

Notes from "A Crown That Will Last"

Week One: The Purpose as Image Bearers

1. Day 1: Mirrors (8/27)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts by talking about mirrors with pictures of rock stars on them. They were coveted prizes when he was younger, but they didn't function as mirrors which was what they were "supposed" to be
- ii. He talks about our role as God's image-bearers. According to Genesis, all humanity was designed to reflect and represent God in the realm of the entire creation
- iii. But Satan tries to appeal to our selfish instincts rather than God appealing to our wisdom and reason. We become beasts (like Nebuchadnezzar), who are controlled by instinct and no longer have a choice

b. Questions:

- i. Which comes more naturally to you: to follow your own desires or to live according to God's will?
- ii. If you are completely honest, when things in your life are challenging or difficult, do you more value and turn to your own desires or to embracing God's will and reflecting his image?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, I know that Satan fooled the first humans by tricking them into believing that following their own desires was a higher purpose and calling than being mirrors and reflecting your will. I can so easily be fooled as well by believing . . .

2. Day 2: Rebellion (8/28)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts by talking about planting a garden, and then going to Africa for a month. Some plants died, and others took over and dominated entire sections of the garden
- ii. He makes the point that, although controlling our own destiny rather than serving God can seem appealing, we aren't capable of it and we make an incredible mess when we try
- iii. By reaching for what looks like a higher position (being in charge), we actually end up with a lower function. Being God's image-bearer is the highest possible function for us as people

b. Questions:

- i. How might it change your approach to your family, your neighborhood, your job, etc. if you understood your true role as a gardener working on God's behalf to create the conditions for life to thrive?
- ii. Rebellion can be overt and obvious, but oftentimes it is the simple act of not realizing that we have accepted the world's wisdom and implemented it in our lives. Think of your approach to those from other cultures, ethnicities or countries, or your stance on partisan political issues. Has God's will been the primary influence in those positions, or have you allowed other sources of wisdom to inform you?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, I want to trust you completely and represent your image and will in every area of my life. I must confess, however, that I can easily slip into accepting the world's wisdom rather than yours when it comes to . . .
- 3. Day 3: Difference or Division (8/29)
 - a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a season in little league where he played with his best friends. But the next year they were all on different teams and their friendship turned into rivalry which destroyed it
 - ii. He then talks about the incredible diversity in God's creation which is glorious, but about the human tendency to turn difference into division, which leads to tribalism and destroys diversity
 - iii. What I particularly got out of this is that we were created to thrive as a unified people/creation, and not as individuals at the expense of others. We need to see ourselves as a community, not as individuals
 - b. Questions:
 - i. Are there any behaviors that you engage in or ideologies to which you ascribe outside of following Christ that could lead to division of some type?
 - ii. What are some of the different aspects of humanity and human expression that can cause you to want to divide or separate from others?
 - iii. Keep a list today of every example of human division that you come across, whether it be in your own experiences, watching the news, viewing a movie, reading a news site, etc. At the end of the day meditate on how much division there is in our world. Read John 17 slowly and take a few minutes to pray that God would help followers of Jesus to truly be unified and show the world a different way from all the separation.
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I have, at times, been guilty of harboring thoughts and fostering actions that have turned differences into divisions. As you examine my heart, my thoughts, my feelings and my actions, allow me to see the things that could feed into division rather than create the conditions for unity. As I ponder these things, I now realize that I must grow when it comes to . . .
- 4. Day 4: Babel (8/30)
 - a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about the basketball courts in his community. All but one have a regulation-height basket at one end, and an 8.5 foot basket at the other end. That's intentional, because the city doesn't want large games with lots of people gathering. They think it will increase tension and violence
 - ii. He then talks about the tower of Babel, where God intentionally divided people. Prior to that the rebellion was individual and chaotic, but Babel was an organized rebellion that almost succeeded in overthrowing God
 - iii. So God has intentionally divided our world through language and culture, which means that human effort cannot succeed because the division has been orchestrated by God. Only God can succeed in bringing unity
 - b. Questions:
 - i. Have you found yourself, at times, trusting earthly solutions to human division and tribalism? Why is that counterproductive for the Christian?

- ii. How can trusting in human responses to division, whether they be attempts at unity or embracing divides like nationalism, potentially thwart God’s purposes for humanity to be image-bearers?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I hate the division that we find in the world, but there are times when I have trusted in solutions of the world to overcome the divides. There are many human responses, whether they be rooted in peace and unity or they embrace the division and move toward hyperpatriotism and nationalism. I want to recognize the ways in which I am drawn to these worldly responses, and I want to acknowledge the problems with those approaches . . .
- 5. Day 5: Finding Meaning (8/31)
 - a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about watching TV as a kid, when there were only a handful of channels. He also remembers going to McDonalds, when they only had a few menu options
 - ii. Today we have unlimited choices, especially in Western society, and we can think that choice and freedom is the ultimate prize. But unlimited freedom leads to anxiety, and destroys community and meaning
 - iii. God placed Abraham in a balance of freedom, community and meaning. We need all three of these elements in their proper perspective to be the true image-bearers that God wants us to be
 - b. Questions:
 - i. Do you agree with the idea that we must sacrifice some of our freedoms in order to find true fulfillment and meaning? How have you done that in your own life?
 - ii. What community have you embraced as your primary community of priority and identity? What communities have you had to minimize in order to achieve that?
 - iii. What is your primary meaning in life? How does this meaning motivate your ongoing choices?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I seek the same balance of freedom, community and meaning that you provided to Abraham. I don’t feel as though I have always achieved that, though, and at times I have become very imbalanced. To truly achieve the balance you have made available for us, I feel that I must . . .
- 6. Day 6: Free Samples (9/1)
 - a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a friend visiting from Africa, and going to Sam’s Club with them. He was amazed at the free samples that were available at the end of every aisle
 - ii. Then he transitions to Revelation 5, and talks about Jesus as the lamb who was slain, the only one who is able to open the scroll and the one who purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation
 - iii. Finally, he makes the point that we are God’s “free samples” to the world. What do we show them? And does our fellowship demonstrate the diversity that Jesus envisioned when he purchased us for God?
 - b. Questions:

- i. Do you regularly have people of other tribes, languages, ethnicities and nationalities into your home? Is your close circle of intimate friends diverse, or do they all look a lot like you?
 - ii. In what ways does your church most need to grow in order to reflect the gathering of the nations that will take place in God's presence?
 - iii. If your neighbors were to observe your home life, would they see a sample of Revelation 5:9?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you so much for beginning the gathering of the nations and doing what humanity could not do on our own. I want to be a picture and a sample of what you want done in your church, but I need your help as I . . .
7. Day 7: Together (9/2)
- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a young friend who is a great basketball player, but he's on a bad team. At one point his friend said, "Basically, I AM the team." But one person can't play basketball, it's a team sport
 - ii. Then he goes back to Genesis, where God created manKIND in his image, not just one man. We are to be God's image-bearers as a community, not just as individuals. In our Western culture, we idolize individualism
 - iii. Romans 12 was written to Jew and Gentile Christians, who were both tempted to associate with people who were only like them. But Paul emphasizes that we can't be God's image-bearers without the entire community
 - iv. And he finishes in Philippians 2:12, where we are admonished to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." This sounds like the ultimate individual command, until we read verses 1-11 which are all about community
 - b. Questions:
 - i. Do you approach your Christian life as though you really do belong to the rest of the body?
 - ii. In what ways does individualism present itself as a temptation or an obstacle to your role as part of the image-bearing community of Christ?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, as 1 John 3 reminds me, the fact that you call me your child, along with the family of believers, is a clear sign of how you lavish your love on us. But I must admit that I do not always embrace the family of believers as though I truly am an integral part and really do belong to them. Please help me to understand . . .

Week Two: The Mission to Gather the Nations

8. Day 8: Go Make Disciples (9/3)
- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off with a couple of messages that are a little shocking, until you realize they are text messages that got chopped into pieces. When you read the rest of the message they make perfect sense
 - ii. He then applies this same thinking to Matthew 28:20: "Go and make disciples of all nations." He notes that often we have focused on "Go and make disciples" without including "of all nations"

