

1 *Sándor Paull*

2 00:00:00

3 ...someone to catch the front doors. That would be fantastic. Guys, thanks for being here.

4 I know it's short notice. So glad that you're able to make it and give up some of your
5 evening to be here.

6 Some of you guys still don't know why we're here, do you? Well, we'll jump into it in just
7 a minute. But hey, thanks, worship team for jumping in, we're going to, I'm going to chat
8 with you for probably an hour or so. We'll spend two songs in worship. I'll... after that,
9 we'll get up and pray a little bit. We've asked a few of our folks, couple guys, to help pray
10 over us as a church family. And then we'll do prayer ministry for anybody who wants to
11 get prayer down front.

12 I also would expect and or hope that there may be some of you that need to process or
13 talk or ask more questions. Tonight, I don't think is a good night for raise your hand and
14 ask, "Hey, what about?" kind of questions. We did talk to our group leaders last Monday
15 about these things, and that's a better context. We had a much smaller group and could try
16 to answer specific things. So in a crowd this size, there are lots of things that I cannot
17 address in detail.

18 But if there's things that you want to process, or ask or wonder about or need to help
19 with, our pastors are available. Your group leaders can help some as well. My schedule is
20 available just depends on its openness, its... I don't have a great availability for the next
21 couple of weeks. But of course, we are very willing and wanting to try to help with what
22 this might be like for you guys.

23 The churches that we're a part of are in a pretty significant season, that I think has a lot of
24 different implications for us. And so I want to pray. I want to talk to you about what is
25 the thing, and then we'll begin our Bibles in a couple of different places. And so we do
26 have at least an hour for me to try to make some sense of things with you a little bit.

27 There are 30 hours worth of things to say. Easily 30 hours worth of things to say. And so
28 note that you're going to be getting a very condensed version. And note that I'm only able
29 to say a 100th of what maybe I should or could about at any particular point. And so this
30 is just the very kind of the sort of Cliff Note version of a bunch of different things.

31 And so I want to pray over us. Without God's presence... I love where Moses says, after
32 the people rebelled, and he said, "Well, you can go, but I'm not going with" and Moses

33 says, “We're not going to leave if your presence isn't with us. We're sunk, we don't have a
34 chance.”

35 And so I have felt that wonderfully, in a terrifyingly real way of, if God's not with us,
36 then we don't have a chance. And if we think otherwise, then we're running a business,
37 not the church. And it's our strength, not his, so we need his strength. Let's pray.

38 Father, I am so thankful for every single one who's here. I am so thankful for everyone
39 that you brought, that you're bringing. We're so thankful for your promise, that you
40 established your church. You love us, you call us your bride. And we know that you're
41 not indifferent to the seasons and the things we go through. You're you're not indifferent.
42 You love us.

43 Father, I know I have a great capacity to lead imperfectly, to leave out things that are
44 needed, and to say what's needed in ways that are not fruitful. So I pray for grace that, as
45 I do the best I know how with the grace you give, that the outcomes in these people
46 would happen. I care little of what it means about me directly. But I do pray as a spiritual
47 father here that you would wonderfully strengthen, and build up, and encourage, and
48 protect.

49 And you would prepare for many years in our future of disciples being made and lives
50 changed and people coming to faith. That the trail of wet carpet after our baptisms would
51 be long, because there are many people who come and believe and are saved.

52 I pray that you keep us humble. I pray that You would help us to be careful in our own
53 hearts and our lives. We of course pray father and things that we need to be forgiven for
54 that you would do that.

55 And so we trust you, Lord. You are sovereign and all things are in your hands. We know
56 that Christland church is not ours. It's yours. So have your way in this place in us. Have
57 your way tonight. That as best we know how to hear, respond, talk through, grieve,
58 believe. Whatever the things are that we have to exert ourselves in, help us to do that well
59 now. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

60 00:05:00

61 Okay, so I suppose, to do some backstory, and I won't go all the way back to March of
62 1973 when I was born... I won't go that far back. But this group of churches has been
63 around for... oh, you think I'd remember that more clarity... 27 or 28 years, something
64 like that. And it began in my friend's living room. Steve Morgan, who still leads this
65 group of churches, invited me to be a part of it. I was... we were friends from the weight

66 room on SIU Southern Illinois University Carbondale campus. And he said, “I believe
67 that Jesus has asked me to plant a church.”

68 He was originally planted, not out of the Zeigler Vineyard, that's a small town in southern
69 Illinois. But instead, it was a different, hybrid kind of a church plant where he went
70 directly to Steve Nicholson, who at the time was the Vineyard director for that area, and
71 lead pastor of the Evanston vineyard. He's now since retired. He's still a friend, I'll text
72 him a couple times a year and catch up. And he's still an amazing guy.

73 We were a vineyard church plant, approved by Nicholson, and in that region, particularly.
74 And early, early on, we had some members from the original Zeigler Vineyard, Larry and
75 Carol Anderson, who, Larry was on the original board, a guy named Jamie Moore, Jamie
76 was on the original board, myself and a few others. We started with a 15 or so in that
77 living room and outgrew, and ended up in hotel spaces and building and building
78 eventually.

79 And in those early days, I had known Steve for not super long, and he began to share with
80 me his past and his past before he was a Christian, before he was saved, before he was a
81 pastor. And I've known about Steve's 30 year old past for 27 years. It's beyond, that I
82 think the dates in the court documents that have been posted recently are like, I don't
83 know, eighty-six or seven or something. And so I have known about those events for a
84 very long time. And I've believed, as I'm still quite convinced of, that pre-salvation, not-
85 a-pastor-on-staff, genuine, horrific sin is forgivable.

86 We're going to talk today about and look in the Bible about, is there a lifetime
87 disqualification for pastors because of sin committed before they're saved? Is that a thing
88 or not? There certainly is a thing, that while being released as a pastor, elder, overseer,
89 shepherd in the church, certain sins are disqualifying. I absolutely believe that.

90 We had a pastor in one of our churches, that was that was let go released because, while
91 he was married, he had an emotional affair and had kissed a woman in his group that's
92 not his wife after some months of deception and getting his family out of town so that he
93 could have time with the young woman. When that came to light, he said there was no
94 sexual intimacy. But certainly that the character involved in the act itself of great
95 betrayal, we felt like that is disqualifying for a pastor to do that. And he was removed.

96 So we are, I think, very careful when it comes to sin and biblical standards. And yet, I
97 still do land in the place where, and I'll tell you what he did in a minute, although please
98 note that I am still fundamentally quite opposed to having to speak to a person's forgiven
99 sin. The reason being is that I believe biblically, it's forgotten by God. And I believe

100 biblically that it's a great abomination to have to bring up, discuss, I've used the word
101 “weaponized” because that indeed is what's happened.

102 There's a group of folks that really do believe that this group of churches is suspect and
103 evil because we're founded by an evil, suspect man who has a past, and everything should
104 be destroyed because of that. That actually is what's happening. And I'll give some
105 evidences, though, please note, that I'm not at liberty to say lots of things that I also know
106 for this particular context. And so, just know that, a good leader doesn't say everything
107 they possibly would know to say, because of the appropriateness for different contexts
108 and settings.

109 And so I knew in the early days, the Vineyard leaders knew in the early days. The board
110 was asked by see Steve to consider “is this disqualifying? Should something else
111 happen?” And something else should happen if the legal system was not followed
112 through, and there was a miscarriage or aborted justice. Then something should happen,
113 that would be different. Or if it was underneath or after being released by God in a role of
114 spiritual authority. Those are different things.

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116 And so, the board at the time I was a part of, we said, “No, we believe, thank you for
117 revealing these things and talking to us about it. We believe that we trust and love each
118 other. And it's right to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other, that we'd
119 be healed. We do believe that.”

120 And then the issue came up again, some years later, when he had gone to Seattle to plant
121 a church. He brought it up again to that church board and said, “Please know, if you
122 haven't,” —and lots of the rest of us kind of knew over the years, so much so that we
123 were saying, “Please stop confessing this over and over again.” Not “what if it gets out,”
124 but it's forgiven, forgotten sin, and there's no need to confess the same thing over and
125 over and over for a lifetime. That says something about the actual power of being
126 forgiven.

127 If God doesn't know about something, then why are we informing? Why are we
128 continuing to do that? If there's a need for that, and others determine, well, of course,
129 that's different. But we had decided back in Southern Illinois that that wasn't needed, the
130 original Vineyard leadership that approved his church planting knew of that and believed
131 it wasn't needed, the board, then, at the church in Seattle, agreed in the same thing.

