

# A Conversation with Don Green

By Don Green

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Nathaniel Pringle. Well, good evening. So good to see everyone here tonight. As Andrew mentioned, it's a little bit different format. We'll have the opportunity to do a little bit of Q&A and interview this evening. As I was thinking about what we're about to embark on, the passage from Titus 2:1 came to mind where Paul tells Titus, "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine," and then, of course, he goes on and gives Titus some direction for teaching those in the church and what we're doing this evening with the question and answer time is just an opportunity to continue to flesh that out.

It was thrilling to receive the number of responses in the questions that we received and very encouraging just to know that our body is filled with people, I mean we knew it already, but we got to see it tangibly, filled with people who desire to see God honored in the way that they live their lives and had a lot of questions about those things. So just to kind of frame our expectations for this evening, we did get so many questions that we had to kind of go through and we're taking a cross section of those questions, and some questions won't be addressed tonight just because we know we don't have the time to do that but we'll plan to address those in the near future. So we're really looking forward to that as well.

But without further ado, I'll ask Don to join me on the stage. And Don, I'm really glad that you're back in town. Good to have you back here tonight.

Don Green. Is that so you won't have to preach on Sunday?

Nathaniel. Yes. I'll have a break. That'll be nice.

Don. It's good to be back. You know, I've been gone a lot since June. I've been in multiple regions of the country with churches smaller than ours, bigger than ours, and just kind of getting a taste of what's happening out there with basically like-minded men. But I'm glad to be home. This is where I want to be.

Nathaniel. Amen. We're glad to have you. Anything that you've seen in your time away just, you know, you've been in different regions of the country over the last few months and you mentioned in those different churches, but any observations or points of encouragement or whatever for the church here?

Don. You know, one of the things that just stood out to me as I've been with several of these faithful pastors, is just how important it is for us to stay together and to stick together as men in ministry across different regions because, you know, they're facing the same kinds of difficulties and struggles that we are. They have church discipline things in their churches and, you know, dealing with their own private sorrows and things like that. And there's just such a shrinking number of faithful men, really, that we're like-minded with and so, you know, we just want to stick together with them. So I'm hoping that some of them can come and be here and we can kind of exchange pulpits that way and stand with each other, you know, in the days to come. You know, the days are evil and, you know, when we have friends, we want to stand with them.

Nathaniel. That's right, excellent, thank you. Are you ready to dive into the questions that have come in here?

Don. Yeah, I brought a couple of notes up here, but I know you'll throw me curve balls and say, well, these notes didn't matter, but...

Nathaniel. My last words before we came up were, you're gonna love the questions you know nothing about. I was just kidding. Well, let's go ahead and dive in again. We had just so many good questions, but we'll start with taking a question that relates to some of the teaching you've done recently. The last couple Tuesdays, you've encouraged us, taught us about the Christian's influence from Matthew 5:13 through 16 and, you know, within that context, a broad segment, I guess you could say, of cultural Christianity assume that the church needs to be politically active and you helped us understand that our influence is rooted in the character that is defined in the Beatitudes. But can you expand on that a little bit for us? What is the Christian's influence as it relates to politics? How can we as individuals, should we as individuals be active? But just if you could expand on that and that'd be great.

Don. Yeah, I think the key thing to remember is that, you know, it's a collective "you" that Jesus is expressing in Matthew 5:13 to 16. It's a plural "you," and when we talk about politics and government and all of that, is to distinguish between the mission of the church and what individuals do privately. I was having an interaction with a man. He's outwardly, I mean he's theistic at least, but I don't know where his true spiritual convictions are, but he's involved in politics. I think that's great. If a Christian has opportunity in politics, that's what they want to pursue, that's one thing. If Christians are engaged in voting, that's good salt on on the earth, but that's different from what I was really addressing in those messages to talk about the mission of the church and what the church should be doing. The church is not an arm of another political party. The church has a spiritual mission to make disciples of Christ, to preach the gospel, and you don't do that through politics and it's a real confusion of the gospel if you try to blend politics and the mission of the church.

And so when I was preaching from that passage, the point was, you know, this is the mission of the church and even, you know, going a step further, it's a, you know, politics is not the mission of the church, that's one thing. And second thing is that the influence of

the church is not found in politics either. The influence as Jesus defined it. I mean, I'm just saying what Jesus said, that's all, and it doesn't bother me that it may sound different than what we're used to hearing from other people. The politics is not the source of our influence. That's not the means through which the influence is exercised. It's through the character, as Jesus explained in the Beatitudes, that poor in spirit, mourning over sin, character that desires God, that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, that's the source of our influence that makes us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Nothing political. And, you know, I mean, I was a political science major in my undergraduate days, I still have, passing interests in politics, so I kind of watch what happens in things, but even the conservative politicians are a spiritual embarrassment. There's that congresswoman from Colorado who's parading her divorce and was found in movie theaters doing inappropriate behaviors that she had to apologize for, and yet she's conservative. Well, we don't want to align ourselves with that and think that, you know, we're going to join forces with people like that. They're not stable spiritually, at the very least, you can say, and so we just want to keep in mind why the church exists. That's what my concern is as a pastor, why does the church exist and how do we further our influence through what Christ has appointed? You know, and our goal is to present every man complete in Christ. Colossians 1:28. not to try to pull the levers of Caesar's government. That never goes well when the church gets too involved in politics, and it's not even effective long-term politically. Those of us that are old enough to remember Jerry Falwell and the moral majority, that kind of hit the rocks as soon as Bill Clinton came onto the scene just within a decade. And so it's all passing, shifting, and we're not dealing with regenerate people predominantly in politics, and so we just have to accept the fact that this world is not our home, that politics is not the source of our influence, it's not our mission, and to focus on what Christ gave to us and we want to follow him as Lord, not try to rearrange the deck chairs on the political Titanic.

Nathaniel. So, you know, just...

Don. But if people want to, I mean, you know, I encourage people to vote their convictions and, you know, I'll probably vote my convictions if, as time allows and all of that, you know, we should be involved in the political process in that way, but not to pin our hopes on it and not to make that our top priority. It's not our top priority.

