronos is just days that flip by 24 hours every day. It's the ticks of the seconds on a clock. Kairos can be translated "opportunity," making most of the time. And by that, I'm not thinking about the next 24 hours. I'm thinking about when is the next window of opportunity. It may not be in a board meeting. It may be in the lunchroom. It may not be this week. It may be at next week's company picnic. But there are times and opportunities for you to do what this text says, and that is to expose the unfruitfulness of a non-Christian life. You know what it was like. I hope you do. "Make the best use of the time, because the days are evil." There may not be as many opportunities now as there might have been in the 1950s, but you better find them.

"Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Do you understand what the will of the Lord is as it relates to light? Light shines a distinctive life, and light exposes the folly of living as a non-Christian that we need to see our sin for what it is and find our righteousness in Christ. Become an effective instrument of God's Word. I need you to display that life that's different, and I need to speak words of light. I love that in John 6:63. This is a good verse. John 6:63, Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." I love that, the words that I've spoken that now, praise God, are recorded for us. They're encoded on that little piece of silicon inside your phone. You can pull it up and read it to someone at lunch this week. Here are the words of life, and I love it in verse 66, the disciples, right after this whole "bread of life" thing, they were done, and they turned, and they no longer followed him. And then he turns to his apostles. He says, hey, guys, are you going to leave me, too? And I love that. In verse 68, here is Simon Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" I mean, you, you are the only one. You're the one who "has the words of life." Where else are we going to go? Now, who is sufficient for these things? Christ is sufficient with these things. But he's made you sufficient for the same thing, the very same thing. Who else in your office are people going to? Who else on your kid's little league team are the parents going to do to find the words of life? Who else? You could be the only person.



But you did read Elijah's story this week in the Daily Bible Reading also, 1 Kings. He thought he was the only one. I mean, he cried on God's shoulders, so to speak. Oh, I'm the only one, the last prophet. And God says, yeah, there are 7,000 I have in this place who haven't bowed the knee to Baal. It's funny how that happened. I remember being in Long Beach Community College, City College. I was there taking a summer class to get some college credits. And I was in this speech class of all classes. Mike Fabarez in a speech class. So I'm in the speech class, and you get to have to do three speeches. One's like two minutes, one's like five minutes, and one's like 15 minutes. And so I, and he said, you can only do one on politics or religion. So I was like, okay, I'm going to use the last one on religion because it's the longest one I got. I was doing so well in this class before that last speech. And I was taking notes the whole way through because my professor was about as liberal and godless and anti-Christian as a professor can get. I found some more at the university when I went on to the university. But this guy, wow. So I gave it all I had in my 15 minutes. I'd spoken about all the dumb things in the two minute and five minute, but here I was 15 minutes and I gave the speech.

Let me just put it this way, I didn't fail the class, but I didn't get a good grade in my speech class. And I don't think it was because of my delivery. I know it was about the content. And what was amazing is I felt a little bit like Elijah that day, getting up and talking about Christianity, defending the Christian faith in light of the things I'd heard in the class. And you know what happened after I did that? I had all kinds of Christians crawling out from underneath the rocks, taking their light, taking the bucket off their light whispering, "I'm a Christian, too. I'm so glad you said all of that." I don't mean to say where else are they going to go, there may be someone else, but you know what it takes often? Someone like you, with the courage to say, I want God's Word to use me in this place, among this group, on this block, in this workplace. And once you do you might find there are a few undercover Christians who come out from underneath the rocks who say I'm with you on this. It's amazing what you could do. God can do some big things if you just have the courage to say I'd like to please God, not watering it down, not being peddlers of the Word, but giving them the truth that there are unfruitful ways to live that end in death. And then there's a way to live, it's not very popular, but it ends in life. It's the way you're supposed to live. God's Word is powerful, "sharper, active than any two-edged sword." We just need to wield it with a little bit of courage.

Verse 4, are you still in this passage, verse 4? "Such is the confidence that we have," through Christ, "toward God." And I see this for Paul and Timothy, I wish it were true of us. I hope you feel confident. Some people might say, "Well, wait a minute. I learned in the last chapter who's sufficient for these things. That's a rhetorical question. None of us." And yet Paul says, yeah, it's not about us, verse 5. "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us." But you are carrying the grenade of the gospel. You have it and "our sufficiency is from God." And now we have 27 installments of this new covenant message and you can wield it tomorrow. You can say something about it today. And God "makes us sufficient as ministers," as those who relay it, a conduit of that. "Not of the letter but of the Spirit." The letter, it'll bring people to realize they're sinners, but it's the Spirit that gives life and hope and peace. The words of life. Number three, you need to "Be Confident in God's Power to Transform Lives." You need to be confident in God's power to transform lives. I don't



want you to be confident because you're a wonderfully articulate person and we've already learned that. What does God do? We saw it last week. He takes people like Moses who say I can't speak well, I'm not very fluent. God says, "I'll be with you." David, he's a little runt out there. He's not even called to the party. God says, "I'll be with you." Jeremiah, I am too young. I can't do this. This is for the older people in the congregation. God says, "I'll be with you." Gideon, I'm weak. God says, "I'll be with you."