132 And then, 10 years later, eight years later, one of the board members believed, after seven
133 or eight years of knowing that and still being in community and friendship and doing
134 family events and still being a healthy part of that church and loving the community and

135 loving him, that indeed, that wasn't something that was allowed, and that, indeed, he was
136 disqualified. And so something changed seven, eight years later.

137 Three years ago, I flew to California and spent some time talking with that individual that
138 was on our church plants there. And trying to describe, “Well, some of what you've
139 remember being told about, that's not actually true. He was not a pastor on staff, he was
140 not a Christian. He was working at a Mormon summer camp in some capacity. I don't
141 know what his actual contract said at the time. And I have not wanted to be a forensic
142 investigator and try to find records and hire investigators,” —though that is being done
143 by some for particular purposes.

144 “I don't think it's disqualifying. And here's why: There's been no cover up, because that's
145 how you knew, you were a part of one of the governing boards that's decided about such
146 things. So there has been no concealment,” though, I haven't shared that with all of you.

147 And I'm not going to share all of Cody's sin with all of you, or all of Jackson's sin—he's
148 sick, by the way—with all of you. My wife sinned once in her life, I won't even tell you
149 what that one time was and what that meant. I just don't think it's morally acceptable to
150 do that. I just don't think it is. I don't think it's supposed to be that way.

151 And so Steve was 22. And at that Mormon summer camp, there was a young man who
152 was 15. And the events of whatever the day was, went into the legal system, the judge
153 followed it through, I don't remember what the actual attorney word for it is. Charges
154 were dropped or settled or satisfied, or some attorney-ish thing. And the outcome was
155 “community service and counseling.”

156 And so I understand that to mean that there was not malicious acts of violence that were
157 involved, because that's... otherwise there'd be lifetime registries and incarceration, and
158 there should be. Like, there absolutely should be.

159 And so mixed in to this is a right, sober contrition for sin, because sins ugly, and we hate
160 it. Some of what's been going on online for the last two years, especially, is just a
161 complete fabrication. Some things have a little bit of truth. And some things (i.e. the
162 court documents found by their private investigator) are of course true. Those are true
163 things, we've known that there's nothing that is distorted about that. That is exactly as
164 those documents are posted. Those are the exact things.

165 I would encourage you by the way... Please note what I'm saying what I'm not saying. I
166 am not saying, “I forbid you from going online and reading what people are saying about
167 us.” I'm not saying that. But I do suggest that if you do it will cause a number of effects
168 that you may not understand. And there's a lot of things, it's hard to parse out the
169 difference of what's happening. And you will incur a wound of one kind or another. I'll

170 help you with that wound, and I'm not saying "you can't" or "I forbid it." That's silly. If
171 you want to do that you can, but at the same time if somebody was saying about your
172 biological family that they're evil and should be destroyed and there's... you probably
173 wouldn't particularly find reason to read about the newest thing. There's probably
174 wouldn't be a wise thing to do in my mind. And so you can. But I suggest that you don't
175 for those reasons.

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177 I have failed in that regard myself, because lots of things about me are there, including a
178 transcript of my teaching where I shared the story of my confession of running from the
179 police, 20 years ago, on a motorcycle. All the teachings that have ever been found online
180 are now being analyzed forensically and posted, and psychologists analyzed my word salad
181 from that teaching, and said that I'm either just not a good communicator, or I'm a master
182 manipulator. And I read that and think, "I don't even know what I said. Like, that's word
183 salad. I don't even know what those words mean. I'm just filling airtime with words."

184 And so there is a very systemic approach to find, not just "this event is a problem," but
185 there's 100 things that have been brought up. And so we want to discuss this issue as it
186 stands. Because there's a reason to do that. That's a valid thing to say it happened. It was
187 sin, it was awful. And we understand that. And here's why I've not revealed that
188 throughout the years, because I still, to this moment, do not believe that I've sinned in any
189 way.

190 By the way, as I've shared this in greater detail that I can in this context with our elder,
191 overseer, pastors, and a lesser degree in detail with our small group leaders, I am very
192 thankful that, out of all of those folks, we are an absolute complete unity at Christland in
193 terms of what we believe.

194 One, that Steve Morgan is not disqualified for life from pastoral ministry from events
195 from 30 plus years ago, before he was saved.

196 I also asked our board to consider, genuinely to consider, if I've done wrongdoing by not
197 revealing all of these things all along because I'm still morally opposed to it, believing
198 that it would be wrong for me to do that, please know that I'll accept any censure,
199 discipline, removal as a result of that. And if I need to, to remove myself from that
200 discussion for our board, of course. But I told our board, "Please note that I'm presently
201 not repentant for that, because I'm presently not convinced that I've done wrong yet. And
202 so, if there is discipline, note that I'm in an unrepentant position, because I'm still not
203 aware that I've done anything wrong in the midst of it."

204 And so that means that I'm either a psychopath, or I'm oblivious. Both are problems as
205 your lead pastor. You don't need a guy that's oblivious in some massive sin he's done,
206 and he can't figure out how he's done it. Or that I'm actually just really a bad character
207 guy. Well, either way, you're in trouble. And you should have a different lead pastor.

208 I've been asking Jesus if I am what some believe, then either reform me, help me, or
209 remove me. Like help me to not be broken, or deceived, or deluded, or oblivious, or
210 helped me to step aside for the sake of your church so that it can be led by a man of
211 greater character and ability so that you guys have what you need: a spiritual father that
212 you can believe that would be imperfectly leading you, but yet better than myself.

213 So our board said, I suppose thankfully, for me, like I didn't, you know, I want those men
214 to share with me everything they think, and said, "You guys, I'd need you to tell me
215 exactly what you believe. If there's things that I'm not seeing, or that you believe, I have
216 to know that I want to know that. Tell me. There's no manipulation, there's no pressure,
217 there's no expectation. I want to find out if we are like minded, and if we're not, we'll
218 figure out what that means and what to do. And we'll love each other through all of that."

219 And so, our board members, our group leaders, have processed these things.

220 Now, for some of you, what you're processing is seven minutes old. Like you have no
221 anything except for what I said seven minutes ago, and your mind is still reeling with
222 "Wait, what, to the what?" And I think that you should not have any pressure to be okay,
223 right away. Like, I've known this stuff for 25 plus years. Like it's... it's not realistic, even
224 to yourself, to say: "I see it for what it is, and how come everybody can't get on board and
225 be okay and support your leader." And I don't think we should have that rhetoric with
226 anybody. I just don't think that.

227 I don't think we should just say, "The other guys are the bad guys. We're the good guys.
228 So shut your mouth and leave us alone and let's go get them and,"—to use the Jackson
229 phrase— "mess them up." Like I don't, I don't want to mess anybody up.

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231 I want to be sure that we are rightly humble and trying to see are there things in this that
232 we could do or do better. I want to be loving and kind, because, at the end of the day,
233 these are not entirely deceptive things. They are situated in a particular way for a
234 particular end. That's quite true. But there are some true things in this, and so that's why
235 it's it's worth talking about.

236 Our... the leadership team, then, as a result of the recent things of the last three years, we
237 considered it again. The network leadership team is comprised of myself—unfortunately.

238 I would just love to be a lead pastor and lead Christland. And so maybe someday I'll get a
239 chance to not be in that role, where 26 churches' worth of opinions and people filter
240 through just one guy. I would love for that to be true someday, somehow, if possible.

241 But also James Chidester, who is a PhD psychologist that is in Austin. He is paid for by
242 some of the network fees. 5% of all the giving here goes into helping some of our
243 Network expenses. Also on the board is Luke Williams, the lead pastor of the church in
244 California, Vista church, and Tony Ranvestel, that's in Vida Springs church in
245 Gainesville, Florida.

246 We considered this with outside counsel from a retired national director of a large group
247 of churches. And I loved it, because, to get a 78, almost 80 year old guy in there, I told
248 him very specifically, "Man, I love that you're here because, if we're not seeing
249 something that we need to see, you would tell us." Like, you would say, at that age, and
250 that vintage—that's one of the things... I can't wait... when I'm 70 something, I'll just let
251 it rip. Like I might just wear flip flops with black socks to my knees and not care. Like, I
252 would love to be that age and to be fearless. People can think what they think.

