



Summer at Woodland Hills Part 8 – The Great Adventure

Scott McElvain

This is my second time to be up here and I'm just truly honored and grateful. As Ted asked me to jump in on the Summer Series, which are a bunch of one off messages, so it's kind of in different directions each week, he kind of said, "Hey, Scottie, why don't you kind of think or maybe lean on something that you've given a talk on multiple times." I kind of looked at Ted and said, "I've never given a talk twice on the same thing." So, the venue and the places I'm speaking, I'm not cycling back around a lot of things, so I kind of had to go back and go, "Okay, Lord, what do you have for me?"

One of the things that I appreciate that Ted is speaking on and does a great job of mentioning through various talks over the years, is this concept of a sacred echo. A sacred echo is something, whether it be an idea, a passage, a friendship, that just kind of seemingly is just there. It just keeps coming back. It's just kind of flowing out there and, in random, different ways, it keeps appearing.

I can truly tell you that as I began to think about this week, there was a sacred echo. It was one that I've not really every had because it was a song. I knew that it was something that maybe I needed to pay attention to. When I was scrubbing the dishes, I began singing this and I thought to myself, I have not heard this song, I have not sung this song in 15-20 years.

[Song plays] "Saddle up your horses..." Yes, Stephen Curtis Chapman. Yes! If you know this song, come on give it up. It's *The Great Adventure*. It gives me goose bumps every time. I was probably 12-13 years old at a summer camp. Stephen Curtis Chapman came to do a concert. I heard that song and probably listened to it a thousand times within the next two to three months. And then it just kind of moved on.

But I kid you not, for whatever reason, I'm sitting in my kitchen... the dishes are my duty. The kids go to sleep, the house is quiet, I'm there doing the dishes and I just start singing, "This is the great adventure." I'm thinking, *Where is this coming from? What?* For 15-20 years, I have not heard that, so I've just been listening to that song and I've just been in love with that song and this idea of the great adventure, that life is a great adventure. It's a journey that we are all on in different ways and in different paths, all headed in a similar direction as Christian brothers and sisters.

As just a little side note... I continue to be overwhelmed sometimes at the power of music. The power of music and worship, this idea that 15-20 years ago, a song that I learned as a kid, came back to me as an encouragement? Wow.

We got to spend Week One at K-Kauai this summer. I have a five-year-old and a three-year old and they are in different groups and each group has a name and every time they say that name at kamp, there's a chant that comes along with it.

One of my sons was in the group of Coconuts. Every time they said, "Coconuts," there was a chant, "I'm a nut, I'm a nut, I'm a coconut." So, we leave kamp and just like Stephen Curtis Chapman and The Great Adventure, I bet my boys said that every minute of the day... it sure felt like. We have three under five right now, so when that clock hits 7:30, they are asleep and there is just a big sigh of relief like, "Woo, we got the asleep." And you're laying down and the baby monitor is over there and it's silent for about 30 seconds. We hear, "I'm a nut, I'm a nut, I'm a coconut." We're like, *what is going on here; I thought you were asleep, man.* I tell you the truth; I again find myself doing the dishes. What do you think I started singing? As parents, we know that your kids listen to these songs. Those songs are imprinted in their hearts too. That power of music is so strong.

I began to think about it. I want to read the chorus of the song for those of you who have not heard it. First of all, I encourage you to listen to it because it's phenomenal. The chorus goes like this. Stephen Curtis Chapman sings, "Saddle up your horses, we've got a trail to blaze. Through the wild blue yonder of God's amazing grace, let's follow our leader into the glorious unknown. This is the life like no other. This is the great adventure."

I could stand up here before you and, with my meeting a lot of people in my 33 years of life and asking how they're doing, I've not met a lot of people who respond to me, when I ask them how everything is going, "Everything is perfect. I have no surprises, everything is calm; it's super boring." Right? More often than not, what do I hear? Crazy. Mountains. Valleys. Peaks. Despair. Joy. Happiness. It's all in the adventure.