It's all over the Bible. God will be with his Word. It will go forth through you and accomplish what God intends it to accomplish. It will not return to him void. You just need to throw the grenade. In World War II, a lot of people's lives were saved through the people sending messages through the Morris Code. And no one got a message through Morris Code and said, man, that was a fabulous delivery. Nobody said that. "Dot-dash-dash-dot-dot-dot-dash-dot." No one said, man, that guy's so good with words. Nobody said that. It saved lives as the allied forces communicated truth to each other about the reality of what's going on on the ground. No one really cared about the messenger. Ultimately it was about the message. The message could save lives. I don't care if a 320-pounds, six-foot-nine muscle man throws a grenade at me or if some 80-pound 95-year-old grandma throws a grenade at me. I'm going to respond exactly the same. I'm going to throw it back. (audience laughing) What's the point though? Jesus says you have the seed of the Word. God's the one who prepares the soil. Your job is just to throw the Word, get it out there. The power is in the message. The power is in the words of life. The power is in you relating that the end of the law is Christ and his righteousness. Submit to the righteousness of God. He's provided it through his own Son.

Who is sufficient for these things? You are in Christ because God's Word resides as an app on your phone. Because you have a book called the Bible, you probably have multiple copies, and you could probably give one to your co-worker and say, let's just read the book of Luke together and talk about what you're reading. If you get someone in the sphere and influence of the Word of God, they're messing with a sharp sword, they are going to get cut, or they're going to throw it away. Your job is to present it. I want you individually to think that way. And then I'd like you to think corporately like the Thessalonian church. First Thessalonians Chapter 1 verses 6 through 8, Paul is bragging on this church. And he says you guys have become an example to all the believers all throughout Macedonia and Achaia, where our Gap Year students are right now. You are changing this whole region in Greece. Not only has the Word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that I don't even need to say anything. I don't need to talk about it. Everyone's talking about your influence. That's amazing. Do you know what we could do as a church? If we just continued to get the Word out there, uncompromising, not peddling it, and by God's grace, it's already starting to happen. It ain't big, it ain't big, I mean, it hasn't been written up in any big articles or anything, but you know, there are two churches we've announced recently, one in Long Beach and one in South Treasure Valley that we really didn't lift a finger for. You know that, right? We invested in those churches, and those churches that we invested in are now investing in other churches. And this whole model that we presented has only happened because of this congregation in Orange County, California. Humanly speaking, it was this church that sacrificed millions of dollars to start churches in Texas, in Guatemala, in Idaho, in Huntington Beach, in Tustin. This is the church where the



Word of God is sounding for it. It's ringing out. And we just need to say what could God do if we just thought a little bit bigger about all this? About your influence, what could you do? What could our church do?

Let me just turn to you one last passage, Ephesians Chapter 3. Paul's going to talk about some very practical things in Chapter 4, and of course we just read much of Chapter 5, but in Chapter 3 he's ending this doctrinal section with what's called a doxology. We call that rhetorically a doxology. It comes from the word "Doxa," which means to "glorify" or to "praise." And he's praising God. Here's the doxology part. "Now to him who is able," to God, we're praising God, we're glorifying God, doxa. "To him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we could ask or think." Can I just raise your expectations a little bit? One church with the Word of God, one Christian with the Word of God, one movement with the Word of God can do far more abundantly than anything you could pray for this week. Pastor Lucas is inviting you to a prayer meeting, we need to pray, pray big. You need to pray big, bigger than you pray right now. What could God do through us corporately? What could God do through you in your sphere of influence? "Far more abundantly than we could ever ask or think according to the power at work within us." Now that's where we get back to the first point. Is that power already working in you? Do you know that God has transformed your heart? And if so, are we passing this on faithfully as good ambassadors, good stewards of a message? And if we are, man, the impact we could make. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus," I love this, "throughout all generations."