253 And he's a wonderful man. Dearly trusted. Used by Jesus dramatically. And he said, "Oh,
254 no, I see this very, very plainly. And here's what I believe you guys need to do. You've
255 brought me in for counsel. And here's how I see it. Here's what I think's happening. And
256 here's what I think you do. And here's how I think you go about it." His insight was so,
257 very valuable to us.

258 So, as a result of that, and I'm giving you the iceberg of many, many 1000s of hours of
259 thought and prayer and conversation, the Network Leadership Team believed that this
260 day would come, though it took almost three years for it to come. Where the final thing
261 was released online a week ago, Friday. But I've known all along. And I've known all
262 along that this day would come.

263 And a lot of other things were brought up in terms of leadership culture, or whatever.
264 There are hundreds and hundreds of things that have been raised to discredit. And we
265 knew this day would come.

266 So the leadership team created a letter to say, "this is what we believe." Because people
267 need some leadership. They need some help navigating what it means.

268 And so I'm not going to read the letter in its entirety. But I have asked Cody to have
269 copies prepared and there'll be on the back. And you guys on your way out can certainly
270 grab a copy of that, and can read it if you'd like, you can ask me questions if you want.
271 Tony Ranvestel and I primarily worked on drafting that letter and a couple different
272 versions of it. And so I'm not going to read it.

273 But just a few things: There are seven main points to the letter.

274 One is, specifically, we're not going to try to defend against every accusation, because
275 new ones come in every day, by the way. Like it that's not a possible thing to do.

276 Anytime the pharisaical sort of assessment of every teaching or audio or these meetings
277 done in the churches—they're guys coming in, recording audio, posting it to the group,
278 they're assessing it for their discussion.

279 So it's gotten... it's gotten very intense. One of our members here was threatened with his
280 job. So, “You leave the church, and you disavow and say ‘they're evil,’ or we'll call your
281 boss and get you fired.” Like there's a bunch of really awful things happening. One of the
282 pastor's daughters was getting nasty mail, “your dad's a this or that,” and, like, just really
283 awful stuff.

284 I've blocked some numbers. I've blocked some email addresses. I'm getting cussed out
285 and threatened. It's gotten... the level of vitriol is very intense right now. And I
286 understand where it's coming from. It's coming from folks that... some still love Jesus, I
287 believe. Some have publicly said they don't any longer. Some were on staff with me back
288 in Southern Illinois. Some were in some of our other churches.

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290 And throughout, if anybody would say, “You know, I just in my conscience don't agree
291 doctrinally with a church supporting a leader who has a past prior to being saved. I don't
292 doctrinally believe that I can support that.” Then, know that, you guys, whoever that is,
293 either here or in any of the churches, will have our blessing to follow their conscience,
294 find a church that they really want to be a part of, and follow Jesus. And I genuinely... I
295 don't... I'm not saying it snippy. So... this is recorded right now, and the audio's there.
296 I'll use words not inflection, in case it's posted, to say, “I genuinely,”—wait I said it with
297 inflection. It's hard to do that when you're being analyzed. “I fully believe and will truly
298 bless any person that wants to follow Jesus in another place. That's okay. That is really
299 okay.”

300 And indeed, if a person's conscience is convicted of that, well, that's the integrity way to
301 go about such things. A person should act where their conscience is leading them in those
302 areas. Like that, to me, it makes sense to me. So that a person can continue to flourish in
303 their faith and believe in the leadership of their church and grow spiritually. That all
304 makes sense to me. I don't, just, understand it, but I support it. If a person is convinced, it
305 doesn't mean that I agree with those convictions. But I agree with the decision is the right
306 way to go for a person's family or their faith or their future. I understand that fully.

307 But also, let me say that if a person chooses to do that, and they love the family, this is
308 their church home, and a week later, they say, “You guys are evil, I'm going to destroy
309 you,” I think that means a bad character. I think if you leave and say, “I don't agree, I feel
310 like I'm called here. There's some things that were hard and hurtful in those places...”

311 So some of you in this room came to Christland, but were in local churches in College
312 Station prior to coming here. But by by doing that, and I've heard a little bit of what it
313 was like at X church across town. But I've been really grateful that those of you that have
314 come from those churches have not said, though you were all hurt in those places, they're
315 not evil, and I'm going to destroy them. And I need to protect people by making sure
316 nobody ever goes to XYZ church across town.

317 I would never want you to do that. And to come against a church for any reason,
318 believing that it was your sovereign duty to protect the general public by warning against
319 those evil folks.

320 So those of you that have shared painful experiences from other churches, the reality is
321 any of you that have ever been in another church have been hurt there one way or
322 another. And the reality is, if you stick around here for very long, there are some ways
323 that I'm not going to lead you perfectly, and you'll be hurt here. It's the nature of
324 imperfect families and churches. You cannot find that on Earth, where you're going to be
325 a part of a place, unless it's “show up, go home, and there are seminary lectures that are
326 designed that...” Maybe that's possible to not be hurt in that context.

327 But my understanding of churches: we're a family, we love each other, we do life
328 together, we give ourselves one to another. And that means that hurt feelings are going to
329 happen. And that means we get practice to forgive and to love one another and to repent
330 and to resolve. Those are great things.

331 I don't want us—I get why some churches are run like corporations. Because it's safer,
332 perhaps. And there's not the kind of suffering and emotional spiritual hemorrhaging that
333 happens from a season like this. I understand that. But, yeah, I don't think that's what
334 we're called to do.

335 So the letter from leadership team; I'm not going to read it to you. But the paragraph one
336 basically says “we'll not reply to the issues specific.” Now you can personally ask me,
337 “Hey, I read this, what about that?” And I'm not going to say, “Hey, you lunatic, how
338 dare you read that?” I'm not going to say, “Oh, man, that's hard. Well, as I understand it,
339 here's what's true or not true or partially true about that thing. So what do we do about
340 that?” That's okay, you can do that. I have a certain limited amount of, just, simply time
341 availability for such things, but I don't mind that. You can.

342 The second paragraph just says, “We want to be humble and loving leaders that Shepherd
343 folks. And one of the attacks is about spiritual abuse. And spiritual abuse is thrown
344 around. Sometimes that I, would suppose, it legitimately happens. Sometimes it's used in
345 the phrase of, “I got my feelings hurt. I didn't like what you did.”

346 But I have been very intentional with our leaders to say... recently at our third Friday,
347 training our small group leaders... what's dating culture supposed to look like here? Do
348 you have to get permission from your group leader or from me to ask someone out for
349 coffee? Is there a form, you know, 10B dash A that gets notarized? That she would then
350 have initialed... and then he would...? Is that what kind of culture we are? Are you in
351 trouble if you don't...?

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353 Like, what's... what kind of leadership culture... how much involvement, investment?
354 And because the leader would always say, “I'm responsible, and I want to be... I want
355 people to do well...” I've realized that when we came out of Southern Illinois, that
356 particular area of our culture got weird. I didn't know it. And I didn't mean it to get that
357 way. But it got weird.

358 And I said, “Wait, wait, wait, wait. How come somebody is asking me”—this is not here,
359 this is in southern Illinois—a pastor's asking me, because the group leader asked them,
360 because they were asked by someone in their group... “I asked her to coffee.” She said,
361 ‘Yes.’ We had a latte. It was good. How long do I have to wait before I ask her to
362 something else?” Like, wait, What? What? Why are you asking me? I will not answer.
363 I'm offended at the question. That's so crazy. It's so crazy, like some of what's being said,
364 like, let's make sure we're not that! And if we are, we can fix it. Because, what the church
365 is, is us, and it... Man, if that's something that's happening on my watch, man, I'm sorry,
366 let's fix it. Like that's not at all what I want.

367 I don't want to control your life. I don't want to know that stuff. I want to train you and
368 righteousness and help you to stand on your own as a disciple. I'm not here to censor your
369 music collection or to, I don't know, measure your hemlines, or to, I mean, that's not... I
370 don't... I don't want that. I don't need that.

371 So there has been some accusations of abuse. And I just don't believe that it's inherently
372 true. Although certainly there are events that our leaders could have done a better job
373 with. There certainly are. Like, I can't come out of any interaction without realizing, “Oh,
374 I could have done that a little bit better, done that differently. That sort of thing.

