

Andrew Lawrence

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Preacher: Andrew Lawrence

[0 : 00] Well, this feels a bit unreal. I think this is what Tim said verbatim.! This is Andrew's last message before he leaves us.

It can be read in different ways. But you're right, this is my final time of preaching in Harvest Church as an elder of Harvest Church, after just over 10 years of being part of the team here.

And can I just say, it's been such a privilege to bring God's Word to you on so many occasions over the years.

And thank you for how you have heard His Word. And well done, and thank you for where you've taken it to heart and let it produce fruit in your life.

God loves that. I also just want to say how good it is to share leadership responsibility in Harvest Church. I think it's very easy when somebody's full-time and called eldership team leader or whatever, we forget that actually we believe eldership is plural.

[1 : 06] And during my time in this church, I've had the privilege of serving alongside some fantastic elders, some brilliant eldership teams. All men of great faith, integrity and servanthood, whose heart has been for God's glory and the extension of His kingdom.

And I'm just going to name those people. Some of them are here, some aren't here because they're away this week, or in other parts of the world now. But when I first came, Anthony Porter and John Barrett, I don't think Anthony's here, John Barrett's over there.

No, Anthony's not here. Honour's here, she can represent Anthony. Anthony, they both stayed true to that calling to be elders, despite a phenomenally tough set of circumstances the church had been through.

And they served this church so well. And then Nathan, Nathan Sylvester, came to us from the coin, first time he was recognized as an elder, and with us on staff for a number of years, and now part of the leadership team of One Harbour Church in North Carolina.

And which we sent them to, and they've just started to lead a site, a meeting, a Saturday evening meeting over there a few months back. And more recently, Sean and Rob.

[2 : 25] Current elders serving me the longest time. Sean, since 2018, and Rob soon after. By the way, Rob's doing really well. Thank you for praying for him. He is recovering well.

Hopefully we'll see him in a few weeks, or maybe even a month or more's time, as he's recovering from his heart surgery. And then most recently, Tim, who recognized as an elder just under a year ago, and now leading the team.

These are faithful men of integrity who love Jesus and who love his church, and have served this church so well.

I'm so blessed to have served with them. And I wonder, can we just thank them, whether they're past or present, can we just actually just applaud them and say thank you to them for how they've served this church?

Thank you.

[3 : 45] And I want to encourage you to do the same. They're all interrelated. In one sense, you're getting four sermons in one, so I hope you set the oven for two o'clock, not one o'clock.

You think I'm joking. Where I'd like to start is here, Psalm 37. It's on the screen if you want to. I will read it out to you anyway, but you can read it there.

It's my first ever sermon in Harvest Church in April 2016 was based on this passage. In fact, I preached the whole of the psalm at that point in time.

I've just taken a few verses from it, which say this. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him and he will do this. And then it goes on to list a number of things. Now, that's that excerpt from the psalm. The whole psalm is written in the context of trouble going on.

[4 : 54] It's like, oh, in the midst of all this trouble and the enemies who hate me, this is what I've got to do. But actually, scriptures encourage us to put our trust in God in every circumstance.

And I guess the first thing I want to remind us of is this. God is trustworthy. Let's trust him. And, you know, it's so good when we worship and effectively singing the creed.

I believe in God the Father earlier. Hey, yeah, we remind ourselves. This is who God is. As we gaze upon God in all his majesty, in all his fullness, in all his greatness, it's, oh, yeah, I can trust him.

Because we get tempted to trust other things, to put our trust in other things. And it's so easy to forget to trust God and to allow our circumstances to determine how we respond in situations, to respond how we think about things, how we feel about things.

And it's so important to keep a good perspective on who God is. And that's why worship, that's why prayer, that's why reading the scriptures are so important, because all of those things help us to gaze afresh on God, see him in his fullness, and go, yeah, and he's trustworthy, and I'm going to trust him despite whatever I'm going through.

[6 : 22] And so that's the first thing I want to encourage us. I've got a few more things I actually want to say within this, but linked to that, Hebrews 12, verses 1 to 3 say this, therefore, and this is a summary after we've read the Hebrews 11, which is a passage which lays out so many people of great faith, therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so you will not grow weary and lose heart. And so part of trusting God, let's fix our eyes on Jesus.