- iii. If our focus is on the first part, we are happy with numerical growth and we are happy with a church of people just like us. If our focus is on the entire scripture, we're not happy with either of those
 - iv. This command from Jesus is God's plan to gather the nations, to reverse the curse of Babel and to create a diverse, unified, worldwide body of disciples from every nation and culture. That is God's dream
 - b. Questions:
 - i. What are the practical differences between understanding that our primary mission is to make disciples of all nations and not just to go make disciples?
 - ii. What obligations and responsibilities does a mission like making disciples of all ethnicities and people groups bring to you personally?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I am so grateful that you have chosen me to be part of your kingdom and your family. As I think about our mission to gather the nations, please help me to . . .
9. Day 9: Slow to Understand (9/4)
- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a time that his wife surprised him with an anniversary trip. He thought they were going to his home town, but she had something much more special planned (visiting Abraham Lincoln's birthplace)
 - ii. He then talks about how incredible it is that it never occurred to the twelve that they should reach Gentiles. Jesus told them to make disciples "of all nations," but they thought that meant Jews from all nations
 - iii. In Acts 2, there were "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." They thought that Jesus' plan had been accomplished, but in Acts 10 it took both a vision and a miracle to get Peter to look further
 - iv. We can think that a church with a few diverse people groups is what God intends, when really he has a much bigger plan in mind. We think we already know what God is going to do, and miss the power of what he really is doing.
 - b. Questions:
 - i. Is it possible that even now we are like Peter, sitting back thinking that God has already completely fulfilled his mission when there is much more work to be done? What part of the mission might be yet to finish in your local context?
 - ii. How often do you share your faith outside your normal circle? Do you intentionally go to other neighborhoods or interact with groups of people not represented in your church to share the gospel of Jesus with them?
 - iii. Go to a store in your neighborhood that you normally don't go to. Pray that God will lead you to reach out to some people who are different from the types of people you normally proclaim the gospel to.
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, what you have done already to begin your mission of gathering the nations is truly amazing. Thank you for letting me be part of it. Please make clear to me where you want to send me on this mission. In the back of my mind, I have always felt that someday I should . . .
10. Day 10: A Big Decision (9/5)
- a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about a time when the “default app” on his phone got switched, so it tried to open every file with the same program. And one size doesn’t fit all, so it was very frustrating
 - ii. Then he talks about how early Christianity consisted of people solely from Jewish backgrounds. They didn’t see themselves as starting a new religion, but as following God’s voice
 - iii. So it was natural for the Jewish culture to dominate early Christianity. And when Gentiles started becoming Christians, they had to decide whether they needed to become Jewish as well
 - iv. The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 was a crucial step, because there they decided that there would **not** be a “default culture” for Christianity, other than godliness and mutual respect
- b. Questions:
- i. Can you think of any examples where the default culture of a church made it difficult for others to feel comfortable or welcomed?
 - ii. Why do you think it was so important that the apostles sent the message that Christianity would be intentional about not embracing one default culture?
 - iii. Romans 14 is full of cultural conflicts that were taking place in the church in Rome. Go through that chapter and find at least five specific areas in which they were experiencing cultural conflict.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, help me to learn from the example of the apostles in Acts 15 and realize that one of the amazing aspects of following Jesus is that it transcends culture by using every culture as a vehicle for worship and community in the Christian faith. Yet, at times my own spiritual family can fall into operating through a default culture. As I think and pray about it, open my eyes and help me to see that . . .

11. Day 11: The Mission in Galatia (9/6)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about people coming to him and asking advice about changing jobs. He points out that their primary consideration is typically how to provide for their families
 - ii. He notes that this perspective is lacking in two ways. First, the primary purpose of work isn’t to provide for our families, but to reflect the kingdom of God to our co-workers
 - iii. And second, our careers don’t provide for us and our families, God does. We are called to trust God’s provision and love for us, and not our work, as the source of our security
 - iv. He then applies this to Peter’s behavior in Galatia, where he initially lived like a Gentile but when some men came from Jerusalem, he changed his behavior and started following Jewish customs
 - v. Paul challenged Peter, who was in danger of trusting his culture more than Christ for his identity and standing before God. Culture is a powerful divider, but cannot be allowed to be so in God’s kingdom
- b. Questions:
- i. Are there any aspects of culture that we, without thinking much about it, elevate to a status much higher than they should be and so confuse them with necessary elements of the gospel?

- ii. What would Paul say to churches today that consist of virtually only one race, ethnicity or cultural group?
- iii. Select a people or cultural group that lives in your area and about whose culture you are unfamiliar. Find a way to start reaching out and building connections with people of that group from a position of friendship.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I need your guidance and revelation to see what I can't see on my own. Let me be humble like Peter was in Paul's rebuke. When I think of areas in which I can confuse my own culture with adherence to the gospel . . .

12. Day 12: The Mission in Rome (9/7)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about how good intentions do not guarantee success. Nobody gets married expecting to divorce, but many do. Similarly, many multi-cultural religious movements start strong, but end badly
 - ii. To put it simply, if we do not pay careful attention to the dynamics of culture, the mission to gather the nations will be put in serious jeopardy before too long. The church in Rome is a great example of this
 - iii. Our cultural preferences can be deeply important to us and tied to our emotions in ways that we often don't understand, but we must train our selves to remember that they are nothing more than disputable matters
 - iv. Paul encourages them to accept one another (Rom 14:1-9), refrain from judging (Rom 14:10-18), pursue peace and unity (Rom 14:19-21), keep negative thoughts to themselves (Rom 14:22-23)
 - v. Bear with one another (Rom 15:1-6), accept one another (Rom 15:7-22), realize that God has entrusted many aspects of his mission to us to carry out as we see fit (Rom 15:23-33)
 - vi. Unity is fragile. Ignore it and it will shatter. Handle it recklessly and it will fracture. Just as marriages that are neglected or not cared for intentionally will probably break apart, so will the diverse church
- b. Questions:
 - i. What aspects of the culture of others is most likely to irritate, annoy or infuriate you?
 - ii. How skilled are you at working through and accepting differences in cultural areas that are important and emotional to you?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, you have given us the mission to gather the nations, and what a privilege it is. Help me to never forget just how challenging it will be. When it comes to accepting those with different cultural practices and beliefs from my own, I realize that . . .

13. Day 13: The Mission in Corinth (9/8)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a time when he broke his foot, but didn't tell his coach and continued to play. This caused major problems down the road—just because he **could** play on a broken foot, didn't mean he **should**
 - ii. Then he talks about the city of Corinth, which was a center of pleasure-seeking and independence. The challenge there was to find unity in the midst of wild cultural and economic differences, and strong opinions

- iii. Paul identifies four keys in 1 Corinthians 10. First, not everything is beneficial (1 Cor 10:23a). Often matters of opinion are not inherently right or wrong, but the question is whether exercising one's right benefits others
 - iv. Second, not everything is constructive (1 Cor 10:23b). The opposite of constructive is destructive, which can often be the case when opinions are expressed and argued. We should seek to build up, not to tear down
 - v. Third, we should not seek our own good but the good of others (1 Cor 10:24). And finally, whatever we do should be done to the Glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)
- b. Questions:
- i. Do you regularly apply these four principles to your decision-making process? If not, what do you think might change if you start?
 - ii. When doing the difficult work of interacting with people of a different culture, how would it challenge you to "do it all for the glory of God?"
 - iii. Write down the three most difficult situations you are having right now in your interactions or connection with others. How might each of these principles redirect the way you approach that situation or person?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, thank you for providing us with your word that guides us practically and succinctly in so many areas of life. When I think of my interactions with others, especially cross-cultural interactions, I have, at times, failed to fully implement these four principles from 1 Corinthians 10 in the things that I have thought or the ways that I have acted. I can think of at least three specific situations where if I had fully embraced these principles, I would have acted differently and would have . . .

14. Day 14: The Mission in Ephesus (9/9)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about how weddings are the creation of a new family unit. And multi-cultural weddings are even more special, because they create a unique new family culture
 - ii. Then he does a brief exposition of Ephesians, focusing on Eph 2:15 which says that "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." Jesus brings all people together
 - iii. This is a mystery that God kept concealed for thousands of years, but was revealed in Christ. Jesus' death on the cross is the fulfillment of God's plan to "gather the nations"
 - iv. And this is what Paul is celebrating in his glorious praise language in Ephesians, that "through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus"
- b. Questions:
- i. Have you ever considered just how monumental it truly is that the purpose of the cross, according to Paul, was to bring about the gathering of the nations?
 - ii. When you share the gospel with people, is the gathering of the nations in Christ part of what you proclaim? If not, how would that change the way you present the gospel?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, you have done more in bring together all people groups and nations than we could have asked for or imagined before Christ. Yet it is not

always easy to live in the reality of such a diverse people. According to your power that is at work within us, please work in our church right now by . . .

Week Three: The Task to Be All Things to All People

15. Day 15: A Slave to All (9/10)

a. Summary

- i. He starts off talking about the Disney movie “Hercules.” It wasn’t very successful, but after failing to become a “true hero” over and over, Hercules finally achieves his goal at the end by sacrificing himself for his girlfriend, Meg
- ii. The idea of achieving greatness through self-sacrifice doesn’t appear often in the ancient world outside of the Bible. But it was central to Jesus’ life and mission, and those of us who follow him must embrace and imitate it
- iii. When it comes to gathering the nations, if we look out for our own interests or preferences, we will be unusable in this mission. We must follow Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor 9 to become all things to all people
- iv. If we are not prepared to give up our freedom and our rights, we will not win many people to the kingdom of God. We find true victory and become true heroes in God’s kingdom through self-sacrifice for the sake of others

b. Questions:

- i. Are you fully committed to giving up your rights and comfort for others for the sake of the gospel?
- ii. When was the last time you sacrificed willingly for someone else or gave up your cultural preferences or rights to advance the gathering of the nations?
- iii. We cannot become all things to all people without being aware of our own culture. For one entire day, take note of every major thing you do, believe or think that is culturally conditioned. Be prepared to write a lot!

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, being part of the gathering of the nations is not always easy. My cultural preferences, comfort zones and practices feel normal to me, and I like them. When I think of intentionally giving up my right to always embrace and express my own culture . . .