375 The third paragraph is about accusations; we've had outside counsel.

376 Fourth paragraph is “we’ll bless folks that want to leave and find places where they plug
377 in.” And that’s true. We’ve never tried to build our empire. We’re not trying to conquer
378 the world. We’re trying to be a part of a healthy local church that makes disciples and,
379 God willing, allows us to plant churches.

380 I had somebody asked me, “Is this meeting about a church plant announcement?” Like,
381 oh, I would so love that to be true. Oh, man. Do you think Jesus would be kind enough
382 that we could call another family meeting one time in the future, and I’m not having to
383 talk about something of great pain and hardship, but it’s a great blessing that causes great
384 hardship? Oh, man, I don’t know if Jesus will ever let us. But I have hopes for that day.
385 Man! I want to have another family meeting someday where we’re not saying, “Hey,
386 there’s a bunch of stuff being said about us. And here’s what to make of that.”

387 Would you join, somehow, in your heart, praying that God allows that to be true? That
388 we can continue with what we’re called to do; keep building the wall? I think we’re called
389 to do this. And I know we’re not doing it perfect, but I don’t... I just don’t think we’re evil.

390 I don’t think the other guys are the bad guys either. I don’t mean that, although some of
391 what’s happening is straight evil. They’re not... everybody’s not evil that thinks
392 otherwise. So please never do that. Somebody believes some of that stuff or wants to go
393 somewhere else, they’re not our enemies. They’re not... we have enemies but it’s not
394 people. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. There is a massive spiritual battle
395 behind all this. Please know that.

396 But the people, even that disagree, or that somehow believe they’re doing the public
397 good, are sweet people trying to do what they feel convinced of. They are. There are
398 people that I’ve had in my homes and in my heart, and I’ve done life with and loved and,
399 and been friends with for 20 years, some of them. They’re not evil people, please know
400 that. There are people trying to do what they think they’re supposed to. And that’s where
401 we’re at.

402 Okay, the fifth paragraph is the leadership team saying we’re thankful for Steve Morgan’s,
403 strong yet humble leadership, depth of love, Christ-honoring character, he’s called, gifted,
404 qualified to continue to lead. I really believe that guys, I just really do. He’s not a perfect
405 guy. He has really high gifting and he has some flaws. He does. And I know those flaws
406 more than almost anybody else. Just like, you can talk to Cody and Jackson, and they can
407 tell you my flaws. Or my wife could tell you my flaws more than the rest of you know
408 them. That’s true. But I do not believe he is disqualified from pastoral ministry. We’ll get
409 into our Bibles. And a little bit if I can get down to it. Eventually, we’ll be in First
410 Timothy three, answering the question, “a good reputation with outsiders”. So how’s that

411 still true? We'll answer that question. And we'll talk about Gospel before we spend some
412 time in worship.

413 The sixth part of the letter is “we've known about this for a very, very long time.” And
414 there's been a due process of this issue being considered over and over again by the
415 governing bodies of, four different times, leadership boards governing bodies, and those
416 men have decided—I've been on two of those four governing boards—decided, biblically
417 and otherwise, this is not a problem. And this is not something that the Bible prohibits.
418 Nor has there been any track record since then that shows a lack of character that would
419 be disqualifying. That's just simply not true.

420 00:35:00

421 And then the seventh point is, “Christians and churches around the world are under
422 spiritual attack.” And that's no joke, guys, that is so true. If you look at, kind of, what's
423 happening in Christendom, there is a group of churches, that they measure spiritual attack
424 by the number of pastors martyred per year, in the funerals they do for pastors,
425 particularly in India.

426 So there really is, and it doesn't take much to say... there's a Hillsong scandal. And in
427 some ways you think, well, if they're sketchy stuff happening, the people being sketchy
428 should be found out and removed... or I mean... so there's a part of me that, justice, I'd
429 say, “Yeah, if, if it's imperfect people trying their best...” Like, I've wondered, can we
430 still do Hillsong stuff because we know their background? Can we still do Bethel stuff,
431 we know their background? Can we do elevation stuff, we know their background? Can
432 we do Vineyard stuff, we know their back...? Like at some point you can't do anybody's
433 stuff.

434 But... but... we've been in, by some, connected to, say, Southern Baptists, where
435 ordained pastors committed awful sins and the church hid it. That, to me, is not at all
436 what we have. At all. We have sexual sin from prior to being a Christian and being a
437 pastor. And you have great transparency with local boards that knew that, and you had
438 justice completely followed from the legal system perspective. This is not the same thing
439 as that, in my opinion.

440 But you have things, in terms of almost any major church, Mars Hill, Hillsong, all those
441 guys... Matt Chandler's had a bunch of stuff. You can go through any major group—
442 Southern Baptists—and lots and lots of churches go through stuff, especially in today's
443 era, where there is a lot of vitriol against essentially everybody. Conservatives against
444 liberals, and you can just, kind of, look, and there's a massive spirit of division in our
445 country, against all kinds of “us/them, we're the good guys/they're the bad guys. Don't we

446 hate them? Don't they stink? Let's go, you know,”—Jackson phrase— “Let's go mess ‘em
447 up.” And I just think that's happening in the church culture as well. And we're
448 experiencing some of that.

449 And so, the issue by itself, I... please do not understand me to say it's no big deal. I don't
450 think it's no big deal. I think it's awful. And you haven't had the benefit of me seeing
451 Steve, on his knees, sobbing his eyes out in great humility and in great agony over what
452 he had the... what he did all those years ago. I've seen him in that posture a dozen times
453 over and over and over again. He's so tender hearted and so broken. And so by me... I
454 don't want you to feel like we're circling the wagons, we're defending our own. It's us
455 against them.

456 I don't want to feel like, somehow, when it comes to victims, or sin or sexual sin, that
457 somehow we are not understanding the weight and the impact that that has. Because
458 some of you have experienced such things and been through such things. And those are,
459 those are life changing events. I'm not trying to minimize that at all.

460 Those of you in our kids program, and... when you sign up, you sign a permission slip
461 for background checks. We've never in 20, I don't know however many years, had
462 someone with that background in our kids program. We've never had an accusation of
463 anything improper. We've never had an investigation nor needed it. In all these churches,
464 in all those years, in our kids program, we've just never experienced that because we take
465 it really seriously. We've had kids program policies from the very beginning, that no
466 one's alone with kids, bathroom policies and protocols. We're very, very, very strict on
467 those things. More than many I would believe.

468 So the issue by itself, I don't want to dance around it and say it's no big deal. That's not
469 what I'm trying to say. What I'm trying to say is, as I understand it, doctrinally, there's
470 been no miscarriage of justice. It's not a a betrayal of pastoral trust, responsibility. There's
471 been no attempt to conceal that action. The action wasn't one of violence or malice. As
472 evidenced even, by the way, based on the actual court decision of penalty. I think you can
473 make an easy case for that, though, again, I'm not a lawyer. And, you could say, 30 plus
474 years of godly character and holiness since then.

475 00:40:00

476 Girls, if you're gonna somehow marry a guy, and he's reformed and he's met Jesus, and
477 all of his crazy ways are over—I was gonna do the “Brother, Where Art Thou” quotes:
478 “Your days are over, aren't they, Soggy Bottom Boys?” “Yes, yes, sir. No more of
479 that.”—Okay, you're pardoned. You know, don't buy it. I want to see two years minimum
480 of track record, we've got 30 plus years of track record. 30 plus years.

481 There are continued attacks. And the next thing will be, by the way, distortion of an event
482 from 10 plus years ago, with a confession of masturbation. And I'd like to find a guy
483 that's gone 20 years not done that, by the way. If you're that guy, talk to me after and I'll
484 buy you a taco. Like, I just don't think you'll find that. But, by the way, also know that in
485 the weaponization of that event, it will be distorted and the events will not be what they
486 are purported to be. So please know that. Yeah, the event happened. But it's not what it's
487 going to be posted to say.

488 I also expect we'll have some victim statements from the sister of the guy and the
489 family's account of those days and what that's done. I suspect, we'll have a victim
490 statement as well, to try to keep outrage going for the thing.

491 And I don't... I don't... I'm not saying you shouldn't be outraged by sin, horrified by its
492 effects. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that at all. But also know that it's not
493 particularly the kind of thing that some have sort of created about it.