Because as we fix our eyes on Jesus, that will protect us from growing weary, even when we're enduring opposition, even when we're disappointed, even when things aren't going well, even when sin wants to ensnare us and entangle us.

As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we will do well, because we will trust God. And so that first area I want to remind us of is this, God is trustworthy.

[7 : 56] Let's trust him. Let's keep on trusting him. The second area I want to talk about, I'm basing it out of Galatians 5. By the way, all things had preached in the past, which we have preached, many different ways would have expressed this.

Galatians 5.16 says this, So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. We are not called to live the Christian life alone.

God gives us his Holy Spirit, and he wants to walk with us through life. He wants to journey with us through life. He wants to literally take our hand and walk with us through life together.

There's people who do just that, who walk by his Spirit, who live by his Spirit, recognising that he is sufficient to help us and help us to see Jesus.

Yes, to understand that we're loved by the Father, that we're his child, we're his children. Spirit in us cries out, Abba, Father. Galatians, end of Galatians 3, beginning of Galatians 4, Romans 8.

[9 : 11] Therefore, we need to remember this. If we're going to live by the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, we need to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit, as Paul encourages the Ephesians to do in Ephesians 5.18.

Be filled with the Spirit. Go on being filled with the Spirit. And so, as we know that God is trustworthy, as we gaze on him, let's remember he has given us this, this wonderful gift of his Holy Spirit who wants to walk alongside us to help us spot the pitfalls of life, to step away from sin and temptation, and into the goodness and grace and mercy of God.

And he gives us his gifts to enable us to do that and to help each other to do just that. It's a full package. We lack nothing as believers.

We've been given all that we need for life and godliness in and through Christ Jesus. And so I want to encourage us, let's continue to be a people who are filled with God's Spirit, who walk with God's Spirit, who live by God's Spirit with that clear relationship with him where we welcome him into our lives, where we seek him, and seek his presence, his direction.

We don't just make random decisions in our lives without consulting God. No, we ask him first and say, hey, Lord, what do you want to do in this situation? What do you want to say in this situation? And then he gives us grace and power to do whatever he's calling us to do.

[10:47] He will walk with us. He will guide us. He will remind us who we are in Christ. He will both equip and empower us for all that he has for us as God's people.

Let's be a people who live by his Spirit. The third thing I want to remind us is as we do so, as we trust God, as we keep our eyes fixed on him, as we walk by his Spirit, let's remember this, 1 Samuel 15, 22.

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings, Samuel replied, and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice. To heed, that is to listen, is better than the fat of rams.

Let's be a people who are obedient. It's God as he speaks to us. Yes, we need to weigh what he says, absolutely, particularly where it's prophetic and make sure it's in line with Scripture.

But let's be a people who exercise our faith in a way that we don't want to just make big sacrifices. No, no. Your sacrifices are easy to make.

[12:02] We want to be obedient. That's a heart of obedience. When it's talking about sacrifices in this passage, it's talking about literally burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Sometimes I think we can get drawn into that sort of thing. Oh, I'm doing this for God. Are we? Is that what God's asked us to do? We can do some things and then ignore what God's calling us to. I'm doing this for him. Oh, well, I can ignore that. No, no, no. Let's be obedient to what God says.

Let's be a people who are obedient to how he leads us, how he directs our path.

You know, in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28, Jesus says, teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. Obedience is important.

It reflects a heart which says, God, you're more important than what I think and what I feel. It's saying, hey, it's a heart issue. I want to live for the glory of God.

[13:02] I want to live. I want to be a delight. I want to serve God's plans and purposes in my life. God is far more interested in our hearts than our actions.

But actually, when our hearts are good, our actions will follow on. Matthew 5, 8, happy are the pure in heart for they will see God.

Want to see God? Have a pure heart. Receive that purity which God gives and live in that purity out of obedience to him. In all the ways he directs your path, follow him.

And faith is the vehicle by which we take steps of obedience. As we gaze on the goodness of God, as we see the goodness of God, the grace of God, the love of God, the majesty of God, as his spirit takes us closer to him and helps us to enjoy him and know his delight and pleasure over us, taking steps of faith comes so much easier because I'm in good relationship with him.

And so we can take steps of faith, whatever that may well be. We can be obedient to what he calls us to. We can trust God as we step into his plans and purposes.