16. Day 16: Learning (9/11)

a. Summary:

- i. The author of this book, Michael Burns, is American and his wife is African. He starts off talking about how they knew there would be cultural challenges in their relationship, but they never realized how challenging they would be
- ii. To her family, the morning was sacred and everybody greeted each other by name. To his family, dinner was sacred and everybody dropped what they were doing when dinner was ready. It was easy to offend, and feel offended
- iii. Paul was effective in reaching both Jews and Gentiles for two reasons. First, when he encountered differences he was careful not to characterize them as weird, strange, offensive or rude. These judgmental words set up barriers
- iv. Paul also refused to be a victim of culture, and instead committed himself to understand and embrace cultural differences. He was driven by his desire to connect with people’s hearts so they could come to know Christ

b. Questions:

- i. As a disciple, how much effort have you put into becoming a student of other cultures and learning to interact humbly and competently with them?
 - ii. Are there any specific aspects of another culture that you know you are uncomfortable with or don't like? What do you do with those elements?
 - c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, help me to see the different cultures around me that I need to learn about and adapt to. When I think of my need to learn . . .
 - d. Conversation-starting questions about culture:
 - i. Did you grow up in a culture that was more collectivist in nature or individualistic?
 - ii. Did you grow up in a culture where people were respected automatically because they held positions of authority, or did they first have to give and earn respect before being given it?
 - iii. Did you grow up in a culture that values time, order and punctuality to a high degree, or one that values relationship over time and would never rush or worry about time to the detriment of a personal connection?
 - iv. Did you grow up in a culture that valued worship and deep connection with God as something that is done in a quiet, contemplative and pious environment, or did worship take on a more celebratory feel that was focused on corporate gratitude?
 - v. Did you grow up in a culture where it was expected that political issues and hot-button news stories would be talked about and wrestled with at church, or one where you didn't bring up those things at church?
 - vi. Is the dominant culture within the church your own culture, or is it largely different from your natural culture? How has that impacted you?
17. Day 17: All Things to All People (9/12)
- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about tolerance. In modern Western society, tolerance is lifted up as one of the greatest virtues. Tolerance implies letting anybody be or do whatever they want to be or do, without interfering or judging
 - ii. But he points out that tolerance is extremely limited, because it can do nothing to promote unity. It can keep us from interfering, but it is powerless to mend divides or differences. In some ways it reinforces the fences of division
 - iii. In the kingdom of God, we are called to maintain diversity and even have a level of tolerance, but we are also called to complete unity. The only way to do that, especially in the difficult waters of culture, is to be all things to all people
 - iv. Being all things to all people demands that I learn about you; value and respect your culture, perspective and background; and be willing to put them on an equal plane with my own. It means moving past toleration toward participation
 - v. Gathering the nations requires us to be all things to all people. If we shirk that part of the work, the task will slip through our fingers and God will move on and find other people who will pick up the mission and do their part to maintain it
 - b. Questions:
 - i. How much of a conscious effort do you make to be all things to all people?
 - ii. Are there any aspects of cultural life, expressions or practices of others within the body of Christ that you have experienced and felt uncomfortable with or ignorant regarding? What has been your response when those situations have arisen?

- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, truly being all things to all people seems exhausting. Please give me the will and the strength. Sometimes I feel like I don't even know where to start. When I think of such a great task . . .

18. Day 18: Share in the Blessings (9/13)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about marriage as an example of building unity from diversity. We are not just called to tolerate each other in marriage, but to embrace our differences and create "one new family out of the two"
 - ii. This is challenging, there are no days off and our different cultural backgrounds are always conspiring to make us bump into something. But if we persevere, the unity is worth all of the hard work and challenges we face along the way
 - iii. There is a sentiment in modern Christianity that "all I need is God." But in 1 John 4:20, John tells us that anyone who says he loves God yet hates his brother is a liar. Whoever loves God must also love his brother
 - iv. And in 1 Cor 9:23, Paul says that he becomes all things to all people for the sake of the gospel. But loving one another is not just a requirement, an act of obedience. Paul says he does it "that he may share in its blessings"
 - v. So there is joy and benefit in the hard work of unity. Being culturally pliable, humble and competent is not just an obligation of the gospel, it is also one of its blessings. Being all things doesn't just benefit others, it benefits us
- b. Questions:
 - i. Is being all things to all people something you have ignored, only tentatively dabbled in, or embraced wholeheartedly?
 - ii. What do you gain by being culturally humble and flexible?
 - iii. Write down the top twenty blessings that you have received from God by being part of his family. Identify those you have received through being part of an ethnically, tribally and culturally diverse body.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you for the blessing of being part of your family and being called to be all things to all people. Cultural flexibility and humility are not always easy or my first instinct, but it is part of how you want to bless me. As I listen to your voice in this area today, please make clear to me . . .

19. Day 19: Hard Work (9/14)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about all the hard work that we put into education—twelve years of school, followed by college, interspersed with lots of menial jobs and other experience along the way to get us prepared
 - ii. And he contrasts that with becoming a parent—the challenge is much more difficult, and the preparation is almost non-existent
 - iii. He then turns to 1 Cor 9 where Paul talks about becoming all things to all people, and then gives an illustration of how hard that work will be—the runner who goes into strict training and disciplines himself to win the prize
 - iv. We can't just "show up" and be all things to all people. It requires discipline, self-denial, thoughtful planning, effective coaching, strict training—all of the things an athlete would need to be successful

- v. And we never arrive, we must continue to grow in order to achieve this greatest of blessings, a truly unified, diverse multicultural gathering of the nations. This is “The Crown That Will Last” that this book is all about
- b. Questions:
 - i. What does being all things to all people mean to you?
 - ii. What does being all things to all people demand of you personally? In what areas do you still need to put in a lot of work?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you for the call to be all things to all people. I know that it will be necessary to maintain the diverse family that you have given us. I know that I have much work to do in this area. When I think of the areas in which I specifically need to grow, I am filled with the thought that . . .

20. Day 20: Inversion (9/15)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about Saturnalia, the biggest holiday of ancient Rome. One aspect of it was the symbolic freeing of all slaves, where they could say and do whatever they wanted, and exchange places with their masters for a day
 - ii. But it was only a farce, and served more to reinforce their slavery than to make them feel truly free. The masters had all the power, and most cultures have a similar imbalance of power. This hinders the gathering of the nations
 - iii. Even the apostles occasionally argued about who was the greatest. But Jesus taught a completely different concept, that the greatest was the one who served. Power was to be used to benefit others, not to exalt oneself
 - iv. Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet, but Jesus did it anyway. Peter wasn’t being humble, he was holding on to his worldly view of leadership. And Jesus wanted to root that out, so Peter would also serve when he became the leader
 - v. The choosing of the deacons in Acts 6 shows that Jesus was successful in making this point. The apostles gave up power, control and responsibility to a “nondominant group” to make sure the needs were equally met
- b. Questions:
 - i. On a scale of 1-10, rate yourself in each of the following areas:
 - 1. Cultural flexibility and willingness to change your own preferences
 - 2. Cultural humility and willingness to value the preferences of others as equal to or greater than your own
 - 3. Cultural curiosity and willingness to learn about other cultures so that you can participate in them and be as welcoming to others as possible
 - ii. What do you find most challenging about applying the principles of servant leadership to your role in multicultural community?
 - iii. Every community has dominant groups that have more power and influence. How do we react to those positions of influence?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you for the perfect example Jesus set of servant leadership. When I think of being a servant leader, whether it be in a leadership role or in the dynamics of cultural influence, I believe that the challenges that face our church and me as an individual are . . .

21. Day 21: Flexibility (9/16)

- a. Summary:

- i. He starts out talking about his two sons. Having grown up in a multi-cultural home, although each of them has a “preferred culture” they can switch back and forth effortlessly between their mom’s culture and their dad’s culture
 - ii. Paul grew up multi-cultural (Roman and Jewish), but he also worked hard to adapt to cultures that were not native to him. This is what it means to become all things to all people in order to effectively gather the nations
 - iii. In Thessalonica, Paul was among his native culture and he spoke effectively. In Athens he was in an unfamiliar culture, but he had studied them and was able to establish common ground by beginning with a common creator
 - iv. He started in the synagogue in Athens, but moved to the marketplace and the Areopagus. He talked about their cultural life, their religious beliefs and themes of Greek philosophy that would connect with his audience. He built bridges
 - v. Paul did exactly what he proclaimed in 1 Cor 9:19-23. He valued the Greek culture rather than criticizing it, he had taken the time to learn about it and could speak to it. He used their images, language and style and it worked
- b. Questions:
- i. Think of four or five distinct cultures that are present in the area where you live. How might you effectively change your approach to connecting with them and presenting the gospel, or how might you organize a small group Bible talk meeting in order to connect with them in the best way possible?
 - ii. Are you truly willing to put in the work necessary to be all things to all people?
 - iii. Pick one cultural group that lives in your area but with whom you are mostly unfamiliar. Develop a specific plan to learn more about that culture so that you may be as ready as possible to share the gospel with them
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, I know that the task of being all things to all people is not easy on any level. Please help me with the challenges that face me when I interact with people of different cultures, races, ethnicities, countries, political beliefs, tribes, etc. The biggest area that I need to grow in when it comes to this right now is . . .

