

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

Selected Texts

Written By

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Annually, per our Constitution, we pause and consider the state of our church for the new year. With the size of our church body, coupled with the complexity of our various ministries, this could easily be a multipart series; however, since we just have one Sunday for this worthy endeavor, I limit my observations to a handful of points.

Before we dive into the details, I'd also like to say a couple of preparatory things. One, if this is your first Sunday, or if you have just recently been worshipping with us, then this is a great day for you to be here for you get real acquainted with the inner-workings of this fellowship. This data point can certainly assist you in determining if this is where the Lord would have you worship. Two, this will not be a typical expositional sermon where I will take a given biblical text and dissect and apply it to your life. If that is what you desire, then you'll need to come back next week when we exegete Romans chapter 15. Three, we are a church body, or a family if you will. Ostensibly, this means we talk as family members about anything and everything so we can be unified and head out together accomplishing our Lord's Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). So, don't be shocked to hear more behind the scenes info than normal. That should be expected as family members have a family meeting, right?

With these preparatory thoughts in mind, I have one over-arching statement I'd like to make and then develop in the next few moments. Here it is:

God Has Providentially Positioned This Local Church To Accomplish Much For His Kingdom

I don't glibly say this either. As we excitedly anticipate the occupancy of the new worship center, replete with ample staff space, educational space, and so forth, during the first few weeks of July of this year, we can't help but see and sense God's hand upon us to do even greater things for Him. Yes, the new facility comes with a responsibility to listen to the Lord and seize the moment to move out in a more profound fashion. Moving out, of course, is all about maximizing our divinely directed positioning.

Let's down to brass tacts, then. What do I believe God has positioned us for? Several things.

One: We Are Positioned For Greater Cultural & Spiritual Impact

Our culture is descending into darkness as break-neck speed. Some of the bills passed this week by our Virginia governmental leaders are simply shocking. Not only are they attempting to force moral, godly, religious people to embrace their false, sinful forms of sexuality, they are setting up a system by which to curtail free speech which does not support their thinking, teaching, and world view. Hate speech laws designed to protect godless, immoral behavior are just around the

corner, and all of these will be used to intimidate and silence the voices of reason and religion. There truly is a battle raging between moral and spiritual light and darkness, between truth and error, and given our current trajectory the terminus of this decline is frightening.

Enter the local church of Jesus Christ.

We answer to a higher power, God. We answer to the clear, unchanging, absolute revelation of His inspired Word, the Bible. We do not fear because we know the words of Jesus are true when He proclaimed:

¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

When this old wicked world is gone, the Church of Christ shall stand in His glorious presence for all eternity. Presently, however, we see and sense the birthpangs Jesus spoke about prior to His judgment of the wicked and His magnificent appearance to usher in His kingdom of peace, justice and holiness (Matt. 24). Being wise, therefore, we do not and should not flinch. Culture can, and will, change its beliefs to suit and rationalize its sins but we, of all people, know that truth never changes. What's true is always true, not matter the thinking of people, the changes in culture, or the turbulence of the times. Based on this, therefore, we stand firm-footed in our faith and are committed to be that light set on a hill for all to see and discover hope, peace, and meaning for living.

When you think of who God has sovereignly brought to this particular church, you know this just didn't happen willy nilly. No, He has sovereignly guided influential, academic, loyal, godly, and well-trained people here for such a time as this. Because of where we are located, we have saints who desire to be God's light in places which can, and will, impact our entire culture for God. These folks come from all walks of life, and from all facets of the military and the government. They are all here: CIA, DIA, FBI, DEA, NASA, ICE, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, the White House, the Pentagon, U.S. Customs & Border Protection . . . along with lawyers, judges, school teachers, professors, brokers, coaches, home school leaders, pro-life leaders, and so forth. With a church containing this unique grouping of believers comes a grave and humbling responsibility to make sure they are trained to be that light in the ever-encroaching and advancing darkness. And given the fact we lose 20% of our highly gifted members per year as the military or government moves them literally around the world, we are challenged even more, as church leaders, to make sure you are equipped to be mature saints who stand, like David, before the Goliath of godlessness wherever that might be.