I can tell you that the last year for the McElvain has been quite an adventure. Never in my life have I cried so many tears of pain and despair for various things. I've been in valleys I've never seen nor felt nor never want to go back to. But I can also tell you that in the same vein, I've been on mountain tops; I've been blessed in more ways than I can understand and imagine. I've seen Jesus in new ways and been transformed by it. Tears of joy, happiness, and blessing.

I say these things to say that you and I, my friends, are on the great adventure. There's nothing like it. So, if I begin to think in terms of an illustration of how life's a journey and adventure, then I begin to say, "What are the things that should accompany me on this adventure, this journey that would help me on this path that I've been placed." With three children under five, it takes about a 20-minute check list for me and my wife to think about all the things that we need to be successful if we just take a trip to Walmart. You go through the checklist and you forget one thing, you're like, "We're just turning back; it's not even worth it." There are things that we know we need on journeys and adventures.

When I began to think about adventures, some of the first things that came to my mind... Again, I'm in a house full of little kids. First thing that came to my mind were Buzz and Woody. The adventures of Buzz and Woody. I looked up the year that Toy Story came out. I was 9 years old when Toy Story came out. I've been on an adventure with Buzz and Woody for quite some time. So much so that now I'm taking

my kids, possibly, to see Toy Story 4. I also think about Batman and Robin, the old ones, the classics. These guys were on a journey and adventure to clean up the streets of Gotham City.

I teach at a classical school, we read a lot of old books, so we read Lord of the Rings; you have to, right? And this band of individuals, eclectic as they may be, all on one adventure, journey, and path to accomplish one goal. So, I don't think it's a hard sell to you to tell you that the power of people along that journey in our lives is huge. The comradery, the fellowship that should have along this great adventure is so important. I am super grateful for the community that God has given me. I'm super thankful and I know the benefit that comes with that.

So, this morning, as we kind of narrow in what we're going to be talking about, we're going to be talking about Christian fellowship. I think scripture is replete with understanding that God has given us fellowship for a means to encourage us, to support us, to be a part.

Ecclesiastes 4: 12 says, ***Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him – a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*** I always think of that passage just to solidify that there is power in a group, in community. Jesus himself sends his disciples out. What does he do? He doesn't send them out individually, he sends them two by two. We see other relationships in scripture that are powerful friendships, Paul and Timothy to name one. So, this idea of comradery and fellowship within the Christian walk and adventure and journey of life to me is one I want to dive a little bit more into. Specifically, I want to land and hone in on a little bit more within that Christian fellowship. I think there are many things we could talk about that we could really dive into to discuss, but this morning, I want to talk about Hebrews 3. I want to read this passage and make a couple of comments this morning.

Hebrews 3; 12-13 – ***Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.***

Now when I'm doing my studies and I'm reading my Bible, there are generally some words that when they come up, I slow down. One of them is *beware*. I think often a tendency of mine, when reading scripture, is I'm just reading the law, trying to get through a chapter because I'm going to get my chapter in today, and I just glance over a word like *beware*. But when I think about in context my life, if somebody calls me and says, "Scotty, beware..." my ears are perking up. Because it's somebody that I know and trust and they're saying, "Hey, something is not right up ahead, and you should be warned about it." I use the example: "Hey, Scotty, beware there is backed up traffic on the strip; you probably want to take the backroads." Right? I'm rerouting. My friend is looking out ahead for me or giving me a heads up and I'm making a decision because of that. So, already, in this passage, the author of Hebrews has gotten my attention.

The second word in there is *brethren*. Another translation is brothers and sisters in Christ. So, I want to be clear that when the author is speaking here, he is speaking to Christian brothers and sisters. It's Christian fellowship. So, beware, be on guard, be warned. What's he warning us about? "...lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." So, he's concerned about fellow brothers and sisters in Christ departing from the living God.

Another translation changes the wording here to, instead of *departing*, gives us *turning*. I appreciate that because I think Ted highlighted for us something so important. He highlighted the power of posture for us last week, did he not? That as we are learning to be better communicators and listeners, our posture is important. The way we sit, the way we look.