Week Four: The Covering of Love: Our Identity in Christ

22. Day 22: Love One Another (9/17)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off by talking about how he sometimes feels like “a fish out of water” in his own home. His wife is African, his sons can go either way, and his wife’s mother and nephew are both living with them. So African culture dominates
 - ii. It can be frustrating and exhausting to live in a “foreign” culture all of the time, especially in one’s own home. So what does he put up with it? **Love.** Love is the only thing that can make it work. It is indispensable in every way
 - iii. He then turns to John 13-16, which focus on the conversations Jesus had with his disciples the night before his crucifixion. Jesus starts by washing their feet, to show that hierarchy and self-benefiting power have no place in his kingdom
 - iv. He then talks about the betrayal and suffering that are coming his way, before the cross and on the cross. Sacrifice will be part of his legacy, but it is not a sign of defeat. It is through sacrifice that God will be glorified in him

- v. Then he tells them to love one another, not according to the world's standards, not based on their feelings and preferences. They are to love one another as he loved them, lowering his position, taking on shame and willing sacrifice
 - vi. And this is the only way that Jesus says people will be able to recognize true Christians. Not by sharing our faith or giving to the poor, but by sacrificing our rights, our societal privileges and our cultural norms for the sake of others
- b. Questions:
- i. If the only thing that people knew of God's love was by experiencing the love for others you demonstrate in your own life, what would they know about God's character?
 - ii. What are some of the things other than love that we can be tempted to hang our hats on as the indicator of being followers of Jesus?
 - iii. Spend the rest of the day focusing on the love you have for others. Take two minutes at the top of each hour to pray that God will help you in the next hour to reflect his love into the world in every way possible
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, we know what love is because Jesus came and lived it out. Thank you for that. When I think of the world knowing who his disciples truly are based on their love for all people, I wonder . . .

23. Day 23: All God's People (9/18)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about going on a trip, and asking his son to take care of the yard. They have a big yard with lots of things to care for, but his son went above and beyond. That made him feel loved and respected by his son
 - ii. He then focuses on the church in Ephesus, and reminds us of what we learned on Day 14, that the mystery of Christ is the gathering of the nations into a single, unified, multicultural body
 - iii. And this is probably what Paul meant in Eph 1:15 when he commends them for their "love for all God's people." This is not a general commendation, but a specific commendation for being united with one another, regardless of tribe or culture
 - iv. Then in Rev 2:4, Paul commends the church in Ephesus for their hard work and perseverance, but says they have "lost their first love." Could this also be a reference to a lack of love "for all the saints" and a return to tribalism?
 - v. In closing, even if we achieve a diverse, united, multicultural body at some point, that is no guarantee that it will continue to grow and thrive. We must "make every effort" not to slip back into tribalism and division
- b. Questions:
- i. Do you actively and intentionally love all God's people, or do you have a tendency (even if it is unintentional) to spend a lot more time and energy on people who are more like you culturally?
 - ii. During your time as a disciple, have you grown into comfortable patterns and routines? They are not necessarily bad, but what do you do to maintain your zeal and passion for God's mission and your journey to become like Jesus?
 - iii. How diverse are your spheres, at least in terms of age and ethnicity? Look at your work/school environment, the people who lead/direct you, your small group, your neighborhood, close friends, discipling partners and mentors
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, help me to see if I have fallen from my first love for your mission to gather the nations. If I have, help me to have a clear picture of the things I did at first so that I may return to them. Make it clear to me that I need to . . .

24. Day 24: Second-Mile Love (9/19)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about an incident from college where someone was tailgating him. He and his friends were ready to fight, until the other guy got out of his car and he was huge and muscular! So they apologized and drove off
- ii. He then goes to Mt 5:38-42, where Jesus tells us “if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well”
- iii. In the world, when we are mistreated there are only two options. Either we stand up and fight for our rights, or we run away. The choices are strength or weakness, fight or run, demand justice or tolerate injustice
- iv. But Jesus offers out a third option—neither fight nor run, but stand there and willingly offer the other cheek. By this we show that we will not run, but neither will we fight back. We sacrifice, willingly suffering for the benefit of others
- v. Being an image bearer is our purpose, gathering the nations is our mission, being all things to all people is our task. But only sacrificial love will bind these together and keep them from becoming ugly distortions of what they should be

b. Questions:

- i. Have you embraced the type of sacrificial love that Jesus expected of those who would follow him?
- ii. What are some practical and specific ways that you might be able to show this type of love in your own life?
- iii. Start a conversation with someone today about injustice. Ask them how they would respond if they were punched or spit on, wrongfully sued or publicly mocked. Then share Matt 5:38-42 with them and ask them what they think

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, our world, in its present state, is so full of injustice and oppression in big ways and little ones. Help me to discern the opportunities for me to turn my cheek, give up my coat, or walk that second mile. As I reflect on this passage from Matthew 5 today . . .

25. Day 25: I Love Everyone (9/20)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about how he has often felt good about “loving everyone.” But then one evening he saw a news story about a group of white supremacists, and his blood began to boil at what they were saying and how others responded
- ii. He then goes to Matt 5:43-48, where Jesus quotes the prevalent oral tradition of the day to “love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” That standard was prevalent then, and unfortunately is still prevalent now among believers
- iii. Jesus goes on to say “love your enemies,” which basically means we should have no enemies. But Christians today are often comfortable having enemies. They regularly post or comment about entire groups of people as their enemies
- iv. This causes two problems in the church. First, Christians can feel like enemies to other Christians. But more often, different groups of Christians have different enemies, which can cause great tension and division in the body

- v. Loving our enemies seems crazy and stupid, but it is God’s very nature. God doesn’t withhold his love from those who seek to harm, ignore or abuse him. And neither can we, if we truly seek to be his image bearers
- b. Questions:
 - i. Are there any politicians, celebrities, countries or groups of people that you have deemed “dangerous” in one way or another, and have grown comfortable with thinking of them as your enemies and then acting accordingly?
 - ii. What is the most daunting aspect for you about the call to love our enemies?
 - iii. Examine your heart and find one group or person that you have accepted as your enemy. Develop a specific plan to change your own heart and then to actively pray for, love, and if possible serve that person or group
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, this might be the most difficult thing you will call us to. Help me to love my enemies. Help me to see who I have become comfortable with as an enemy and have allowed to be outside my love. I really need you to . . .

26. Day 26: Without Love (9/21)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about winning the lottery, which most people dream about from time to time. But statistics show that 70% of major lottery winners end up filing bankruptcy. How can something that looks so great end up being so bad?
 - ii. He then turns to 1 Cor 13, which starts talking about wonderful gifts for the church—understanding all languages, fathoming all mysteries and knowledge, faith that moves mountains, giving one’s possessions and even one’s life . . .
 - iii. Any one of these gifts seems like it would transform a local church. But Paul’s message here is that even having all of these wouldn’t benefit the church one bit if these gifts were not used from a place of love, for the benefit of others
 - iv. Love points away from ourselves and toward the benefit of others. I could stress about my agenda, but love is patient. I could compare myself to others, but love does not envy. I could talk about myself, but love does not boast
 - v. We can have the most diverse church in the world where cultures are brought together to praise and worship God, and where every Sunday is an amazing international celebration, but if we do not have love, we have gained nothing
- b. Questions:
 - i. Ask the Spirit to reveal to you what you most need to gain from 1 Corinthians. Read it through slowly four or five times, and listen to his voice.
 - ii. List each category (patient, kind, not envious, etc.) and write a few sentences about how each is needed in cross-cultural relationships in the body of Christ
 - iii. What do you think is the direct connection between being culturally humble while striving to be all things to all people, and love?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you for sharing your love with us and allowing us to love you and others. Thank you for the gifts that you have given to each of us to help build up your church. When I think of the gifts you have given me and the need to use them in love . . .

27. Day 27: I Didn’t Expect That (9/22)

- a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about the sitcom “Friends” and its opening theme, which begins with “So no one told you life was gonna be this way,” and laments that “It’s like you’re always stuck in second gear”
- ii. This captures the disillusionment that confronted many young people in the 90’s. Disillusionment is one of the strongest of human emotions, and can transform love for a church body to deep resentment almost overnight
- iii. We come into the church with high expectations. Have you ever said, “I should not have to deal with that in the body of Christ?” And to make it worse, we judge others by their actions when we judge ourselves by our intentions
- iv. Isn’t it reasonable, though, if we join a community of people professing to follow Jesus, to expect that they will act like Jesus? To think that way has at least two major problems
- v. First, it confuses the journey with the destination. An arrow doesn’t hit its target until the very end of its journey. Similarly, we will be buffeted along our journey and will not truly be like Jesus until the very end
- vi. Second, Scripture clearly tells us that we should not expect smooth sailing along the way. All of the admonitions we have been reading in this book are needed because unity in a diverse community is challenging. Conflict must be expected
- vii. God is not glorified when perfect people who are all identical get along in harmony. He is glorified when imperfect people who are all very different fail one another, but continue to demonstrate love, forgiveness and loyalty

b. Questions:

- i. How do you handle disappointment with others in the church?
- ii. Do you wisely expect to encounter mistakes and sin both from yourself and others in the body of Christ, or do you sometimes come to the table with unrealistic and unbiblical expectations?
- iii. What are your expectations in the church for (a) whether you will be sinned against, (b) whether you will be loved the way you want to be, and (c) whether you will be completely understood, accepted and welcomed? How do those expectations compare with Eph 4:1-6 and Col 3:12-17?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, I am guilty of occasionally setting myself up for failure by expecting that I should never encounter any level of unpleasantness in the body of disciples. Please help me to look at passages like those we read today and to realize that . . .