Pragmatically, what does this all mean? Good question. It means we have to double down on our efforts to provide a top drawer educational program, at all levels, to train our people to shine brightly where God has placed them. With new adult classroom, fitted with all the latest technological gear, we will be offering classes taught by gifted teachers to continue to train you in apologetics, biblical study, and evangelism. We will continue to focus on and further develop these three areas because they form the backbone of our strength.

Apologetics is a pivotal discipline in our morally and spiritually rudderless culture, hence, we will offer classes designed to help you answer all the hot button issues of the day: Is there a God? If there is a God, why is there evil? What is true tolerance? Is sexuality fluid or fixed? How do I know the Bible is God's Word? Is there only one path to God? . . . to name a few. And just what is apologetics? Alister McGrath defines it well in his book *Mere Apologetics*:

Apologetics aims to convert believers into thinkers, and thinkers into believers. It engages our reason, our imagination, and our deepest longings. It opens hearts, eyes, and minds. As the great apologist G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) once quipped, “The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.” Apologetics celebrates and proclaims the intellectual solidity, the imaginative richness, and the spiritual depth of the gospel in ways that can connect with our culture.

Apologetics is to be seen not as a defensive and hostile reaction against the world, but as a welcome opportunity to exhibit, celebrate, and display the treasure chest of the Christian faith. It encourages believers to appreciate their faith, and to explain and commend it to those outside the church. It aims to set out the intellectual, moral, imaginative, and relational richness of the Christian faith—partly to reassure believers and help them develop their faith, but primarily to enable those outside the community of faith to realize the compelling vision that lies at the heart of the Christian gospel.¹

Sorry for the longer than normal quote, but it is worth it since so much is at stake. So, whether you are an adult who wants to know how to defend and share your faith around the proverbial water cooler, or you a young person who needs to know how to handle the major questions you’ll face in relation to your faith when you attend college, we are committed to training you so you are positioned for maximize faith impact.

We will continue to showcased and stand on the Word of God regardless of what the carnal, philosophically twisted culture says. Why?

- The Bible is THE spiritual light: Psalm 119, “¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
The Bible is THE milk which feeds the new believer: 1 Peter 2, “² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”
- The Bible is THE mirror which shows you your spiritual condition: James 1, “²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”
- The Bible is THE fire and THE hammer which demolishes falsity: Jeremiah 23, “²⁹ Is not My word like fire?” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?”
- The Bible is THE solid food which feeds the soul: Hebrews 5, “¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 11.

and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

In this holy book are God's answers to all of life's questions, the wisdom of how to live for God, and the knowledge of what is the right way versus the wrong way.

Teaching this holy book is one of the main reasons our church has flourished. God, as promised, will not permit His word to return void (Isa. 55:11). He will always bless the bold, clear teaching of His Word, and this is why we will shall remain committed to expound it at all levels of our body from the smallest child to the oldest adult. In apologetics we show people why it is logical and reasonable to believe in the God who has spoken, and in the Word, in His special revelation, we show them how to know and walk with Him.

We don't want to be known as just a great place to go to learn how to do apologetics, or a place to attend where there is excellent biblical instruction at all age levels. This is all well and good, for spiritual maturation purposes; however, we know all of this should lead us, like Jesus, to share our faith with anybody and everybody. What is apologetics and Bible study if it does not lead us to lead others to a faith relationship with the Master? It is nothing but intellectual snobbery and pride, which is contrary to the faith. Hence, if we are convinced there is a God who created and loves us, that He came to earth to deal with our sin problem on the cross, that He rose in time and space on the third day defeating sin and death, then this should embolden us to speak up and out for Him more often than not. Our culture is descending into darkness, but He is the One who can save them and pour light into their lives. How can we not share Him and His gospel? How can we not train you how to share your faith in a profound, powerful fashion? We have and we shall.