494 So the other thing is issue by itself.

495 The other part is the context of three years and a hundred or so attacks. The goal isn't,
496 "we love you guys, and your leader is evil. And by the way, keep going, you guys are
497 doing great." That's not the thing. The thing is "every lead pastor needs to be removed."
498 And that is really what's going on. And so lots of threatening stuff, every lead pastor,
499 they're gonna hire investigators and find out about our past. Maybe I ran over a possum in
500 '93. I don't I don't remember. But I mean, it's that kind of a thing.

501 And so, I am not a sinless guy. And in my opinion, by the way, my story of running from
502 the police, while—I remember because our daughter was like three months old, and I
503 come in limping. That was 20 years ago—but I was a pastor and I was on staff. And I
504 didn't go to my leader, I went to another guy on staff to tell him instead, because I didn't
505 want Steve to say, "You either don't go over a hundred miles an hour," —I'm like, "I can
506 do that in second gear. Like I do that every day. How dare you—" No, but I concealed it
507 from him because I didn't want the effects.

508 In my opinion, if there's any accusation of bad character, I have bad character from that
509 event, as more evidence, from than what he did 30 years ago prior to being saved. Like
510 that makes more sense to me. If there was a disciplinary action against a pastor, in my
511 opinion, that particular sin is worse in that regard in terms of its reflection upon me and
512 my character. I think it's way worse.

513 And so we are—I don't know about you guys. But the rest of we, us, we've done some
514 stuff in our past. And, if you recall, when Jesus with the woman and adultery, he started
515 saying, "If you're without sin, start throwing rocks." He left that, he left the mob first.

516 The older folks left the mob, dropped their rocks, walked away. Realizing that, “Yeah,
517 we've been forgiven from a bunch ourselves.”

518 So for some of you younger folks, I might encourage you to ask some of our older folks, I
519 told you, part of the blessing of a multi generational local church, is that you can go to
520 some people that have been through some stuff. And so that would be a very, very wise
521 thing to do. Any of you could talk to Villard and Diane <last name redacted> and say,
522 “Villard and Diane, what do you think? You've been... you've led a couple different
523 churches, you've seen a lot of things come and go, what's your perspective? How do you
524 frame all of this?

525 You could do the same to Kirk and Beth <last name redacted>. You guys have been in a
526 bunch of different local churches, you've seen some stuff. You've walked through
527 different seasons.

528 You could ask even Kathy <last name redacted>. the same question. You might benefit
529 from that. Some of you younger folks of... “I want your wisdom and your experience and
530 the benefit of what you've seen and you've been through. Hopefully, you haven't suffered
531 for nothing. God's done some stuff in you, and walk me through what that means.” You,
532 of course, can do that if you'd rather talk to them or in addition to any of us as leaders.

533 Essentially, our overseers, and that is our governing board, has decided we do not believe
534 that Steve Morgan is disqualified from pastoral ministry for life because of those events.

535 00:45:00

536 I suppose, thankfully for me—which in days where it's less pleasant to do what I'm doing,
537 I'm not sure it was a gift to me—that they said I get to keep my role as lead pastor. There
538 are days that selling cars would seem pretty nice, or selling water filtration systems, or
539 something else, would be pretty nice. Or selling traffic signaling equipment to
540 municipalities, it'd be pretty nice. But so far I feel called to what I'm doing. And until or
541 unless I'm disqualified and removed by Jesus or a board, I'll continue. Because I don't
542 know how to do but try to be faithful to what I'm convinced of.

543 The third question is, “Do we leave the group of churches?” And so all of our overseers
544 at the time said, “No, we believe on those three things, exactly the same thing.”

545 And so that was wonderful that we are in that spot. Let me also say, by the way, that if
546 there is pre-saved disqualification of sin, then Saul/Paul would be your your best case
547 study. That he's murdering Christians. And then something like three years later, he's
548 preaching Jesus with power and local churches. So quick, in fact, that local Christians

549 didn't believe him. They didn't think, until Barnabas vouched for him, and they said,
550 "Okay, maybe he's not just trying to infiltrate and destroy us."

551 So I think that, essentially, I think I had a group leader ask that, or one of the other
552 churches that I've been trying to help in all of this, "Is there a sin prior to being saved,
553 that is disqualifying?" Well, I do think that there are sins that give evidence of faulty
554 character that would make it not safe. I do think that's true. And we'll get to that in the
555 Timothy text.

556 So pastoral disqualification: if they're a Christian, they're a pastor. It's a serious sin of
557 some kind. I've had lots of different pastors over the years, 20 plus different pastors. And
558 those men have confessed, "I looked at pornography last night, I got mad and said
559 something I shouldn't have said, I, they've confessed different things to me over the years.
560 And I've had group leaders confess things to me over the years. And there have been a
561 few times, not with pastors, but with group leaders, that their particular sin was
562 disqualifying from that particular role.

563 Young guy back in the day, was having one of the women in his college students small
564 group stay the night and stuff was happening, and he was lying about it. And that worked
565 until she got pregnant. It's pretty hard to lie about it, then. Well, that guy was obviously
566 removed from leading a group. He was still in the church, we loved him. And I thought
567 the discipline, I hope, will help his character. Quite gifted, but his character is not what it
568 needs to be. Maybe someday, in ten years, wherever church he's at, Jesus can use those
569 great gifts for something of value. I'll never see that day. But I think he's gifted for
570 something in the kingdom of God. But regardless, unless there's character, and we do that
571 through right discipline, with a purpose of love and development in that man, he'll never
572 be in a role like that, or shouldn't be.

573 Okay, so 1 Timothy 3. I'm going to do that, then we'll be in another text. And then I want
574 to try to answer what happens from here, like, what do we do next? What does this mean?
575 Where do we go? I want to try to do that. We have two songs of worship. We're going to
576 do some prayer together. Cody, Villard, Tim Pappoe, and I are going to pray a little bit
577 over us.

578 And I would ask: Would you guys be in prayer for us? For our group of churches? Be in
579 prayer for us that Jesus has his way. He wants to do some things in us that we need. We
580 need some things that this kind of season can produce. And we of course, need protection
581 and all those other things.

582 Okay. 1 Timothy, you guys there? Three?

583 One through seven is about overseers, so that's specific to our purpose. Verses eight
584 through 13 are about Deacon leaders, so that would be our small group leaders.

585 We're just going to focus on the first seven verses, verse seven particularly.

586 “The saying is trustworthy, if anyone aspires to the Office of overseer, he desires a noble
587 task. Therefore, an overseer must be...” So this is Paul writing to Timothy. They're
588 planting churches quickly, and Timothy is having to go back into those towns, into those
589 churches, and identify leaders, and release leaders and structure. So we do it the opposite
590 way. We already have a leadership structure in place when we plant a church. Well,
591 they're just going and preaching on the streets, or going to the synagogues. People are
592 being saved. Crazy stuff's happening. Philippian jailer's family, Lydia's household's
593 being baptized, churches are just formed.

594 The other thing, by the way, in prayer: if we're going to experience some of the suffering
595 of Scripture, wouldn't be amazing if we experience some of the Holy Spirit power, and
596 healings, and the supernatural, that also happens? Like, if we're gonna have some of the
597 sufferings, let it be the sufferings of Christ. Not because we're <inaudible> or because
598 we lack character. I mean, if we're sketchy, and we suffer, we can't blame Jesus for that.
599 “It's the sufferings of Christ!” No, it's the sufferings because we're wrong. But if they are
600 the reproach of Christ, suffering of Christ, may it also be that someday we experience
601 some of the power that's supposed to accompany that.

602 00:50:00

603 Okay, so this is the list. Paul is saying to Tim, “When you're looking for a guy that's
604 going to be a pastor, elder, overseer, here's what you look.” You look for: must be above
605 reproach, husband of one wife. We interpret that not “prior married,”—some groups of
606 churches say that if you're prior married and divorced, you cannot be a leader in the
607 church. You're just qualified because of these verses. We would say this refers to
608 polygamy. Not that a guy couldn't have been prior married, divorced, now he's married to
609 somebody else. That's not how we interpret it.

610 Sober minded, self controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. You should think
611 through all your overseers. We've got staff overseers, and we have non teaching
612 overseers, which is Winston on our board, Mike Berardi on our board. But the rest of our
613 pastoral staff: Xavion, myself, Cody Jackson, you should think, “Are those men qualified
614 or not?” Is this largely true, with grace needed sometimes, but not massively untrue, or
615 they're disqualified.

616 Not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must
617 manage his own household well with all dignity, keeping his children submissive.

