

We are in the throes of college football season. Whenever I think about diehard fans, my mind always goes to Harvey Updyke. Does that name ring a bell for anyone? He was a fully-committed Alabama fan. He named his son Bear Bryant after the legendary Alabama coach. He named his daughter Crimson Tyde. One time he saw Alabama national champion shirts on discount for \$3, so he bought all 18 that the store had. Fully committed. When his team lost to Auburn in the Iron Bowl about ten years ago, he was so upset that he went to Auburn's campus, where there are two famous 80-year-old oak trees that students TP after every major football win, and he poisoned them. He didn't just spray a little Roundup—he put a powerful herbicide on those trees, 500 times as much as needed to kill them. Then he called in to brag about it. He put on so much poison that they had to adjust the town's water supply for a time. He ended up serving jail time for his actions and was ordered to pay—get this—an \$800,000 fine.

This guy was all in, but his passion of choice ended up being a little off base, to say the least. We are in the last week of our series called “All In,” in which we have been talking about committing to what matters most. There are lots of things to which we can give our energy, our passion, and our efforts, but these are some of the things that matter most: family, marriage, God, and today, the kingdom. There are so many people in the Bible who were all in on the kingdom who we could talk about, but today we are going to look at several passages from a man named Paul, who was as all in on the kingdom as anyone. He did not begin by being all in on the kingdom. Early on in his life, he was as opposed to the kingdom as anyone. He went from town to town persecuting people who believed in Jesus. He arrested them. He killed at least one of them. He was as anti-kingdom as anyone, ever. Then Jesus appeared to him. Paul's life was radically transformed, and he spent the rest of his life doing all he could to advance the kingdom. He encapsulated his conviction and passion in Acts 20:24: “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.” What would it look like in our lives to be able to say something like that? My goal, my purpose, my ambition in life is not to pursue my own interests or passions or pleasure; my mission in life is to run the race God has given me, making sure people know about the good news of God's grace! That's where God wants every single one of us to be: truly all in on the kingdom! Today, to make this as practical as possible, I want to talk about three specific ways we can be all in on the kingdom.

We can be all in on the kingdom by fully engaging in God's work. There was a time when Paul was writing to his young prodigy, Timothy, about being fully committed to God's work, and Paul gave Timothy a few examples to consider. Take a look at 2 Timothy 2:4-7:

No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Paul tells Timothy to think about three types of people: soldiers, athletes, and farmers—three professions which require full commitment! A soldier must be entirely focused on the mission at hand because life and death hang in the balance. An athlete goes into intense training for competition, doing whatever it takes to win. And if you know any farmers, you know how hard they work, but can you imagine a farmer having to do their job without modern equipment—no tractors or combines or trucks? They have to give everything they have to their task. Paul is saying to Timothy, “Take all that you know about soldiers, top-tier athletes, and farmers, package that into one—that's what your focus, your training, your commitment level and work ethic have to be like in the kingdom.” That's a lot. But it doesn't have to be overwhelming

or intimidating. Being fully committed to kingdom work often looks like being engaged in your community, serving at your church, and taking advantage of opportunities as God places them before you. That's how a family in our church has lived it out. Take a few minutes and listen to the Brake's story. (Please watch the online version of the sermon to view the video.)

We can be all in on the kingdom being fully committed to kingdom work. Let me give you another way: **we can be all in on the kingdom by sharing the gospel with people.** The gospel is the greatest news in the history of the world. The gospel changes people's lives and eternities, and God decided to get His message of hope and restoration to the world through us! 2 Corinthians 5:20 tells us: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." God communicates His message to people through you and me. We are His ambassadors. And as ambassadors, we have to be focused not only on conveying the right message but conveying the right message in the right way. 1 Peter 3:15 instructs us, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We aren't talking about being obnoxious, we're not talking about being rude and pushy and disrespectful. With the right blend of confidence and humility, with gentleness and respect, tell people the good news of what God has done for them.