God has providentially placed us to do so much more for Him in 2020, and that kingdom advancement is intrinsically related to our commitment to apologetics, the Bible, and evangelism. God wants to use you to make a difference in this old world, and we want to be the church which equips you to that end per Paul's teaching:

¹¹ And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love (Eph. 4).

Sound advice worth heeding, especially in a church strategically placed by God for great societal impact.

Two: We Are Positioned For Continued Financial Stability And Freedom

As this church has numerically blossomed over the last eleven years, we, as leaders, have done much to keep up with the growth. Staff size has changed, organizational structure has changed many times, the locations of various ministries has changed, and built Timothy 6:18–19 (NASB95) ¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

ding structure has changed. This wonderful stage, balcony, and more comfy worship chairs replaced the rickety and noisy stage, no balcony, and uncomfortable slightly padded worship chairs. The foyer was doubled in size, prior to our current building project, a few children's classrooms were turned into much needed staff offices, and a children's welcome room was built to receive all the children and their parents.

With all of this growth, also came financial growth. The \$2.2 million dollar construction loan we had when I first arrived was paid off quickly, making us debt free. As the budget continued to increase, your obedience in giving increased as well, leaving us more money for ministry than we budgeted over many prior years. And when we grew to the point we needed to build a whole new worship/educational/teaching facility, we sensed God calling us to name the new endeavor for fundraising *Following God's Lead*. We called it this because that's exactly what we were, and are, doing.

In order to merge the *Following God's Lead* motif into our quest to raise \$9 million as a downpayment towards our \$18 million dollar worship facility project, we tapped into a baseball theme. You'll remember the first title:



Many team players lined up to *Get In The Game* by resolving to give generously to the building program. As time passed and funds poured in, we developed a second giving theme:

Approaching our downpayment goal, which was, in itself, amazing, we later added a third giving theme:



Players, once again, listened and did what they could financially do to make sure we had the funds to position our church for great ministry to countless lives. Today, I'm proud to tell you we have

blown by that initial downpayment goal because of your generosity. Presently, we have right at \$12 million, which puts our team in a sweet spot for present and future play. As your “coach” I have to say, way to go team.

As your “coach,” I think a new challenge is in order for the team. Do you realize how close we are to being debt free, again? Can you imagine what we can do for God and the advancement of His kingdom and its life-giving, life-transforming principle if we are debt free? So, what do I propose? I propose a new baseball giving motif for old and new-timers. What’s it called? Here it is and it is most appropriate:



Believe me, there is nothing more exciting than being at the plate in a big game and drilling the ball out of the park. I’m sure you as Washington National fans (I’ll pray for you) know what I’m talking about. Remember when Howie stepped up to the plate in Game 7 of the World Series last year? His clutch 336 foot homer on a down-and-away cutting fastball changed everything. Let’s pause and remember the moment. [Video clip]

What Howie did for his team and what I’m challenging you to do for your team: to financially help us hit the proverbial ball out of

the park. How will this happen? It will happen as you step into the batter’s box, ready yourself for the pitch, and then determine to be a generous giver. Here’s how Paul, a great player in his day, put this type of clutch hitting:

¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (1 Timothy 6).

So, I ask you, Who will be the next spiritual Howie? Talk about a wonderful way to position your team for the win.

Three: We Are Positioned To Get People Academically Trained

With Dallas Theological Seminary moving their East coast campus into our basement at the end of this year, and with classes starting in September of this year, you will have, at your fingertips, some of the best biblical training you can ever receive to either prepare you for full-time ministry, or to make you an even more skilled lay leader. Many of you will retire in hour early forties after an eventful and rewarding career in the military. At that point you’ll be wondering, What does God want to do with me now? Perhaps He will want you to be trained to take your leadership gifts and abilities to a whole new level altogether. A seminary education will help you realize that goal. Others may want to change careers and do something wonderful for God and others. Again, a seminary degree is a must.