Nathaniel. So as Christians and thinking about even the state of our country, be involved as we can as individuals but, you know, should we anticipate that, you know, America as a Christian nation, it's going to get better and better?

Don. Well, if you want to think that, I mean, I guess you can, but Scripture says that evil men are going to proceed from bad to worse and, you know, we have a lot of evil men in leadership in our country. That's to be expected. And, you know, the wrath of God is manifested against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and there is absolutely no reason to think that there's anything other than the wrath of God abiding upon our country. And the answer to that is not a bigger Republican majority in Congress, the answer to that is revival from the Spirit of God through the preaching of the word of God to the conversion of sinners far and wide and what we need is a sweeping revival of the

Holy Spirit to fall down upon us, not to gain control of the Senate. I mean, honestly, my friends, honestly, you know, we just need to set our affections higher and have a higher view of the kingdom of God than what the political view of things leads us to think.

Nathaniel. I love Romans 1, you know, it enumerates our society straight through, right through the end of the chapter.

Don. Yeah, and in the context of Romans 1, what is In the full context of Romans 1, what is the answer to Romans 1:18, through chapter 3, verse 20? What is the answer? Paul says he's eager to go to Rome, not so that he can get a hold of Caesar's household and talk about the different cabinets of government. Paul says, I'm eager to go to Rome because I want to preach the gospel there. And then he goes on and he explains in the subsequent 11 chapters what the gospel is that he's going to proclaim and you're not going to find politics anywhere in that. It's justification by faith, sanctification as a result of that, the security of the believer as a result of that, and this just does not fit with the paradigm that's being peddled to us by other segments of Christianity.

Nathaniel. And just to circle right back around, that's...

Don. I'm sorry, I'm not more clear about these things.

Nathaniel. The call of the church is to protect the confession of Christ, according to 1 Timothy 3.

Don. Yeah, you know, when you go to the pastoral epistles, the church is the pillar in support of the truth. You know, and Jesus said three times, three times in John, I think it's 18, you know, he speaks about "my kingdom," but he said, you know, he makes it plain "my kingdom is not of this world," and as he was speaking to Pilate, you know, he's a king but his kingdom is not of this world, and it's just a reversal of the order of redemption to turn the gospel and the kingdom of Christ into something that is preeminently a political enterprise. It's traitorous, it's treasonous, I should say, against the gospel we've been entrusted with.

Nathaniel. Amen. Well, I think that's a good segue to the next question as well, the question that's raised often about our philosophy of ministry here at Truth Community Church, and we love to talk about our philosophy of ministry, why we do what we do, in order to carry out the instructions of the gospels, the pastoral epistles, and to do that in a biblical way. And one of the questions addressed that specifically and raised the question that you spent a number of years at Grace Community Church.

Don. Yeah, I was there 20 years.

Nathaniel. That's a lot of years, two decades. And at Grace there's a number of maybe traditional ministry programs that were used there and at TCC we approach things a bit differently when it comes to programs.

Don. We approach things a lot differently. Just speak the truth.

Nathaniel. All right. All right. I'll try to be more clear. Thank you. So can you clearly address that for us, address the distinction, the thinking behind our philosophy, why are we doing what we do?

Don. Why are we not more like Grace Community Church when the pastor of Truth Community Church came from Grace Community Church?

Nathaniel. Well said.

Don. Yeah, I mean that's, you know, it is a common question and, you know, I'm not going to duck it. I'm just not going to duck it. I love Grace Community Church. I always will. I have many friends there. Some of my best lifetime friends are in the highest levels of leadership there. I wrote a book about John MacArthur. John MacArthur has spoken here many times, and so there should never be any sense of question about my personal love and loyalty and, you know, and relationships with those men. I would lay my life down for them, you know, especially those that have been in lay leadership there for a long time. I would lay my life down for them and consider it a privilege to do so. I'm going to be out there next week for a Grace to You board meeting. So all of that just to say that no one should ever question my qualifications as someone who's supportive of Grace Community Church. Full stop. I don't want any wedge to be possibly in anyone's mind about that. There is no space between us. But having said that, you know, I have another role here as a pastor and I have a different authority as a pastor, and we as elders and we as a church, there's a different authority. Listen, what happens at another church with different resources and a different history 2,000 miles away is not the authority for our philosophy of ministry. You know, Grace, you know, we've been in existence for 12 years, you know, roughly, not even that, and as a church, less than that. This is a problem with Q&As. You start thinking about a lot of things you want to say all at once and it short circuits the brain. Grace Community Church has 25 times the number of people that we do. Their budget and their revenue is probably 20, 25 times what ours is. Their history goes back 65 years compared to ours. And it's not a legitimate comparison to put a newer church side by side with that and say why aren't you like them? I mean, just on a human level and a resource level, that's not a good comparison. It's not a clear thinking comparison. And besides that, Grace Community Church has John MacArthur, and we've got, you know, you and me, and a couple other guys. You know, I mean, this isn't even fair. You know, we're bringing a plastic fork to a gunfight, you know, if you think about it in those crass terms. Grace Community Church and what they do is not the authority for us. Scripture is. And what does Scripture say about philosophy of ministry? What does Scripture say about the early church? And what does it describe in the early church doing? Acts 2:42, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And however poorly we do it, we do that. That's our philosophy of ministry. And it's simple. It's clear, it's direct, and it's simple. And it's done that by design. And I believe, and our elders believe, it's not just the opinion of one pastor, our elders as a board believe that the Bible points us to simplicity in ministry, not complexity. I was with, in North Carolina this past week, I was with the other speaker

was a man named Dr. Ian Hamilton, who's the president of a Presbyterian Seminary in England. And he was like-minded. He's been a pastor for decades. He said, you know, we have our Sunday services. We have midweek. We visit people. We pray. That's ministry. And, you know, I could have hugged him when he said words to that effect. And am I saying too much?

Nathaniel. No, this is good. Please keep on.