At School of the Ozarks, where I work, we believe this too. You can bet that on week one of school, I'm going to sit before all my kindergarteners and sixth graders and do a little call out. I ask them a question and they respond. I say, "Students, how do we listen?" and they respond, "With our eyes, our ears, and our heart."

"So, you're telling me... First graders, I want you to understand that you're communicating to me that you're listening to me. When you're looking at me, your communicating to me that you are intently listening to the words that are coming out of my mouth. Finally, that you actually care about what I'm saying." That posture is important. I very well know that there are many first graders that are looking at me... "Mr. Mac is talking, I'm following him," but the whole time, he's thinking about corn dogs. I can just tell. I know it's happening. So, we're talking about the heart, we're talking about the ears and the eyes, this posture of learning.

Earlier in this chapter in Hebrews, it talks about the encouragement to fix our thoughts on Jesus. The writer of Hebrews is warning you and me that there is a posture change possibly ahead. A turning, a fixing our eyes and our thoughts upon Christ. You have my attention, author.

So, then what? I mentioned that some words I pay attention to. Let's go back to Hebrews 3. *But...* I hear the words, *therefore*, *however*, or *but* and I'm slowing down, I'm paying attention. But what? But what's he say to do? "Exhort one another daily, while it is called today." Exhort is one of those words that I have a general, gray understanding of. I kind of understand the concept of it, but I want to get on the same page for you this morning with what we mean about exhort, exhorting.

When we look in our Webster's Dictionary, you look online, we get a good definition. "An urging done by someone close beside." I love this definition because I hear two things in there. With that word *urge*, to me there is some passion behind that, some emotion, yearning. I'm pulling, I'm urging you to something, I'm urging you to action. That second part, I think, is very important. Someone close beside. There's a relationship here in this urging, this pulling, right?

If we look at the Greek in this specific verse, I think it broadens our understanding of this word *exhort*. I think it's helpful for us. I'll add some other things. It also could mean to summon, to encourage, to admonish. This exhorting is an urging of a close friend that also entails a summoning, a pulling close, an encouragement, and even an admonish. But I want to direct this because I think it's really important about what the author is exhorting us to. We have **direction** with this definition. And if we remember the first part of that verse, the author is warning us, "Hey, there are some of you dealing with an evil heart of unbelief; you are waning and wavering in your belief in the Lord and living God. So, that **purpose** of our exhortation, of our encouragement, of our admonishing, is meant for belief. As Christian brothers and sisters, we are to exhort one another that we would encourage our brothers and sisters in continuing to believe.

I did not ask the worship team... I know nothing of how they pick or choose songs and they didn't know much of what I was going to talk about. But to hear that song *I believe*. "I believe in the resurrection. I believe in the name of Jesus." Even as we worship, we are affirming our beliefs, how important they are, how powerful our beliefs are. They are hugely important.

Now I want to go to who. We're already kind of defined that this passage is directed at Christian brothers and sisters, but I want to make one other note here. I think maybe as I'm introducing this, I could understand, "Alright, Scotty, so you're talking about those that are wavering in their belief, those that are walking through a valley and really beginning to question whether their sins can be forgiven, whether they are of any value as a person. There are some foundational, core beliefs that might be struggling a little bit.

I want to roll over into 1 Thessalonians 4 and I want to show you that I think it's a little bit more than that. 1 Thessalonians 4: 1 – ***Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you receive from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.*** You see, I think this passage is directing our exhortation not just to those that are struggling in some beliefs... They've accepted Christ, made a stamp, they're dying daily to their own selfish desires. It's all about you, Jesus, and they're struggling with some of those commitments. But I believe this passage is to all brothers and sisters, that we would excel still more in our belief, growing in it, solidifying in it.

Our Role - Here's my big point this morning. Our role. This passage brings about a role for me in my adventure. When pertaining to my brothers and sisters in Christ, my role has now expanded. I do not take lightly that God has entrusted me in this passage to be one who admonishes, who encourages, who supports and urges my brother and sister to stay true to the foundational beliefs that they committed when they gave their life to Christ. That is not small task. That is no small responsibility that God has entrusted me with, entrusted us with.