28. Day 28: The Covering (9/23)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about repainting some steps in his back yard. They were old, knotted, pockmarked and weather-worn, but after painting them and sealing them they looked beautiful. The paint covered all of the imperfections
- ii. He then talks about how Peter denied Jesus three times at a “coal fire” in John 18:15-18, and then about how Jesus asked Peter to affirm his love three times at another “coal fire” in John 21:15-17. “Coal fire” is only used twice in the NT
- iii. Jesus wanted to cover Peter’s denial with something completely different, so that his memories of a “coal fire” would be covered with love and acceptance rather than betrayal and failure. “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8)

- iv. He closes by sharing about his 25-year marriage, which still involves daily cultural clashes. And that's just two people—how much more in a large church of multiple cultures! Only a thick covering of God's love can keep us united
- b. Questions:
 - i. Have you ever felt frustrated with the cultural practices, beliefs, expectations or expressions of others in the church (even if you didn't recognize them as such at the time) to the point where you were exasperated or even felt like giving up? How does love help navigate through times such as those?
 - ii. Are there any conflicts (big or little) that you are currently embroiled in that could use some of the creative type of love that Jesus showed Peter? What can you do specifically in that situation to let love cover over the imperfections?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, your love for us is amazing. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We have many imperfections in our church family, but we also have love. Please show me the people and situations that most need to feel my love today. What I really want to know is . . .

Week Five: The Power of Cultural Humility

29. Day 29: Identity (9/24)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off by talking about marriage as a demonstration of the kind of relationship God desires with his people. Marriage affects identity, as two individuals leave their families (cultures) to begin a new family (culture)
 - ii. That's exactly what happens when we are baptized into Christ. And yet, our native culture doesn't disappear, it remains with us and continues to affect us. But we must subordinate it to our new identity as disciples of Christ
 - iii. Paul's writings clearly tell us that no superiority or division is allowed (Col 3:11), but he also was comfortable writing about his identity as a Jew and his hope that his own group of people would be open to accepting Jesus (Rom 9:1-5)
 - iv. Never once does Paul oversimplify culture by saying, "You're a Christian now—none of those things matter anymore. Just behave culturally like a Christian." He understands how much work it will take to bring cultural norms together
 - v. Culture is much like language. All of us have a primary language, that shapes who we are in many ways. When we become Christians, we subordinate and utilize our language for Christ. It still shapes us, but it doesn't define us
- b. Questions:
 - i. Do you struggle, at times, with allowing your racial, cultural or ethnic identity to take precedence over your identity in Christ, in your mind or your reactions? (Don't answer this question too quickly.)
 - ii. How do you personally find balance between seeing your primary identity in Christ and the fact that you are still perceived in the world as being a member of your ethnic/cultural group?
 - iii. Write down 2 or 3 ways that you could utilize your cultural background and identity to further the kingdom of God. Write down 2 or 3 aspects of your culture that, if you are not careful, could become obstacles or roadblocks
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, thank you for the diversity of your creation. I am thankful for the many differences you have crafted in your world and I'm thankful for all cultures, but am grateful for mine as well. I understand that my own culture powerfully shapes how I interact with you and with your people, and how I approach life in the kingdom. When I think of balancing my cultural upbringing with being a member of your family . . .

30. Day 30: My Way Is Better (9/25)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about folding laundry. He has a very specific way that he does it, and when his mother-in-law folds the laundry it is a great challenge to him not to unfold it and refold it the "right way" (her way is the "wrong way")
- ii. All of us have our preferred ways of doing things that are comfortable for us. As long as we are with people like us, we don't think much about it. But when we interact with someone from another culture, our humility is tested
- iii. Ethnocentrism is when you evaluate and judge the cultures of others according to the standard of the customs and norms of your own. Rather than viewing their culture as a viable alternative, we deem it inferior or flawed
- iv. Ethnocentrism is detrimental to community because it puts unfair expectations on others to change and to value my preferences over theirs. If they have to adapt to my methods, that is working against being all things to all people
- v. Instead, I must be culturally humble and be willing to adopt some of their methods. If they are doing the same thing, something new and wonderful is created, not the colonial mindset that pressures others into accepting my ways
- vi. Ethnocentrism can be very subtle, we may not always be able to recognize it in ourselves. It may look as innocent as being set in our ways or not liking change. We must reject ethnocentrism in favor of cultural adaptation and humility

b. Questions:

- i. How would any of us best be able to determine if we are ethnocentric?
- ii. Have you ever found yourself looking down on the cultural practices or expressions of others? What would it look like to be all things to all people in that situation?
- iii. Think about ways you can move from (a) judging from your own cultural perspective to (b) judging from others' cultural perspective to (c) active participation in the cultural practices of others in your diverse community

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, I appreciate my own culture and am grateful for it. At the same time, I recognize that ethnocentrism is a very real threat to unity and harmony of the gathering of the nations. Help me to see myself clearly and to be humble enough to ask others about this and listen to what they see in me. As I think about my own potential for ethnocentrism, I realize . . .

31. Day 31: Above and Below (9/26)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about his college roommate, who was a soccer player from Mexico. They built a good relationship, and had a lot of fun together. But when they wanted close connection, they both gravitated back to their own friends
- ii. He then talks about two aspects of culture. The first aspect is the visible part (food, clothing, mannerisms, language, greetings, music, art, rituals, gestures, etc.) When the world speaks of being multicultural, it is talking about this part

- iii. The second aspect lurks unseen, below the surface (deeply held cultural values and beliefs that remain even if we change our visible cultural preferences).
“You can take the girl out of the city, but you can’t take the city out of the girl”
 - iv. The “iceberg principle” tells us that 90% of the iceberg is below the surface. This is a good analogy for culture as well. Most of culture remains unseen by the eye, but profoundly affects who we are and how we view the world
 - v. During the Jewish exile in Babylon, God instructed his people to go to Babylon and embrace the culture. They were to get Babylonian jobs, buy Babylonian homes, create families and live their lives. If Babylon prospered, they prospered
 - vi. But their underlying culture had to remain devoted to God. If we are to truly unite as a diverse body, we must understand one another at both levels. It requires wisdom and humility to draw one another out at the deeper level
- b. Questions:
- i. Can you think of specific examples of when you differed deeply from someone with a cultural background unlike yours, even though you knew them well and shared many things in common above the surface?
 - ii. Why do you think it can be so difficult to connect with people from other cultures at the deeper level?
 - iii. Ask five people who have different cultural backgrounds from you the following questions: (a) When should someone receive respect? (b) What constitutes a family? (c) How can we communicate to show respect? (d) Should you automatically submit to someone in authority? (e) How is faith best lived out? (f) Should we help the needy without seeking to understand them, or should we seek to understand before trying to help?
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, the waters of our hearts are indeed deep. This certainly includes those aspects of our cultural values and beliefs that were passed on to us without our ever realizing it. Yet these same deep waters can keep us divided despite our best efforts to unify. When I think of the work that it will take to truly connect with others at this level and learn about their culture below the surface, I . . .

32. Day 32: Blending Culture (9/27)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about one aspect of his culture growing up—that we should take care of ourselves and never need anything from anyone. This is in conflict with another aspect of his culture—that we should joyfully help those in need
 - ii. Then when his wife was put on bed rest with their second son, they needed and received a lot of help from disciples, including meals, cleaning help and money to replace her lost income and cover the medical costs
 - iii. Initially he was ashamed and embarrassed, but eventually he humbled himself and became grateful. This points out that not all cultural practices are good, and not all of them fit with the kingdom of God. This is one such practice
 - iv. There are three responses to culture. One is to reject cultural practices that don’t fit with the kingdom. These include excessive self-reliance, a willingness to lie to “save face,” and a sense that raising children is “women’s work”
 - v. The second response is to appreciate the cultural expressions and perspectives of others on their own terms, respect that culture, and where appropriate, to participate. This is the process of becoming all things to all people

- vi. The third response is the transformed culture (Rom 12:1-2). Being conformed happens automatically, but being transformed is intentional. We renew our minds according to God's wisdom, his mission, and the tools he provides for us
- b. Questions:
 - i. What aspects of your culture did you have to transform or reject when you became a disciple of Jesus?
 - ii. What are three examples where you have intentionally embraced and participated in the culture of someone else to the extent that it is now part of your transformed culture?
 - iii. Ask some friends who know you well and are from different cultural backgrounds from yours what aspects of your culture they have observed that might not fit with the kingdom of God.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, please continue to give me wisdom to know when I should reject and not conform to the patterns of the world. Give me the strength to be all things to all people and to be transformed. Help me to understand that rejecting aspects of my culture that are not appropriate for the kingdom of God is not a one-time event, and that I must . . .

33. Day 33: Dominant (9/28)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a time when he was visiting Kenya, and there was a construction worker directing traffic. Michael thought he was angry based on his body language, but the Kenyan brothers said it was completely normal
 - ii. He then talks about the concept of a dominant culture. Every church has a dominant culture, and the members of that culture don't even realize it. It's only the members of the nondominant culture that see the dominant one
 - iii. And when the members of the dominant culture are called to adapt just a little, they complain as if they are the only ones having to adapt, when the nondominant members are forced to adapt almost all of the time!
 - iv. Most of the early Christians were Jews. But Paul quickly realized that Jewish customs were only cultural, they were not essential to Christianity. When we confuse culture with Christianity, it quickly becomes a huge problem
 - v. Paul would consistently call the dominant group to accept the others, lay down their rights and be all things to all people. And he would call the nondominant group to not think they had to change their culture to be part of God's kingdom
 - vi. The dominant group has a special responsibility to recognize their privilege and be willing to give up their dominance for the benefit of others. If we all strive toward grace, patience and humility, wonderful things will happen
- b. Questions:
 - i. Are you part of the dominant or nondominant group in your church family? How has that affected your experience within the church?
 - ii. If you are part of the dominant cultural group, how does the gospel and the principle of being all things to all people call you to act in the body? If you are part of a nondominant group, how does the gospel and the principle of being all things to all people call you to act in the body?
 - iii. Discuss these questions with someone from one of the "other" groups in your church: (a) Have you ever felt like an "other" culturally? How did that feel? (b) How does it make you feel to know that members of nondominant groups in the

church experience the same struggles that they face in the world? (c) What can the groups do together to make all people feel valued and included?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, it's not wrong or sinful to be part of the dominant group, and I'm not lesser than anyone if I'm part of the nondominant group. Please help me to see things from the perspective of others. When I think in those terms, I realize that . . .