Don. Okay. I think it helps to be clear even if it seems a little bit controversial when you say it. Two things. One, I recognize fully that people will come here perhaps drawn by the preaching, thinking they want a certain kind of preaching, but when they don't see all the programs that they're used to and, you know, vacation Bible school and separate women's ministry and separate youth ministry and separate children's ministry and big music ministries and all of that, I realize fully that when people come in, drawn by the preaching, but carrying those expectations that that's what a church should do, I realize that a lot of people are going to do a U-turn and go away. I'm okay with that. You know what? Because I know that they're going to, they're perfectly capable of finding churches that will provide that for them. I don't mean this to be as derogatory as it sounds, but churches like that are a dime a dozen. I mean, this is the whole reason that I'm doing the series that many people have appreciated, some haven't, called "Building a Christian Mind." This is the predominant mindset, all of this program-driven stuff, and I'm not talking about Grace Community Church here, I'm speaking broadly. I've already vindicated my love for Grace Church and I will never say a critical word publicly about Grace Community Church. We might as well go home if that's what people are hoping I'll do. That's not it. But the predominant mindset in churches is we've got to do this and we've got to preach in a certain soft way in order to get as many people as possible in. Well, look where that's led us. Look where that has led the church and look at where it's led society in the vacuum of spiritual leadership and the vacuum of spiritual teaching. Churches with a lot of programs are a dime a dozen and their proliferation has not done much to advance the kingdom of God as evidenced by what's all around us. And so I do not feel beholden and our elders do not feel beholden to what is basically you know, speaking broadly, a failed model of ministry. So why would we want to do what everybody else is doing when it's proven to be, you know, superficial and broadly ineffective? And so the criticism that we're not doing what other churches do doesn't affect me and I want people to come, I want people to stay, but if they leave because we don't give them what they want, that's the way it goes. That's one of the prices of what we do. You know, what I would encourage people to do that come in and we talk with people. I realize I'm rambling here, but that's one of the things about a Q&A. You know, we encourage people to wait for membership. We tell people, wait a year. Give it a lot of time to get to know us. Because what we want, we want people to know us before they join with us. And also, we want to see on our end, you know, the people are willing to come in and say, "I want to support what you do," rather than bringing an agenda for you to change what you do in accordance with what my presuppositions are as someone relatively new to the church. And we are who we are, we know why we are what we are, and that's the direction we're going. That's leadership. And truth, not the church, but the principle of truth isn't evaluated by counting noses or saying what the other guy does. I

Corinthians 1, Paul rebuked the division in Corinth, "I am of Cephas. I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Christ." He says, "Well, you know, were any of these guys crucified for you? Was Paul crucified for you?" You know, and so we don't line ourselves up after men. We look, we do our best to come to Scripture to understand what we believe it to say, and then in all of our imperfection and weakness and failure, we try to aim ourselves after what we understand the word of God to say and obey it. And, you know, the next verse you find in Scripture that authorizes a youth pastor will be the first one that's found, and I just use that as an example. And yet this is so, you know, in so many churches, that's so assumed that you'd have a youth pastor that no one even stops to say, where do you find a youth pastor in the Bible? Well, it's not there. You know, the pastor is the pastor of the youth. And yeah, so I get, you know, we've come by our position honestly and we just want to be faithful to it.

Nathaniel. And just to expand it a little bit here, would you say that looking at church history, that the programs that have been introduced into church ministry broadly are a relatively new invention that arose out of deviant theology?

Don. Sure. Yeah, I would say that. Well, you obviously have things in mind that prompt you to ask that. Why don't you kind of expand on your own, answer your own question and expand on your own thought there.

Nathaniel. I put myself in hot water.

Don. Well, that bounced off me and stuck on you.

Nathaniel. When I think of the programs and the dividing up of families when they walk in the door to church and the need for every felt need to be met by special interest programs in the church, I just think of decisionalism that we're trying to please everybody and get them to follow God in a manipulative way versus the central preaching of the word of God to the entire church, young and old together. Broken homes, broken lives, what they need is the preaching of the word, not a special interest group.

Don. Yeah, that's definitely true. And, you know, we are, without apology, a pulpit-driven ministry, not a program-driven ministry, because we believe that the word of God is what he uses to change lives and to strengthen his people and to convert the lost, and because that's our conviction, we can't do anything other than be focused on the pulpit. And a lot of times, you know, less is more. Less is more. If you dilute the focus on the pulpit by keeping people so very busy doing all kinds of other stuff, the word gets lost in the shuffle and it just becomes one more thing that we do among many, many other things. And the other thing that I would say, and not every church you know, follows this, even that's like-minded and it saddens me when I preach in a church like this and, you know, they take the kids out and then just let the, you know, and you're just preaching to the adults. I don't want that. I want the kids to be under the word of God. And in our church, you know, my series on youth ministry philosophy, if people haven't listened to that, they really should hear that because that's really central and foundational to everything that we're saying, our philosophy of youth ministry is to have the youth be a

part of the ministry. That's it, you know? And I like the fact that our children, the children of our families can come here and they can have a direct personal access to a guy like Dr. Andrew Snelling and they can see what it's like to have a man like him love them and take interest in their questions and explain things to them. Well, if we had a different philosophy of ministry that separated them out, they'd never even get to know him and that would be a travesty. That would be a great, great loss. And I wish even more of the families that do identify with this would take advantage of the fullness of that opportunity. But we believe that the unity of church is expressed in part by multi-generational relationships where children are as welcome as senior saints in the services, and that we minister to all of them in the same way and it's not segmented, and you don't find the egg separation in Scripture, I don't think you find the age separation in Scripture either.

Nathaniel. And just anecdotally, it's amazing how often a conversation, whether it's pastoral or just even within homes where people will tell us afterwards, a conversation was taking place around a situation, a struggle, and then, you know, that week at church from the pulpit, that very thing was addressed, whether it was a Scripture reading, pulpit prayer, the message itself, and that has happened, that happens over and over and over and over again. And, you know, that's not why we do it, because of the experience, but the experience shows that that's what God uses.