618 Someone who does not know how to manage his own household, how will they care for
619 God's church. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit,
620 fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by
621 outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace into a snare of the devil.

622 So the right question that's been raised by—when I was at Joshua church last weekend. I
623 think I've aged six months in a week. I think it was last Sunday night. One of the right
624 questions that they raised, “So is Steve still well thought of by outsiders? And if he's not,
625 then what do we do with these verses?” And I love the question, I told him that. It's a
626 good question, because it's not a question based on the optics of a situation or a damage
627 control model, or a psychological thing of, “wouldn't it make sense that a guy with that
628 past never does the blah, blah, blah?” Those are humanistic arguments that have some
629 limited merit on their own, but aren't particularly as helpful to a doctrinal discussion.

630 The doctrinal discussion, that's the deal, right? Not, “What makes sense to you? Well, I
631 think it makes more sense for this.” The better thing is, “What does scripture say?” And
632 so I love a question based on scripture, because that's what we should be thinking about.
633 Not just, “Well, I'm gonna invite my friends. What if my grandma finds out that I go to
634 this thing?” Like, “What if I'm now embarrassed of my church family? And I'm... what,”
635 —those are real things, true things. But those are not as important as a biblical question.
636 Do you follow where I'm at?

637 Asking the question biblically is the right way to go about it. I appreciate the question.
638 Like, that's what we should be thinking about.

639 “Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so he may not fall into disgrace into
640 a snare of the devil.” And so the actual word by the way—so first, I would say this, it's
641 not... above... “well thought of by outsiders,” it's not optics, it's character. And so, in
642 the community that are not Christian, that are not in the church, if people look at our
643 overseers and their interactions with Cody, Xavion, myself, Jackson, Berardi, Winston is,
644 “That guy's... he's... oh, he's... he's on the board? That guy? That guy that kind of was a
645 little bit sneaky, shady, a little bit, like, not respectable? That... that... that guy?” It's not
646 about optics, it's about character.

647 And within the community, a person's going to be known. And they're not going to be
648 putting on a Christian veneer of, “Oh, praise God, everything's great.” The people that
649 see them in their daily life, see them interact with their kids, see them when they're tired,
650 and they've argued with their wife on the way to HEB. They're going to see the real dude.
651 And that's important that he has good character.

652 Because, if it's just the optics of, well, you're disqualified if enough people decide they
653 don't like you. Well, Paul was in Lystra. And when he and Apollos were preaching —
654 Apollos or Barnabas? Barnabas, I think. No, Apollos? No... one of those guys. It's in...
655 it's in... and I have got it written down here because I'd mess it up. Brain Power lagging.
656 I forget.

657 Anyway, one of those two guys. It's Barnabas. They thought these guys are Gods. Let's
658 sacrifice to them. And because they were speaking out in a language that was not a
659 language that Paul and Barnabas knew, it took them a while to figure out what was
660 happening. "Why are they bringing in livestock? Oh, no! They think we're gods. They're
661 trying to sacrifice!" So they rush into the crowd, tear their garments. "Don't do this.
662 That's not right. We're not gods. We're men like yourself. That's an abomination. No, no,
663 no, no."

664 00:55:00

665 And they said even with all their efforts, they had a difficult time preventing them from
666 sacrificing to them as gods. But then some of the Jews that hated Paul from Antioch
667 showed up. And they persuaded the crowds. And the crowd, the whole crowd, turned
668 against them. And they said, "These guys are evil, let's destroy them!" They drag him out
669 of the city and stone Paul.

670 Acts 14: "Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the people from offering
671 sacrifice... the Jews from Antioch and Iconium, having persuaded the crowds, they
672 stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing that he was dead."

673 I wonder if he actually was. You get stoned until they're done throwing rocks, people
674 suppose he's dead. Dr. Luke's being kind. I wonder if he actually was. We don't know.

675 "When the disciples gathered about him,"—I suspect they were praying, and not just, you
676 know, blotting his bloody forehead with a damp cloth—"He rose and entered the city.
677 And on the next day, he went on with Barnabas to derby. And they had preached the
678 gospel to that city and made many disciples. They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and
679 to Antioch..."

680 That's an interesting thing. "Let's loop back through those same places? Really, Paul? The
681 guys that were throwing rocks? That you got drug out of there?"

682 "...Encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying that through many tribulations, we
683 must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every
684 church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they
685 believed."

686 Shocking! So, Paul was not disqualified though a whole town turned against him, and
687 stoned him till he was a bloody pulp, drug him out of the city, left him for dead. He goes
688 on, continues to obey Jesus. And then he loops back around and goes to the same city.
689 And he helps them find elders in that city for those churches. So, my point being, if this is
690 about optics of “you're only qualified until enough people think you're disqualified, and
691 then you are disqualified,” well, then that didn't make sense that Paul could continue in
692 that function with great effectiveness.

693 He would have been disqualified based on that interpretation of the verse, right? You
694 cause enough uproar, you malign someone and say they're sketch, enough people believe
695 they're sketch... Well, then they have to be removed as pastors because they're sketch.

696 I was gonna do a Bill Clinton quote, “But hear me on this... I did not have...” No. “But
697 hear me on this...” Sorry, wait, is it too soon for a Bill Clinton quote?

698 If a pastor is sketch, then the boards need to remove or discipline that pastor. They
699 should. Which is why I asked our board, “If I'm sketch, I don't know it, or I'm such a vile
700 man that I've fooled myself and everybody else. But if I am, do your job, and replace me
701 with a better man, a different man. Do that. That's, what you should do.”

702 So hear me on that. If there is a sketch pastor, don't guard the guy. Like, do you know
703 how many people have told me over the years, “The church we were part of, the pastor
704 was stepping out on his wife, or so and so was stealing money, I brought it up, and they
705 kicked me out.” You know how many times I've heard that? I've heard this so many
706 times, it's heartbreaking.

707 If you bring legitimate—the Bible says you have to have a couple of witnesses. And if
708 you have that, and a leader is genuinely guilty of that sin, I'm not going to kick you out of
709 the church and defend my guy at all cost. That's not what we do. I'm going to be sure that
710 it's true and work that out. And then I'm going to make sure that the church is protected
711 and it's safe, even if it means it has to be safe from me. I want you guys to be safe. I want
712 this to be a place where you can drop your kids off, and you're not worried, and you can
713 sleep at night believing, “My leaders aren't perfect, but they're sure trying, and they're
714 doing the best they can.”

715 And if you're convinced that your leader is sketch, then you have my blessing, not my
716 agreement, because I don't think our leaders here are sketch, but you have my blessing to
717 find a place where you can love and be loved and be a part.

718 There are a bunch of amazing churches in this town. There are. A bunch of them, and I
719 can help you pick one or find a few like. That's okay.

720 00:59:30

721 Another guy in one of the churches was writing this about lifetime disqualification, in
722 case it's useful. His thinking is interesting. In it he says,

723 “If it's this attitude that would cause Steve to no longer be well thought of by outsiders,
724 that I can't possibly link it to 1 Timothy 3:7. If all that it took to disqualify leaders to
725 expose their sin before they was a Christian, then the church would have no leaders.
726 Either that or we would all be forced to hide our sin for fear that if it ever came out, it
727 would do too much harm to the church neither seems biblical to me. There's always a
728 strange paradoxical line to walk for the Christian. The Bible calls us to be well thought of
729 by outsiders, yet it simultaneously says we will be hated by the world. How do we
730 reconcile this?

731 It is telling me that 1 Timothy 3:7 comes at the very end. Paul begins by charging
732 overseers to be above reproach. He then gives a bunch of specific examples for what that
733 looks like. When he concludes that an overseer must have a good public reputation, it's
734 extremely difficult for me to imagine someone meeting the qualifications in verses 2
735 through 6, and yet be unable to meet verse 7. When I think about Steve's life, I think
736 about someone who has demonstrated his character again and again. Take away sinful
737 slander against him and attempts at character assassination, and you are left with a man
738 who has faithfully discharged the duties Jesus has called him to for decades.”

739 And I believe that. I absolutely believe that that's true. Those aren't my words. That's
740 words from another leader in our group of churches, but I absolutely believe that.

741 See, most of you don't know who Steve Morgan is. And I've had that as one of my
742 greatest gifts of grace and blessing in my life. I'm not going to save my own suffering by
743 saying otherwise. I can't be convinced of that. He's wounded me in his imperfect
744 leadership, of course, just as every wife has been wounded by her husband's imperfect
745 leadership at one time or another. — Or you've just been married last week, and there is
746 not time yet. But it's, it's, it's coming —He's not a perfect man. But he's not an evil man. I
747 would know by now. 30—you would know by now.

