

**I. Introduction**

- A. So obviously, a lot to talk about today. A lot going on.
- B. If you're joining us online, if you're hearing me on audio or video... then this is a big day for our church. We are making a change.
- C. And I know that change is hard... all change is hard. Change raises emotions that can be difficult to deal with.
- D. I understand those emotions. And I want to share a little bit about my story... as we talk about what is changing, and most importantly what isn't changing at our church.
- E. And one of the things that will never change is our commitment to and submission to the authority of God's Word.
- F. So here is our Scripture for today:

- 1. *Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."*

*Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:1-5)*

- G. Please think with me today on the topic:

- 1. *The Resistance*

**II. How We Came to Redding**

- A. In 2002, Margi and I packed up our belongings, sold a ton of our stuff, turned our backs on a lifetime of friendships, and family, and familiar places, let go of the forever home we had built and occupied for two years, and made an epic trek of 2,281 miles from Chicago, IL to Redding, CA.
- B. This was the hardest change we ever made.
- C. We made this move with two cars, two dogs, one moving truck, one very active toddler, and one very pregnant momma.
- D. To that point, we had each lived our entire lives in the city in which we were born and had grown up. We were products of Chicago schools, fans of Chicago sports teams, and followers of Chicago culture.
- E. We still miss what still feels like home to us.
- F. The change was overwhelming. When anyone tells me change is hard, I get it. I'm sure you do too. But we set down roots here.

**III. Change is hard.**

- A. We moved here in September, set up in a new home, and started work the first day of October. Twelve weeks later, God — with a lot of help from Margi, and a lot of by-standing from me — gave us a new baby boy on Christmas Day, December 25, 2002.
- B. We now had two babies to raise, nineteen months apart, with no family to help us, and nobody we knew or had yet grown to trust, in addition to a church ministry we were still figuring out. And streets to learn. And people to meet. And friends to make. And something like 81 straight days of rain, without a break, to understand.

**IV. The amount of change in our lives was overwhelming.**

- A. But God had a plan. And God had a mission for us. And God was faithful.
  - 1. He strengthened us to press through the change.
  - 2. He motivated us, time and again, to stay the course, and trust his will.
- B. For all those times we felt we couldn't take it any more, for all those times, we looked to the past and thought we would be better off... Margi and I came up with a saying... "We are missionaries."
- C. That's what we said. We are missionaries on a mission field.
- D. And there are a lot more difficult places to be missionaries than in Redding, CA. We actually have indoor plumbing here, and we're not eating monkey brains, and nobody is tearing down our churches and throwing us in jail for preaching the gospel.
  - 1. *Lesson 1: We are still missionaries today. In God's great plan, every Christian is a missionary.*

**V. Ezra**

- A. In the book of Ezra, God's chosen people had been in exile. They were to be his missionaries in the world. They were chosen so that all the world may know there is an invisible Creator God in heaven, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... the one God who could never be contained in idols.
- B. And yet time and time again, God's chosen people turned their backs, not only on their mission, but also on their God.
- C. They forfeited their place in the promised land. Foreign invaders drove them to exile.
  - 1. Jerusalem was destroyed, the symbol of their security.
  - 2. And their temple was destroyed, the symbol of their mission and their faith.
- D. But by the time of this book, things have turned around. The forced exile is lifted. They can go back home. And out of all the millions of Jews scattered across the Persian Empire, a handful does. Just shy of 50,000 Jews return home.
  - 1. They rebuild the altar — making the gospel of salvation the main thing.
  - 2. And now, they begin to rebuild the Temple. Their spiritual lives are waking up again. They are embracing their mission. For seventy years, they were gone. Now, the next generation is back. Everything is new to them. Everything is different. They left a comfortable past, for an uncertain future.
  - 3. Because they were guided by the same truth that I hope guides us today:
    - a) *Lesson 2: Never be afraid to entrust an unknown future to an all-knowing God.*
  - 4. Why did God's people in that day accept all this change into their lives?

- a) Because of love.
  - (1) They loved God.
  - (2) They loved God's truth.
  - (3) They loved their faith.
  - (4) They loved God's salvation and his way of forgiving sinners.
  - (5) They loved the path of life marked out by God's Word.
  - (6) They loved the great mission of helping other nations and peoples find the wonders of the great God of heaven.
- b) Why the change? For them, it was because of love.

5. For us, coming from Chicago, it was the same reason.

6. And for any of us, who have uttered one prayer, or volunteered one minute, or given one dollar for the mission of our church, it's the same. Out of love.

VI. We accept these changes out of love.

A. Out of concern for lost people. Out of respect for God and willing obedience to his call.

1. *Lesson 3: The love of God compels us "to become all things to all people, that by all means, we might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).*

B. I stand here today at a place in my life and ministry where I can just keep that status quo. I can coast. Our church can coast. You can probably coast. We can keep on doing what we are doing, because it's working well enough, and things are fine, and don't rock the boat, and make life easy.

C. All these voices are in me... and yet, there is another voice that just isn't satisfied with status quo. I am not willing to coast. And I am not willing to stay comfortable for long.