Don. Yeah, that's right. That's right. And there's a lot more that could be said and should be said, but you know, the other thing that I would say about it, you know, if you read, if you study at all what the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, Revelation 2 and 3, if you read those at all, you realize that, for example, Jesus said to the church in Sardis, said, "I know your works, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead." And the church at Ephesus in chapter 2 where there were a lot of things in that church that Jesus could commend, but he said, "You've lost your first love." It is a serious, profound mistake for anybody to judge any ministry simply by outward appearances and say all of the programs are a sign of life. That's not necessarily true. You can have the programs without sanctification. You can have the programs without love. You can have the programs without the blessing of God. You know, that doesn't mean that God's pleased with us by the fact that I'm making this point. It's just, you know, we've got to judge with righteous judgment, not according to appearance. And, you know, I'll go to my grave saying those things.

Nathaniel. And it's in good company to make the pulpit central. Lloyd-Jones did that in the churches that he went to.

Don. Yeah, he went in and shut down the programs, turned off the choir, said, get rid of the platform, use it for wood in the furnace, you know, we're going to focus on the pulpit. Well, now, you know, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, everybody loves Martyn Lloyd-Jones now, but in his day, there was a lot of resistance to the very principles that he acted upon that we believe that in a faint shadow of a way that we're trying to pursue also.



Nathaniel. That's good. Well, like you said, we could talk a lot more on this. Pretty easy question here. We recently transitioned to the ESV using that primarily.

Don. Yeah, the English Standard Version.

Nathaniel. So, can you tell us a little bit what was behind that decision?

Don. Yeah, you watch what happens in Bible translation and, you know, the publisher of the New American Standard Bible, which issued the 1995 version that I had been using, in 2020, they came out with an updated translation, and that's usually not a good sign, and they were outspoken about wanting to modify their approach to gender statements and things like that. As I recall, they're going to keep the 1995 version available, but then have the 2020 and I didn't like the direction of the translation philosophy and I knew that it was just going to engender tremendous confusion to say, we use the New American Standard 95, and, you know, well, I've got a New American Standard, why is it different than what yours? All of that just generates so much confusion. And so, you know, I'm not interested in that confusion. So, you know, I'm very comfortable with the English Standard Version. You were using the ESV. Andrew was using the ESV. Dane, I can't recall exactly what he reads from. I think it's something that predated the King James version. If only there was a camera on Dane there with his face in his hands. It just unified what all of us as elders were doing with a perfectly acceptable translation that could stand the test of time in a better way. And so it just, you know, I didn't view it as a very big change and, you know, but that was the thinking behind it. You have to think long-term. Is this sustainable long-term? New American Standard was not going to be sustainable long-term. People have asked me about the Legacy Standard Bible again. You know, I respect everything they do, but it's so new. I don't know how available that's going to be long-term and so I went with something that I felt like was established and would be available long-term. I don't want to have to go through another version change because of the idiosyncrasies of publishers down the road.

Nathaniel. So, you know, for someone that's used to a different version like Dane, any words of wisdom if they have a beloved version and that comes up from time to time? Should they get an ESV?

Don. Yeah, I would encourage you to at least bring an ESV to the services so it's easier to follow along. Over the course of years, I've read through the Bible in different versions, New King James version, I think I did the NIV one year and all of that, and so I don't get as stressed out about Bible translations as some people do, but just as a practical matter to be following in church the same version that the preacher's using, probably healthy and facilitates comprehension.

Nathaniel. Thank you. Pivoting to a different topic here, a question came up about prayer, referencing Spurgeon as saying that prayer reflects the health of the church. So what kind of direction would you offer to someone seeking to grow in that area and looking at our church?

Don. Well, I know you've thought, you've given thought to that. Maybe you could answer that question and, you know, let me take a sip of water or something.

Nathaniel. All right. I'll give it a stab. You know, prayer, anytime you answer a question about prayer, you just feel completely unqualified to answer a question about prayer. We're supposed to pray without ceasing and that's commanded and you read that verse and you're immediately convicted. So with that caveat, you know, speaking personally, how do we approach prayer? First of all, look at what Jesus taught. I mean, what better place to start than when the disciples asked Jesus, how shall we pray and he told them. And meditate on that. Listen to Pastor Don's messages on the Lord's Prayer and start with what Jesus said about praying. Look at Jesus' prayer in John 17, what he's praying about, what the things are on his mind as he goes to the cross. And, you know, then there are many other places in Scripture that give us models of prayer. In the Old Testament, we have a whole book of Psalms that many of those are prayers. And so saturating your mind with Scripture is the place to start when you think about pursuing prayer. And then, you know, something I found helpful is particularly when I'm having difficulty concentrating because it can be difficult to concentrate as we go to the Lord in prayer, but you've probably heard of the ACTS, A-C-T-S paradigm of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, and it's very close to the Lord's Prayer, but one of the things within that that was personally rich over time was that aspect of confession and learning to confess your sins to the Lord, particularly after a season of adoration. You look at the glory of God and think about the glory of God, who he is, and then look at yourself and begin confessing your sins. And as one writer, I don't remember who it was, but a Puritan writer, alluded to the fact that you go from confessing specific sins to ultimately just confessing your general sinfulness. And that practice of confession and repentance is critical to a healthy prayer life because we're not going to God to prescribe how we want God to act, what we want him to do. We go to God to submit ourselves to the God of heaven and to humbly ask him to work according to his will what he sees good and fit. And to deal with our pride, we need seasons of confession and repentance. And so that's a critical part of praying in private, just learning how to be honest with yourself and let the conviction of the Spirit of God work in your soul and responding to that.

Don. Yeah, you know, and as you're saying these things, one thing that occurs to me, when the church gathers, especially on Sunday, and we, you know, you or I, one of the other elders leads in corporate prayer, you know, I don't know what people are actually thinking as they listen to that because I'm in the act and, you know, I'm praying, you know, I don't have time to be thinking as I'm praying what other people are thinking. So all of that to say is to realize that, you know, that we gather at least week by week there's a time to, in a sense in which this is a corporate prayer where an elder is leading prayer and there's opportunity for for you to amen that quietly, privately in your heart, to pray along with that and to agree with that and to affirm it as your own prayer, and there's an aspect of instruction in prayer week by week that we do, even though we're not intending to instruct on prayer, the very example of corporate prayer gives us a sense of direction in that as well. And I could only affirm everything, all of the other things that you said there. Prayer is not about getting God to do what we want him to do. That's the first step toward growing in prayer, is to abandon that consumeristic, selfish mindset of trying to

dictate our will to God. Our goal is to submit our will to God, to submit to him, to depend upon him, to worship him. And I've come to some of the same conclusions that you were describing. You can confess sin, I said a bad word, I thought a bad thought, all of that, but, you know, the longer you go, you just realize, "Lord, I don't even know the beginning of my sinfulness. What can I do except agree with Scripture that my heart is corrupt, that I am not fully devoted to your glory, I confess that to you. Change me," and, you know, and you're just casting yourself even more dependently upon the Lord for his grace and mercy.