748 He is not disqualified. He is amazingly gifted in an apostolic way, he suffers greatly for
749 what he's called to, and he is obedient to death to what he's convinced God's asked him to
750 do.

751 I'm not going to disavow him. I want to be more like him. I do. I want to be more like
752 him. He is a better man than me, in his character and his gifting and his obedience to
753 Jesus. He is.

754 And if the reverse was true, then I should be his leader. Agreed?

755 You should pray for him in the season designed to destroy him. I won't stand on my
756 watch that he would be discredited and sent away in great shame. He's not done wrong.
757 He's not done wrong. He's not perfect, but he's not done wrong.

758 There'll be more things that will be released, I'm sure. But in terms of, “Is there another
759 big thing, Sándor, you know about? That's not public yet?” No, no, there's not. This is the
760 big thing. But this has been held over him from the very beginning, when we were 10
761 people in his living room.

762 What a great gift that Jesus has now allowed this to be removed as a great future threat.

763 I think our best days are coming when we can say, “Yeah, we have leaders here that have
764 done stuff. And look at how amazing Jesus is that he uses us still.”

765 Yeah, we have standards to protect. If a person, their character is faulty, and their motives
766 aren't pure, and they're a danger to people... Of course, we have biblical systems and
767 responsibility to do that. And we do.

768 Do you know how long it takes for me to release a pastor here into that role? I mean, I
769 knew Cody for years before we decided that's what his life and his gifting and his calling
770 was. He had been in the church for a couple years, he led a small group for a couple
771 years, he was in my garage changing out the transmission of his white Ford Taurus with
772 deer blood in the trunk from when he was a hunter.

773 I got to see that man before he had any role responsibility. And we wondered and waited
774 and tested and have an apostolic team around us to help discern and determine that.

775 Guys, we are slow. We don't just hire random people, do some interviews, and hope for
776 the best. We don't release pastors until—these are men that I've known for five or 10
777 years before that.

778 There's some of you in this room, I've been watching you since you were five, wondering
779 if that's what God's built you to be.

780 And so we were very, very, very careful with these things.

781 Let me finish with 1 Corinthians 6 and we'll worship. Turn to 1 Corinthians 6

782 What does the gospel actually say about the nature of our forgiveness? Is imputed
783 righteousness true? That we have the righteousness of Christ? Is it true that when we're

784 justified we're not guilty? Like, not guilty. But we did it. No, but we're not guilty. Is that
785 really what we believe?

786 01:05:00

787 See, I think that this whole season might be used by Jesus to strengthen us and to enhance
788 our understanding of the beauty, power, mystery, majest... scandal of the cross. That
789 we're so imperfect, and we're so flawed, in so many ways, and God still does some stuff
790 in us. Amazing. How can he do that? We've seen Jesus do some shocking things over
791 these years. I don't think he's done with us.

792 Guys, can I tell you my opinion? I don't think any group of churches is designed by Jesus
793 to last for perpetuity. I just don't think. I know the Catholics trace back to Peter, and
794 they're the original. I don't think any group of churches... if you look at Christian history,
795 lots of different groups rise and fall. I just want to be faithful in our lifetime to do what
796 God's entrusted. He might intend this group to endure until he returns, and he might not.
797 And he raises up another group, some other time in history, to obey and to do what he's
798 doing.

799 We're not the only thing by the way, please don't think I'm saying that. I just think we do
800 the best we can. And there are some evidences of God doing some amazing things. Some
801 of you in this room—God's done some amazing things in you here, in spite of our
802 weaknesses, and our flaws. And there still are plenty of those to go around.

803 Let's look at the text and we'll worship, and we'll pray. Verse 9, 1 Corinthians 6:9:

804 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” So what's
805 that mean? Less reward in heaven, is what that means? It means what you're terrified to
806 wonder if it means: it means “not inherit.” It means “not get there.” It means “not make
807 it.” It means “the other place, not the good place.” It means exactly what you'd hope it
808 can't possibly mean.

809 “The unrighteous will not inherit. Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral nor
810 idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves nor the greedy
811 nor drunkards nor revile or is nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. And such
812 were some of you.”

813 If I go through the list, “sexually immoral,” sexual contact, that is with the person that
814 you're not married to? Yeah, I can check that box prior to being married. That's true for
815 me. “Idolaters,” worshipping a false god that's not the true God? Oh, I've done that. My
816 paganism and my background. I prayed to Grandfather. I bled for Grandfather. Like,
817 yeah, I'm an idolater for sure. “Adulterers,” that's not on my list where I've had sexual

818 contact with someone who was married or I've done that since being married to Amanda.
819 That's not on my list.

820 “Men who practice homosexuality,” that's not on my list, though it is for others. “Nor
821 thieves...” I'm sure that there are times where—I have nightmares by the way where I'm
822 leaving a store and I've somehow taken something I haven't paid for. Like, awful. There
823 was a—when I was a kid and I found a BB gun in a trash barrel. I went to Big Ben, Old
824 Ben, I don't know, some one of those old department stores, and I had a little cylinder of
825 BBs. And I'm so excited that I run out to the van. And my dad sees, “Hey, Sándor, you
826 didn't pay for those.” [Gasp] And so I run back in, and give them the money.

827 And so “thieves... the greedy... drunkards.” I've been drunk a couple of times.
828 “Revilers... swindlers,” will inherit the kingdom of God.

829 “Such were some of you.” I think Paul's being nice. I think he's being nice. I think that we
830 would all say, “Yeah, at least one of those things, that's me.” I think. I think. That was
831 “such were for some of you.”

832 But you were, when you were saved, you were what? Washed. You were sanctified. You
833 were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. So what
834 do we think that “washed” means? And “sanctified” means? And “justified” means? It
835 means that the things that we once were in gave ourselves to are completely wiped away
836 from the record and memory of God as though it never was. That's what I believe that
837 means. That we are declared “not guilty.”

838 Now, the penalty, justice, did come. There is one who was declared guilty so that we
839 could be declared justified. There is one who suffered wrath so that we could have mercy.
840 There is one who was rejected and condemned that we would be chosen, accepted, loved.
841 There is one who faced what we deserve so that we get what we don't deserve. Talking
842 about Buddha. No. I'm sorry. Muhammad. No. Sorry.

843 01:10:00

844 Do you get the gravity of this hope that we have? Do you get the gravity of that? If we go
845 by the law, and a standard of righteousness that even our adversaries can't match and hold
846 up to, nobody stands under that. I'm disqualified from being used by God for any good
847 purpose, if the standard is “scrutiny to every word and deed.” And no mercy, no grace, no
848 forgiveness, throw him out. He's ruined. That's a Cody word—not ruined—it's “ruint.”

849 But God's still uses men with a past like me. Men with a past like you. Women with a
850 past like some of you ladies. He still uses that. I don't know why. I think If I was God, I

851 would just use unfallen angels. They seem like a safer bet to do the stuff in the right way,
852 then do use us. I think that. Like, he didn't ask me though. I'm glad he didn't.

853 All I know to do is what he set before us, which is “make disciples of all nations, be a
854 part of a healthy local church that tells people about Jesus and lives it as best we can.”
855 Let's forgive people, because we've been forgiven by Jesus. Let's literally love people
856 that, even if they might hate us, that we would love in return, and in response. I've
857 learned how to do that, by the way. In the early days, bitterness was starting to grow and
858 bear it's nasty for you to my heart. True. And it grows up and defiles many.

859 I can genuinely say now that I love those even that will send me hate mail and nasty
860 things that are just evil, ugly. I still—I do. I choose to love those guys. And it's not just a
861 choice, I feel a great hope for what God might reveal in terms of mercy and help to them
862 as he is doing to us and the things that we need. Guys, we're not perfect.

863 I would encourage you to not read about all the things, because it's really hard to separate
864 out what's true, what's not true, what's somewhere in between. It's really hard to do that.
865 You will incur a wound in that process. And it will eventually have an effect upon your
866 heart and your ability to trust and to believe. It will do that eventually.

867 But if you do, and you have things that you wonder about, you can ask me. And you
868 won't be in trouble, and I won't be mad. I'll do my best to help with what I understand.
869 You might agree or you might not. And that's okay.