At the DTS campus, you'll be able to get an MA in Biblical Counseling (2 year program), an MA of Biblical and Theological Studies (2 year program), or you can obtain the Th. M. degree (4 year program). Since this is my alma mater, I can easily say from experience a degree from this school will equip you and position you to be a powerful tool in the hands of the living God. With the presence of this graduate school here, we, as a church, will also be positioned to make sure saints are trained for the work of God beyond these four walls. And, I'm sure, if space permits, you might be able to just audit a class here



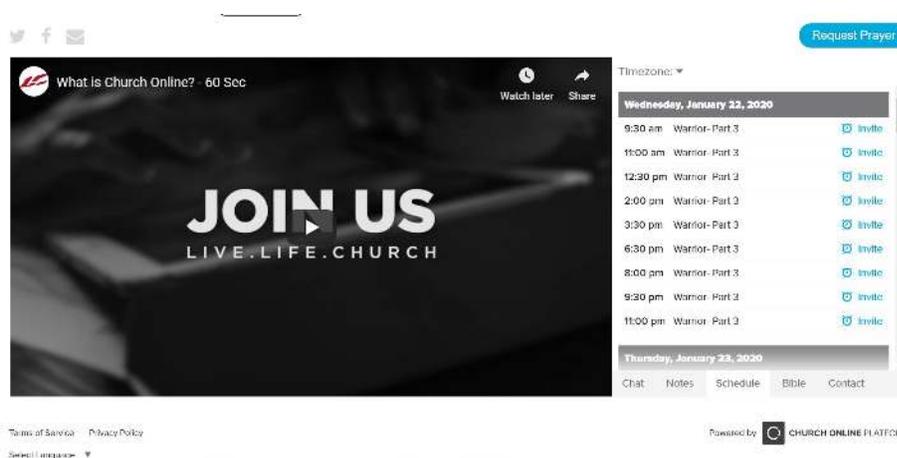
and there if you desire to enhance your understanding of God's holy Word. Again, what a way to position yourself to accomplish even more for Christ as you hone your gifts for His glory.

Isn't this all so exciting? Who knows how God is going to use the presence of this grad school to impact us so we can impact others? Time and eternity will tell.

Four: We Are Positioned To Ramp Up Our Media & Technology Impact

Really, there is so much to tell you at this point I can only scratch the proverbial surface.

In our new building, we have a room located just off the main entrance devoted to growing our online church community. Many cutting edge churches around the country are reaching thousands of people simply through this online church format. Craig Groeschel does it at Life Church in Edmond, OK. This clip from their web site gives you a small glimpse of how they



operate. As you can see, there are tabs for worshippers to chat either with groups or to have a personal one-on-one conversation with a church team member. There is also room for prayer needs, coupled with the ability of team members to follow up on these prayer needs in a personal fashion. What a wonderful way

to extend the impact of a given ministry. We have been doing it on a small scale, but in the new building we are planning on ramping up this impact exponentially. All of this, of course, will call for many of you to step forward to be used of the Lord to be a shepherd of folks you may never meet, but who need a saint to come along side them for encouragement and hope.

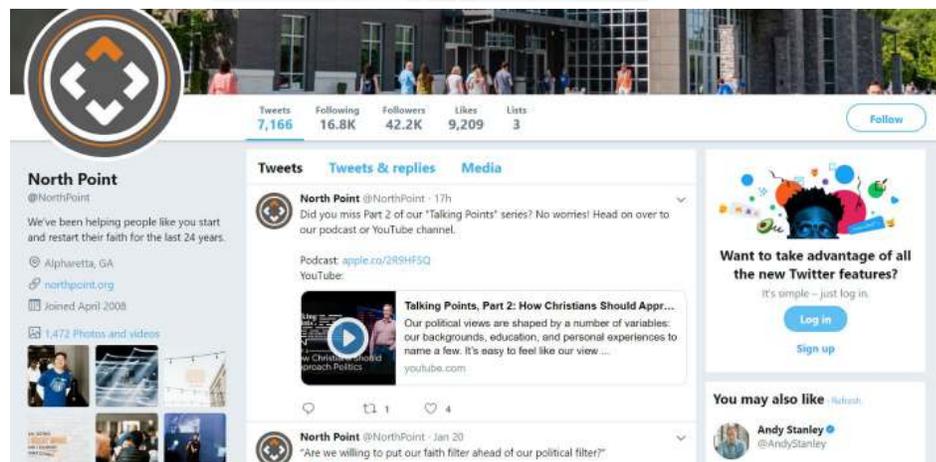
Additionally, there is so much more we can, and should, be doing to get our great ministry out there in the digital world to reach more people for Him. Andy Stanley's North Point church in Atlanta does a great job in reaching a wide variety of people by means of a top-notch *Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter* emphasis. With Millennials and Generation Z people being tech savvy and more prone to be impacted by a church's *Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter* ministry, it is time we