Nathaniel. And you come to a point even at a practical level where when criticisms are hurled your way, practicing prayer in that manner, you realize, you know, the worst thing anyone could say about me is actually rather nice compared to what the reality is compared to what I know about myself and don't know about myself because of the state of my heart.

Don. Yeah, you know, what you just said is so true. What I don't know about myself, you know. There have been many times where I've said, "Lord, I don't even know the depth of it and so I'm confessing to you that which I don't even know, but that you know. And, you know, the heart's deceitful above all else, who can understand it? I don't even understand the sinfulness of my own heart but Lord, I just cast all of that upon you and trust that Christ is sufficient even for that."

Nathaniel. And it's those seasons of personal prayer that really contribute to effective gathered prayer. When we have different prayer meetings, those times are times that ideally flow out of the personal prayer life of those gathered. You know, we're not gathering even in the same sense, let's gather so we can get God to do whatever. It's a gathering out of a love for God, a love for one another, obedience to Scripture, but out of the fullness of what's happening in our own lives as well, not as a replacement for that.

Don. Yeah, that's right.

Nathaniel. Again, lots that could be said about prayer. Love talking about that topic.

Don. Yeah, you know, the one thing that you haven't said and that shouldn't be said, and what's striking to notice by its absence is that we haven't said, "Well, if you're going to be serious about prayer, you've got to be up at 4 a.m. You know, and you said, you know, it's got to be two or three hours. I mean, that's what Luther did, wasn't it?" And all of that and all of those outward forms, you know, that's not the place to start. I like to say that the outward form in time and all of that will take care of itself as you work on the attitudes of prayer that relate to humility, confession, dependence, worship; those things will naturally fill out time but if you just start by saying, I've got to pray more, you know, you've lost the battle before it begins.

Nathaniel. Yeah, it's not a liturgical checkbox.

Don. That's right.

Nathaniel. It is a developing relationship with the God of heaven. And the more that we know him, there's a growing naturalness, a natural desire to speak with him and that's what prayer is.

Don. But the original question that was submitted that prompted all of this, it's a great question and we can kind of sympathize with the disciples when they heard Christ pray and they said, "Lord, teach us to pray. I have no idea. Lord, I'm lost unless you lead me in this." And so there's, you know, we're all going to feel an inadequacy in prayer and that's probably the first starting point of it. If we think we've got a formula that we can follow and that that's going to make us good prayers and all of that, you know, it's just not the way to go. It's a matter of the heart as opposed to the outward form first and foremost.

Nathaniel. When the disciples said we need to devote ourselves to prayer and the preaching of the word, prayer is hard work.

Don. Yeah, it is.

Nathaniel. Much harder than running programs.

Don. Yeah, churches that want a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of programs and put those demands on their pastor, smaller churches with single staff pastors or anything, they're turning, when they demand that, they turn their pastor into an activity director as opposed to a man of God, a man of the word, a man of prayer. You can't have it both ways. Mary's chosen the better part.

Nathaniel. That's right, sit at Jesus' feet. Transitioning from the church to the home.

Don. Okay.

Nathaniel. Instructing our children is a vital part of our responsibility as parents, taking what we receive here, bringing it to the home, and a while back you'd mentioned a book that you plan to publish along those lines. I think it's "Will You Tend the Lambs" was the working title.

Don. Yeah, that's the working title.

Nathaniel. Any update on that?

Don. Well, let's put it this way, the work, the initial form of the manuscript is sitting in my file cabinet waiting patiently for me to come back and to pick it up and to get back to it. I want to do that book. I've done a lot of work on it, a lot of thinking about it, but just more immediate priorities have taken me away from it. It kind of reminds me of Jude 3. Jude said, "I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, but I have to write about something else in light of subsequent events." My problem is that I've got a half dozen books that are in different stages of production. My great hope is that

before I die I'll be able to get them all done sometime. But it's hard to...the writing process just takes some exclusive attention that I don't find easy to give to it on an extended basis and so I try to fit it in when I can and I'll trust the Lord for what the outcome of it is. That's not a complaint at all. I'm blessed to do what I do. It's just a statement of reality and explains why I would announce something like that and then you'd never hear from it again. What area of darkness did that get hidden into?

Nathaniel. Writing is a one of the more strategic parts of your ministry, right?

Don. I want it to be. For the time that I have left, I've got a lot of writing that I want to do. And I don't know. I'm asking the Lord, give me 25 more years where I could finish some preaching, do some writing before I have to go so I've got something that I can leave behind to a future generation. That's a great, great burden of my heart and it's entirely in the Lord's hands as to whether he gives that to me or not. But I'm asking. If he doesn't give it to me, that'll be okay, but I won't have, but not because I hadn't asked.

Nathaniel. Well, I speak, I know for many, we've benefited already from the books that you have been able to publish and we're very grateful for the labor that you've already invested and that helps us to know how to be praying for you as well, that the Lord would open those doors according to his time and his will. So I appreciate you for that. Thank you.

Well, this is a perfect segue into what is the greatest challenge for a pastor. Is it that you can't write? And a great question that came in, what's the greatest challenge for a pastor? And along with that, what's the greatest challenge for the church?