I did say the word *admonish*. Other words we could say are stern rebuke. And maybe you thought, *He's talking about loving and encouraging...* Right? That word admonish is in there for a reason. When I look back over my life, some of the most powerful and important talks came from people who love me enough to admonish me.

I walked into the College of the Ozarks. I drove down from Kansas City, freshman, playing basketball, working 15 hours a week, fulltime student, trying to make friends. I was a mess. My priorities were out of whack, my time management was terrible. I was having a blast, but I wasn't taking care of the things that I needed to take care of, specifically my academics.

The dean of the college called me in. You better believe I got a good, admonishing talk. It was everything that I needed. I didn't like it. I questioned whether I should be there. She was compassionate, she was kind, she was loving, soft in her delivery. She was stern in her warning about the direction that I had set my course on at this moment in time.

I cried, called my dad, struggled. I saw her the next couple of days, and she gave me hug, loved on me, encouraged me. Thankfully, I got back in there and got those priorities straight. That's one story of an admonishing conversation from a friend that I needed to hear. What it came down to, what I saw was that she cared enough to about me to tell me the direction, the course, my position was not in the right place. I'm super grateful and super thankful of that.

Sometimes, we have some people in our lives that agree with everything that we say. We believe that loving somebody that's never disagreeing or calling something to something higher or challenging... Unfortunately, when we have people like that in our lives, eventually, we will meet somebody that's going to give us that face. You all know this. Simon Cowell, American Idol, right? I remember watching it. You could just see it coming from a mile away. A person walks in there saying, "I'm going to rock this; I'm the best thing you've ever hear. I'm so great, I'm so great, I'm so great..." They sing the first line and Simon's face does that. Why does that happen? It's because that person did not have people in their life that was willing enough to say, "You should probably just... Your singing style should be washing dishes in the comfort of your home."

Another word for this is **pseudo community**. Pseudo community is a community of friends that are just not challenging, not encouraging, not admonishing, not giving you a warning. They're going to agree with everything you say. They're not going to call you out. They're not going to challenge you to grow and excel still more. They're going to let you just kind of waiver on that adventure down a path that they know, they can see is not good at all.

One of the things Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that I think is so good, "*Nothing can be more compassionate than the sever reprimand which calls another Christians in one's community back from the path of sin.*"

I want to be clear. I'm not saying to go out and just start lining people up. That's not what I'm saying. If you recognize your brother or sister is struggling, you need to do a heart check. Is this coming from a place of love, care, compassion, kindness, soft-heartedness? Have I prayed through this? As well on the other side. Am I humble enough to receive this? Am I willing to open my ears to hear that my brother or sister in Christ is concerned about a direction I'm going concerning my beliefs? It takes some humility for sure.

Sometimes, I think you and I, we are forgetful. If I don't keep things at the forefront of my mind, I often forget many things, including some of my core, foundational beliefs.

Great story – Marcus Aurelius, a Roman Emperor. Legend has it he had somebody follow him around, 24/7, that when somebody was praising him or worshipping or giving him encouragement, this person would step in and say, "Don't forget you're just a mere mortal." You see, we are easily deceived.

If we look at the passage, Verse 13 mentions this: "**...lest any of you be hardened...**" Hardness of heart in your belief. "**... through the deceitfulness of sin.**" The lies, the tricks of sin that pull you in different directions, that make you think there's something better out there. You see, sin gives us a big advertisement that it's better, but it never delivers. It's deception. The deceitfulness of sin breads a

hardened heart, an evil heart, an unbelief and a turning of posture away from the Lord. You and I should be aware, and you and I have a role in each other's lives.

Now if somebody comes and tells me, "You need to be practicing something daily," they believe that it's pretty important. I have bad lower back pains. At my doctor, it's very well noted. "Scotty, you should be stretching every day because it's good for you." We look back at the passage. He's saying, "Hey, not just when you feel like it, not just when it's convenient for you, but daily exhorting one another with the direction that you might be affirming, supporting, encouraging, admonishing your brothers and sisters in their belief in the living God."