34. Day 34: Everyone Is Welcome (9/29)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about a time when his sons were with friends, and they were all on their phones listening to music or watching videos at the same time. It was just noise, not music, and he couldn't stay for more than a minute or two
- ii. He then says that the church should be a place where everybody feels welcome, but nobody feels at home. If someone feels at home, that means they're part of the dominant culture group, and others aren't. That's not God's plan
- iii. For everyone to feel at home, it would be like the boys sitting around all doing what felt completely comfortable to them. It would be bedlam, not unity. Nobody feeling completely at home means we're gathering the nations
- iv. We want everyone to feel welcomed, included and valued. But we don't want to have a dominant culture that forces everybody else to just get on board. We all should understand that we will not always feel at home in the church

b. Questions:

- i. Do you always feel at home culturally in your church? If so, what responsibility might that mean for you in terms of the group becoming more inclusive and diverse?
- ii. If you often struggle with feeling out of sync culturally in your church, what are some godly responses you can have to that?
- iii. What are some things that individuals can do to make the church a more inclusive and welcoming cultural environment for all?
- iv. How diverse is your small group? How welcomed and comfortable might someone from a different culture be upon visiting your group? What are some steps you could take to create a more inclusive and culturally flexible environment?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, when I think of the phrase "We want everyone to feel welcome, but no one to feel at home," my response is . . .

35. Day 35: Clothed with Christ (9/30)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about how one of his sons used to put on his dad's clothes and walk around in them. When he was small it was comical, but as he grew older he continued to do it. He even wears some of his dad's shirts as an adult
- ii. He then talks about our primary identity. What is that group that comes to mind when you think of yourself? What group elicits your highest loyalty? Which group are you the most passionate to defend when criticized?
- iii. Before we become disciples, our primary identity may be our nationality, our race, our gender, our job or our family. But when we become Christians, our primary identity changes when we "put on Christ." He is our primary identity

- iv. In the ancient world, clothing was one of the most obvious and visible markers of a person's identity. You could tell someone's class, profession and much more by what they wore. People should see Christ as our "clothing"
 - v. Like his son, the clothes don't always fit and we wear them imperfectly. But we must resist the temptation to alter them, and do our best to wear them faithfully. We must never forget that Christ is our primary identity and identifier
- b. Questions:
- i. Have you ever been guilty of trying to alter the life of Christ to make it fit you a bit more comfortably?
 - ii. What negative and potentially divisive elements can arise in the body of Christ if the individual members do not have their identities deeply rooted in Christ?
 - iii. Take some time to consider each of the following areas of life and whether you have truly found your identity in Christ: politics, your persona and presence on social media, ethnicity and racial identities, career and what it means to be successful in life. Feel free to add more categories as well.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, thank you so much for clothing us in Christ. You have allowed us a new identity and a new reality in the life of your Son. It is only when we embrace that identity that the gathering of the nations can move forward and we can truly be all things to all people. Help me to understand that the areas I need to grow in concerning my identity in Christ have to do with . . .

Week Six: Together or Apart?

36. Day 36: My Story, Your Story (10/1)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about his view of the police growing up. They were the "good guys," stars of the TV shows and beloved in his community for giving away free baseball cards of the team that played in his town
 - ii. His wife had a very different experience. In her world, the police couldn't be trusted, were unfair and biased, and were agents to suppress black people and advance the cause of white supremacy. A completely different view
 - iii. He then looks at John 8, where Jesus was preaching to the Jews. At first they loved him, but then he starts challenging their views of who they are and they want to kill him. What produced such a rapid change in them?
 - iv. They believed they were freed from slavery in Egypt, but he told them they were still slaves to sin. They believed they were Abraham's descendants, but he told them that he was the Son of God. He even told them the devil was their father
 - v. If we don't understand these deeply-held "metanarratives," we will never understand each other's strong reactions to things in the body of Christ, and we will just waste energy trying to convince one another that we are right
 - vi. We need to draw one another out, seek to understand each other's differing perspectives and validate them. This will help to create empathy for one another's stories and perspectives, and come to a common understanding
- b. Questions:
- i. When you encounter a disciple who has a very different opinion from yours on a social or political issue, how do you respond? Do you argue and try to convince

them that you are right? Do you determine to simply not broach the subject again? Or do you try to listen and learn about their perspective and the identity-forming stories of their cultural group?

- ii. What can you do to grow in your cultural humility and competence when it comes to the identity-forming cultural stories of others?
 - iii. Spend an evening with someone from a very different cultural background than yours. Spend more time listening than talking. Ask them questions aimed at digging down into why they think the way they do and bringing out their metanarratives.
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, help me to be patient and willing to learn what other cultural communities have experienced rather than just assuming that my view of the world is always correct. When I think of listening to and learning the stories of other cultures . . .

37. Day 37: Me or We? (10/2)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about a time when he left his home office to pick up his son, and then came back to resume his work. But his wife was sitting at his desk, using his computer and texting friends on her phone, and it really irritated him
- ii. In his culture, even within the family each person had his own stuff. You were supposed to take care of your stuff and could share it if you chose, but it was your stuff. In her culture, everything belonged to everyone, it was all “ours”
- iii. The core difference is whether we come from an individualistic culture or a collectivist culture. This is illustrated quite clearly by comparing Barnabas (collectivist) to Ananias and Sapphira (individualistic)
- iv. This contrast is not really cultural, since they were all from the same culture. But it nonetheless demonstrates the ways that these two perspectives can clash in the body of Christ, sometimes with disastrous consequences
- v. Christianity was born in a collectivist culture, and even in modern Western culture we still find lots of encouragements in scripture to be more collectivist. This is a challenge to our independent, self-reliant world view
- vi. To have a blended community of individualist and collectivist cultures will take an incredible amount of trust, humility, communication and work. It will not be easy, but it is part of the mission to which we are called as disciples

b. Questions:

- i. Do you come from a more individualist or collectivist background? Can you think of a time when you were concerned or offended by the instincts or actions of someone you now realize may have simply been operating from a different cultural worldview? How does knowing that help you to see how you might be able to process conflicts like that differently?
- ii. What can you do to learn more about the outlook of others with a cultural perspective different from yours in areas like this?
- iii. Make a list of all of the aspects of church life and community that can be impacted by whether you are individualist or collectivist. Think about how someone from the opposite viewpoint would approach each topic differently.

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, if I'm honest, the actions and perspectives of those from different cultural backgrounds often make little sense to me and just seem wrong much

of the time. Grant me the strength to continue to pursue humility. When it comes to my background as an individualist or collectivist and my response to those from the opposite background, what I need to learn is . . .

38. Day 38: Straight to the Point (10/3)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts out talking about two family groups where people are habitually late. One leader addresses it directly, calling people out and giving direction. The other leader does a lesson on respect, including punctuality as an example
- ii. Some cultures prefer direct communication as honest and loving, but this can feel aggressive and harsh to others. Those other cultures prefer indirect communication, which can feel manipulative and evasive to the first group
- iii. There is no “right” way to communicate, and some cultural practices are not consistent with scripture. But understanding cultural preferences can help us to identify the cause of a clash, and the resolve it effectively
- iv. As a scriptural illustration, he looks at Paul in Galatians 1 and Philemon. Galatians 1 is a powerful example of direct communication, while Philemon is an equally-powerful example of indirect communication. Paul was skilled at both
- v. We can’t know everyone’s communication preferences, but we can learn, especially with those we interact with regularly. And understanding our own communication preferences will help us to be all things to all people

b. Questions:

- i. Before reading this devotional, would you have said that one of the two broad categories of communication styles was more godly than the other? How can it be destructive to community when we think that mere cultural preferences are more spiritual or the right way to do things rather than just a way?
- ii. What has been your typical reaction when you encounter someone with the opposite communication style from your own? Have you experienced a lot of discomfort or annoyance over this type of conflict?
- iii. Meet with someone you suspect has communication preferences that are opposite to yours. Think of scenarios which might require clear communication, and how each of you might communicate in those scenarios. Discuss how each of you could misinterpret the other’s communication in these situations.

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, it is so easy to offend people and not even know it. What feels respectful to me may feel rude to them, and vice versa. Please give me wisdom in this area. I can get easily annoyed when communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds from my own. When I encounter these types of situations, help me to understand . . .