Don. I have a theory. I know what's true for me. I've answered this question publicly before and I think it's true for every pastor, whether they would say so or not. But, you know, just speaking from my personal self-assessment, the greatest challenge I have as a pastor is just my own sanctification or lack thereof. If you're growing in sanctification, then you're going to be content with your circumstances, you're going to be productive with your time, you're going to be loving toward others, not just in the church but with your family, with your wife and all of that. And, you know, if the Lord would instantly grant me anything, I would ask for greater sanctification because everything flows from that. You minister from your own sanctification or lack thereof and, you know, just speaking more broadly, I can't remember where I was reading this, but it's helpful to remember, people sometimes want, this is off, I'm going off track here, and I had no idea that this was going to pop into my mind. But people will often wonder, you know, how could a guy be an effective pastor and he was such a good preacher and yet he disqualified himself morally in the ministry? And there's a very good biblical understanding there that just you hear it's articulated and then everything, a lot of things open up to you. The fact that a man is gifted does not mean that he's sanctified and you can see that so clearly in the book of 1 Corinthians. They were gifted. They had a lot of gifts and all of that, but they weren't sanctified and the mere bestowal of a gift by the Spirit on a man or a woman doesn't mean that they're going to be sanctified in their use of it. And a man in the pulpit can pursue, can do what he does without being sanctified in

his private life and eventually the Lord has his ways of exposing the hypocrisy of that and people are left to wonder, but the mere element of giftedness does not mean that a man is sanctified. And so for, in my opinion, ministers of the gospel have to want not only to exercise their giftedness, and you know, every minister would love to see his influence broader than what it is, but it's more important that he hunger and thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5:6. It's more important that he seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, Matthew 6:33, and all these things will be added to you. That's more important and pastors engage in the same internal battles for sanctification and, you know, mixed desires, mixed motives as anyone else. And so every pastor, and I put myself at the top of this list, needs to grow in those matters of sanctification and if you do, then the other things will take care of themselves. That's on an individual level. You know, the challenges for a church you might articulate a little differently.

Nathaniel. Yeah, yeah. It's convicting, isn't it, when you're preaching week by week, and I'm not saying, I'm saying from my own experience here.

Don. Then why were you saying "you" as you were looking at me?

Nathaniel. "You" plural, right? Y'all. To come across the passage, work on the passage, come back to the passage that you're preaching that week and realize it's dealing with you.

Don. Oh, yeah. I mean, I just get accustomed. I just get accustomed to it, and sometimes I'll say this in the course of preaching, sometimes I won't but I just get accustomed as I'm looking at my notes and looking out and preaching and looking at the text and just saying, man, this is all about me and you're just convicted. Your own preaching convicts you. It's a kind of a weird experience. But it's very real. It's what you're describing. As we preach the word, hopefully it's sanctifying us, even in the act of preaching.

Nathaniel. Yeah, that's right. Any further elaboration on the challenges of the church, that a church faces?

Don. Are you asking about the church broadly or Truth Community Church in particular?

Nathaniel. I think the question, if I remember...

Don. Well, forget how it was submitted. Just make it your own.

Nathaniel. Let's make it local for our church.

Don. Yeah. Let me say this, kind of tying it in with some of the travels that I've done in ministry and the other places. You know, since June I've been in like five different states and with a lot of appreciation for the congregations that have been there, predominantly just sweet people that are affirming and encouraging in ministry and all of that but I have a unique and special love for this church. This is my home. This is where my heart is. And there are just so many remarkably fine believers in Christ at the upper age of the

spectrum and at the middle and throughout and we just have a wonderfully fine congregation and some of the finest Christians that I know attend Truth Community Church and I'm very, very grateful for that. And I include the broad sweep, I include you guys in what I'm saying. And so I speak from a perspective of excel still more. That's the biblical, Paul would affirm a church and then he'd tell them excel still more and it's in that perspective. And I think speaking corporately, not about any particular individuals, I think corporately the threat that a church is always going to be faced with is to recognize its own temptation and even sinfulness in being discontent with the sufficiency of Scripture and the authority of Scripture. It's one thing to come and to sit in an auditorium and listen to the word be preached. It's another thing to actually obey it and to obey it joyfully and to willingly submit to it as opposed to resisting it if it comes in the matter of pastoral admonishment or even in philosophy of ministry. And speaking over the course of time, over a decade, not about any particular incident in recent history, it's grieved me over the course of time to just see a pattern, people come for a while, it seems like they're growing, and then you realize that the seed there fell on shallow ground and they really didn't want the word, you know, and they weren't committed enough to be consistent in gathering with the fellowship of God's people under the word, and they wanted other things out of life and other priorities, and church got in the way of that, and the word of God got in the way of their aspirations. And that's, you know, figuratively speaking, I just put my head in my hands and I weep over that as I see that taking place because the long-term implications of that for life are dramatic for, you know, if it's families that are going that direction and just casting adrift and not really making building and structuring their lives around participation in the church, ultimately, it comes down to, and no one wants to hear you say this, so I'll say it so you don't have to.

Nathaniel. Thank you.

Don. It comes down to that there's a lack of contentment with with the word, there's a lack of desire to be under the authority of the word and a resistance to the authority that God establishes in a local church and that's when, as a pastor, you realize that a church isn't all that it might appear to be on the outside. And having done a lot of work in preparation for my series on Revelation, recently having gone through Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 in a lot of depth, I'm just struck and haunted by what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus. He said, "I know your works and you know your doctrine, you don't accept false teachers," and it all sounds so really good. Everything that he said, you're thinking, man, this must be a really, really good church. And he says, "But I have this against you. You've left your first love. You don't love me." And it's just astonishing to realize that those outward things could be there and that Christ, who knows their works, who knows their hearts, who knows everything about them, would look at them and say, "You've left your first love." What Christ said to a church is obviously then what would be true of individuals and you see a broad spectrum of people over the years and you just realize, Paul said in Philippians 3, "I say this even weeping that they're enemies of the cross. Many walk of whom I spoke and now I speak even weeping that they're enemies of the cross." They walked away. They left, 1 John, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us." I'm not saying that someone can't leave Truth Community Church and be a Christian. That's not at all what I'm saying. I'm just saying you asked me what about

a church. Well, there's an outward conformity that is not always an expression of an inward love for the sufficiency of the word, an inward love for Christ, a real heart-life submission and conformity to the authority of the word, and that's always going to be the greatest challenge that a church faces. It would be better for us if there were violent people protesting outside our door and making it difficult for us to gather together corporately and having a sense of fear and danger, it would be better to be in that position than to be in that quagmire of mediocrity that is not content with the word, that loves other things in the world more than we love Christ. And that's the biggest challenge that a church faces. You go through that and you could interpret the whole of Revelation 2 and 3, those seven letters to the churches, you would find that unifying principle in everything that they said.