You see, adventures have trials. And these stories we know; we love the adventure. We also recognize that there are adventures and trials in our day to day. There are temptations, lies, deception of sin is ever present. We should be on guard as we walk on this great adventure in Christian fellowship.

Wrapping up, John Pipers says that he believes much of the role of Christian fellowship is this: to say things that will keep each other believing. What a great test, a great evaluation tool for the way in which you and I walk in conversation and Christian fellowship. Are the words and the things that are upon my heart that I want to press upon those that are along with me in this great adventure things meant to encourage, support, and lift up that they may continue believing in the living God? That's tough for me to think in that way. Am I doing this on a daily basis? God has entrusted me with this role as we walk and try and please the Lord on a daily basis? This exhortation?

In Christian friendships, are we exhorting one another, saying things to each other that are keeping each other believing? In our small groups, do we go there and just kind of keep it on the surface without any challenge? I think about challenge. I'm a basketball player. My favorite coaches were the ones that were challenging me. They were urging me not to shoot jump shots. They knew my strengths and weaknesses. They were admonishing me, challenging, supporting, encouraging me. Those are the ones that I look back and say, "That was a great coach." It wasn't the coach that sat there and said everything I did was great.

We love the coaches that challenged us. They were there, speaking truth in our lives, holding us accountable and so should we in our **small groups**, in our **friendships**, as well as in **our marriages**. Those trials, in different places in different areas, are vastly different. Those friendships... My relationship with my wife is vastly different from my relationship with those in my small group and my Christian friendships. But, do you know what? I need to know these people. I need to understand my wife, I need to continue to date her and pursue her that I might know her in that close relationship that I might urge her, whether she's struggling with something or she just needs to continue to excel more in her belief and foundation in Christ.

Even in our parenting. Are the words that are coming out of my mouth to my children instilling an understanding of who Christ is? Even so, as they know Christ, am I continuing to encourage them and love them.

Piper puts it like this as well. You and I, in this adventure, as we think about Christian fellowship and the journey, we are to continually be yelling this: **He is greater**. Christ is greater than the temptations, than the sinful desires that come upon us, than the valleys and despair that come upon us. Christ is near, he is present, he loves us. He is greater. What a beautiful name it is; the name of Jesus. I don't know about you, but I, after studying this passage, am invigorated with more of a direction to walk back into my friendships, my small groups, my marriage, my parenting, understanding that I've been called to a role in my fellowship and my community to exhort one another in humility, gracefulness, with a compassion that we might be saying things that are pushing, turning the posture back to our belief.

We're affirming the promises of God, the character and the nature of God, that Jesus did die, he did rise, and our sins can be forgiven. A right understanding of who I am. A right understanding of who the Lord is. These are big things. And those beliefs trickle down to the way that you and I behave, the way we spend our money, the way we treat other people. Those have powerful implications.

So, this morning, I exhort you. I hope you hear in me the urge and the passion to go out and to continue on a daily basis exhorting those that God has placed in your fellowship, in your community, recognizing that they themselves are on quite an adventure, quite a journey just like we understand ourselves to be. I want that. I need that. I need my brothers and sisters in Christ to have my back to be watching my blind spots, to be reaffirming, reminding me that my posture is fixed on Jesus for he is greater.

I need to be that person too. Yes, I want that in my life, but I need to ask that question. Is that my direction and purpose? Do I think in terms of that when I walk in a small group? Do I think about my parenting? Am I that type of person who is looking to exhort in a loving, kind, compassionate way? That's challenging. But I challenge you to it. I think that if we walked in that, we practiced that, that's transformative. It's powerful because I need that on the adventure. I hope that's a good word for you this morning

At this moment in time, let's stand and pray and ask the Lord that he continue to encourage us with this and present opportunities that we may walk in this.

Father, we love you, we thank you; you are greater. What a beautiful name, the name of Jesus. Lord, help us see ways in which we might lovingly urge, summon, and might even admonish with a loving heart, caring enough for our brothers and sisters when we recognize that the belief is waning or wavering, we would love them enough to speak truth.

Lord, it's in your name we pray, Amen.