39. Day 39: Many Versions (10/4)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about a single sister in their congregation, who shared that she almost didn’t become a disciple because every time she came to church somebody would take her out for lunch afterwards and pay for it
- ii. He didn’t “get it,” but his wife helped him understand that this sister was from a culture where family only ate together at home. If you took someone out to a restaurant, it was a business relationship rather than a personal one

- iii. Family feels different to people from different cultures. They had a service where people from different cultures shared what felt like family about the church, and what didn't feel like family. There are many versions of family
- iv. The author sees family in the church as a small group of clearly defined members who prepare one another to operate on their own and not need the resources of the family. They're united by the cause, but not always together
- v. To his wife, family drops in unannounced and shares resources always. If you're in the vicinity, you're family. To him, her version feels undisciplined and open to abuse. To her, his version feels stingy, unloving and mechanical
- vi. How do we become and maintain ourselves as a family when we don't even agree on what we mean by "family?" It will take a lot of communication, humility, and hard work

b. Questions:

- i. In what ways does your church feel like family?
- ii. In what ways does your church not feel like family?
- iii. Discuss these questions with your family group, and ask what you can do to make your group look more like the biblical concept of a church operating as a family and to help it feel like family to everyone involved

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, thank you for lavishing your love on us by making us your children and brothers and sisters to one another. Help me to see where I need to grow in making this church my family and helping others to feel that way too. When it comes to being family with one another, I realize . . .

40. Day 40: Politics and Allegiance (10/5)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts by noting that religion and politics are historically taboo topics. But with the internet we have access to people's inner thoughts, which combined with our outrage culture and lack of tolerance create a very ugly concoction
- ii. Political views are shaped by our cultural and historical backgrounds as much as they are by our philosophy and economics. Our experiences hugely influence how we view the world and what we believe is the best political approach
- iii. It is important to keep in mind that there is no one political approach or philosophy that is perfect. It is also important to recognize that politics by nature is a game of division, with opposing groups vying for influence and power
- iv. He proposes three guiding principles. The first is to recognize that the kingdom of God is a real kingdom with a real king and real laws which we must follow. Our first allegiance is to the kingdom of God and not a political system
- v. Next, as kingdom people, we are called to a radically different life. "Be devoted to one another, bless those who persecute you, live in harmony, care for your enemy" (Rom 12). Our focus must be on the eternal, not the temporal
- vi. Finally, we must define success properly. If we gain the whole world yet forfeit our souls, we are not successful. A strong economy is not the biggest concern of the kingdom of God—we need to keep our priorities in line with God's

b. Questions:

- i. Have you ever let political views become too important to you or shared views on temporal issues that could work to divide the body?
- ii. Why do you think that politics can become so important to some Christians, to the point where they are willing to let it become potentially divisive?

- iii. Take some time today to sit down and examine your political views, loyalties and affiliations. Look at the three areas listed above, and write out your political philosophy that can serve as a mission statement to direct your engagement with politics
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I am grateful for the country that you have allowed me to grow up in and I'm thankful for where I live. When I made you Lord, I was pledging my complete allegiance to you in every way. Please help me to allow no rivals in my heart, including politics or my country. When I think of the political arena and then consider my allegiance to you and your kingdom, I realize . . .

41. Day 41: Authority (10/6)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a situation at his son's school, where a teacher spoke disrespectfully to his son and his son fired back disrespectfully. As they discussed it, he and his wife had very different opinions about the situation
 - ii. There are two kinds of authority. Ascribed authority tells us to respect and submit to someone because they are in a position of authority over us. Achieved authority only respects someone who has earned our respect
 - iii. The Bible actually comes down more strongly on the side of achieved authority. Jesus admonished the twelve to serve the people and earn their respect, rather than demanding respect simply because they were in a position of leadership
 - iv. A diverse church will have members from both perspectives, and both perspectives bring with them strengths and weaknesses. By being aware of our tendencies, we can anticipate conflicts and work through them when they arise
- b. Questions:
 - i. Do you tend more toward ascribed or achieved authority?
 - ii. How much effort do you put into making the work of leaders a joy rather than a burden?
 - iii. Pick a leader in your church or another fellowship to pray for each hour throughout the day
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, thank you so much for providing leaders to keep order and help guide our family of faith. When I ponder my culturally conditioned approach to leadership, I realize that it affects my interaction with and approach to leadership by . . .

42. Day 42: Faith Too? (10/7)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about a conversation that he and his wife had with their worship leaders. They were talking about how to diversify the music ministry, and the worship leaders had identified some new songs to include
 - ii. His wife pointed out that music serves fundamentally different purposes for different cultures. White Protestants tend to be more doctrinally-oriented, and music serves to reinforce what they know and believe about God
 - iii. African American faith tends to be more experiential, and serves as a tool for coping with the trials and tribulations of life. Music becomes one's testimony to God, and God's way of communicating his comfort back to the believer

- iv. So even faith itself has a strong cultural aspect. For some, faith is an experiential community reality. For others, faith is doctrinally-oriented and is judged through an individualized assessment of costs and benefits
 - v. For those from the second group, church is a place to focus on the truth of God and to escape the terrible events of the world. Talking about social issues and painful current events has no place in their concept of corporate worship
 - vi. But for those from the first group, church is a place to wrestle with what is going on in the world, to talk about it and even ask hard questions of God, as the Psalmist often did. These two perspectives are strikingly different
 - vii. So culture even affects the nature of our faith and how we practice it, both individually and as a church. We must work hard to understand one another and to incorporate these differences into a truly diverse church culture
- b. Questions:
- i. How willing are you to experience new types of worship and intentionally push past your comfort zone for the sake of your brothers and sisters who long to worship in different ways?
 - ii. What is your instinct when it comes to the purpose of church and discussing controversial issues that go on in the world? What impact do you think it could have on others from the opposite cultural view if your preferences were always followed? What work would the church need to do to retrain, accommodate, or help the other group get what they need?
 - iii. These discussions are especially challenging if we have not divested ourselves of our allegiance to our country, our ethnic group, or our experiences. Watch the video “Gospel of the Kingdom” by the Bible Project, and discuss the practical implications when it comes to worshipping in a diverse community
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, there is so much to think about when being part of a multicultural community that sometimes it feels easier to throw my hands up and quit. It would be so much easier to find a group of people that share my cultural instincts and comfort zone. Please keep reminding me that that is not what you want. I often want to come to church to be comforted and comfortable, and it can be exhausting to have to put in this much work to be all things to all people. Here is what I need to grow in and think about . . .

Week Seven: The New Antioch

43. Day 43: Antioch (10/8)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about what makes a church community stand out from the world. Is it moral standards, or refusing to engage in certain habits? The early church stood out because of its stunning diversity on display in the community
 - ii. He then goes to Acts 11 and talks about Antioch. Antioch was an extremely diverse city, with 18 different ethnic neighborhoods and frequent tensions and riots. There was a lot of diversity, but no unity. Tribalism was on full display
 - iii. But the church in Antioch was stunningly diverse. Their leadership team (Acts 13:1) included Jews, Greeks, Herodians and Africans. They lived in harmony as family in the midst of ethnic tension and division. How were they doing this?

- iv. Acts 11:26 tells us that the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. This probably reflects the fact that there was no ethnic label that could be applied, because they were so diverse and unified. The only label that fit was Christ
 - v. This is our goal today, to be the gathering of the nations. We strive to be as noticeable and countercultural as Antioch was in the first century. We want to be the new Antioch, to confuse people and defy labeling because of our diversity
- b. Questions:
- i. Does the diversity and cultural inclusion of your small group and church stand out in your community?
 - ii. What are some of the things that the church in Antioch had to overcome in order to maintain such radical diversity?
 - iii. Challenge yourself today to invite at least three people who are of a different cultural or ethnic group than you are to your church or small group gathering
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, thank you for the example of early Christian communities like Antioch. When I think of the challenges that face my own fellowship, I realize that . . .

44. Day 44: Intentional (10/9)

- a. Summary:
- i. He starts off talking about a visit to Zambia, where one brother told him they don't have racism in Zambia. He was talking to another brother afterwards, who pointed out that they also don't have any white people in Zambia
 - ii. It is much easier to have unity when everybody thinks alike. There is much potential for conflict in diversity, but we will never attain or maintain any level of diversity unless we are intentional about doing so
 - iii. In the 80's and 90's, many churches actually chose to be monocultural, because it's easier to attract people who are all the same culturally. The concept is called HUP, the homogeneous unit principle, and it works to a degree
 - iv. The less diverse a group is, the less work it will likely require to maintain unity. The inverse is also obviously true. The more diverse, the more work there will be. This means that we must be relentlessly intentional about being diverse
 - v. This requires people who: (1) reach out to others who are different from them, (2) get out of their comfort zone and participate in new cultural expressions, and (3) work at sharing life with others who have different cultural instincts
- b. Questions:
- i. Are you consistently intentional about creating and maintaining a broad cultural environment in the church and being all things to all people personally?
 - ii. Do you feel passionate about growing in your cultural humility, or is it something you lack zeal for? What can you do to increase your passion if necessary?
 - iii. Starting this week, plan to invite people from another cultural group, both inside and outside your church family, over for dinner once a week. Try to do this for at least six weeks, although you may want to keep it going as a habit
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, whether it's in my personal evangelism, the way I carry myself when we sing songs in styles I'm not used to, or working to ensure that we have

diverse representation in all aspects of church life, help me to be intentional.
Help me to see the areas . . .