Now, how many generations are there going to be? Well, I don't know, I think anybody there thought about the 21st century very much, maybe a few, but here we are in the 21st century of Christians on the other side of the planet. Who would ever think that on some unknown continent on the other side of the planet, we'd be sitting here with a church filled with people who want to hear the Word of God. At the very least, let's get people here. I mean, you read that this week in the Daily Bible Reading in John Chapter 1, you know, Philip's and Nathaniel's conversation. Come and see, come check it out where the Word is read, where the Word is described and explained and interpreted and expositied. Get them in the building. Let's make this place full at every service and full in the lobby. And so that we'd be forced to get back to planning churches again organically from us. We're just trying to recover financially from all the other church plants. But we could do more! This South County could be radically transformed more than you could ever imagine. Throughout all, I love this, "glory in the church" because of this "power that work within us." "And in Christ," obviously, that's the message we're putting "throughout all generations forever and ever."

Spurgeon was once asked, what's the secret to your massively fruitful ministry? And the story is told that he took them down into the basement of the church there in London where the boiler was, the heater for the sanctuary and he said it's here. And they thought, a boiler? He said, no, no. This is where we meet to pray for the preaching of the Word. Do you understand what we have in the pulpit? What you have in your pocket? What you have in your mind as you memorize Scripture are the words of life. They are powerful, they change people.



1,638 years ago, 1,638 years ago there was a man a lot like a lot of college men sitting in a backyard in Milan on the other side of the world and he was considering his life, which is a lot like a lot of graduate students: partying, living with his girlfriend, drinking, drunkard, just all of that. But brilliant, getting his education, going about his business. He heard some kids playing in the next yard. He didn't even know that there were kids next door. But he heard them saying, apparently, what was some kind of childhood chant back then. Take up and read, take up and read, take up and read, take up and read. He took it as a cue from God. He was kind of at the place of Ecclesiastes, like, what is my life all about? And he writes about this time as he sat there, and not far from him was one of his best friends. And his best friend had the epistles of Paul there with him. This is in the fourth century. And he took this as a reason to get up, he walked over, he picked up the epistles of Paul from his friend, and he said I'm going to pick it up and read it. He opened it up, didn't know where he was going, it just plopped it open, to Romans Chapter 13 verses 13 and 14, and here's what he read, 1,638 years ago, here's what he read. "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality." That hit him like a punch in the face. And then here it is. Do you want the gospel in a short little line, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desire." That one verse, verse 14 of Romans Chapter 13, cut him to the heart. And he said this life I'm living is a mess.

And this bright young student, this bright young thinker, his name was Augustine, he changed the world. I just wonder, had God had a willing person bring the Word to Augustine, had we have had to have some neighbor kids chant some nursery rhyme to get him to pick up the Bible? Augustine, one of the brightest theologians the Church has ever seen, maybe for the next what, thousand years, who knows? Here he was shaping not only the Church and clarifying its theology, but shaping Western civilization. He writes about this whole scene. If you want to read about it, you can go to his Confessions, popularizing the whole format of an autobiography. Augustine, this bright mind was used by God tremendously in the lives of many, many, many, people down to my life and a lot of people in this room who have read him because the Word of God changed him. I just wonder if you could get someone to read one or two verses of the Bible and think about it this week. Maybe the soil is prepared. We need to be ready first by making sure we're real Christians. Internal, genuine transformation, and then a willingness to deploy it. Even if it just starts with come and hear the Bible taught. Let's read the Bible together. Let's think about your life and see if we can't talk about the narrow road. Let's confidently trust, not in our own sufficiency, but in the power of a clearly faithfully shared message.

Let's pray. God, help us in our day with all the trouble in our culture and all this pushback, and we think the day of revivals and the awakening is over, and if that was for Whitfield and the Wesley brothers and Edwards, it's not for us today, it's really dark today. God, so many times you have used one Christian and one church to start a massive movement of people who are just willing to share the unadulterated, unwatered down, unmanipulated text of Scripture, the truth of the gospel. Saying we're not going to sit here and chase some system that tries to establish a righteousness of its own, but we're submitting to the righteousness of God. Our hope is only in Christ. It's about the gospel of grace. Please help us to be faithful and bold. You haven't given us a spirit of timidity, you've given us the spirit of power, a sound mind,



discipline. So help us God even today to begin with a resolve, first of all knowing beyond any doubt that you have transformed us from the inside out, not just the outside to some standard of community ethics, but we really know that you've invaded our hearts and then saying I just want to see that replicated in more people. Give us that heart today that we might be useful and faithful stewards in your hands.

In Jesus' name. Amen.