VII. Ezra

A. When the people of Ezra's day began to rebuild the temple, immediately, the resistance arose.

B. And it came disguised as a friend.

1. "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do, and have made sacrifices to him going way, way back."

C. These would one day be known as Samaritans. They were the people of the surrounding regions, who joined with what few Jews did not go into exile. They had been influenced by the faith of God's people, but not quite enough.

1. *They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods — according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. (2 Kings 17:33)*

D. They feared the Lord AND they served their old idols too. They sacrificed their children on the altar, and practiced all the corruptions of the national religions.

1. They created gods that were not holy.

2. And religions that had no Savior.

3. And Saviors that had no cross.

E. This is what you get when you mash together religions. It's called syncretism.

1. *SYNCRETISM: blending the truth of God with the (most appealing) lies of the devil.*

F. For example, when Catholic missionaries brought the gospel to Haiti, the people mashed up Catholicism with their tribal religions, and it's called Voodoo.

G. The truth of God and the lies of Satan can never be joined as one.

H. And when the Samaritans offer to help — even though the Jews could use the help, and even though the offer seems sincere, and even though it would be so much easier not to needlessly make any enemies — there is only one answer God's followers can give:

1. "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God."

a) Sometimes the resistance comes disguised as a friend.

b) Sometimes the resistance comes disguised as data and logic. That doesn't make sense.

c) Sometimes the resistance comes disguised as kindness and sentimentality and the popular opinion.

d) Sometimes the resistance comes undisguised as outright opposition to the mission of God, hostility to authority of Scripture, laxness in doctrine or morals, or attacks on the gospel of pure grace.

e) Sometimes the resistance is simply you being worn out. When you do God's work, expect resistance.

I. As long as you lead a spiritually passive life, the Enemy will leave you alone.

J. As long as you live a spiritually unaggressive life, the Enemy will be unaggressive toward you.

K. But the minute you begin to build God's work, God's way in the world, you may count on a fierce and relentless resistance.

1. *Lesson 4: Let us so live that we may give the devil good reason to fear and hate us.*

L. Yes, change is hard. Yes, building the work of God is hard.

M. But since when has God called us to avoid what is hard? Since when has God ever said, "Hey Church, stick with easy?"

VIII. Name Change

A. So I stand here today, asking for an open heart and a trusting spirit as I announce a new change.

B. I am announcing today a new name for our church.

1. That is the change.

a) We are not changing our mission.

b) We are not changing our doctrine.

c) We are not changing our leadership.

d) We are not changing our programs or our schedule.

- e) We are not changing what is precious about our church.
- f) We are not changing our denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

C. We are not changing anything precious in terms of relationships or ministry or meaning or core values of our church.

IX. Here is the new name.

- A. We are changing our name from Neighborhood Church to Pathway Church.
  - 1. We love our church.
  - 2. We love our mission.
  - 3. I understand the feelings of change. If this is a hard change for you, believe me, I understand.
- B. We have had a year of conversations, and year of prayers, a year of consultations at the leadership level in our church and denomination.
- C. We have wrestled with whether or not to change our name. We have wrestled with what name to change it to. We have worked through doubts and fears.
- D. But I am announcing that, with one voice, our Governing Board of Elders made it official at our meeting in August of 2019. Over the last months, we have been preparing for this announcement today.
- E. Let me give you some of our reasons.

X. Reasons

- A. *The primary reason is because we think this change will help our mission for years to come.*
  - 1. The name Neighborhood has served us so well. We are so thankful for the people who built up this church, and bought this property, and gave us this home base for a mission to the North State.
  - 2. We honor the name.
  - 3. Yet everything has a season, and we believe we are entering a new season where a new name will propel our evangelistic mission forward with new energy.
  - 4. One of the great heroes of our church, Paul Edwardson, used to say that church was on a conveyor belt. We're all growing older. Many of us won't be around for the next generation.
  - 5. We wanted to do the hard thing now, and set up the next generation as best as we can, to carry the saving message of Christ in this region till the Lord returns.
  - 6. It's about the mission.
- B. *Another reason is to bring our name into alignment with our philosophy of ministry:* we lead people along the Grace Pathway, so Pathway is a natural name for us. It is more in line with who we are and with what we do. We are more than a neighborhood church, we are a regional church. And Pathway has an energy and a dynamism of forward motion and going somewhere.
- C. *Another reason is to distinguish our church from other churches nearby and in our denomination that are called Neighborhood.* No, we are not related to Neighborhood of Cottonwood/Anderson, or Neighborhood of Brentwood, or Neighborhood of Modesto, or Neighborhood of Chico, or Neighborhood of Visalia, or Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes Estates. I have had more conversations than I could ever count, explaining the differences between our church and those churches.
  - 1. This isn't to say there aren't other Pathway Churches. Of course there are. But they are fewer, and none of them is as prominent.
- D. *We also felt that we were ready to refresh our identity in our community.* We have a new building, we have a new discipleship pathway, we have a new Seminary in a Box launching in the new year. We have a new leader in our groups and classes, and if anything can give us a reason to reach out to people who have left the faith or dropped out of church altogether.
  - 1. Hi... we might not have spoken in a long time, but we wanted you to be aware that Neighborhood is changing our name to Pathway Church, and we are the same great church, with the same great people, and the same beliefs and a new name.
- E. There are more reasons, and I could go on. But I'll stop for now.