45. Day 45: Our Ancestors (10/10)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off telling the story of Naomi, who an Israelite woman who moved to Moab with her husband and two sons because of severe famine. Her husband and her sons all died, and she was preparing to move back to her homeland
- ii. But one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, determined to stay with her and made the memorable pledge, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die”
- iii. This pledge of loyalty was even more striking then that is now, because of the ancestral nature of society. But this is exactly the pledge that we make when we become disciples. We are grafted from our family into God’s family
- iv. In 1 Corinthians 10:1, Paul says that “our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” He calls the Jews the Corinthians’ forefathers!
- v. So when we become disciples we still retain our culture, but we are grafted into God’s family and there is a seismic shift in our identity. Our race or ethnicity no longer defines us, the kingdom of God is our primary place of identity

b. Questions:

- i. Do you see your primary identity, the one that outweighs all other identities, as Christian?
- ii. What are some of the mindsets that we must embrace in order to truly see the Christian people as our people?
- iii. Write a letter from Paul regarding your identity in Christ. How would he encourage you? How would he challenge you? What would he say to you about your loyalty and connection with your ethnicity, race, nationality, etc. in relation to your loyalty and allegiance to the King?

c. Finish this letter from you to God:

- i. Dear Father, let me be like Ruth, and help me always to make your people my people. That is often easier said than done. I don’t always look at other Christians as though they are more my family and my people than those with whom I share DNA or the family I was raised in. I have more work to do. Specifically, I still need to . . .

46. Day 46: Justice for All (10/11)

a. Summary:

- i. He starts off talking about how standing up for someone when they are being mistreated is one of the quickest and best ways to cement a relationship with them. And failing to do so will send signals that we cannot truly be trusted
- ii. He then turns to 1 Cor 12, which talks about each part of the body having equal concern for the other. In fact, God has given greater honor to the parts of the body that we might be tempted to think of as less deserving of any status
- iii. Even in the family of God it is easy to think of ourselves in subgroups based on race, ethnicity, culture, or any number of other categories. We must resist the temptation to divide ourselves into these “groups within a group”
- iv. Paul also says, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” This is what happens with bodies—back pain affects the whole body, but a good back massage can relax the whole body

- v. This is precisely where multicultural and multiethnic communities can break down. It rings hollow if we claim to love someone but only offer platitudes about caring for them and are comfortable ignoring their needs or pain
 - vi. God's people should stand up against injustice and stand up for the marginalized, the mistreated, the underprivileged, and the downtrodden. This is why Jesus declared the gospel was "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18)
 - vii. When we have brothers and sisters who come from groups that have historically been marginalized, what position does it put them in if the rest of the body doesn't stand up for them and work toward justice?
 - viii. Is our gospel good news to the poor, the prisoner, the blind, and the oppressed, or is it only good news to the middle-class, the law-abiding, the sharp, and the people who follow the rules?
- b. Questions:
- i. If you were to write a personal ministry mission statement, could it include Luke 4:18 or would that not fit with how you have tended to carry yourself as a Christian?
 - ii. Think of the version of the gospel that you most often share with people. Is it good news for those mentioned in Luke 4:18, or does it carry a tinge of "keep warm and well fed" while not really addressing some of the real issues and injustices that many populations face?
 - iii. Plan with your small group to meet with an influential community organization that works with underprivileged folks. Ask them what the major concerns and needs for that population are and what your group might be able to do to help
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
- i. Dear Father, please let me never turn a blind eye to the suffering of others. I want to love all people, but sometimes it is easier to feel like I want to help those who are poor and destitute in some other land while I ignore those who are being oppressed right around me in my own country. Do I sometimes explain away their mistreatment or say that it is all in their head or their own fault? Please open my eyes and help me to realize . . .

47. Day 47: Radical (10/12)

- a. Summary:
- i. The author went to private school growing up, where they wore uniforms. At the end of the school year they had a banquet where you could wear whatever you wanted, but everybody just wore their uniforms because that's all they had
 - ii. He then talks about Priscilla and Aquila. They were converted in Rome, but moved to Corinth where they met Paul in Acts 18. When Paul left for Ephesus they accompanied him there, and eventually moved back to Rome
 - iii. Paul praises them in Rom 16:3-4 because they were a great help to him, and says all of the Gentile churches owe them debt of gratitude for their courageous spirit of sacrifice to go anywhere, do anything and give up everything
 - iv. He then ties the chapter together by noting that most of our churches are located in cities that are racially and ethnically segregated. If we just divide into groups geographically, we will segregate just like the world around us
 - v. What is needed are courageous people to physically relocate to help with diversity in our churches. Although Priscilla and Aquila weren't focused on diversity exactly, they were willing to move across cultural lines for the gospel
- b. Questions:

- i. Are you willing to move to an unexpected neighborhood or area for the sole reason of advancing the gathering of the nations?
- ii. What can you do to break down some of the barriers of segregation and separation in your own city or church?
- iii. Choose a specific amount of time that challenges you a bit to think that you can pray that long, and spend most of that time praying about the gathering of the nations and what you can do to help break down barriers. Ask God to make it clear to you what you can do
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, most of the time I want to be comfortable. I am constantly tempted to live like everyone around me and operate at the level of my means. Yet Jesus gave up everything and intentionally lived below his status for our benefit. Help me to be willing to do the same. When I think of what I can do to help break down barriers in our world . . .

48. Day 48: Tear Down Those Walls (10/13)

- a. Summary:
 - i. Today's lesson is a good summary. He starts by talking about the return to Jerusalem in 539 BC, and how Israel's primary focus at first was on rebuilding their own homes rather than rebuilding God's temple
 - ii. The prophet Haggai challenged them on this. Not only were they guilty of taking care of themselves first, but Haggai pointed out that God was frustrating the work they were doing by refusing to grant them success (Hag 1:5-6)
 - iii. There is an important truth conveyed in this story. When God has work for his people to do, we will simply not be as successful or prosperous as we might think we should be if we are neglecting that work to focus on other things
 - iv. Ephesians 2 begins by reminding us that we were dead in our transgressions and sins before God made us alive in Christ. That is not something we did, nor could we ever. But that does not come without effect (see "therefore" in verse 11)
 - v. This "therefore" ties together Eph 2 and focuses on the work God has given us to do—the gathering of the nations. We are to gather the exiles into a new humanity, to tear down the walls of division and hostility and become one
 - vi. This cannot just be in theory. Paul wanted this to be on display in Ephesus, in Galatia, in Rome, and in every single place where God's people were gathering together. It would not show the manifold wisdom of God if the early church declared . . .
 - vii. "Our church over here on this side of Ephesus is all one type of people, but there is a group of Jews who believe the same things we do, and they meet together across town. Oh, and we have a joint gathering twice each year"
 - viii. The question for us is simple. Have we been doing the good works that God prepared for us? It is so easy to get caught up in so many other important things in our spiritual walk that we forget we should be tearing down walls
 - ix. Are we tearing down those walls? Are we looking for those walls? They may be in our community or in our hearts, but our work is to be the new humanity in Christ and to tear down those walls that the world is so good at building up
- b. Questions:
 - i. Have you subtly accepted other philosophies of the world that seek to put up walls and barriers and forgotten our work as God's people to tear down the walls of separation and hostility?

- ii. Are there any walls that you have yet to tear down in your own heart that keep you separated from a certain group of people or type of people?
- iii. Spend special time today in prayer asking God to reveal to you the specific task he has set aside for you in tearing down the walls of division in the great mission to gather the nations. Pray until you think you have some clarity and then develop a plan for what you can do specifically to be part of this work
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I can never thank you enough for calling me out of the kingdom of darkness and into your wonderful light. Thank you for taking a foreigner and refugee and adopting me into your people, your family. Help me not to neglect or forget the work that you have created us to do. When I ponder the task of tearing down the walls of hostility, I know that . . .

49. Day 49: A Crown That Will Last (10/14)

- a. Summary:
 - i. He starts off talking about the January “bounce” at health clubs and gyms, where people make new-year’s resolutions to exercise and get in shape. But it only lasts a few months, and then everything is back to normal
 - ii. This speaks to an important principle. Anyone can do something for a short period, even impressive things. But consistency is the beast. Staying with something for the long haul is incredibly challenging, whether physical or spiritual
 - iii. Seeking after cultural humility and working toward being all things to all people is difficult, but it can also be exciting, for a while. Then the reality sets in, like it does for a marathon runner after that first exhilaration. This is a long race, not a sprint
 - iv. We must not grow weary. Yet I can almost promise that there will be times when we will. We will want to give up. We will want to be in a group that “gets” us and where we don’t have to work so hard
 - v. We must stay centered and our “why” must be bigger than our “what.” Our motivation must remain bigger than our obstacles. Why are we doing such a difficult and exhausting thing? Because this is God’s plan, what he loves and wants
 - vi. When Paul declared that his goal was to be all things to all people, he was realistic. He knew it was work comparable to that of a world-class athlete, but he also knew that he was not doing it for something temporary or meaningless
- b. Questions:
 - i. What is the most tiring or frustrating aspect of interaction and relationship in a multicultural church?
 - ii. How often do you think about why we are pursuing diversity in our churches, as a way to motivate you through the challenges that come along with it?
 - iii. Think, pray and then write three to five specific things that you plan to do as a result of going through this book
- c. Finish this letter from you to God:
 - i. Dear Father, I want a crown that will last. I want to keep going and never give up. Help me to realize that being all things to all people will take constant attention and work for the rest of my life. I recognize the constant effort that this will take, and I know that I need to . . .