[14:29] And as we walk with him, we can take bigger steps. We don't have to stay taking small steps of faith. We can grow. We can express our faith in different ways.

And then the fourth one I want to mention is this. Matthew 6, verse 10. This, oh, 9 and 10 actually. This is then how you should pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Now we know that what we call the Lord's Prayer goes on from there. I just want to highlight those first couple of lines of the Lord's Prayer. To me, I've always thought, I always feel it's an overview. Where do we start when we worship God? We give ourselves to him. We need to remember that. We exist to worship him. That's what we're made for. To worship him, to be a delight to him.

[15:37] To extol his goodness, his grace, his love, his mercy, his justice, his greatness. To speak it out, to live lives which demonstrate that, which express that.

and to see his kingdom come. That is to see the rule and reign of God extend on the earth through his people.

That's us. All of us are called to this. There's no exceptions. And so when we pray, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, we're worshipping him.

We're saying, hey God, you're great, you're majestic, you're wonderful. We're keeping our eyes on him. And then as we pray, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We're

saying, hey, Lord, I want to get involved in that.

I want to see it happen, yes, and I'd love to see it happen in lots of different things, but I want to play my part in doing this too. We're committing ourselves to him. Saying, yeah, Lord, please extend your kingdom through me.

[16:43] And so what we're doing is totally counter to the world in which we live, which says, go for self-gratification, make yourself the most important thing, put yourself first, and we're saying instead, God, I want to live for your glory, I want to live for your honour, I want to live for your praise, and I also want to live to see your kingdom come.

And that's all far more important than me. And how do we do that? We do that by, first of all, reminding ourselves God's trustworthy, that he's good, that he's gracious, that he's loving in all his ways, and he's provided the way, the means, through Jesus Christ for us to come to him, to know him, to know his love, to know his grace, to know his mercy.

We start there. And then we welcome his spirit in our lives. We say, yeah, I want to walk by your spirit, Lord. I want to walk by your spirit.

I don't want to do my thing on my way. I want to walk by your spirit. Fill me with your spirit. Be my best friend. Be my companion through life, spirit of God. Knowing that the Father delights in a heart which is surrendered to him.

So we delight ourselves in him, that we give ourselves over to him and in so doing we worship God and we give ourselves to seeing his kingdom come.

[18:16] Amen? Four very simple things. Now, I'm not quite sure where we're going to go now, if I'm honest, but I sense the spirit of God's here and he wants to particularly speak to a few people.

Not sure who that is yet, but we're just going to look for what he wants to do by his spirit. Now, you may think this is all well prepared and noted and all the rest of it.

You've got to be joking. But as we were worshipping, what I felt I saw was this. I felt I saw a library like the Bodleian Library in Oxford, a grand library with big oak frames with lots of dusty tomes of books all in nice spines and leather spines and all ordered and arranged round themes and all this sort of stuff.

I saw a person walk into the library and go, wow, so much knowledge. How does one get hold of all this knowledge?

So many stories. How does one read all these stories? I felt the spirit of God say, welcome to my home.

[19:36] Come and draw near to me. I have all of this, but you don't need to go and read it all. You don't need to spend years cloistered away in a library, but I want to come and dwell in each of us.

I want you to know the stories of God in your heart so that when you are challenged and when you are in difficult circumstances, when you face disappointment, you turn to him straight away and receive his comfort.

I felt he also wanted to highlight, though, that within that library, the library of God, there is truth and there is revelation of who God is. And we are to welcome his spirit to allow him to stir in our hearts the truth that we read in the scriptures because he's good.

But you know, one could spend all one's life in a library and some people do. I felt, he said, but this is only part. Yes, it's a place to rest.

Yes, it's a place to be refreshed. But it's for this purpose. It's to go out. It's to leave that library knowing that I will come with you by my spirit and I will lead you and I will direct you because you have a kingdom to play your part in the advance of.

[21:05] And so there's both a drawing into God and fixing our eyes on him and allowing him to feed us and refresh us and strengthen us.

But let's not just stop there. Let's remember, I feel he would say, remember the poor. Remember the lost. Remember the needy.

Remember the hurting. And when you see them, remember what I call you to do, which is go and be Jesus to them. Amen.