And let me say one other thing, Nathaniel, about that, you know, and just going back, people just think in such carnal ways about the church and if you see a big church with a lot of things happening and a lot of people go in there, people say that must be, you know, that's a successful church. You look at a small church and, you know, modest ministry, modest budget and all of that and, you know, what are they doing wrong? That is not the way Christ looks at the church. You read what Christ says to the church at Philadelphia. He says, "You have a little power, but I love you and I'm going to set before you a door that no man can shut." Christ looked totally beyond the outward appearances and commended that church that had little power, little resources, probably little outward influence but Christ said, "You're loyal, you're devoted," you know, and it's filtered, unqualified commendation of that church, whereas the church that outwardly had the appearance of life, Laodicea, Sardis, Ephesus, he rebukes those churches. And so we just cannot think about these things in human terms as if we're counting noses and determining who has the best church. That is not how Christ thinks about the church.

Nathaniel. And Paul in 2 Timothy 2:14, really through chapter 4, when he's dealing with Timothy and helping him with the church matters, I mean, you could go through that passage and find almost every kind of church issue in those chapters, he keeps coming back to Scripture. "Study to show yourself approved. Go back to the Scriptures that you were taught when you were young. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Preach the word."

Don. Yeah, that's exactly right. So as a church, and as individuals in the church, these are the things that, you know, I would admonish, encourage, exhort people to examine in their own lives. And, you know, the...you know, what good is having a time like this if you're not going to be candid about it and try to actually help people, you know? What good is it going to be?

Nathaniel. Live by sound doctrine.

Don. If someone were to ask me what makes you lose sleep, these are the kinds of things that cause me to lose sleep as I look out on, as people come, people go, some stay, some leave, you know, that's what concerns me is that life priorities, life choices reflect... you



know, you know the tree by its fruit and a life that isn't really interested in God's word, you know, that's, that ain't good.

Nathaniel. Yeah, that's right.

Don. That makes pastors like me lose sleep at night. What's going to happen to these people? And if their salvation is real, how is it that these things are treated so casually and indifferently with their life choices? It grieves me. It grieves me. It worries me. Especially in light of what Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day..." And it's not a biblical picture, but I just kind of picture myself standing at the side, watching people filter through judgment and say, "Oh, I was so afraid of that." And, you know, "Oh, no, Lord, no, I know them. I preached to them. Oh, God, don't send them away." And they've got to be sent away because they never knew him. They didn't even want to. You ask me what the problem in the church is, I think that's it. These kinds of things, you know, will shorten my life.

Nathaniel. Andrew started with one of my favorite verses, God's word is settled forever in heaven, Psalm 119:89. And that's part of the grief, right, when we have the comfort of God's word that is forever and it's eternal, and exchange that for the trivets of the world.

Don. Yeah, you know, people treat worship and treat their commitment to the church like it's an entertainment preference. You know, I'll go to church this week because there's not a ballgame on that I want to watch, this is not our week to go camping or whatever, you know. And, you know, people can go on vacations, that's okay. I watch sporting events on television, that's okay. But I'm just talking about a life pattern. People don't even realize what they're doing. You know, you'd ask a lot of people, you know, are you faithful to your church? Oh yeah, well, you know, if they looked at their calendar and saw what they actually did, you know, they're here one time out of, you know, they're here a quarter of the time and, you know, and they're deceived into thinking they're faithful and it's just not, that's just not the way it works. You know, our commitment to the church isn't an entertainment preference. It should be that which we structure our life around. Everything else fits in around that, around supporting the fellowship of God's people, being under the preaching of the word of God, of not abandoning you know, the gathering of the saints. That's a critical, central aspect of biblical Christianity and we treat it like it's an optional add-on as long as it doesn't inconvenience us or interfere with the earthly things that we want to do. In one of the states that I was in back in the West, one of the pastors there was telling me, I said, people here structure their lives around skiing and being outdoors and all of that, and they'll show up at church if they want to, and he says it's endemic, you know, in the churches in our state. And so I'm not just speaking about anything here. This is, you know, we've just got an entirely wrong consumeristic mindset about church that is not, you know, it's not biblical, and the outcome of it is going to be catastrophic eternally for a lot of people who thought they were safe.

Nathaniel. Sufficiency of the word, it comes out, whether we believe it or not, comes out in the way we live our lives and the priorities of the life.

Don. That's it. And you know, Nathaniel, the other thing is people should not resent a pastor saying those kinds of things to them. That's the thing. You know, we say things like that, I say things like that because I'm concerned for the eternal souls of everybody that comes under the sound of my ministry. That's why I say these things. I'm concerned for their eternal soul. I'm not trying to run anyone's life. I'm just saying, you know, this is what Scripture says. This is what Scripture is. This is what Scripture does. Why doesn't that matter to you more than it apparently does? I say that for their good, not for, you know, not to be mean.

Nathaniel. It's straight out of Hebrews 10, don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together, and then right after that are significant warnings about your eternal soul.

Don. Yeah, and then you go into the whole examples of the faith in Hebrews 11. They were sawn in two, they were torn by lions. Being a Christian is not always convenient. And it's ridiculous, it is ridiculous for people to think that they would actually die for Christ, like the heroes in past church history, it's ridiculous for anyone to think that they would die for Christ if they can't get up in the morning and be in church on a consistent basis with the people that they made a public commitment to. You know, we're just fooling ourselves if we think that we're going to shine in the moment of testing if we can't shine in the little things of faithfulness when no one's watching.

Nathaniel. These are the people that we'll be with for eternity, Lord willing, many of them, and we're giving attention to the eternal word of God being preached.