870 If you have a hill that you die on, then I understand that and I'll respect that. For some
871 people, this is the hill. “No, I believe in disqualification from pastoral ministry. Because
872 of that...” and I doctrinally don't land that way, and—but I know some genuine, God
873 fearing Christians do believe that. That's true. That is true. I personally don't. Our
874 Leadership Team board does not. Our local board does not. Our group leaders do not. But
875 others do. Respectable, God fearing good people in places do believe that. I get it.

876 I remember from back in the day—and we'll pray here in a minute—Steve saying, “Why
877 would God ask me to do this? Look at my past. Look at what I've done and how that
878 could wound people in the future. Like, why would he still ask me to do this and to start
879 this group of churches and to do this? Why? Why can't I just do something else with my
880 life? Why does he keep asking me to do this? Like, I don't—I've never asked for it. And
881 there's men much less flawed than me to do it.” I've seen him agonize over that.

882 But I still am convinced of that calling. I am. Because we wouldn't be here without that.
883 Jesus didn't ask me to start a group of churches and I couldn't do it. I don't have the
884 gifting and vision to do it. I don't. But I think we're gonna keep going with whoever
885 wants to.

886 And any that want to do something else have our absolute love and blessing to do it.
887 That's okay. That's okay. And I will not stay in for us vilifying anybody who leaves under
888 that conviction that's not okay with me. We will not gossip and slander and turn them into
889 the bad guys and remove our friendship and our love. We will not do that. Okay? We will
890 not do that. We will love them. And we will bless their convictions and their decisions.
891 And we will want good things for their future. And we will be a part of this great
892 kingdom together, even if we're in a little bit different places as we do it. That's okay.

893 01:15:00

894 Some of you may be called, not in this season, perhaps but another, to do a different
895 church in a different kind of a way. Maybe me too. That's okay. All we know to do is to
896 obey Jesus with what we're convinced of as he leads. And we all do that imperfectly.

897 Where do we go from here? More attacks, for sure will happen. There's no doubt there's a
898 bunch queued up. There's rounds in the chamber... rounds in the magazine. Sorry,
899 military guys. I mess it up.

900 Like, there's more stuff that's coming, I have no doubt of that. And so we keep going.
901 That's all I know to do. The Leadership Team of The Network said, "So does the right
902 thing cease to be the right thing if X number of people would leave a church or a church
903 would leave the group? Does that change the right thing to do in certain circumstances? If
904 there's an article written, does that change the right thing to do? And we become into sort
905 of damage control? I don't think it means that. I don't think it changes what we're
906 convinced of is right and wrong based on outcomes."

907 And so more attacks will come. Some may choose to not want to visit if you invite them.
908 You know, if you Google, my name, it doesn't take much to see this whole thing. And I'm
909 not—I don't like it particularly—but I'm willing, if that's part of the cost of trying to obey
910 Jesus as best I know how, that I have a lifetime stigma attached to my name, I don't care
911 about my name and reputation. I just don't.

912 But there may be some that would say, "I don't want to go to that place. I've heard about
913 what you guys are, what they do." Well, invite them to a different church that doesn't
914 have those things. That's okay. I invite people have different churches.

915 I'm, dear friends with Brian Fisher at Grace. He's praying for us a lot. What an amazing
916 man. Do you guys realize that? He's one of the three apostolically gifted four that I've
917 ever met in my life. He's an amazing man. What a gift.

918 I'm friends with Allen Duty at New Life. That's an amazing church. He is a really solid
919 guy. Doctrinally, we're very close to those guys. There's some amazing churches in this

920 town. Invite people to those places if they don't want to be a part of what we're doing
921 here. That's okay.

922 Pray that in this suffering that it somehow glorifies Jesus, and it's used to sanctify us.
923 Like, Jesus gets glory. No matter what happens from here. That's what we want, right?
924 It's not about this thing we're trying to build. Guard at all costs, defend our guy. No, thank
925 you for loving me and, and praying for me. But the point isn't, "I've established a thing,
926 and I'm defending my empire." If Jesus asked me to go somewhere else, and hand this off
927 to someone, we'll do it. And I think I've demonstrated that or we wouldn't be here.

928 So what do we do? We're gonna pray, we're gonna love Jesus, we're gonna have real—I
929 don't want to say meaningful conversations, because that's sort of code language, in our
930 culture for certain things. But I do mean that if we need to walk stuff out, and things that
931 you have questions about or need help with, great, that's okay. You shouldn't be afraid of
932 asking or wondering or saying anything. There should be none of that.

933 If we are what we think we are, which is we love one another, and you can ask or say
934 anything, and that's okay... Well, I think it's true. At least I know it's true if you come to
935 me with something. You can. "Hey, help me with this. I'm not sure about that. I still—I
936 actually am convinced otherwise, on that part. So what do I do with that?" That's okay.
937 We'll work out whatever that means.

938 So, guys, we're in the midst of a time, aren't we? I know. I hesitated to call this meeting,
939 because 80% of you didn't know and may never know and shouldn't care. And I've just
940 brought you into a whole thing and put a burden on you that I've tried to carry myself.
941 But I want your prayers. I want you to know what God's doing in what's happening. I
942 want to protect you if you happen to hear something—that you've heard from me—what I
943 think is real about it all. And what I think we're supposed to do about at all.

944 God may see fit to get us through this and to come with a kind of power and working and
945 salvations. No seasons last indefinitely. They just don't. And I do have faith in my better
946 days and moments that there is an "after this." That we can go back to the work that we're
947 called to. That we're not supposed to stop now. Right now I'm building a wall with a
948 weapon in one hand and a hammer in the other. That is true. And yet there may be a time
949 when I can put the sword down, and I don't need to defend. I hope you don't hear me
950 defending myself tonight. That's not particularly what I'm trying to do.

951 I do love this church and this group of churches. And I do love Steve that is our leader. I
952 do. I love him. I'm committed, and I believe. Not just because I have a history, but
953 because I'm convinced scripturally and by my experience of a man of great character and
954 calling. I believe that.

955 01:20:00

956 And so we'll see what Jesus does. If he allows us to keep going, we're going to keep
957 going. And no matter what we do, whether we're here or not, we're going to love him.
958 Right? Whether we're here or scattered, we're going to love him, aren't we? Because I
959 would hope for nothing less. That whatever it is that you do, and wherever you go, you're
960 going to love Jesus, and you're going to advance his kingdom and you're going to obey
961 the Bible, and you're going to seek God. Whatever, wherever you're at, and however you
962 do it, that's what I hope you're producing. Otherwise, I've failed you.

963 So with that said, worship team, why don't you come on? Why don't we stay in and pray?
964 And then we'll have a couple songs of worship, then we'll pray together for a little bit.
965 Let's pray.

966 Father, be in our midst. We're humbled that we don't deserve any of the good things that
967 you give. But we're thankful for every and any good thing that you give. Father, would
968 you let us be quick to repent of things repent-able? Give us the humility to be ready and
969 willing, eager, to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Father, if any
970 of us in this room have wronged anyone, whether it be ourselves or others in the
971 community, help us to act right, help us to speak right. Help us to guard our hearts. Help
972 us to not be angry or bitter or defensive or mean. Help us Lord. If we're going to claim
973 Christ, let us have the character of Christ, who was accused, him wrongly, of course, and
974 yet he did not open his mouth. He did not return upon them. He healed the guy's ear. Can
975 we be that Lord? Can we be the one who heals the guy's ear? Not the one with the sword.

976 Increase our faith, that you reign on high. Increase our faith, Lord. For those of us that
977 can be often a little too worried about our reputation or opinion or how people see us—
978 that's so true for me, Lord—help us, Father, to care more about what's right and true and
979 what you're calling us to do than the optics and impression of it all. We do ask, give us
980 character, that those outside the church would think well of us. That better be true. Where
981 we're working, and what we're doing as we interact with people around town, that we act
982 with a kind of honoring to the one to whose name we belong.

983 Jesus, those that have— I feel like there's some of you that had been under spiritual attack
984 and didn't, kind of, know what it was, even, until now. Like, this thing you didn't know
985 about, but you've still felt the heaviness, and you've still felt the shadow. Father where
986 there is some spiritual attack... it's not everything of this season we're in, but it is some of
987 it... Would you lift it, Lord? Would you look upon us? Would you come by your spirit?
988 Would you lead us now in worship?

989 [end]