XI. God is Faithful

- A. One thing I have learned —
  - 1. *Lesson 5: In all the twists and turns and changes of life, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God is faithful. He is steady. He is the true constant in our lives.*
- B. We believe in the immutability of God. He says, "I am the Lord, I change not."
  - 1. When Jacob's name was changed to Israel, God stayed the same.
  - 2. When Saul's name was changed to Paul, the gospel didn't even flicker.
  - 3. When Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Daniel became Belteshazzar, and Cephas became Peter, their faith never wavered, their hearts never wandered, and their God never changed.
- C. Because God is faithful, God's truth endures. God's truth stays true.
- D. God's truth does not change relative to place or time or culture or current opinion. God's truth does not change when majority opinion changes.
- E. And when the Samaritans came with their mash up of faith in God and allegiance to idols, and when they offered their help...
  - 1. It made no difference that the Jews needed help.
  - 2. It made no difference that the Jews needed money.
  - 3. It made no difference that this was not a good time to make enemies.
- F. The truth cannot be mixed with a lie.
  - 1. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And*

*what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)*

*a) Lesson 6: Sometimes allegiance to God and his truth requires saying no to the path of least resistance.*

- G. God's truth stays true even when it isn't popular.
  - 1. And even when following God's truth makes life hard.
- H. I'm not for a minute suggesting that the name of Pathway Church dropped down from on high. I'm not suggesting that anybody who is unhappy about this is ungodly.
- I. I'm just saying that whatever else you might say about this change, our hearts are in the right place, and we're not shying away from something hard.
  - 1. But that courage has always been the spirit of this church from the beginning.
  - 2. And that is one of the reasons that makes it such an honor to be your pastor.

**XII. Ezra**

- A. When the Jews told the Samaritans, thanks but no thanks, the Samaritans shows their true colors.
  - 1. *Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:5)*
- B. The Jews laid the foundations of the temple, and started building the temple, and about a minute later, they were stopped. They were stopped for a long time.
- C. Actually, they were stopped for 16 years. Part of this was getting caught up in the Persian legal system.
- D. But a bigger part was they simply lost their drive. More on that next time.
- E. Because nothing kills momentum like needless drama and conflict.

**XIII. Call to Action**

- A. I can tell you today that I've left a large part of my heart in Chicago, and it's hard to believe over 17 years have gone by...
- B. So I can understand why somebody would never look at this place without wanting to call it Neighborhood. I get you. I feel that with you.
- C. But here's what I want to ask of you...
  - 1. If this new name is a struggle for you, I want to ask you to engage the struggle with grace, with an open mind, and with love and respect in your heart.
    - a) You can reach out to our pastors and to our elders if you want to talk, to share, to pray, or just to get stuff off your chest.
    - b) But like I said, to do that with grace, an open mind, love, and respect.
  - 2. If you're an early adopter, and you're already on board, please pray with us, and help us get the word out.
    - a) *Neighborhood is becoming Pathway and we're inviting you to join the journey.*
    - b) Our old website still works. Our old emails still work.
    - c) Our new website is on your Guide, [pathwaychurch.life](http://pathwaychurch.life).
    - d) Pray for the transition.
    - e) Pray for the communication. And above all else..
    - f) Pray for the mission.
  - 3. And finally in all your questions, never doubt this:
    - a) We as a church have dedicated our lives to building a great center for mission and for truth... a place...
      - (1) Where the Cross of Christ is lifted high,
      - (2) The gospel of Grace is unapologetically proclaimed,
      - (3) Sinners are invited to to become saints,
      - (4) Saints are equipped along the Grace Pathway,
      - (5) Broken hearts are mended,
      - (6) Fractured lives are made whole.
      - (7) We are building a place where flawed people become vessels of perfect grace,
      - (8) And where those who are unloved are welcomed in a church where the world's lost, least, little, and last are warmly embraced.
      - (9) A church where the Word of God is fearlessly taught, book by book and verse by verse,
      - (10) And where the great doctrines of evangelical theology remain forever our north star.
      - (11) Never doubt we are a church dedicated to evangelism...
        - (a) Whose mission is helping people find and follow God.
      - (12) A church where we have a great God who is with us every step we take,
      - (13) And a church where the joy of the Lord is our strength every single day.
    - b) If that's what you're looking for, you're in the right place. Resist the resistance. Join us. Help us build something spectacular.
      - (1) WELCOME TO PATHWAY CHURCH.
      - (2) We're all about Helping People Find and Follow God.
        - (a) Almighty God, as you have blessed the work of Neighborhood Church for all these years,
        - (b) Now bless and use Pathway Church for as many years as there are till Jesus comes again.