We are told these days, "Don't push your beliefs on anyone." "Whatever you believe is fine, just keep it to yourself." But what I have found is that people are as open as ever to talking about spiritual things; they just want to have the conversation in a humble, open way. I was on a flight three weeks ago and sat next to a lawyer from Manhattan. She was not an Evangelical Christian, but on her initiative, we talked about Christianity for over half the plane ride and then she asked if I wanted to share a cab to midtown. She was in her early 70s, so I didn't think there would be any suspicion of impropriety. We shared a cab together and had a delightful conversation. We've exchanged emails since. On a different Uber ride in New York City, the driver found out my companion and I were both pastors. Again, he was not a Christian, but he interrupted our conversation and talked with us for about 20 minutes about the viability of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Again, on his initiative. What I have found is that people are unbelievably open to conversations about God and the gospel if we have them in the right way. And we can never forget, the gospel message changes lives! Romans 1:16 tells us, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

When people respond to the gospel, it brings about salvation. But we must share it. Romans 10:14 says, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" You and I have to share the message. That's part of what it means to be all in on the kingdom.

I don't know if you saw this, but the head coach of the Colts took an opportunity last Sunday, with the platform he has, to share the gospel. Listen to what he said. (Please watch the online version of the sermon to view the video.)

Here's one of the most influential guys in our city. After a huge win against one of the best teams in the league he says, "I know some people are struggling. I want you to know where I find my hope." Beautiful. Let me give you three words that can describe what it looks like to share the gospel in a helpful way.

Invitational. This is where you just invite someone to church or invite them into a conversation or a relationship or a space where you know the gospel is going to be shared. We see an example of this several times in the Bible. In John 1, a guy named Nathanael was suspicious of Jesus; he wasn't sure if Jesus was worth his time, but his friend Philip said: "Come and see" (John 1:46). Nathanael ultimately

made the decision to place his faith in Jesus. Sometimes, all you have to do is extend an invitation. Did you know that on a yearly basis, only 2% of Christians invite someone to church? In an entire year, only 2% of people will invite a friend, neighbor, co-worker, or family member to church. I've seen again and again that an invitation can change a life. Make it a goal, with Christmas upon us, to reach out to someone you know, and simply give them an invitation.

Sometimes you get an opportunity to go a step beyond invitational and move toward **testimonial**. This is where you have a chance to describe what God has done in your life. In John 9, there was a man who was born blind who told everyone not only that he was healed, but that it was Jesus who healed him. And as he was explaining it, he simply said, "One thing I know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25). It's hard to argue the power of personal testimony. That's what the football coach did. He said, "Here's what I've found; I'd encourage you to find strength in Jesus, too."

Sometimes you get to go a step beyond invitational and move toward **evidential**. This is where you talk about the reasons you have for your faith—that it's not just blind optimism, it's not just the opiate of the masses, it's based in very compelling evidence. History is filled with countless people who have set out to try to disprove Christianity and then, reluctantly, after months or years, become devoted followers of Jesus. Luke, the man who wrote the third gospel, begins his account this way: "I have carefully investigated everything from the very beginning...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4). Jesus said the truth will set people free. Believers should never be afraid of or intimidated by deep discussion and introspective questions. When done with sincerity, they only point people closer to Jesus.

One of the best ways I have ever found to share the gospel with people is through hospitality. Invite people into your life, invite them into your home. Love people, serve people, share meals and trips and holidays and your life with people—and see the way doors for conversation about God open. I was reading a book this week by Rosaria Butterfield. She's a woman who has led a lot of people to faith in Jesus, and she spoke about the importance and practice of hospitality in her life. Listen to what she said:

My husband and I aren't cheap when it comes to hospitality. We budget for it, to the point where it hurts. Practicing daily, ordinary, Christian hospitality doubles our grocery budget—and sometimes triples it. There are vacations we do not take, house projects that never get started, entertainment habits that never get an open door, new cars and gadgets that we don't even bother coveting. It costs money and time and heartache to run a house that values radically ordinary hospitality and nightly table fellowship, and we are all in.

Being all in on the kingdom can be as simple and as ordinary as saying, "We'd love to have you over for a meal." And seeing where God leads the relationship. And when the door opens, tell them about Jesus.