step up our game in these highly important areas.

What will it take to get going at a whole new level?



Creative thinkers, people who understand what these platforms are and how to effectively use them, people who have a passion for populating them with great info, and so on. Is this you? I know that many Millennials and Generation Zers are looking for a place and a cause to make a difference with their lives. If you fit one of these groups, or even if you don't, but you do want to do something out-of-the-box for God, then this is it. We've done a little work here, but nothing to magnitude of what we should be



doing.

And while we're talking about digial platforms, what North Point is doing on their Youtube channel is awesome. They are getting the Word of God out in a creative, eye-appealing fashion and it is making the difference in countless lives. We can do the same, but it is going to talk a whole lot more leaders and volunteers to make it happen. Will that be you?

Saddleback church in California is another church doing great things on the digital world to touch lives for Christ. You can't cruise their website and not be touched by the numerous video life-change stories they post. We, too, have many lives which have been transformed by God; however, we are not showcasing them like we should to give hope and help to a larger audience. To pull this off will take a team of people who know how to shoot, edit, and upload video. Is that you?



Not only does Saddleback showcase changed lives on their website, they market their cutting edge children's program and teaching with highly creative videos. Imagine how many more

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children we could impact for Christ if top-notch videos were available for families to watch with their children in the privacy of their homes? Again, what will it take to make this vision a reality in our body? Creative, talented, dedicated servants of Christ.

If anything, God has positioned us to do much more to spread His gospel and Word by means of the digital medium. But given our current staff size, we need a more robust group of volunteers to take this crucial area and take it to a whole new level. I think 2020 is the year we get moving in this area in a major fashion, however, that movement is all dependent on you catching the vision and stepping out of the shadows to be used of God.

Some time ago, I spoke with a college student who came to see me based on his parents exposure to our ministry online. He let me know upfront that he was not a believer and really so no need of being one. He was quite fine with his life. At one point in our conversation, he asked me what percentage of my faith was based on faith and what rested on facts. When I said I think it is 10% faith and 90% fact, he about fell out of his chair. Astonishing he, the thinker, replied, "That's not what I expected and that's not what the Christians I go to school say. They base their faith in Jesus solely upon faith. That is why I cannot be a believer. There is no evidence."

I spent the rest of our valuable time introducing him to the vast amount of evidence that there is, in fact, good reason to not only believe in God but in the fact God has spoken through the Bible. No, he didn't trust Christ that afternoon, but he left with a major rock in his shoes, a rock which, I know, the Spirit will use to soften the spiritual soil of his hardened heart. And to think he came here by way of the internet. How many more young people are out there like this young man? Probably too many to count, but God knows their number, and He also knows how we can work smarter to reach them. Will you help us?

I think 2020 is going to prove to be one of the most monumental years in the life of this Christ-honoring, biblically based church. He has profoundly blessed us over the years, but this year, in particular, He has positioned us to shine the light of His truth as never before. Yes, moral and spiritual darkness seems to be the order of the day, but it is stopped dead in its tracks when it encounters a church sold-out to Jesus, the Christ. We are that church, and we count it a privilege to do what we can to shine most brightly.