Don. And just remember the context in which I started all of this. I love Truth Community Church. I'm proud of the people of this church, but, you know, I've got to speak the balance of everything, not just what tickles people's ears and makes them happy in the time and, you know, and lets everybody say, "Oh, he didn't step on my toes." I don't play that game, especially at this age.

Nathaniel. We need to be convicted weekly.

Don. I do too.

Nathaniel. Yeah. We agree on a lot of things. It wasn't always that way.

Don. Have we ever had a disagreement? We haven't had a serious disagreement the whole time you've been here.

Nathaniel. No.

Don. Not at all.

Nathaniel. Nope.

Don. In fact, we have a joke, Nathaniel and I have a joke about that and, "We agree again? Yeah, we agree again."

Nathaniel. What do you know?

Don. It's like that.

Nathaniel. And it's a blessing to have that working relationship and harmony. I remember the first time I met you and you said something about particular redemption and I wasn't there yet.

Don. I said that the first time at McAlister's.

Nathaniel. Not at McAlister's. I actually kept my mouth shut, which was unusual for me.

Don. I see mine was flapping, which is not unusual for me.

Nathaniel. Over several years, we would meet occasionally and got to know each other better and the Lord clarified my understanding about some things. But one of the questions that came in was just asking when we first met, we had some differences theologically and probably even philosophically as regards to the ministry, but how did we approach the relationship and did we work through anything, you know, subsequent to that? How do we get to this place? Why didn't we just say, "Oh, this guy's not on my page"?

Don. Yeah, you know, not every Master's grad and BJU grad would be a hand-in-glove fit for ministry like the two of us have been, and I think you should probably speak to this as much as I am, because I don't even remember that particular redemption comment, for example. But, you know, when it comes, you know, Nathaniel, we came here in 2012, and you came about six months later, having done an exhaustive survey to see if there was a Bible teaching church in the area. You said, no, there needs one in eastern Cincinnati. And then your heart must have sank when you saw, "Oh man, there's..." You weren't, that's not even fair. You showed up, you know, when I had already made my plans.

But the way the question was framed was how did we work through those differences and from my perspective, there wasn't anything to work through. You know, it wasn't like we identified differences and now what are we going to do with them and, you know, we had to work through difficult conversations and things like that. It wasn't like that at all. I mean, Nathaniel, I wasn't sure exactly what your trajectory would be with where you were when we first met, but I loved you and I respected you. You know, you uprooted your family for the sake of the word of God. You came to a place where you thought the word of God was needed and you started doing what you knew in ministry and you started preaching through the word verse by verse. How could I not love a guy like that? How could I not respect a guy like that? And so Nathaniel and I just, you know, we just got together periodically and it wasn't a matter of working through anything, it was just a

matter of loving each other in the common pursuit of the truth. And your convictions developed as you preached through Scripture and there came the time, as we were speaking far too candidly tonight, but as you and I talked about the disaster that is Crossroads Church and their philosophy of ministry and their preaching Super Bowls and all of the goofy stuff that they do, we came to the conviction that we would be more effective working together than we were apart. And so we moved in that direction.

One other thing I want you to say, I can't, there is no measure, you could not measure the depth of my love and respect for Nathaniel Pringle. You couldn't. And I've mentioned this multiple times, but it had such a great impact on me. In 2015, when the Supreme Court Obergefell decision came out, you know, mandating so-called homosexual marriage on all 50 states, I determined to preach my series on homosexuality. I sent out an email to every Reformed pastor that I knew in the area, in this area, in the Cincinnati area, and I don't care who gets offended by this, I really don't, and said, "Here's what we're doing. We ask for your support. If you come, we'll give you time on the platform to read Scripture, to pray, to do anything. We just invite you to come and stand with us as we stand for Scripture in this defining moment in the history of our country." Words to that effect. None of them showed up except Nathaniel. No one even responded to the email, as I recall, said, "I can't be there, but I'm glad you're doing what you're doing." Nothing like that. Nathaniel showed up. That told me everything I needed to know about Nathaniel as a man.

And listen, to the extent that there was any doctrinal differences, I don't even remember them, but you can't teach that kind of courage and desire to stand alongside another man in ministry. And, you know, you distinguish yourself and I'm eternally grateful to God that you did, because it knit my heart to yours like David to Jonathan. Ever since, Nathaniel was proven to be the man that I thought he was. And more. How did we work through things? We respected and loved each other, and over time God joined us together.

Nathaniel. Amen, and I can get my mutual admiration club mug out here, but the same is true as just seen. It was it was the character of Don, his obvious love for the Lord, again the similar circumstances of uprooting from a place to come to another place for the sake of preaching the word of God, and those other things worked themselves out in time and it was just pursuing, pursuing the Lord, loving and respecting one another and the Lord worked graciously to bring us together.

Don. Yeah, and we're trusting the Lord to keep us together long, long term.

Nathaniel. Amen. That's right. And it's a privilege to stand against error together too.

Don. Yeah, there you go.

Nathaniel. Just shoulder to shoulder with firmness, with conviction. My blood pressure is starting to get up when I think about Crossroads, Roman Catholicism, you know, just

those horrible deviations from truth that infect this area and so it's a privilege to stand together like this. Glad the Lord worked the way he did.

Don. Yeah, me too. Why don't we close on that one? We'll save the other one for another time.

Nathaniel. That sounds good.

Don. So you want to pray for us?

Nathaniel. I will.

Let's pray.

*Father, thank you so much for our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you for your love first for us that sent Christ to die for us while we were still sinners, and we thank you for the privilege of being part of the body of Christ as Christ builds his church, the church against which the gates of hell will not prevail. And Lord, we thank you for this body. We thank you for each family and individual that is represented as part of Truth Community Church. We pray for your continued blessing on the ministry here. We pray that you would continue to grow us in our likeness to our dear Savior Jesus Christ, that you would continue to cultivate a deep love and affection for one another that is rooted and grows out of our love for you, our love for Christ, and the work of the Spirit of God in us. Thank you for the opportunity to engage in these questions, and we pray that you would encourage us as we go to our places of work and labor for the rest of the week that we would be effective in our Christian influence as salt and light in this dark world. We love you and we pray all of these things in Christ's name. Amen.*

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