I don't know if you saw this, but a few days ago, Matt Doran, a well-known TV host in Australia, had a chance to interview Adele as part of the launch of her new album. He pulled all the strings he had to get the interview. He flew 10,000 miles to sit down with her in person. And as he was interviewing her, she asked him, "What did you think of the album?" He said, "I haven't listened to it yet." She stopped the interview and said she wasn't interested in any more questions. He did all the work to get the connection, but he didn't listen to her album. Sometimes believers invest months or years into a relationship and the door opens, but we neglect to have intentional conversations about Jesus. But it is the name of Jesus, it is His gospel, that brings hope and changes lives.

We've talked about being all in on the kingdom by being fully committed to God's work and by sharing the gospel. Here's one more way: **we can be all in on the kingdom by investing our finances in God's**

work. Sometimes we can be understandably reluctant to talk about money in church, but everyone knows if you really want to know what someone values and prioritizes, look at their calendar (how they spend their time) and look at their bank account (how they spend their money). No matter what they say, it's where they direct their resources that really tells the story. This isn't Dan talking—Jesus said He wants His people to be fully invested in the kingdom with their money. He said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

Yes, we need places to live and cars to drive and clothes to wear. But Jesus says that though all those things are good, eventually they are all going to wear out or rust out or burn up. When we invest in heaven, when we take our resources and we direct them toward people and the gospel and eternity, we are investing in something that can never be destroyed. Some of you are doing an incredible job at investing your resources into the kingdom, and specifically you are investing into the ministry of this church. If that's you, I want to thank you and honor you. So many wonderful things are happening at this church: families are being fed, children are being taught the Bible, a couple hundred people made a decision this year to be disciples of Jesus, almost a million dollars given to mission work—that's possible because of your investment. Thank you. Well done!

I do want to take a moment and bring you up to speed on where we are financially as a church. Let me first say, if you are a guest, or you are new here, we want you to know we are not asking anything from you. We want you to be able to come to this church and receive from the ministry of this church without any expectation. We are just really glad you are here. For those of you who call this your church home, for everyone who is a partner with us at The Creek, this is like a mid-year check-up. We run a July 1 - June 30 budget, so we are almost ½ way there, and we are presently 8% below budgeted need. To this point, we have not had to cut back on ministries or mission commitments, but if that trend continues, there will be many ministry opportunities we'd like to say yes to that we won't be able to. This could be a good moment for anyone who God has uniquely blessed financially this year to take account of all that God has given then decide, I am going to invest in the kingdom with some of this. Also, for anyone who is a part of this church family but for one reason or another hasn't made the decision to give, it's a chance to say, “Now is the time. Even though it comes at a cost, I am going all in on the kingdom by giving to my home church.”

We want to be people who, not just with our finances, but with our entire lives, make an impact on eternity—who go all in on the kingdom. When I think about going all in on the kingdom, my mind is drawn to one of my heroes of the faith, William Carey. William Carey is regarded as the father of modern missions. He was born in Britain in the 18th century. He was a shoe repair man. He lived at a time in history when people said, “If God wants to save people, He's God, He's sovereign, He can do it Himself.” And William Carey said, “No, no, no! You got it all wrong.” God doesn't snap His fingers and bring the entire world to salvation; He uses people do to it. Knowing that God was calling him to share his faith with people far away, he learned Hebrew, Italian, Dutch and French while he was repairing shoes so he could travel with fluency and do Bible translation work. He ended up translating the Bible into six different languages. He moved to India and won hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people to the Lord who had never heard the name Jesus before. When he went around preaching before his departure to India, he kept telling his countrymen: “Enlarge your vision. Enlarge your vision. Quit settling for a safe, comfortable, easy life. Cry out and say, ‘I want God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, and in my life and my city and my family, even as it is in heaven.’” Perhaps his most well-known quote is “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God!” I want that to be the heartbeat of our church. We have enlarged our vision. We expect great things from God, so we attempt great things for God, then we step back and watch how God does immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine.