Hijacked Christianity: How An Aberrant Eschatology Enables A Grievance Culture That Supplants Christian Grace For An Extremist Meritocracy

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Hijacked Christianity: How An Aberrant Eschatology Enables A Grievance Culture That Supplants Christian Grace For An Extremist Meritocracy

by

David Sharp

Under the Direction of Dr. David Cheshier, PhD

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences Georgia State University 2022
ABSTRACT

The Evangelical participation attack on Capitol Hill that happened on January 6th, 2021, that almost toppled American Democracy, was an eye-opening experience to the dangers of radicalization. For this paper, the central question is, do recent evolutions to Christian Eschatology (Premillennialism/Postmillennialism) give exigence to the radicalization of mainstream American Evangelicalism via a Dominionist ideology? This study is a rhetorical criticism that will examine sermons of four prominent Neo Charismatic around the time of the 2020 National COVID Lockdown Announcement and the Capitol Hill Insurrection. This study uses a Constant Comparative Method (CCM) to inductively identify the possible themes, and a Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) to provide a more detailed examination of their rhetoric. Findings illustrate that increases in Millennialism rhetoric correlate with radicalization tendencies to create grievances that dehumanize outsiders while stoking existential crises in their own members to propel them into action via quests of significance.

INDEX WORDS: Amillennialism, Bethel Church, Demonology, Dispensationalism, Eschatology, Glossolalia, International House of Prayer (iHOP), Kansas City Prophets, Kingdom Now, Latter Rain Movement, Neo Charismatic, New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), New Order of the Latter Rain, (NOLR), Postmillennialism, Premillennialism, Rapture, Seven Mountain Mandate, Spiritual Gifts, Spiritual Warfare, The Third Wave, Tribulation, YWAM, Ideology, Narrative, Seduction, Utopia, Metaphor, Meaning, Mystification, Identity, Constitutive Rhetoric, Interpellation, Mortification, Victimage, Scapegoating, Quest for Significance, Existential Crisis, Cognitive Enclosure, Cognitive Link, Grievance, Othering
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Jonelly Sharp, for all her wisdom, encouragement, and support. She is my continual inspiration from her bravery to; walk away from toxic communities, to seize her agency and tell friends, family, and bosses no, to choose honesty and truth in the face of adversity. She rocks!
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Capitol Hill Insurrection televised on January 6, 2020, was a traumatic day for many Americans. After all, American Democracy almost ended that day as previously understood. The event has and will continue to receive scrutiny for all the sociological and political factors that lead to its inception.

Since January 6, a growing body of video and pictural evidence showcases Evangelical Christian participation in the Insurrection. A chief exemplar appeared eleven days after the Insurrection when a reporter for the New Yorker, Luke Mogelson, released his video footage from the Insurrection, “A Reporter’s Footage from Inside the Capitol Siege | The New Yorker.” At 7:56 seconds into the video, he records a rioter inside the Senate Chamber invoking the name of Jesus Christ. Then the Q-Anon Shaman Jacob Chansley gets everyone in the Senate Chamber to stop their activities and leads them in prayer to ask God to bless the event (Mogelson, 2021, 7:56; Posner, 2021, p. 267-268). Mogelson’s video poses an existential crisis for Christian believers like myself; that the greater bulk of the rioters present at the Capitol Hill Insurrection probably identify as Christians, or more accurately American Evangelicals.

On an academic level, research conducted on American Christianity has looked at its links to conservativism (Posner, 2021), racism (Jones, 2020), and sexism (Du Mez, 2020). These issues are extremely relevant and deserve scrutiny, but they potentially do not go deep enough. On a fundamental level, Evangelicals have changed ideologically and theologically enough for them to override the peace-making mandates of the faith as they did on January 6 and act out on their grievances. This theological shift can form an ideological shield that justifies, validates, and incentivizes these radicalized Evangelicals. Which begs the question, how does a religion that professes belief in a savior that preached tolerance and non-violence turn radical and extremist?
Seth Brown of the Southern Baptist newspaper the Biblical Recorder offers a micro answer to the January 6 issue “‘There are those that become preoccupied with end-times prophecy.’ … ‘Sometimes it’s very difficult to determine. Is this kind of your age-old prophecy stuff, or is it Q stuff, because some of it is very similar’” (as cited in Posner, 2021, p. 268). Nevertheless, depressingly scant little academic attention as to how issues like the end-times can/is radicalizing believers has been given.

The assertion of this paper is that the theological shift that enables this radicalization links back to Eschatology, which is the study of the end-time prophecies found chiefly in the book of Revelation. Specifically, the millennialist interpretations of this book envelop two of the three primary eschatological interpretations, Premillennialism and Postmillennialism, which can provide exigence for radicalizing behavior. Furthermore, innovations in millennialist Eschatology during the 19th century enabled a relatively new and fast-growing sect of Christians known as Neo Charismatics to birth an ideology known as Dominionism in the 20th century (Christerson & Flory, 2017, p. 31). Dominion theology calls for nothing short of the reformation of America and the world from a democratic state into a theocratic state that controls all levers of power and cultural influence (Garrard-Burnett, 2020, p. 2). The far-reaching consequences of Millennialism and Dominionism should concern both believers and non-believers alike.

Therefore, my research question asks, how does Millennialism and Dominionism give exigence to the radicalization of mainstream American Evangelicalism, and if so how? For this study, I use rhetorical criticism to examine their rhetoric inductively via a Constant Comparative Method (CCM) that surrounded two points in time; the National Lockdown announcement of March 19, 2020, and the January 6th Insurrection of 2020. The methodology will examine 16 sermons given by four prominent Neo Charismatic pastors: Ché Ahn, Mike
Bickle, Stephen Furtick jr., and Bill Johnson, selecting these four pastors due to their influence and prominence within the Neo Charismatic movement an Evangelical subculture that birthed Dominionism. At least one Pastor in this study, Ché Ahn, revealed he attended the Insurrection, and another Mike Bickle dropped similar hints. CCM will examine what themes were present in the discourse. Then the Discussion section will deductively unpack those themes using Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA). The CuDA section will textually review three sermons as in depth case studies to explore how the rhetoric of Millennialism and Dominionism aid in persuasion.

My theory is that a belief in Millennialism and Dominionism provides the exigence that pastors can use to nudge their congregants into activism, potentially even extremism. In contrast, the current body of research has virtually overlooked the links between Dominionism and radicalization. To my knowledge, no research has connected Millennialism specifically with radicalization. Due to Eschatology’s highly esoteric and idiosyncratic nature, the oversight could result from either a lack of interest or expertise on the subject matter. There appears to be a strong correlation in that the more a pastor preaches on these topics, the more likely that Pastor is to make statements that could radicalize their followers by fueling grievances for outsiders and propel them on quests of significance by stoking deep existential insecurities in the hierarchy of their afterlife. Understanding the encoded language Neo Charismatics use to discuss Dominionism and Millennialism in pursuit of a theocratic state can shed light on the rest of the Evangelical communities’ actions when they invoke the same codes.

The path forward to understanding the research requires the literature review to cover three capacious topics: first is the current meta of radicalization research to illuminate how a person/people become radicalized. Doing so will help color all further information as the paper proceeds. Then, an overview of Eschatology and its key branches of thought is required. All of
which tie into Dominionism and how it effects the social reality of its followers. Sufficed to say, these topics are massive in their own right; therefore, a heavy amount of reduction will streamline the key points.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Radicalization vs. Terrorism

Radicalization and its sister topic, terrorism, ballooned in popularity after 9/11 with a disproportionate focus on Islamic culture/religion. For this paper, radicalization is the topic at hand. All terrorists who use violence are radicals, but not all radicals will ever act out with violence becoming terrorists. As Turcana & McCauley (2010) write that “radicalization means changes in beliefs, feelings, and behavior in the direction of increased support for a political group or cause… It is important to distinguish radicalization of opinion (beliefs and feelings) from the radicalization of action” (p. 19). A person may have extreme beliefs and strong feelings but never find a violent application. The path to radicalization is unique to the individual; as Dawson & Amarasingam (2021) explain that “radicalization is the result of the dynamic interplay of individuals with their environments and contingencies that influence each person’s case in ways that are hard to predict” (p. 22). Concerning the Neo Charismatic pastors in this study, the claim is advanced that their rhetoric correlates to radicalization.

2.2 Radicalization

A radicalized belief can be the view that violence and conflict are necessary to achieve one’s goals within civil society and or functional democracy and that extremism and or terrorism is the enactment of that thought. As Kruglanski, Fernandez, Factor, & Szumowska (2019) compose in their paper, the best way to view extremism is in “terms of the frequency of a behavioral occurrence within some aggregate. From that perspective, extreme’ behavior is that which occurs infrequently within ‘a collectivity; it occupies a tail of a distribution as it were” (p. 117). However, while radical behaviors might be infrequent, radical beliefs can be far more
epidemic. In some cases, a cultural group’s acceptance or indifference to extremist behavior can be a metric of their acceptance of radicalized beliefs.

Therefore, understanding the pathway to radicalized action requires knowing the variables that might induce it. The field of radicalized literature is somewhat schismatic in this regard where one group places emphasis on the physiological needs that fuel grievance (Crenshaw, 1981; Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014; Ghatak & Prins, 2017; Pathé, Haworth, Goodwin, Holman, Amos, Winterbourne, & Day, 2018; Piazza, 2011; Portes, 2020). While another group gives accent to the psychological needs that are fueled in part by ideology, religion, and the social factors that fuel a question for significance (Dawson, 2021; Gates & Podder, 2015; Krugalanski et al., 2018; Mcbride, 2011, Orsini, 2020; Turcanna & McCauley 2010). Both camps agree that no single variable is generally enough to induce violence on its own and that multiple factors should be present when an individual chooses to engage in radicalized violence, but they disagree on what amounts to a primary motivator. Given the topic of this paper, the emphasis will be on the psychological effects, but the physiological factors still need to be understood because it typically takes a combination of causes to invoke radicalized action.

2.2.1 Discrimination

Radicalization researchers who champion physiological needs are in near agreement that discrimination and grievance fuel the rage of violent action. Piazza (2012) succinctly states that “the results indicate that socioeconomic discrimination against minorities is the only consistently significant and highly substantive predictor of terrorism” (p. 521). Discrimination actively disparages the disempowered from following the rules and norms of society. After all, if one side rigs the game, then why should the other side play fair? A sentiment that Ghatak & Prins (2017)
strongly echo is that “it is only in the presence of grievances such as discrimination and repression that a demand for political violence emerges” (p. 218). Typically, a minority group only needs to perceive discrimination by the majority and or the state. The emphasis on perception can mean that the grievance can be real or imagined.

Any perceived discrimination only further inflames other economic factors like the rising costs of housing, education, healthcare, relative to the stagnation of wages, and the explosive disparity of wealth that can affirm the validity of radicalized feelings. Mcbride (2011) concludes that the perception of discrimination leads to a lack of hope for reconciliation, or a redress of wrongs legitimizes radical violence (p. 564). In this way, the physiological researchers affirm the psychological component while insisting that the impetus lies in the tangible. Kruglanski et al. (2019) reinforce that “extremism marks a departure from that [homeostasis] state, introducing a motivational imbalance in which one need rises in saliency and magnitude to the point of dominating and ‘crowding out’ other basic needs” (p. 117). So, real or perceived discrimination creates grievances based on physiological, political, and economic issues.

The challenge for predominantly white privileged Evangelicals claiming discrimination is that traditionally they have been the majority; the loss of status can be an instigating factor. As the pluralistic society of America continues to shift secular and multiethnic, Jones (2020) writes of “this new awareness [among white Evangelicals] has caused a range of reactions, with some mourning. The death of the old and some pushing the new into life” (p. 11-12). Part of this new awareness could mean that white evangelicals can and will begin to see themselves as an endangered minority that corresponds to their shrinking influence and affluence. Posner summarizes the Christian right’s laundry list of perceived grievances that motivate them as “school desegregation, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, affirmative action, and more. Trump
became their hero… against ‘political correctness’ civil and human rights, and at its core the entire arduous project of maintaining a pluralistic, secular, liberal democracy” (p. xvii-xviii). The Evangelical’s embrace of President Trump’s accusation that Democrats rigged the 2020 election against him is another link in a longstanding chain of perceived discrimination against Evangelicals in the political/public arena.

2.2.2 Grievance

When dissecting the varieties of grievances, Orsini (2020) offers two broad paths for radicalization: personal grievance and group grievance (p. 14). A personal grievance is readily understandable as one’s desire for retribution, and it can encompass several different social, economic, and political avenues. According to Crenshaw (1981) the “regimes that deny access to power and persecute dissenters create dissatisfaction. In this case, grievances are primarily political, without social or economic overtones” (p. 383). Nevertheless, power and wealth are inextricably linked; the lack of one highlights the deficiency in the other.

The effects of group grievances complicate matters further. Orsini’s (2020) explanation of group grievance posits that “group grievance [is] when an individual empathizes with other people’s grievances making them suffer for any injustice experienced by a group they don’t even belong with. In this case, the individual becomes radicalized because of the injustice suffered by others” (p. 14). Therefore, a person may not have encountered an afront against themselves yet feel grieved for a wrong levied against a group, who may not even count them as members. On another level, an individual’s actions against a person/group get taken by that person/group as emblematic of the affronter’s entire demographic. Orsini (2020) also helps clarify that things are not always doom and gloom for the radicalization process. Sometimes radicalization can be fueled by the possibility for a status advancement or loss “people risk experiencing a
Hijacked Christianity

deterioration of their social status because of current social changes, while in the second group, people have the opportunity to improve their position. Both groups are more inclined to take risks” (p. 13). From this view, the Evangelical aggression displayed during the Capitol Hill Insurrection was an attempt to retain power; many deemed the gains from such an action were worth the risks of incarceration and or the violent overthrow of democracy.

However vital they may be, grievances and discrimination typically do not induce violence. Dawson & Amarasingam (2021) states that “wide swaths of the Canadian public hold political grievances, for instance, but a vanishingly small percentage ever turn to violence to address them. The explanations offered, in other words, lack sufficient specificity. This limitation is endemic to terrorism studies” (p. 4). The one component uniting all grievance types, social, political, individual, economic, or group-based, is outsiders, which is worth discussing next.

2.2.3 Othering

Small infants usually learn the concept of the other very quickly. The fact that others exist has vast social implications; people must share and coexist to live in the same spaces, be it a room or a planet. According to Piazza (2012), “‘otherness’ refers to cultural identity-based perceptions of difference” (p. 526). The temptation to reduce the links between the other and their humanity grows when differences are perceived. Orsini (2020) highlights that othering is a powerful component of radicalization:

Using dehumanizing adjectives is an effective strategy to humiliate and discredit enemies: they don’t have human features and, therefore, they don’t deserve compassion. Hate is an extreme form of negative identification – a sentiment – that includes the idea that members of the enemy group share a ‘bad essence.’ (p. 15-16)
The concept of “bad essence” can all too easily correlate with external features associated with identity. Piazza (2012) distinguishes that religious-based discrimination is exceptionally potent for producing “identity-based grievances that can lead to mobilization and engagement in political violence” (p. 526). Given the religion’s totalizing nature to frame people, places, and or events in stark; black and white, good, and evil terms, Piazza (2012) further warns that “non-material identities, such as religious identity, are fundamental building blocks in the psychological makeup of people, their communities, and their daily lives. When they are threatened through discrimination, very strong grievances are produced which are especially likely to motivate violence” (p. 526). Therefore, it is essential to understand how psychogenic needs contribute to the radicalization process.

2.3 Psychological radicalization

2.3.1 Social needs and Cognitive Enclosures

Group-based grievances highlight a particular form of psychological need known as social needs. Social needs can see their ultimate consummation in identification with religious groups that can offer a reprieve for individuals suffering from existential dread via a sense of meaning and purpose for their life. Orsini (2020) cites Silber and Bhatt for their work on Cognitive Openings, which highlights how group values, particularly religious group values, can shift an individual’s perspectives through a vehicle of “trauma that makes the individual start questioning the values they previously believed in” (p. 7). The existential anxiety Orsini writes of is an essential component of trauma and cognitive openings. McBride (2011) notes a perceived intersectional agreement from the fields of social, religious, and political theorists that “human beings are driven to imbue life with meaning in order to cope with the existential anxiety that comes from recognizing human mortality. … that the radicalized ideologies underwriting
terrorism actually serve as meaning-giving constructs functioning to relieve existential anxiety” (p. 561). The scholarship also indicates that social and religious groups can also have a limiting factor in restraining violence.

The key to this restraint depends on what is permissible to the group. Turcana & McCauley (2010) offer insights into the group dynamics that can exploit the gap made by a cognitive opening in part by the participant's willingness to act, being either buffered or embolden by:

- By the actor’s perception of what others want him to do (perceived norms) and by the actor’s perception of his own capacity to carry out the action (perceived control).
- Perceived control is crucial in the sense that the intention to act depends on believing that action is possible. (p. 24)

Framed another way by McBride (2011), in group scenarios, “group polarization” is the result of individualistic wills and needs consensually being subjugated by the group/leader’s needs or vision (p. 570). McBride (2011) explains that “extremists often segregate themselves from society; severing ties with individuals outside of the group effectively insulates their non-normative ideology by reducing challenges to their decision-making process” (p. 570). Once isolated, the broader societal pressures to conform are loosened as new social relations within the group supplant their significance. Therefore, the new society offers the definition of what constitutes appropriate behavior.

Accordingly, radicalization by any measure presents an individual with an opportunity to distinguish or advance themselves via sanctioned action within their chosen group. McBride studied group/religious extremist isolation in Muslim extremism, but the research has a disconcerting amount of intersectionality with American Evangelicals. Posner (2021) helps
highlight this notion of religious isolationism by writing that the “religious right and the Alt right are bonded together by shared grievances over a supposedly lost America, in which Christians don’t have to bake cakes for gay couples. And why people don’t have to bow to ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘political correctness’” (p. 188). Therefore, white Evangelical actions since the 1970s progressively pursue more isolation from mainstream culture in the form of Christian Schools, Home Schools, Christian media, Christian businesses, and Christian-based community centers that offer their members an oasis from dissent that is multiculturalism.

The self-imposed segregation finds its theoretical articulation via Orsini (2020), who points out that such actions form a “cognitive enclosure” from divergent thought, which in turn speeds up indoctrination into the group, and subsequently weakens the individual’s ability to question the association for fear of expulsion (p. 18). In the extreme form, Dawson & Amarasingam (2021) note that a group’s power over an isolated individual can be so profound that:

a role-person merger and what social psychologists call a process of identity fusion, in which someone’s personal identity is largely subsumed by the commitment to the needs of the group or cause. The cause becomes an integral and pivotal part of the challenging ‘project of the self.’ (p. 29)

The denial of self and the merging with the group identity or else face expulsion, according to Orsini (2020), parametrically gives the group the ability to define “moral standards and decide whether using violence is right or not. Radical interpretations cannot be questioned or contested by people outside the group. Isolation gives the terrorist group the power to define values and meanings” (p. 15). The indoctrination period is critical for establishing the cultural codes for what is permissible and what is not.
Group power over individuals gets magnified further when religious ideology forms the core values of a social group. For an individual increasing their status within the membership in some form of sacrifice, be it some form of time, effort, or monetary investment, amounts to what Dawson & Amarasingam (2021) says enhances the perception of “fighting to right a wrong, and thereby acquire a transcendent significance” (p. 25). “The” element that tops any value pyramid from Maslow's hierarchy to Bain Capital’s *Elements of Value* is transcendence or some synonym of enlightenment/significance. Dawson & Amarasingam’s use of the word “transcendent significance” is therefore highly apt. Offering transcendence is what elevates a mere exercise bike into Soul Cycle.

### 2.3.2 Ideology, Crisis, and Significance

Transcendence refers to a sense of greatness and therefore needs others to confirm it. Religion and ideology are resistive to critique due to what Mcbride (2011) calls their ability to be meaning-giving constructs, “ideological truth is contingent on the fruition of some future reality and… becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses” (p. 571). Due to the transcendental values, these constructs impart on a person whose religious identity forms what Piazza (2012) would call the “fundamental building blocks in the psychological makeup of people, their communities, and their daily lives. When they are threatened through discrimination, very strong grievances are produced which are especially likely to motivate violence” (p. 526). Therefore, the severity of the cognitive enclosure appears to correlate with the individual investment into the group. The desire to act in defense of the group/ideology can rise with either.

Consequently, an individual's will to violence in defense of their meaning-giving construct brings about an even greater crisis. In what Mcbride (2011) and Orsini (2020) call an
existential feedback loop, “terrorist violence ultimately exacerbates existential anxiety, compelling terrorists to defend their ideologies and returning them to the very state the ideologies were meant to relieve” (Mcbride, 2011, p. 561; Orsini, 2020, p. 21). In this instance, McBride and Orsini explain how the response to the violent act intensifies the discrimination that caused the grievance in the first place, prompting an even more vigorous defense. As a point of distinction, what McBride and Orsini call meaning-giving construct, Kruglanski et al. (2019) calls a “quest for significance” that is:

Social in nature (i.e., significance is awarded by one’s respected peers) the selection mechanism of the particular means to significance resides in the shared narrative of one’s reference group. In essence then, when the quest for significance looms large individuals become susceptible to narratives delivered by persuasive members of their social network that encourage acts of violence as a pathway to significance. (p. 118)

Under Kruglanski et al.’s (2019) logic, this quest forms what he calls a “means-ends relation” (p. 118). Kruglanski et al. (2019) further elaborate that due to significance being a social need tied to external validation that “in circumstances of severe intergroup conflict, however, unleashing violence against the adversary is often hailed as a particularly effective route to significance, earning one the status of hero or martyr” (p. 118). The path to radicalization and violence could flow like this: trauma creates a heightened awareness of mortality, inducing a “cognitive opening” that groups particularly religious collectives offer “mean-giving constructs” as a reprieve from dissent via “cognitive enclosures” that isolate the person into the group, weakening their ability to dissent from the group’s values subsuming the individual (Orsini, 2020, p. 12 & 18).
Kruglanski et al. (2019) cite the final step to violence via “a cognitive link” whereby validation is achieved through violence, forming an if/then relationship “if violent means are implemented (then) the end goal of personal significance is advanced. Formation of a schema occurs in the process of learning or inference in which a hypothesis (e.g., that violence is rewarded by significance) is validated” (p. 119). Therefore, any group, religious or state that venerates individuals for their results/merits if violence forms the heart of the achievement might be incentivizing others to violence.

A clear correlation ties discrimination, grievance, and trauma together, leading an individual into isolation with a sympathetic community. Whereby social acceptance forms the incentive of radicalized beliefs and actions. Possibly, even resulting in vengeance against those who wronged them, their group, or their ideology. However, to understand eschatology’s potential in the radicalization process, one first must understand its interpretive challenges.

2.4 Eschatology

2.4.1 Interpretive challenges

The book of Revelation is a unique epistle amongst all the other books in the New Testament. The Apostle John wrote the book as an apocalyptic text to deal almost exclusively in prophecies about the end times and the final battle between good and evil. Studying Eschatologies cryptic meaning has created a debate amongst believers on interpreting future events.

The three primary interpretive debates revolve around how to handle Revelation chapters 19 and 20. The arguments hinge, as Klassen (2018) would say, on “the assumptions the interpreter brings into the table, the issue under question is whether these presuppositions are recognized, and whether these presuppositions are of the nature that they facilitate faithful
exegesis, or whether they inevitably contribute to eisegesis” (p. 145). The first interpretive challenge with 19 and 20 is the chronological issue; are these chapters describing multiple successive events or multiple descriptions of the same event (Grenz, 1994, p. 14)? The second challenge is treating the text as literal (specific people, places, and time durations) or metaphorical (not specific to a person, place, or amount of time)? The last major interpretive challenge is the issue of Old Testament (OT) Prophecy. Thorsen (2020) writes of other letters in the OT that contain apocalyptic prophecies, specifically Isaiah, Daniel, Joel, and Zechariah (p. 182). According to Grenz (1994), the issue becomes, does the New Testament Church consider these OT prophecies as fulfilled or unfulfilled (p. 17)? Furthermore, if they are unfulfilled, Mappes & House (2013) ponder if the NT Church can fulfill them, or is that an issue for the sons of Jacob to accomplish (p. 17)? The book of Revelation chapters 19 and 20 prophesies the impending return of Jesus and the final confrontation with the Devil. How Christians perceive the future and their role in it directly results from how Revelation gets interpreted.

Chapters 19 and 20 get described by Grudem (1994) as unfolding in stages; a “Church age” where the gospel is spreading worldwide, a “millennial rule” in which Christ returns and rules for a thousand years, followed by a “final battle” with the Devil in which Jesus wins, kicking off the final stage, God's “eternal rule” (p. 1113). Just prior to the return of Jesus, there is a seven-year (could be literal or metaphorical) period of extreme hardship and persecution for believers at the hands of an Antichrist. This period is known as the time of “Great Tribulation.” A Christian’s understanding of these events revolves around the pivotal term “millennium.”

2.4.2 Eschatologies of the millennium

To date, the three major Eschatologies or methodologies for resolving the interpretive challenges to Chapters 19 and 20: are amillennialism, Premillennialism, and Postmillennialism.
Each interpretation centers around the “millennial” reign of Christ, and the latter two (Pre/Post) fall under the term millennialism. Amillennialism treats the text as purely metaphorical, therefore, not specific to any person, place, or length of time (Klassen, 2018, p. 128; Walvoord, 1949, p. 153). Amillennialism challenges Christians with uncertainty, the Savior will return, but there will be no warning signs to signal His imminent return. Around the 1700s, a new interpretation dominated Christian thought until the twentieth century, Postmillennialism.

In Postmillennialism, the millennial rule is metaphorical but happening now! The millennial rule in this context means progress. Christianity’s spread across the globe is a prophetic manifestation that is unstoppable (Klassen, 2018, p. 128). The Tribulation and the Antichrist are metaphors for Christian persecution that believers can overcome. According to Walvoord (1949), Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) “advanced the idea that Revelation 20 followed chronologically the events of Revelation 19, and that the millennium, while in the inter-advent period, was still [a] future” possibility (p. 153). Postmillennialism, with its bright and sunny outlook, is the eschatology of the good times, and with the horrors of the civil war, it fell out of favor by the end of the 19th century to Dispensational Premillennialism.

Premillennialism falls squarely in the literal interpretation camp; all events and time periods happen as described. In this version, Christ returns before the millennial rule. In Premillennialism, Grenz (1994) writes, “displays a basic pessimism about history and the role we play in its culmination. Despite all our attempts to convert or reform the world, prior to the end, [the] antichrist will emerge and gain control of human affairs” (p. 19). The eschatology bounded back into the zeitgeist during the late 19th/early 20th century thanks to John Nelson Darby (p. 46-47). Darby’s innovation as written by Wilkinson (2009) was to “revive belief in the pretribulational rapture of the church, the prophesied restoration of Israel, and the premillennial
return of Christ to Jerusalem” (p. 90). Now the Tribulation is a period of suffering that all believers generally fear, it is the metaphorical “dark night of the soul” that all great stories have.

Objectively speaking, there is no perfect interpretation of Revelation, and any attempt to claim a perfect interpretation for where current events stand concerning chapters 19 and 20 or to make future predictions based on those chapters have rendered the prognosticator utterly foolish (Moorhead, 1984, p. 65). Returning to the central issue is that Millennialism gives exigence to radicalization, the key hinges on human agency to bring about the return of Christ and the millennial rule.

2.4.3 Eschatology and the agentive turn

Historically the terms Christianity and agency have a very low synergy. The very definition of Grace is unmerited favor. The favor and salvation believers receive from their creator is unearned. In this sense, amillennialism holds the closest to the idea of low human agency as Grenz (1994) phrases things “the kingdom of God does not come by human cooperation with the divine power currently at work in the world” (p. 19). Nevertheless, as the millenniums came and went, Christians at some point started to wrestle with the immediate language Revelation uses to describe its events as imminent, yet an intractable amount of time has already transpired.

At some point, the question believers asked… are Christians waiting on God, or is God waiting on believers to fill some requirement or precondition before His return can happen? Pinpointing when this change in thought happened is incredibly difficult as the existing body of scholarship places little interest or emphasis on it. However, it cannot be understated how profound an impact this shift has on the body of Christ.
The “eternal state” marks believers’ last and ultimate goal to end all worldly suffering. If human intervention has any ability to hasten or bring about this utopian vision, then there is an element that is within a believer’s “perceived control” (Turcana & McCauley, 2010, p. 24). Moreover, if God sets a precondition, that condition downplays the significance of Grace, creating a “cognitive opening” (Orsini, 2020, p. 7) by the believer beginning to question their salvation status forming an “existential crisis” … am I a good Christian if I am not doing my part? To relieve the newfound “existential anxiety” (Mcbride, 2011, p. 571), the believer may undertake the burden of “advancing the Kingdom” in a manner akin to Kruglanski et al.’s “quest for significance,” the byproduct of which is the generation of quintessential meaning via a “means-ends schema” (Kruglanski et al., 2019, p.119) that could justify violence if the result is the end of all worldly afflictions, at least for believers. In the totalizing view, anything that promotes or prolongs human suffering can easily be characterized as evil and dehumanizes those who resist the believer (Orsini, 2020, p. 15-16). How much emphasis each group places on an agentive eschatology versus salvation by Grace will vary from Church to Church.

The earliest confirmable change to add agency within the Eschatologies can be attested to Darby to the best of this writer’s ability. According to Wilkinson (2009), “Darby understood that the Antichrist is coming, that the third temple is to be rebuilt, and that a time of Great Tribulation lies ahead for Israel and the nations” (Wilkinson, 2009, p. 92; Thorsen, 2020, p. 187).

Literalistic-oriented approaches to interpreting apocalyptic literature sometimes try to force Jesus’ second coming by promoting the fulfillment of prophecies that they believe must first come to pass. For example, some premillennialists believe that the nation of Israel needs to recapture Arab lands, rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and so on. In order to ensure fulfillment of
prophecies in keeping with their interpretations and expectations, they may promote violence, war, and other atrocities. (Thorsen, 2020, p. 187)

This Dispensational Premillennialist change is arguably the impetus for all modern Evangelical support of Israel. In a twist, however, this support for the Jewish state is inversely anti-Semitic. Premillennialist Christians help the Jews to re-found their nation and eventually rebuild their temple in an effort to trigger the rapture; in this scenario, the Jews get left behind to suffer to the brink of extermination in the Tribulation. Mappes & House (2013) spell it out explicitly “since Israel is destined for seven future years of God's tribulation-wrath and since the church is specifically not destined for God's wrath, almost all traditional dispensationalists hold to the pretribulation rapture view of the church” (p. 52). The anti-Semitic angle does not get much coverage in Christian circles, but it’s the only logic that makes sense, for if all Christians are raptured, who would be left for the Antichrist to persecute? All that would be left are the non-believers and the Jews.

Postmillennialism doesn’t escape from this agentive turn unscathed either, its positivistic ideas of progress posit that Christ’s physical return is predicated on worldwide subjugation on the part of believers. As Moorhead (1984) writes “since the millennium would not arrive via the Second Coming, the saints had to be God's coworkers in bringing about the latter-day glory; and postmillennialists generally used their eschatology to enlist support for… the creation of the New Jerusalem” (p. 73). Postmillennialism’s optimism for Christian progress ironically also hints at victory through conflict. Grenz (1994) writes that “Postmillennialism forms a constant reminder that before the people of God can become the Church triumphant they must be the church militant. En route to the dawning of the golden age there are battles to be won” (p. 18). With the idea of agency in mind, the paper will focus on the millennialist eschatologies that have human
agency: Premillennialism and Postmillennialism. Looking backward the fingerprints of America’s actions and injustices take on a new Eschatological light. Sweet (1979) attributes America’s westward expansion and subjugation of the Native Americans to millennialist views as well “the identity of American Indians was partially shaped by twin forces engendered by millennialist ideology, the squeeze of conquest on one side and the pressure for conversion on the other” (p. 530). The other blot on American history is its active role in the American slave trade, an atrocity that was justified according to Jones (2020) as a perverse form of evangelism, whereby abducted slaves get indoctrinated into the faith by their “benevolent patriarchs” (p.83).

The next wave of modern radical Millennialism would not begin to manifest until the 1970’s.

2.5 Rushdoony and Christian restorationism

The 20th century American culture has not been kind to Christians in many regards. The appendices of the ESV Study Bible (2008) recount a litany of cultural defeats and setbacks that sent Fundamentalist and Evangelical believers into cultural retreat (p. 2621). Believers were humiliated and disparaged during the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, which legitimized Darwinism in schools and left a lasting grievance against academia. The 1960s saw the sexual liberation of Women from homebound domesticated servanthood. In the 1970s, President Carter cemented the Democratic party’s divorce from Evangelicalism by attempting to revoke the tax exception status of Christian private schools for failing to integrate students of color into their systems (Jones, 2020, p. 103). The defeats, cultural setbacks, and the threat of taxes prompted Christians to reorganize and re-assert their cultural dominance resulting in the ideological strategies known as Christian Restorationism/Reconstructionism and then Dominionism. It is during this era in 1973, Rousas John (RJ) Rushdoony, a racist, Calvinist, and postmillennialist, steps onto the scene with his ideological treatise called “The Institutes of Biblical Law”
This document is the Christian’s equivalent of Sharia Law; it would have, according to Garrard-Burnett (2020) would, have effectively rolled back American civil liberties to the Mosaic Era (p. 2). Garrard-Burnett (2020) summarizes Rushdoony’s thoughts:

The US cannot yet fulfill this destiny [waiting for the end] because of its sinful and fallen state [radical catastrophism], as evinced by key bellwether issues, particularly legal abortion, the prohibition of public prayer in school, the teaching of evolution, approbation of same-sex marriage and other similar rights [obsession with purity], compounded by the multiplicity of non-Christian voices and values corrupting American society [obsession with purification]. The selection of ‘true’ Christian leadership is essential to expunging and repenting for these sins [purification of the means through the end]. Biblical law must replace secular legal codes and Christian values should form the basis of the educational system. This leadership must restore a nostalgic ‘Christian’ imaginarie where (white) men, acting with Biblically sanctioned, benevolent and godly noblesse oblige, dictate the lives of women, people of color, and all those outside the mainstream [identification of evil]. (p. 3)

The enthymeme of Rushdoony is straightforward. If Christian administration is the only just administration, then all others are unjust and must be taken down. Resisting the just administration makes the rebel evil and should be righteously and severely punished. The only women and non-whites that get sparred under this system are those who capitulate to the subjugation. As compared to Orsini’s (2020) summary of jihadi ideology, the overlap couldn’t be more synonymous:
The world has been plunged into an abyss of pain and misery (radical catastrophism) because of the actions of certain categories of people (identification of evil) who deserve to be exterminated (obsession with purification). Before the world ends (waiting for the end) one must isolate oneself to protect oneself from rampant moral corruption (obsession with purity) and rejoice in being persecuted, because the sacrifice of life is evidence of spiritual purity (desire to be persecuted). The end is such that it justifies the use of murder (purification of the means through the end). (p. 24)

Rushdoony’s lasting legacy materialized as Christian Restorationism, which formed the ideological bedrock of the Moral Majority. Conn (2011) writes of Robert Billings, one of the founders of the Moral Majority and their liaison to President Reagan, that “if it weren't for [Rushdoony's] books, none of us would be here.’ Scholars say TV preachers such as [Pat] Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and D. James Kennedy were clearly influenced by Reconstructionist notions” (p. 11). As disturbing as Rushdoony and Christian Restoration was, its Fundamentalist, racist, sexist, and homophobic language ultimately lost them the popularity contest with Evangelicals who have conveniently forgotten the patriarch who brought them their culture war against crime and abortion. But on the other side of the theological spectrum, a group of Charismatic Premillennialists were taking notes.

2.6 Wagner, dominionism, and the neo charismatics

In the 21st century, Dominionism is arguably the ideological power in Evangelical circles, but Rushdoony’s influence is still palpable. Garrard-Burnett (2020) summarizes Dominion Theology as an ideology with the goal of:

Cultural engagement to bring about political action resulting in… Christian political leadership across all nations; in the lexicon of the movement, advocates seek to
‘transform,’ ‘redeem,’ and ‘restore’ culture, thus bringing ‘dominion’ to the earth and restoring Christ’s Kingdom to precipitate His Second Coming. (p. 2)

The end goal of Dominionism is undeniable, to overturn secular democracy in favor of Christian theocracy. Budiselić (2015) attributes the popularity of Dominionism to C. Peter Wagner (1930-2016), who in the 1980s used the term Kingdom Now Theology (KN) “proponents of KN theology cite as their goal the ‘seven mountains [mandate]’ which are to be overcome and brought under God's power, and these include religion, family, education, media, government, art, entertainment and business” (p. 147). Regardless of the term used, be it Kingdom Now, Dominionism, or the Seven Mountain Mandate, the end goal of these synonyms is the same, a cultural and political worldwide hegemonic theocratic domination by Evangelicals (Garrard-Burnett, 2020, p. 4-5). The Seven-Mountain Mandate is more of a strategy that falls within the Kingdom Now/Dominionist theology, and these extra-biblical ideologies are the intellectual product of C. Peter Wagner.

Wagner rose to prominence in the 1980s as an Apostle of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). The NAR is a descendant of a decentralized Charismatic sect of Christianity that broke off (or rather kicked out) of Pentecostalism in the 1940s. After the expulsion, they rechristened as the Latter Rain movement (Holdcroft, 1980, p. 47). The Latter Rain’s influence inspired several groups and events through the 20th century; most notably in the 1980s the Kansas City Prophets; and in the 1990s, the Toronto Blessing revival caught national attention with its 600,000 members of attendance (Cartledge, 2014, p. 217; McClymond, 2016, p. 55-56, 61; Christerson & Flory, 2017). The most consistent name for this group during the 1990s and the 2000s was the NAR. Its leaders often claimed the mantle of Apostle, something the more fundamental denominations heavily shun as only an Apostle of Jesus can write scripture. Conn
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writes that “the NAR's theology is foreign to many fundamentalist Christians who reject Pentecostal practices like speaking in tongues and gifts of prophecy, the Seven Mountains agenda has percolated through wide regions of the Religious Right. So has the concept of dominionism” (p. 12). Since the 2010s, the NAR moniker has fallen out of favor with its leadership stemming from the backlash in Evangelical and fundamentalist circles for claiming Apostleship for themselves and anointing new Apostles into their network.

Wagner and other self-titled NAR Apostles like him; Bill Johnson, Mike Bickle, and Ché Ahn prefer to identify as either Christian or Charismatic (although Ahn still actively claims the title of Apostle). NAR preachers have a hyper emphasis on mystical experiences or divine encounters with God, speaking in tongues, miraculous healings, and prophecy. Given that NAR preachers and their followers often reject the NAR label while practicing exaggerated conventions of the Charismatic denomination, yet do not fall under any Charismatic denominational oversight, the label Neo Charismatic feels more fair and neutral for this group. It is worth mentioning that Ahn, Bickle, Johnson, and Wagner were all trained by John C. Wimber, a leader in the Toronto Blessing.

Now the Pentecostalist and Charismatic denominations are decidedly Dispensational Premillennialist. However, in an odd twist, Wagner, and Dominionism, with its view of Christians progressing towards world domination, is decidedly Postmillennialist. However, their Premillennialist emphasis on Israel and restoring its Temple is still present.

2.6.1 Spiritual Gifts and Radicalization

In the Neo Charismatic circles, gifts like tongues, miracle healings, and prophecy are evidence of an individual's special anointing; however, these gifts come with a purpose. Creech (1996) writes that "an outpouring of the Spirit (the Former Rain) that equipped the first disciples
to spread the Gospel (Acts 1:8). Just before the Rapture, God would pour out the Spirit in like manner—the Latter Rain—to induce an end-time revival” (p. 420). The possibility of receiving a miraculous spiritual gifting or “latter rain” has a plethora of radicalization (behavior shifting) vectors to it.

First, as any Church is, in essence, a social network, the ability to gain or credibly manifest such gifts presents opportunities for one to advance within the network. Orsini (2020) writes that radicalization is helped by “the organization’s attractiveness… the possibility to get ahead, in being able to climb the ladder toward the command roles in the internal hierarchy” (p. 9-10). Second, the presence of “miraculous gifts” and “special anointings” that endow leaders with authority to bestow gifting on individuals creates what Cartledge (2014) calls a “stratification” of believers, with those who achieve anointing/gifting rising to the top of the hierarchy and those who are not (p. 222-223). Stratification can induce its own form of “existential crisis” or “cognitive opening” (Orsini, 2020, p. 7) by inducing feelings of guilt and inadequacy for not possessing such gifts, creating a fear of missing out that can assault a person’s “sense of significance” (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2021, p.25). For without gifting, one has no purpose in the body of Christ.

The concept of vocation repeatedly springs up alongside the topic of gifting. Volf (1995) writes on this notion of gifting and purpose when he speaks of miraculous gifting as a charisma “there is no charisma without call; this is what the use of "vocation" underlines. But there is no genuine call without an endowment by the Spirit” (p. 132). In a Dominionist, and Neo Charismatic mindset, a born-again Christian who has not been endowed with miraculous gifting by the Holy Spirit is rendered useless to the Kingdom. Therefore, Neo Charismatic pastors like
Johnson, Ahn, and Bickle appear to create what has been termed “mystical experiences” in every church service.

2.6.2 Mystical Experiences and Radicalization

Now mystical experiences need to be unpacked due to their high level of abstraction and intangible significance to Neo Charismatic discourse. Cartledge (2014) helps explain that a mystical experience “focuses on not just the experiences of transcendence, which the individual recounts, but also on the social context in which such experiences are received” (p. 226). This “transcendence” can be hard to explain; mystical experiences are at their core what Trammell (2012) cites as a numinous encounter with a “divine wholly other” to invoke an “overpowering experience of awe” within the worshipper (p. 211). Other researchers into numinous encounters have a more expanded description of the effect to include “mysterium tremendum” equal parts awe and terror (Stausberg, 2017; Turner, 2017). The sense of awe forms in part by getting the subject to feel powerless or to use the terminology of the radicalization scholar's “existential crisis” that happens while contemplating an infinite, abstract, and unknowable topic like a deity against one’s finite mortality.

Part of the rhetorical toolbox that brings the numinous or mystical effect about is the illumination of hidden meanings within the text that gets metaphorically teased out into a contemporary context through eisegetical interpretation. Coulter (2012) partially explains this concept by saying that "bridal mysticism [was used] to forge a theology of encounter that also offered an implicit renewal understanding of history. This fusion drew upon an eschatology of divine" (p. 301). On a certain level, a Neo Charismatic preacher achieves a numinous mystical encounter by filling a gap for the believer that recontextualizes their understanding of past experiences and or history. Cartledge (2014) reveals the next clue to unlocking this numinous
riddle “as part of the overall experience there is some form of ‘mystical illumination,’ mostly described in a metaphorical sense [eisegesis] of a new light of understanding or appreciation. Leading to a greater sense of unity with God, self, and others” (p. 227). The Revelation brought by the preacher brings a sense of closeness with the creator, and whoever can make a believer feel closer to their God stands to gain a significant and dedicated following.

The potent emotional responses brought out by this revelation via an adept eisegesis of the eschatology is, according to Cartledge (2014), a double-edged sword being ‘‘laden with affect’’ so that they carry with them an array of emotional responses, especially feelings of peace, joy and happiness, but also sometimes sadness” (p. 226). To understand the bi-polar extreme of this experience, one must go back to the original concept of God; Omnipotent, all-knowing, and eternal, a perfect being. To feel closer to God can be both joyous and distressing because He is that which is unobtainable in every sense, a mortifying reminder of human fallibility and mortality.

As potent as eisegesis can be to helping a Neo Charismatic pastor to invoke feelings of “awe and terror” in their audiences, sometimes words alone may not be enough. A substantial portion of a numinous experience gets carried through the vehicle of music. McClymond (2016) explains that "songs allow one to go beyond the lyrics into a realm of the nontangible" (p. 66). Typically, during the crescendo of a pastor’s message, subtle music can begin playing on the heartstrings of a believer; this is both manipulative and deliberate.

Lastly, miraculous gifting has an isolating effect. A person might feel discriminated against if a pluralistic society does not understand or accept their claim/practice of miraculous gifting. Persons who feel discriminated against will harbor grievances for being closeted,
enticing them to retreat further into what radicalist scholars would call the “cognitive enclosure” (Orsini, 2020, p. 18) of the social network where such discourse is accepted.

Furthermore, Evangelicals over the past 40 years have been very proactive in creating “Christian” alternatives to worldly businesses. While these businesses and institutions may or may not have been founded with an intentional Dominionist effort, the Evangelical support and push to drive Christians to these businesses synergizes with Dominionist goals. Any time believers are encouraged (or guilted) to “advancing the Kingdom” by going to Chic-fil-a over McDonald’s, subscribe to Pure-flix over Netflix, to read from Christian/Pro-Christian news outlets (Focus on the Family, Fox News, or OAN) over CNN, to work out at the YMCA over Planet Fitness, and or attend a private Christian academy over public school, a Dominionist agenda is advanced even if only subconsciously. The result is arguably, a formidable and increasingly impermeable cognitive enclosure that is intended to reduce if not outright remove secular influence on believers.

2.6.3 Spiritual Warfare and Radicalization

In Dominionism, spiritual gifts are tools used in a believer’s spiritual vacation. Christians use these gifts in their fight against demons in a campaign of “spiritual warfare.” Budiselić (2015) writes on Dominionism’s reasoning that “in order for the Gospel to be successful, satanic power in a certain aspect must be crushed. In other words, we first need to defeat the enemy in the heavenly realms, and then go and evangelize” (p. 151). The moniker demon has multiple codes behind it, with (evil) spirit, prince, or principality being the most frequently invoked terms. Despite the intangible emphasis implicit in the term, spiritual warfare can have tangible repercussions as Garrard-Burnett (2020) writes that “to expel these dark forces (‘fallen angels, principalities, dominions, and demons’) out of a locality through prayers, fasting, exorcism, and,
less commonly, direct physical destruction” (p. 5). Now the Seven-Mountain mandate is explicitly concerned with spiritual warfare. In this ideology, each mountain represents the seven pillars of society: culture, media, government, family, religion, business, and education. Each of these metaphorical mountains has a literal, knowable, and nameable demon in charge of it, and for the Savior to return, Conn (2011) reports:

That the obstacles to their [Christianity’s] envisioned Kingdom on earth are literal demonic beings who hold control over geographic territory [usually cities and centers of influence] and specific 'people groups.' [typically, Democrats, atheists, and socialists] They [Dominionists] claim this demonic control is the reason why people of other religions refuse to become evangelized and that the demons are also the source of crime, corruption, illness, poverty, and homo sexuality.... The apostles teach that their followers are currently receiving an outpouring of supernatural powers to help them fight these demons through what they call Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare.’ (p. 12)

Sufficed to say, extreme dehumanized othering is happening within this rhetoric, as opposition to this group gets translated as resisting God, which is, in essence, a sin, which makes the people who form that opposition subject demonic influence. Every sin leads to further demonic subjugation and hence dehumanization. In this light, Dominionists literally demonize their opposition. Striking back to Orsini’s words (2020) on radicalization, “using dehumanizing adjectives is an effective strategy to humiliate and discredit enemies: they don’t have human features and, therefore, they don’t deserve compassion” (p. 15-16). So, gifts are needed to take the mountains ruled by territorial spirits or demons who act out through people that fall under their influence.
The spiritual warfare aspect thus also functions as an impermeable wall against internal and external dissent. From one angle external dissenters, typically non-believers, are under demonic influence, thus invalidating any argument they make regardless of its content due to that influence. Internal dissent gets suppressed due to the leadership’s anointed status. As any questioning or withholding of support for the “Lord’s Anointed” risks stalling a move of God, which is sinful, the act of which opens the actor to demonic influence, making them an enemy. This *us* versus *them* mindset echoes’ Orsini’s (2020) radicalization literature “the attitude ‘us-against-them’ becomes much more radical which in turn increases conformity. Hence, members are less willing to call into question their group’s ideas, leading to a rise in ‘cognitive enclosure,’ further increasing radicalization” (p. 18).

Anointing in a postmillennial sense also goes beyond just gifting; it can also carry strong correlations with success and wealth (sometimes called Prosperity Gospel heresy) in an often-abused interpretation of Luke 12:48 “everyone to whom much was given, of him, much will be required” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Luke 12:48). In the twisting of this verse, the rich are paradoxically blessed by God because they are useful to him, creating an attractional opening for business owners and wealthy financiers to fast track themselves into an Apostle’s inner circle.

The radicalization literature would call out this anointing system for potentially creating an existential feedback loop (Mcbride, 2011; Orsini, 2020). In a Neo Charismatic context, believers seeking to alleviate their existential crises of insignificance seek out miraculous gifting to find purpose within “God’s Kingdom.” Once the vision casting leader bestows vocational gifting, believers are in a Postmillennial view mandated to be successful in achieving God’s design. Failure in this system is undeniable proof of sin in the believer. After all, God’s anointing
guarantees success for the faithful/sinless. Failure creates a new existential crisis that forces the believer to repent and double down on their commitment until success or wash or burn out removes them from their leadership’s favor.

The postmillennial progress that accompanies miraculous gifting vocation also opens the possibility of an “outbidding phenomenon” (Orsini, 2020, p. 16), that is, a game of one-upmanship where the success and veneration of one individual generates a crisis of significance in others that gets resolved by matching or exceeding the action that caused the accolade. The outbidding phenomenon can happen on an individual level when believers vie for the attention of their Pastor or institutionally between churches/pastors competing within the same para-network.

The demonizing component to spiritual warfare within Dominionism creates an enthymemic “means-ends schema” from Kruglanski et al.’s (2019) radicalization terminology; for a Dominionist, if there is spiritual warfare, that warfare facilitates the unstated premise, then engaging in that warfare is how an individual’s “personal significance is advanced” (p. 119). The application of spiritual warfare then falls to the “perceived norms” (Turcana & McCauley, 2010, p. 24); the behavioral mores exhibited within the social group in question determines whether violent action will be sanctioned and or venerated. In most cases, Neo Charismatic pastors are exceptionally adept at stopping just short of crossing that line. However, that sentiment offers no solace if the radicalized beliefs and grievances that their discourse generates in believers for outsiders might not find its violent articulation in a sympathetic pro-Evangelical paramilitary group if violence is the desire.

As a recapitulation, the focus of this review is on radicalization, that is, changes in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that diverge against the mainstream culture. Christians may find the theological backing that justifies their grievances in Eschatological Millennialism (pre/post)
and Dominionism. Any Eschatology that places human agency at the center of executing Divine schemes invariably accompanies the temptation that any action is justifiable if it achieves the ultimate result, the second coming of Jesus.

2.7 Constitutive Rhetoric and Radicalization

The ideological factors present in this discourse can be further illuminated by taking into account the rhetorical techniques used by evangelical ministers. Given the emphasis in conservative Christian communities on creating tightly bound networks of identification, Maurice Charland’s account of constitutive rhetoric provides a core framework for textually unpacking the ideological factors that facilitate persuasion within a Dominionist theology. Specifically, the attention in the constitutive rhetorical perspective on narrative, seduction, utopia, metaphor, meaning, identity, constitution, and interpellation closely fit to this rhetorical situation. In what follows I will also suggest that constitutive rhetoric can be supplemented by adding Burkian concepts like mortification and victimage to the analysis.

The rhetorical impetus behind the Neo Charismatic rhetoric starts with an ideology. In the radicalization literature, the goal of an ideology is to bring about its vision for society – the vehicle in a radicalized quest for significance. Charland (1987) quotes Kenneth Burke in saying that “an ‘ideology’ is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence” (p.143). Edwin Black (1970) helps explain why ideology circulates by saying that it is “the network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world.” (p. 112). Black’s use of the word convictions is important when considering the words of Richard Weaver. In his writing on the ordering of knowledge and truth, Weaver rated facts as the base level, and convictions formed a second higher-level knowledge.
Weaver’s point about second-level knowledge is that convictions “order the world effects” (as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 160). Put another way, convictions stratify facts, sifting between what is important or valuable and discarding what is not. Furthermore, convictions are a synonym for beliefs. For Charland and Black, an ideology has a formative or synergistic relationship with beliefs or “rather should be viewed as expressing a vector of influence” (Black, 1970, p. 113). And this would make sense given that Millennialism is more of a belief stemming from an interpretation of Revelation, and Dominionism is the theology/ideology that helps bring it about. Charland concludes that “what is significant in constitutive rhetoric is that it positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in this positioning that its ideological character becomes significant” (Charland, 1987, p.141). The positioning element that allows an ideology to constitute its audience often starts with a story.

When narratives are successfully employed in constitutive rhetoric, they do so in such a way to remove an individual’s perception of choice. The nucleus of any story is a problem that requires an agent to solve. The goal of a constitutive rhetoric is to get its audience to act as the agent within a narrative that already has prescribed a specific solution to the problem. According to Charland (1987), this apparent choice is an illusion because no other option is ever presented (p.139). For rhetors who seek to actualize their ideology, “narrative is a structure of understanding that produces totalizing interpretations the subject is constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain the narrative's consistency. A narrative, once written, offers a logic of meaningful totality” (Charland, 1987, p.141). The totalizing effect Charland writes of echoes Turcana & McCauley (2010)’s concept of radicalization as a means of changing “beliefs, feelings, and behavior in the direction of increased support for a political group or cause” (p. 19).
Thus, the goal of a narrative within a constitutive framework is to visualize and mobilize one’s ideology into existence as some future state. For an audience to rally around a narrative’s telos that deterministic future must be appealing to motivate the subject “towards particular future acts. Since narratives offer totalizing interpretations that ascribe transcendent meanings to individual acts, the maintenance of narrative consistency demands that a certain set of acts be chosen.” (Charland, 1987, p.143). In other words, the subject must want this portending future; they must desire it.

While the narrative example in Charland’s work relied on historical myths, Dominionists appear to prefer utopian narratives as the vehicle for their allure. Kølvraa & Ifversen (2017) elaborate that:

Desire, enjoyment and fantasy, the imaginary dimension of ideology has been linked with affective arousal. The theoretical starting point for this linkage is the Lacanian notion of the subject as plagued by a fundamental lack (of symbolic closure) in its identity and in that of the communities to which it belongs. It is this condition which drives the subject to take refuge in fantasies and desires about a final utopian closure narrated from within ideology as described earlier. (p. 188)

The Laconian “fundamental lack” that Kølvraa & Ifversen describe is arguably consubstantial to an existential crisis that the radicalization scholars had in mind. The enjoyment of a fantasy and or the imaginary further help totalization or radicalization by suppressing critical thinking in its subjects. As Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noeri (2002) put it, “amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality” (p.116). For constitutive rhetoric, then, to be successful, it must interpellate
its audience into a utopian narrative that grips its subjects with desire, to arouse in them an irresistible fantasy.

For a rhetor to compel an audience to act upon a utopian narrative, the audience must be seduced. The notion of seduction is not foreign to Charland (1987), who cites McGee that “a ‘people’ is a fiction which comes to be when individuals accept living within a political myth. This myth would be ontological, constitutive of those ‘seduced’ by it.” (p.138). Kenneth Burke’s idea of seduction is rooted in expectation, as noted by Foss et al. (2002), who write that “expectation is significant in the process of achieving desired effects because life is structured by expectations… Burke defines form as ‘an arousing and fulfillment of desires’ or … to be gratified by the sequence’” put another way “it gratifies the need which it creates” (p. 195).

Seduction also has a dualistic function; it can be the allure or bait that invites outsiders into verbal combat. Kølvraa writes that inflammatory or trolling remarks make for “a seduction or challenge [that] always drives the other mad, but with vertigo that is reciprocal… Such is the inevitability of the challenge, and why one cannot but respond to it.” (as cited in Knudsen and Stage, 2015, p. 195). Furthermore, Foss et al. (2002) note Baudrillard’s deterministic notions for seduction as “an exemplary type of challenge,” that challenges are a form of societal problem, “a form of exchange that stays on the surface and depends on charms and rituals that lie outside of rationality. Seduction, then, operates on the world of fate” (Baudrillard as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 326). While Baudrillard talked about hyperconformity, his description of seduction synergizes with the type of seduction at play in narrative utopias. The point is that narrative utopian rhetoric constitutes its audience when it seduces; it irresistibly pulls in its audience to fulfill attractional desires.
Seduction also helps illuminate the attractional pull charismatic leaders exert on their audience. Kølvraa writes that “seduction is about the ‘charm’ and ‘appearance’ of ‘signs at its surface. It is this that effaces meaning and is seductive” (as cited in Knudsen and Stage, 2015, p. 188). The operative word here is charm, a synonym for attracting. For leaders to be effective, they must attract followers; that is, they must seduce them with their passion for the ideology. The seduction stems from the quest for significance that offers the follower meaning and purpose.

Another word for purpose is calling. Recall the words of Volf (1995) on spiritual gifting; the Greek term for gifting is charismata, “there is no charisma [gifting] without call; this is what the use of ‘vocation’ underlines. But there is no genuine call without an endowment by the Spirit” (p. 132). Recontextualized in this light, Volf appears to say that there is a seductive element to gifting. Because gifting is the “the equipping of the saints” to fulfill their function (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ephesians 4:16), a person’s calling is akin to purpose. The utopian narrative is the promissory note of filling one’s purpose, that is, the expectant desire that seduces. Arguably the appeal of charismatic leaders is that through a constituting narrative, they highlight a lack of meaning (or existential crisis) in their audience to seduce with purpose, then giving them the means of acquiring it (in a quest for significance). The endowment of spiritual gifting is the affirmation of that purpose.

For charismatic leaders, crowd size is also a factor in their seductive appeal. Working as a kind of self-reinforcing feedback loop, Chaput (2018) explains part of President Trump’s appeal, and validity comes from his ability to pull in a crowd, that “his followers… exponentially add value to the product [the Trump brand] through their attention and enthusiasm” (p. 199). The
larger a crowd drawn by a charismatic leader, the stronger the validation the audience gives that the message is appealing.

Religious messages include a prescriptive component connected to a transactional approach that facilitates access to the divine essence. The prestige that accompanies a religious leader is what pulls in their followers to conform to their ways and beliefs. Knudsen and Stage (2012) specifically write on this phenomenon by citing Tarde, who says that:

Those we imitate have prestige and exert an irresistible force of attraction. The way of wielding prestige in relation to another person happens ‘to the extent one answers to the needs of confirming or wanting something here and now.’ Thus the prestigious offers the possibility of instant satisfaction of the receiver’s desire to change. (p. 150)

Most importantly, for an ideology within constitutive rhetoric to be attractive to the masses, the leader must themselves be equally seduced by the message “there is no active or passive mode in seduction, no subject or object, no interior or exterior: Seduction plays on both sides, and there is no frontier separating them. One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced.” (Baudrillard as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 326-327). For seduction to find its meaning within the narrative, a vehicle must facilitate the process; that vehicle is called a metaphor.

Arguably the most powerful gift of the human mind and language is the ability to bridge the gaps between sign, signifier, and signified, that is, to make and understand metaphors. Foss et al. (2002) affirm that “metaphor is powerful, according to Grassi, because it allows for the transfer of insights on several levels. At the most fundamental level, metaphor is the basic process of human thinking: it is a grasping of similarities between two unrelated things.” (p. 67). Metaphor is therefore fundamental for a utopian narrative to be effective. However, the Bible presents a challenge that it pre-exists. Thus, the thematic meanings in its narratives are already
pre-fixed and theoretically immutable to an exegetical interpretation within Dominionist Ideology. To circumvent this roadblock, I.A. Richards writes that:

Metaphor [is] the means by which meaning is developed, but is a method by which a communicator may provide listeners with the experience needed to elicit similar references for a particular symbol… Metaphor is used to supply the experience: ‘But what is needed for the wholeness of an experience is not always naturally present, and metaphor supplies an excuse by which what is needed may be smuggled in.’ (as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 33-34)

Going even further, Waisanen (2018) expanded on how metaphors get used to deceive in what he described as a mystification, “the use of symbols to gloss over important facts, stories, social relations, or other forms of power. They are used by authorities to maintain the status quo through representations of society that differ substantially from how power actually works” (Waisanen, 2018, p. 82). Metaphors can obscure essential facts because they inscribe meaning. By their very nature, they highlight what the rhetor deems important and discards what is not.

Charismatic and ideologically compelling leaders thus use contemporary problems (causes) and contexts (experiences) relevant to their audiences to metaphorically connect to another text, thus altering the meaning of both context, cause, and text. The order is relatively unimportant; like a montage of imagery, the presence of one alters the other, and so they are linked together. In religious circles, using a modern context to interpellate an audience into a Biblical text using metaphor is called eisegesis and is an extremely popular technique for Neo Charismatic leadership. The rhetorical power that metaphors provide leaders derives from their ability to interpret them. Without interpretation, metaphor is meaningless. Foss et al. (2002) explain Ernesto Grassi’s understanding on the power of metaphors, and it is apt:
The metaphor supplies such invention because it does not simply move within the established code to determine meaning, but finds new codes and structures: ‘The function of a metaphor, unlike that of a code, does not consist merely in applying an interpretation, but also in ‘finding’ The new code, on the basis of which reality is rendered. It gives us a new perspective of the relationships between beings. Metaphors function is that of invention – he seeing of new relationships. It is metaphor that produces each new code.’

(as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 69)

Metaphors offer the rhetorician the formal ability to create new knowledge arising when a speaker pairs together disparate or previously unconnected ideas. But all this becomes problematic when done under a Christian paradigm; in the worst case, new metaphorical associations can even be a theological sham, given the traditional Christian view that God’s word is timeless, enduring, immutable. Using a supplemental context or text to facilitate new interpretations violates exegetical practices, and the sola-scriptura maxim.

Because religion deals with ultimate meaning, Horkhiemer (1993)’s words help rationalize a role for metaphor that uses Biblical text as part of new totalizing interpretations:

‘Transcendence’ that comes from reconciling social problems through human thought
‘the sociology of knowledge is preoccupied with the problem of absolute truth, its form and its content; it sees its mission in the illumination of that problem. The effort to achieve ever deeper insight into the evolution of all metaphysical decisions with which human beings attempt to comprehend the world in its totality becomes itself a metaphysical undertaking.’ (p.134)

Put another way, the Bible often functions as the narrative vehicle (including a prescribed solution) that the metaphor uses to endow any supplemental material with meaning, with
Absolute Truth, while the supplement grounds the text as the solution to the contemporary problem.

Hyperbole is an important metaphoric device that also needs discussion given its centrality in Dominionist discourses. Specifically, hyperbole has a strong ability to other one’s opposition. Kølvraa & Ifversen (2017) write that:

Hyperbole – a constitute element in the caricatures of enemies so prevalent in propaganda – has been linguistically described as a form of language that communicates and invites affective investment by establishing a joint shift away from the literal – a shift which is accepted both by speaker and receiver. (p. 189-190)

In art, caricatures get distinguished from other types of illustration for their lack of detail and exaggeration of the basic form. Put another way, caricatures are reductive; they simplify a signifier’s detail to exaggerate its supposed essence. Hyperbole caricatures its human subjects to be less than the whole of the human experience; it dehumanizes them. As with metaphor, hyperbole also works best when it is seductively compelling; the audience must get interpellated as either a victim to the problem, thus forming a grievance, and more importantly, be the agent over the solution.

Identity is essential to constitutive rhetoric. The subject must interpellated, in:

The process of recognizing oneself as the subject in a text. It is to exist at the nodal point of a series of identifications and to be captured in its structure and in its production of meaning. It is to be a subject which exists beyond one's body and life span. (Charland, 1987, p.143)

All narratives, metaphors, and meanings are moot without an identified audience. “The ideological ‘trick’” as Charland (1987) writes, “of such a rhetoric is that it presents that which is
most rhetorical, the existence of a *peuple*, or of a subject, as extra rhetorical. These members of the *peuple* whose supposed essence demands action do not exist in nature, but only within a discursively constituted history. Thus, this rhetoric paradoxically must constitute the identity” (p.137).

Foss et al. (2002) cite Burke’s contribution for how an individual identifies with social groups by saying:

Individuals form selves or identities through various properties or substances, which include things as physical objects, occupations, friends, activities, beliefs, and values. As they align themselves with various properties or substances, they share substance with whatever or whomever they associate, and simultaneously define themselves against or separate themselves from others with whom they choose not to identify. (p. 192)

The more primal a metaphor that is universal to the nature of being, to be seductively relevant for the collective offers what Charland (1987) calls *ultimate identification* citing Burke as “overcoming or going beyond of divisive individual or class interests and concerns. This identity transcends the limitations of the individual body and will. This process of constituting a collective subject is the first ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric.” (p.139). After an ideology constructs its utopian narrative, seduces its audience, with a problem and its solution, via a metaphor, one last and final problem comes when that audience/leader can’t deliver the goods.

For a charismatic leader, nothing is more dangerous than appearing impotent. When problems and failures do arise, leaders have two strategies to combat disillusionment; blaming the defects within the followers for the setbacks or scapegoating an outsider. In Burkean terms:
Victimage is the process by which guilt is transferred to a vessel or vessels outside of the reader. It is the principle of scapegoating, where a victim is selected to be the representative of unwanted evils and is loaded with the guilt of the victimizer. … The victim may be killed (actually or symbolically), driven away, mocked, or defiled. (Burke as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 211)

Utopian futures can also have combative othering effects as well. Kølvraa and Ifversen (2017) further elaborate that seduction can be the “enjoyment gleaned from engaging in the intense desire for a perfect future, or conversely from the affective arousal linked to the hateful stereotyping or denigration of enemies and ‘Others’ blamed for the absence or delay of this utopian future.” (p. 188-189).

Oddly enough, in Neo Charismatic circles, the opposite approach appears more prevalent, that is, “mortification is the process by which individuals make themselves suffer for their guilt or sins. Mortification is self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self” (Burke as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 211). The hypothetical reason for a religious leader to lean on mortification harder than victimage stems from the Christian concept of grace. Failure is always a possibility if all have fallen short. Grace's universal guarantee of forgiveness can potentially reduce the exigence pastors seek to use to activate their audiences. Mortification, however, provides a strong ability to override grace and guilt the audience back into action by fixating on the fault.

Rephrased through the radicalization vernacular, mortification has the power to facilitate an existential crisis, that is, a lack of purpose that comes from not being able to meet the standards or objectives set by the leader. Mortification can compel a subject to double down on
the ideology, that is, to radicalize further, or wash out from the program, thus becoming a scapegoat. The latter, as Horkheimer et al. (2002) write of the risks for the individual who fails the process and gets framed by the leadership as a “tragedy [that] is leveled down to the threat to destroy anyone who does not conform” (Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noeri, 2002, p.122).
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope

The study will use rhetorical criticism – specifically a Textual Analysis of recorded sermons from four prominent Neo Charismatic Churches – to look for Millennialist language, any patterns that can be correlated, and then evaluate radicalizing potential of that rhetoric. The research will examine a select body of sermons given by Bill Johnson, Ché Ahn, Mike Bickel, and Stephen Furtick jr. Furtick replaces C. Peter Wagner in this study due to Wagner’s passing in 2016. As a relative newcomer, Steven Furtick jr. of Elevation Church rose to prominence within the Neo Charismatic ranks in 2012 due to his Church’s explosive growth (over 15,000 members within the first six years).

Ché Ahn founded Harvest Rock Church, Pasadena, Ca. in 1984. During the sermons reviewed of Ahn, he repeatedly advocates for and is affiliated with the evangelical youth movement TheCall, Harvest International Ministries (H.I.M.), and Wagner University. The Washington Post documented Ahn’s participation in a D.C. Rally for TheCall, saying that he was attached to “Gaithersburg-based P.D.I. Ministries (formerly People of Destiny International), a network of 45 charismatic churches. He broke away in 1994 to form his ministry, Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, Calif., and now has a global network of more than 500 affiliated congregations” (Murphy, 2000). Ahn has authored such books as; Modern-Day Apostles, God Wants to Bless You!, The Grace of Giving, Say Goodbye to Powerless Christianity, When Heaven Comes Down, Spirit-Led Evangelism, and How to Pray for Healing.

Mike Bickle leads Forerunner Church, located in Grandview, MO. Bickle’s library website about page credits him as the director of the International House of Prayer (iHOP), “an evangelical missions organization based on 24/7 prayer with worship that… has continued in
non-stop prayer led by worship teams since September 19th, 1999” (Bickle, n.d.a). Bickle’s about page also claims that iHOP boasts “around 1,500 people (staff members, students, interns) serve full-time on the missions base, investing fifty hours per week in the prayer room, classroom, and ministry outreaches” (Bickle, n.d.b). Bickle also founded the International House of Prayer University, and his website credits almost a dozen books to his name (Bickle, n.d.b).

Bill Johnson has been the Pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California, since 1996. Johnson’s website further credits his leadership with “Bethel Healing Rooms, Bethel Music, and Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry” (Johnson, n.d.c). Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry’s webpage claims to “equip you to walk in the gifts of the Spirit, prepare your noble character, and empower you to follow Jesus as He moves powerfully on the earth today” (Johnson, n.d.b). Bethel Healing Rooms asserts that it is a place where “we pursue the Holy Spirit and His healing power in a special time of ministry…. We are joy-filled believers who see God bring complete restoration and healing. We see hundreds of people every week, and it’s incredible” (Johnson, n.d.a). Johnson’s bookstore has over a dozen books authored/co-authored to his name. Johnson and Bethel Church drew national attention and ire back in December of 2019 for their multi-week-long effort to reverse the tragic passing of a small child that belonged to two of their worship leaders. In effect, and arguably because of their Dominionist ideology, Bethel Church tried, and failed, to resurrect a child back from the dead, an event that received scrutiny in a Washington Post Article, and Bethel’s Press page (Lati, 2019, para. 2).

Stephen Furtick jr. is the Lead Pastor of Elevation Church, a multi-site megachurch headquartered in Charlotte, NC. Furtick’s about page ascribes him as a “pastor, songwriter, & New York Times, best-selling author. As founder and lead pastor, he has helped grow the multi-site Elevation Church into a global ministry through online streaming, television, and the music
of Elevation Worship” (Furtick, n.d.). Furtick also has about three books penned, *UnQualified*, *Seven-mile Miracle Book*, and *Crash the Chatterbox* (Furtick, n.d.).

The selected corpus of Neo Charismatic pastors is arguably the most successful/influential preachers within the Neo Charismatic movement today. Each Pastor will have four of their sermons transcribed and encoded for this study. The sermon recordings were observed reflexively or asynchronously from unedited online postings on social media platforms like YouTube. The researcher selected the sermons based on their temporal encompassing (before and after) two specific events. The first event is the national Lockdown announcement in response to the pandemic on March 19th, 2020, and the second event is the January 6th Insurrection of Capitol Hill. These two events represent relatively unique national crisis moments, not unlike the 2008 stock market crash or 9/11.

The COVID Lockdown presented an enormous stress test for the Evangelical religious community on perceptions of religious freedom, faith versus risk, tradition versus public health, and Church versus state. Within the living memory of most Americans, never has it been required to shelter at home due to the risk of death from a contagion’s spread. Also worth noting is that in-person tithing is the primary revenue stream for most churches; Lockdown mandates could directly threaten that revenue stream. Likewise, the dissociative nature that streaming offers could arguably weaken the influence that comes from an in-person cognitive enclosure.

Evangelicals are more easily constituted into the rhetorical argument when physically present with their Pastor and numinously enveloped/overwhelmed by the affective energy of a sanctuary/stadium crowd. Similarly, January 6th also presents a crisis of faith for Evangelicals with a postmillennial viewpoint, as Postmillennialism believes that the arc of history bends toward Christian domination. President Trump’s electoral loss (or theft, as some of the pastors
within the corpus have advocated) stands in stark contradiction to that viewpoint. Examining the sermons from these two points in time will allow for analysis of the shifting discourse from one crisis to the next, from one administration to the next, and what grievances and othering resulted from these events.

### 3.1.1 SERMONS TO BE REVIEWED

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Sermon Title/link</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 3, 2020,</td>
<td>Stephen Furtick</td>
<td>Make Room for The New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3, 2020,</td>
<td>Ché Ahn</td>
<td>Apostolic Decrees to Stop Corona Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 2020,</td>
<td>Bill Johnson</td>
<td>Safety in the presence of God-Restoring our design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 19th, 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 19th, 2020 – Lockdown Announcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 21, 2020,</td>
<td>Mike Bickle</td>
<td>IHOPKC Leadership Panel Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22, 2020,</td>
<td>Bill Johnson</td>
<td>Response During Challenging Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22, 2020,</td>
<td>Stephen Furtick</td>
<td>When God Says Stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 23, 2020,</td>
<td>Mike Bickle</td>
<td>A Special Message to the Global Body of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 5, 2020,</td>
<td>Ché Ahn</td>
<td>Generosity Leads to Breakthrough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20, 2020</td>
<td>Bill Johnson</td>
<td>It’s all about one thing</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 27, 2020</td>
<td>Ché Ahn</td>
<td>Prophetic Lessons From 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2, 2021,</td>
<td>Stephen+Furtick</td>
<td>Hindsight 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 3, 2021,</td>
<td>Mike Bickle</td>
<td>Sunday Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 6, 2021,</td>
<td></td>
<td>January 6, 2021 – Capitol Hill Insurrection</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 10, 2021</td>
<td>Stephen Furtick</td>
<td>Comfort Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 17, 2021</td>
<td>Ché Ahn</td>
<td>All Lives Are Sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 24, 2021</td>
<td>Bill Johnson</td>
<td>Glory to glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 3, 2021</td>
<td>Mike Bickle</td>
<td>NOW with Mike Bickle</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some events in the timetable need addressing for their selection due to their distance from the event in question. First, not everyone preached on the same Sunday before or after the event, whether the March 19th Lockdown or the January 6th Insurrection. If the pastor did not publicly speak on a Sunday that was either just prior to or following from the national event in question, the researcher then expanded further out in time for the most relevant recording adjacent to the event. A notable exception for the Lockdown announcement was Mike Bickle, who purged all 2020 sermons before March 19th, probably because all his prophetic predictions for 2020 proved to be absolutely inaccurate. The corpus used Bickle’s first two post-Lockdown sermons to count as the pre- and post- selections. Bickle’s first appearance was a panel discussion with three other leaders on his ministry team. The panel discussion does present a potential for drift in that groupthink could skew Bickle’s language. Therefore, only Bickle’s words were encoded to mitigate the effect, yet there is still evidence that the discussion considerably softened his rhetoric.

More significant gaps in time appeared around the Insurrection for the pastors. Furtick, for example, seemed to take all of December off and posted re-recordings of his prior sermons. Furtick’s January 2nd sermon featured his wife, Holly Furtick, a fellow pastor at Elevation Church, presenting a highlight reel of Elevation’s best 2020 Sermons. The paper counted Holly’s scripted introductions, assuming that Stephen Furtick proofed/approved the script. One possible limitation to this study is that if these men spoke at other churches in a more relevant period, a record of it does not appear to be publicly available.
4 METHODOLOGY CCM + CUDA

Once the corpus of sermons was selected, the research process moved through multiple phases: a transcription phase, a CCM phase, and a CUDA phase. The transcription phase gathered the sermon texts to prep for encoding and analysis. Initially, YouTube auto-generated transcriptions of each sermon without punctuation. The contents of the transcripts were copied into Microsoft Word documents for further processing. Inside Microsoft Word, an examination checked each document for accuracy and lightly edited them for clarity. Examples of light editing would be to add punctuation based on the Pastor’s inflection and to remove any stammers (e.g., uhms), verbal gaffs, or repeated words (e.g., “and and,” “and so”) that had no performative purpose.

The next step of the transcription phase entailed censoring all congregational participatory remarks to protect their privacy (EX: amens, laughter, and applause), direct pastoral addresses to the congregation (EX: “Can I get an Amen?”), and named references/addresses to private individuals within the congregation were also removed from the transcripts. All sentences remained intact in these cases, but the names were converted to dashes. All redactions were evaluated for their potential impact to the research goals of the project, specifically the CCM encoding and CUDA phases prior to their scrubbing. In every case, the removed content was judged irrelevant to the research and or theme of the sermon. Following the transcription phase, a two-step analysis modeled after Leong, Joseph, and Boulay (2010) was conducted.

4.1.1 Step 1: CCM

The first analytical step utilizes a Constant Comparative Method (CCM) using NVivo to inductively tag codes, themes, and trends from the corpus. Furthermore, CCM allowed for some summary conclusions to be drawn from its descriptive statistics. The primary goal behind the
CCM study was to discern whose rhetoric is the most Millennialist and Dominionist. Table 1 shows all of the various themes that can accompany Millennialism with subcodes like: Dominionism, Conflict, Demons, Criticizing Culture, Tribulation/Rapture, and Punishment/Judgment.

The challenge with encoding for Millennialism is that it does not get talked about explicitly very often due to its more abstracted conceptual nature. Therefore, to identify Millennialist rhetoric requires a researcher to discern the enthymematic agenda lurking behind its ideological narratives. A Millennialist narrative focuses on subjugating the world into the faith (in a Postmillennialist sense), and or rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem to trigger the Rapture/rise of the anti-Christ (in a Premillennialist sense) as its ultimate quest for significance.

The distinction between subjugating the world to the Gospel versus sharing the Gospel with the world is threaded via the choice non-believers get over their own affairs. Millennialism and Dominionism dictate that the second coming cannot happen until everyone is subjected to Christianity’s morality, cultural, and legal codes. Enforcing a moratorium on abortion within the legal system, for example, forces non-believers to adhere to Christian standards and therefore furthers a Millennialist agenda, whereas any admission that Christians are to not enforce their standards on non-believers (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Corinthians 7:15) does not fit a Millennialist agenda.

Dominionism codes are a subset of Millennialist language that look for domination and authoritarian phrasing. Any terminology that stresses; a loosening, or binding of spiritual authority, Christian authority over the secular world/culture, leadership authority over the Evangelical community, as well as an emphasis on obedience and ontological purpose were tagged with the Dominionism code.
Millennialism requires its pastors to interpret all events within its ideological narrative to facilitate the second coming of Jesus through worldly objectives. Furthermore, because Dominionism seduces its believers into thinking they are supernaturally equipped and divinely mandated to succeed in all worldly endeavors, it needs a way to account for setbacks, failure and delays. Therefore, certain codes were developed to account for the various aspects of Millennialist interpretations, namely, Conflict, Demons, Criticizing Culture, and Punishment/Judgment.

One of Millennialism’s paradoxical tenets is that it allows for conflict as a viable pathway towards its positivistic march for world domination. Conflict coded any usage of war-like language that emphasized a struggle against worldly and or spiritual forces. Dominionist preachers try to interpret what spiritual forces are behind worldly events as a means of legitimating their spiritual authority. Conflict also tends characterize outsiders as hostile, and highlights grievances that believers should harbor against them.

When conflict happens, demonic influences often get highlighted as the ultimate source of resistance. The code for Demons therefore, looked for phrases and thoughts that referenced: demons, demonic possession, and or demonic influence. Other demonic codewords included (evil) spirits, prince, and principality. Demonic influence is one of the primary ways Dominionist preachers otherize or dehumanize outsiders.

To explain for failures and setbacks, Dominionist preachers prefer to scapegoat outsiders as deserving of punishment or highlight the failures of their congregation as deserving of punishment. Therefore, Punishment/Judgement is the code for when spiritual meaning is derived from setbacks, natural catastrophes, and other cultural defeats. In these cases God’s wrath, and other synonyms like justice and discipline form the crux of the thematic emphasis. Punishment
codes were brought up in two critical contexts: mortification, and scapegoating terminology. On one level, the pastors justify the suffering non-believers incur as a divine punishment, the cleansing wrath of God for their sinful behavior, tying directly into scapegoating and victimage. In contrast, when believers receive divine punishment, the rhetoric shifted over to mortification. Placing emphasis on God’s punishment as “loving discipline,” as a way to correct, purify, and or sanctify errant believers.

A second component of the CCM analysis for the sermons is to map the valence for specific themes like government, COVID, and non-believers. In coding valence, the goal was to track positive and negative associations, specifically adjectives and modifiers used to describe the value, nature, substance, being, and or essence of a given topic as inherently good or bad. Knudsen and Stage (2015) offer insight into valence mapping by “focus[ing] on how a sample of text, through the representation, stick or fixate certain negative/positive affects to certain subjects or objects” (p. 18). Valence mapping enables the analysis to surmise how much overall positive/negative weight each pastor chooses to affix to these topics. While affect is a factor that is implicitly at play within the study, the primary focus of the research here was on the rhetoric of the pastors, with no emphasis on the audience, nor the audience’s interaction with the discourse. The result is that in what follows I make no attempt to advance a specific claim about the role of affect or mood.

Therefore, Tables 2 and 3 deal almost exclusively with mapping negative/positive valence statements. Table 2 traces themes as they relate to particular grievances that derive from secular issues within the discourse. Any negative/positive phrases about the government, COVID, and the 2020 presidential election were encoded separately to look for emphasis. An exception to this pattern within worldly issues is the theme of abortion. When discussed within
the corpus, abortion is exclusively negative and arguably is one of the most emphasized grievances.

Table 3 covers issues that thematically deal with the negative/positive valence encoding for identity, personas, and the constituting/interpellative language used to subsume them. Specifically, the number of times the pastors spent talking about; believers (within their own community), other Christian groups (outside their sphere of influence), and otherized non-believers in negative/positive contexts.

NVivo gave percentages for how much of a sermon each code occupied. Therefore, an excel document was generated to convert the coding percentages across the known word count, sentence count, and speaking time of each sermon. Doing so gave quantifiable approximations of each variable to look for possible correlations in thematic emphasis based on approximated content durations. These four touchpoints in time allow for evaluating shifts in their rhetoric as the political contexts changed over time. As the research question is chiefly concerned with looking at potential links between Millennialism and radicalization, an examination looked to see what patterns of emphasis corresponded with pastors that frequently talked about it. The cumulative content from the 16 sermons totaled about 15 hours, or 10,709 Sentences, or 143,761 words.

4.1.2 Step 2: CuDa

After labelling the major themes and codes quantitatively, the second step involved Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA). The Discourse Analysis involved two steps. will briefly explain how the major radicalization terms (Grievance, Cognitive Enclosure, Othering, Existential Crisis, and Quest for Significance) manifested throughout the entire discourse. Then the Discourse Analysis examines three sermons (one each from Bickle, Johnson, and Ahn), to
unpack the persuasive tactics each pastor employs using Constitutive Rhetoric as a framework. The rhetorical examination places a stronger emphasis on rhetorical terminology like: ideology, narrative, seduction, utopia, metaphor, meaning, eisegesis, identity, constitution, interpellation, mortification, and victimage to deconstruct its persuasive potency. The transcripts of the three sermons were copied in their entirety into the Appendix sections for review if more context is needed and as a way for the reader to confirm or interrogate my readings.

The line-by-line textual rhetorical analysis examined the following sermons. Mike Bickle’s February 3rd, 2021, YouTube post, “Now with Mike Bickle” (Appendix A), was selected due to his heavy reliance on mortification to overcome congregational inertia after the botched prognostications of the 2020 Election, the January 6th insurrection, and the successful inauguration of President Biden. Bickle’s sermon can be seen as a targeted call to his networks' leaders and active volunteers to get them to persevere and endure regardless of burnout and personal cost. Bill Johnson’s March 15th, 2020 Sermon “Safety in the presence of God-Restoring our design” (Appendix B) showcases Johnson’s mastery over eisegetical metaphors as he attempts to weave multiple levels of analogies together to generate new and progressively compound numinous meanings throughout his sermon. Johnson’s sermon is also evocative of how Dominionist pastors inject meaning into national events like COVID because all three pastors characterized the virus as a demonic invention/intervention. Therefore, by force of faith, Christians should be immune to demonic attacks under a Dominionist paradigm. Johnson arguably tries to get his followers to rally into radical action by manifesting the literal presence of God in a constituting narrative of spiritual warfare. Johnson’s March of 2020 sermon is like Bickle’s, a call to action, but one made at the start of a crisis. In contrast, Bickle’s February 2021 sermon is more on damage control.
Lastly, Ché Ahn’s January 17th, 2021, sermon “All lives are sacred” (Appendix C) is the final sermon to be textually examined. Ahn’s sermon is arguably the most radicalizing of the group; his’s rhetoric emphasizes more than any other pastor within the corpus utilizes hyperbolic othering. Ahn claims in this sermon that COVID is a curse on the land stemming from abortion, and Christians suffering under COVID is a result of their cultural failures to stop abortion while simultaneously scapegoating outsiders as infanticidal “murderers” the cause for Christian worldly affliction. Ahn’s rhetoric appears to be in a more overt populist style that mortifies his audience for their complicity in society’s sins, as evidenced by COVID.

The combined use of CCM and CuDA is rare but not without precedent; Leong et al. (2010) wed the two methodologies together for their research, saying that “the constant comparative method was originally developed for the use in a grounded theory methodology and is now applied more widely as a method of analysis in qualitative research” (p. 14). For the encoding process, an in-vivo method examined the indigenous terms used by these social actors (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 322).

The big hurdle of analysis involves what Carbaugh (2007) has termed the “five modes” for examining the phenomena via a CuDA: a theoretical model (terminology), descriptive model (context), interpretive mode (significance), comparative mode (contrast), and critical mode (who benefits)” (p. 171). The theoretical model for this paper was Constitutive Rhetoric (Ideology, Narrative, Seduction, Utopia, Metaphor, Meaning, Identity, Constitution, Interpellation) plus the inclusion of the Radicalization terms (Grievance, Othering, Cognitive Enclosure, Existential Crisis, and Quest for Significance), and the Burkian terms of Mortification and Scapegoating. The line-by-line analysis unpacked the Evangelical codes by expanding the text's political,
cultural, and theological contexts. As they manifest, any thematic similarities or contradictions between the pastor’s statements will also be highlighted.

Of all the modes, the critical mode is the most debated. Ultimately, the divide is over the severity of the problem under investigation, where a more benign communication issue dictates a more objective stance. At the same time, abuses of power appear to call for a more activist role on the researcher’s part.

4.1.3 Addressing methodological bias

As a former Neo Charismatic member from 2010 to 2014, the potential for bias in the research must be acknowledged and addressed. The researcher made the following examination into bias and meaning to remove as much bias from the work as possible.

Carbaugh (2007) talks at length about how to explain meaning in a project to clarify the role of interpretation and critique, offering an almost Burkean pentad of radiants or a “hub of cultural meanings” centered around answering questions about “personhood, relationships, action, emotion, and dwelling” that the discourse creates (p. 174). Dollar (2021) elaborates on this by distinguishing the difference between implicit and explicit radiants/hubs and the terms/codes that they encapsulate as “each hub includes multiple discursive terms or grounders. Interpretation requires studying each grounder and its radiants before addressing the other grounders, and relations among and between these” (p. 133). Researchers cannot conduct meaningful analysis without a firm grasp of the culture's native terminology in a way that creates consensus. Carbaugh (2007) concludes that interpretation is successful if it “creates a productive portrait of the meaningfulness of the practice to [the] participants. In my experience, the interpretive account is successful if [the] participants say something like… ‘I hadn’t thought of it quite like that before’” (p. 174). The challenge, however, is if the nature of the phenomena is the
potential abuses of power happening within the ranks of the host culture. Actors within said culture probably will not accept findings revealed by outsiders and or expatriates when a high level of ego involvement is present, where the individual’s sense of self scaffolds with that community.

Cultural resistance only further compounds when using a reflective rhetorical criticism. In what Wheeler (2017) termed “a ‘dead’ online community, which I define as a virtual space where the creators and moderators no longer monitor or respond to comments, the target audience no longer participates in discussion” (p. 164). By examining recordings made by the host culture, the actors and agents within get no further voice in informing or shaping the findings that their artifacts and fragments helped generate. Even with high emic understanding, researchers still need to be aware, acknowledge, and reduce the possibility of bias in their work.

Using frequency and triangulation to reduce bias can be helpful methods for avoiding calamity. Leong et al. (2010) elaborate that triangulation is a multi-modal approach involving “Multiple investigators, multiple data sources, multiple theories, and multiple data collection methods to confirm findings, all are strategies for reducing systematic bias in the data. In each case, the strategy involves checking findings against other sources and perspectives.” (p. 14). In this case, “multiple data sources” involve the four pastors under review. The two-step analysis of CCM and CuDA incorporates the “multiple data collection methods.” Examining multiple related events across time and contexts can offer “multiple theories” of explanation for phenomena. This project's weakest link in using triangulation to reduce bias is the lack of multiple researchers. Still, blind inductive coding and quantitative frequency can help ameliorate the issue to a degree.
CCM’s data collection can help alleviate bias potentials by inductively discovering themes through word usage frequency within the research corpora. Terms that have high-frequency empirically quantify that a phenomenon is present and merits further investigation via CuDA methodology. Leong et al. (2010) demonstrated this in their research by utilizing CCM in a CuDA study on the pedagogical practices in Second Life; the CCM data codes revealed a high frequency around a phenomenon of frustration, which instructed their researchers to examine that theme further once the project advanced to the CuDA phase (p. 23). Leong et al. (2010) employed multiple researchers to increase triangulation but still reinforce the notion that any research needs openness and transparency in its limitations. If the researcher can incorporate empirical analysis to identify relevant themes (theoretical), offer a full contextual description of the event/phenomena (descriptive), offer a range of possible interpretations (interpretive and comparative), be transparent about the limitations of the findings, while backing up existing claims with warranted evidence, resolve issues of bias.
5 ANALYSIS

For the analysis, Tables 01, 02, and 03 attempt to organize the coding data efficiently, starting from the left with the speaker column that divides every event by each pastor. The sermon and date columns provide the sermon and dates that each event happened. The total word count column conveys how much text was in the transcript, while the total sermon length column represents how much active time the sermon took based on the video recordings. The time count started as each pastor began uttering their first words in the transcript and stopped when the final word in the transcript finished pronouncement. Because NVivo gives coding percentages, these two columns’ word count and sermon length allow for approximations on each code's word count and time length.

To the right of the total sermon length in Tables 01, 02, and 03 are the measurements for each code. Each code has two data units; the sub-column % shows NVivo’s percentages for each code across each event. While the sub-column next to it, time, shows the approximate amount of time that code occupies. Offering these two measurements allows for some nuanced comparisons due to the variations in sermon length. Bickle delivered the shortest sermon within the corpus at just over 38 minutes, while Johnson had the longest sermon at 78 minutes. Relying on percentages alone has a relativizing effect; for example, in Table 03, 34% of Ahn’s sermon “All lives are Sacred” was flagged for “Negative Othering.” A time approximation expresses Ahn’s animus; instead of 34%, Ahn spent 18 minutes spewing vitriol towards outsiders.

At the bottom of each pastor’s row group on, Tables 01, 02, and 03 are tabulations for each code for comparison. The sub-row Lockdown totals tabulates the encoding of the two sermons given during Lockdown and expresses their word count and time (totals) for each code. The Insurrection Totals, sub row does the same thing but for the last two sermons. This
measurement allows for comparisons across each time period to see how emphasis changed from one political season to the next. The sub row Grand Totals gives the complete approximation of word count and time spent on each code. Table 01 provides the major codes for Millennialism, and the sub-codes that added into it; Dominionism, Conflict, Demons, Criticizing Culture, Tribulation/Rapture, and Punishment/Judgement.

Dominionism, read as a textual code, tags any language highlighting spiritual authority over the world, and or other spirits like angels and demons. Dominionism also includes any references to Seven Mountain Mandate, and existential purpose. Existential purpose relates to Dominionism in that the ultimate goal of the ideology is to bring about the second coming of Jesus. Dominionism as a code therefore also included any time a pastor tries to instill a sense of mission or purpose in their congregation with phrases like “advancing the kingdom.” Also, to clarify, the ultimate purpose in traditional Christianity is found in the ultimate commandment referencing Matthew 22:36-40, that is to love God and love people (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Therefore, any language where the pastors used to emphasize loving God, or loving people as an ontological purpose was not included as Dominionist language.

Conflict as a code looks for any references to war, fighting, discord, opposition, hostility, etc. Conflict is a premise that should not exist in any thematically significant way in Christian discourse, due to the peace-loving mandates found in Matthew 5:9 (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). However due to Dominionism’s concern with exercising of spiritual authority, any resistance to that authority often gets expressed as conflict. Conflict and Dominionism are two very closely related codes yet are distinct. Dominionism’s goal is to create and exert authority, conflict is just often the byproduct of the exertion, and therefore separately encoded.
Demons is a code that looks for references to evil spirits, Satan, the devil, princes, principalities, fallen angels, etc. Dominionist preachers that take the titles of Prophet or Apostle will often try to imbue spiritual meaning into secular events like COVID, presidential elections, and even mundane matters like traffic jams. Therefore, Dominionist preachers tend to talk about Demons disproportionally to most other Christian groups.

Criticizing Culture is a code that looks for any references to the world or secular culture as a snare, trap, distraction, corrupting, unjust, and or fallen. Criticizing culture relates to Millennialism in that Dominionism seeks to exert authority over secular culture by highlighting its faults. It can be argued that Criticizing Culture could also be a measurement of how strongly a pastor encourages the formation of a cognitive enclosure within their own communities by disparaging the outside as toxic, corrupting, distraction.

Tribulation/Rapture codes tag any statements that make explicit reference to those two words in addition to Premillennialism and Postmillennialism (the latter two terms were never stated explicitly within the corpus).

Punishment/Judgement are codes that reference the actions by God that get described as punishment, discipline, purify, corrective, and or sanctifying due to the presence of sin. Punishment/Judgment directly relates to how Dominionist preachers try to negatively imbue worldly events with meaning. Furthermore, since Millennialist rhetoric deals with the forward marching of Christian progress towards world domination and the second coming of Jesus, Punishment and judgement themes can be seen as an attempt to explain setbacks and delays to that agenda.

The Table 1 data presentation strategy is thus organized to account for the different facets of Millennialism as a code. Dominionist language is a strategy for enacting Millennialism that
focuses on authoritarian language, just as the codes Demons, Criticizing Culture, Tribulation/Rapture, and Judgment/Punishment are thematically related to interpreting worldly events through the eschatology to bring about the end times.

Lastly, just as language can have multiple meanings and themes a single statement can envelop multiple codes. If a preacher emphasizes an event where some aspect of secular culture is responding to demonic influence, that theme would be tagged as containing both Criticizing Culture and Demon references. As a result, there is considerable overlap between the six subcodes and their parent code Millennialism, a fact I hope to parse when considering their rhetorical effectiveness.
### Table 01: Codes for Millennialism

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<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Sermon</th>
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<th>Total Sentence Length</th>
<th>Millennialism Total</th>
<th>Dominionism</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Demons</th>
<th>Criticizing Culture</th>
<th>Tribulation / Rapture</th>
<th>Punishment / Judgment</th>
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Tables 02 and 03 follow the same format as Table 01 but focuses on the coding families’ Secular codes (Table 02) and Persona codes (Table 03). Table 02 shows Government Positive,
Government Negative, COVID Serious, COVID Downplayed, Stolen Election, and Abortion themes. Virtually all coding within the Table 02 family could be helpful in measuring grievance language.

Government Negative as a code looks for disparaging and critical language directed at secular authority figures located within the local, state, and federal government to include any grievances listed against them. As these Neo Charismatic preachers align politically with the Republican establishment, virtually all vitriol is directed at politicians with a liberal and/or Democratic orientation. Government Negative also included any references to Communism and Socialism as a grievance against the government. Government Positive meanwhile does the opposite and looks for any language that praises secular establishments, that more often than not included praise directed at Republican and Conservative officials.

COVID Serious counts any reference that takes the virus seriously as a deadly threat and or serious health risk to people’s lives. In juxtaposition to COVID Serious, COVID Downplayed looks for any attempt to de-emphasize the health risks of the virus. Additionally, COVID Downplayed shares considerable overlap as a specific grievance against the government. As the pastors within the study often characterize public health measures aimed at curtaining the virus as draconian or an assault against religious freedom, particularly if the enactor is a liberal Democrat.

Abortion and the Stolen Election are codes that measure the appearance of specific grievances within the corpus. Additionally, the codes for COVID Downplayed, Abortion, and Stolen Election can be considered as three different grievances for how the government gets criticized.
Table 02: Codes for Secular Issues

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<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Sermon</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Total Word Count</th>
<th>Total Sermon Length</th>
<th>Government Positive</th>
<th>Government Negative</th>
<th>COVID Serious</th>
<th>COVID Downplayed</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Sudden Election</th>
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<td>Apostolic Decrees to Stop Corona Virus</td>
<td>March 3rd, 2020</td>
<td>9376</td>
<td>0.54:35</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>0.00:13</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>0.01:00</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>0.00:13</td>
<td>5.13%</td>
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<td>Gradually Leads To Breakthrough</td>
<td>April 4th, 2020</td>
<td>6979</td>
<td>0.41:48</td>
<td>3.59%</td>
<td>0.01:28</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00:00</td>
<td>8.48%</td>
<td>0.00:33</td>
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<td>Prophetic Lessons From 2020</td>
<td>December 27th, 2020</td>
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<td>3.33%</td>
<td>0.01:41</td>
<td>20.22%</td>
<td>0.10:13</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
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<td>2.59%</td>
<td>0.01:19</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mike Bickle of Forward Church, Kansas City, Missouri | BIOPRC Leadership Panel Discussion | March 21st, 2020 | 10731 | 0.19:20 | 10.00% | 0.00:09 | 6.13% | 0.03:44 | 15.57% | 0.00:30 | 11.43% | 0.06:50 | 0.17% | 0.00:00 |
| A Special Message to the Body of Christ | March 23rd, 2020 | 8071 | 0.45:53 | 0.72% | 0.00:00 | 7.20% | 0.03:18 | 1.62% | 0.00:44 | 10.07% | 0.04:35 | 3.59% | 0.00:00 |
| Sunday Service | January 31st, 2021 | 12176 | 1.00:29 | 0.31% | 0.00:13 | 5.09% | 0.03:35 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.39% | 0.00:15 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| NOW with Mike Bickle | February 5th, 2021 | 6138 | 0.38:24 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |

| Stephen Parish, Elevation Church, Charlotte, North Carolina | Make Room For The New | March 3rd, 2020 | 7576 | 0.53:46 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 1.47% | 0.00:47 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| When God Says Stop | March 22nd, 2020 | 10487 | 1.00:21 | 2.00% | 0.01:35 | 0.00% | 0.03:00 | 7.59% | 0.01:11 | 7.82% | 0.01:50 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| Hindight 2020 | January 2nd, 2021 | 6443 | 0.43:24 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| Comfort Food | January 10th, 2021 | 8088 | 0.58:02 | 1.72% | 0.01:10 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 1.86% | 0.01:05 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |

| Bill Johnson, Bethel Church, Redding, California | Safety in the presence of God-Faithing our destiny | March 15th, 2020 | 11304 | 1.18:33 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 1.36% | 0.01:09 | 15.06% | 0.11:30 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| Response During Challenging Times | March 22nd, 2020 | 4880 | 0.30:22 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 1.41% | 0.01:30 | 22.14% | 0.07:03 | 9.00% | 0.02:44 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |
| It’s all about one thing | March 26th, 2020 | 6142 | 0.44:39 | 1.76% | 0.00:00 | 6.99% | 0.02:57 | 0.29% | 0.00:00 | 9.39% | 0.04:12 | 11.50% | 0.00:00 |
| Glory to glory | March 24th, 2021 | 6289 | 0.45:07 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 0.28% | 0.00:38 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 | 1.60% | 0.00:43 | 0.00% | 0.00:00 |

Table 03 shows the encoding for Persona. Persona codes examine the constitutive, interpellative, and othering aspects of each discourse, specifically the intended audience, the Believer, versus Other Outreach, Other Negative, and Other Christian. The Other Outreach and
Other Negative themes allow for an elementary valence examination of how the discourse treats the Non-Christian groups.

Believer codes involve direct constituting language, we, you, and us in a direct address to their primary audience believers in attendance (in situ and or virtual). Some other pronouns that occasionally get invoked are: believer, beloved, brother, sister, family, bride; these can also be codes for constituting Christian believers, and or followers within the Pastor’s network, specifically within their direct sphere of influence.

Other Christian is the code that looks for references to Christian denominations, communities, and faith-based organizations, like non-profits, Christian media, and businesses. Essentially the code looks for references to Christian believers that fall outside of the pastor’s sphere of influence and therefore assert a they/them distinction, even though they are still brothers and or sisters within the faith. Therefore, any organization that the pastor is a leader, contributor, CEO, and or board member of gets excluded from this code. Other Christian as a code encapsulates a wide gamut of valences ranging from ecumenical solidarity to schismatic Othering. Because Neo Charismatic pastors are a-denominational yet conservative leaning, the more conservative the faith-based organization (Evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic) the more likely the valence is positive. On the other hand, the more liberal the faith-based organization (Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Catholicism), the more likely the valence is negative.

Other Negative enshrines any disparaging, critical, pugilistic, bucolic, and or vitriolic, references to outsiders (they/them/it) that are non-believers. Any time an outsider is described as: demon possessed, corrupted, distrustful, depraved, perverted, lost, fallen, lying, hating, deserving of judgment/punishment and or anything akin to bad essence fits this code. Adverse hyperbolic
characterizations of outsiders also fall within the code, most common examples include: atheist, liberal, Democrat, socialist, and communist.

Other Outreach is a near negation of the Other Negative code. As a near negation, non-believing outsiders (they/them/it) are addressed more humanely, but still not in a positive context. When a pastor chooses to describe a non-believer as: redeemable, salvageable, reconcilable, reachable, pitiable, someone who is suffering, and or needs evangelical outreach best fit this code.
### Table 03: Codes for Persona

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<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Sermon</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Total Sermon Length</th>
<th>Believer</th>
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<th>Other Negative</th>
<th>Other Christian</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Word</th>
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6 RESULTS - CCM

The results section illustrates the key findings from the CCM encoding mostly in scatter plot form. There are two primary kinds of scatter plots utilized. The first style of scatter plots (Tables 04, 06, 08, 10, and 12) shows how long a pastor talks about each theme across time. The second type of scatter plot (Tables: 05, 07, 09, and 11) cross-references how each theme compares against a pastor’s emphasis on Millennialism to look for correlations and behavior patterns in the data. In effect, Tables: 05, 07, 09, and 11 examine if a rise in emphasis on Millennialism (measured in H:MM:SS) correlates to increases and/or declines in other codes (which are also measured in H:MM:SS). For Tables 04 - 12, the scatter plots will consistently represent Ahn with Blue dots, Bickle with Red dots, Furtick with Green dots, and Johnson with Purple dots.

Table 04 shows the amount of time each pastor spent discussing Millennialism and Dominionism per sermon. Overall, Bickle (Red) and Ahn (blue) consistently spent more time in their sermons discussing Millennialism-related topics, while Furtick (Green) and Johnson (Purple) did not. However, Furtick’s Millennialist rhetoric qualitatively is far more tepid than his peers. He mentioned the rapture once as a joke, but most of his score comes from criticizing secular culture. Furtick’s language could, at best, be described as mild, in that it induces the least amount of victimage, and grievance when compared to the statements made by Ahn, Bickle, and even Johnson. In this study (see Table 01), Furtick never explicitly or implicitly talked about Seven Mountains or advancing the kingdom using war-like language (marching, resistance, struggle, conquest, battle) or territorial spirits, a.k.a. demons.
Table 04: Millennialism: Lockdown versus Insurrection

For color coding in Table 04, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (Y-value) is measured in time (HH:MM:SS).

With Millennialism as a foundation, drawing out correlations between the other valence categories is possible. In the following tables, Ahn (blue) and Bickle (Red) appear to demonstrate a pattern of behavior that is distinctive from Furtick (Green) and sometimes Johnson (Purple).
With all 16 events encoded, Table 05 cross-examines Millennialism code (X-value) usage versus negative othering (Y-value) in a scatter plot. For color coding, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. A correlation seems apparent that higher negative othering appears to correspond to a higher emphasis on millennialism. There are, of course, variations in the data.

Table 05: Other Negative vs. Millennialism

For color coding in Table 05, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Meanwhile, Table 06 shows how the Other negative theme (Y-Value) varied from event to event (X-Value). Other Negative is measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). With the exception of Johnson (Purple), negative othering drastically increased during the Insurrection as the Biden Administration was poised to take office.
Table 06: Other Negative – Lockdown vs. Insurrection

For color coding in Table 06, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Table 07 shows Millennialism code (X-value) usage versus Other Outreach statements for outsiders (Y-value) in a scatter plot. Both X and Y values are measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). The data here is harder to correlate; Furtick (Green) and Ahn (blue) get less humanizing with an increased emphasis on millennialism. In comparison, Bickle (Red) and Johnson (Purple) are wildly inconsistent. Timing is a variable that might help explain some of the inconsistencies see Table 08.
Table 06: Other Outreach vs. Millennialism

Table 08 shows the distribution of the Other Outreach theme (Y-Value) varied over time (X-Value). Other Outreach is measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). All four pastors were consistently more humanizing during the Lockdown announcement and the Trump administration.
Overall, the discourse was more humanizing to outsiders during the Lockdown announcement (Table 08). Table 08 reveals that Johnson (Purple) and Furtick (Green) were generally more outreaching towards outsiders. Although Bickle (Red) made a considerable contribution here, the discrepancy stems from his panel discussion on March 21st at the start of Lockdown. Bickle’s panel discussion represents just 11 percent of his overall speaking time within the corpus yet disproportionately constitutes 47 percent of all outreaching statements he made towards outsiders. The staff members who accompanied Bickle’s panel discussion spent significant time making appeals targeting mothers, Asian Americans, and Chinese foreigners. This group bias likely prompted Bickle to soften his rhetoric to be on par with messaging of his ministry leaders. Table 08 could also represent how appealing each pastor makes their sermons towards outsiders or how insular their rhetoric is in targeting their own community.
Table 09 shows the usage of the Millennialism code (X-value) versus negative government statements (Y-value) in a scatter plot. Both X and Y values are measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). In events where the government got criticized, Ahn’s (blue) plot shows a stronger Millennialism emphasis accompanies government negativity, but inconsistencies within the corpus exist. Trend-wise, Bickle (Red), with one exception, stayed more or less consistent in his criticisms of the government, Johnson (Purple) was primarily flat, but his negative rhetoric spiked albeit mildly during one of his more millennialist sermons. Furtick (Green) didn’t criticize the government at all.

Table 08: Government Negative vs. Millennialism

For color coding in Table 09, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Table 10 shows the emphasis on Government Negativity theme (Y-Value) varied from event to event (X-Value). Government Negativity is measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). Generally, Government negativity increased during the insurrection, when the Biden presidency
was about to take power. As opposed to the sermons given during the lockdown announcement, Ahn (blue) and Bickle (Red) were far more reluctant to criticize Republican-led administrations. Most governmental criticism during the lockdown announcement got directed at Speaker Pelosi and Governor Newsome. Bickle (Red) had a precipitous drop in government negativity for his February 3\textsuperscript{rd} sermon; this drop is probably more for thematic reasons. Bickle’s February 3\textsuperscript{rd} sermon got targeted towards rallying volunteers and leaders and, as such, wasn’t discussing or possibly avoiding the government themes during that time. The most prominent exception to these trends was Furtick, who didn’t criticize the government at all. Johnson’s (Purple) most significant spike in government criticism came from a sermon that dealt with abortion.

### Table 9: Government Negative: Lockdown vs. Insurrection ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ahn (Blue)</th>
<th>Bickle (Red)</th>
<th>Furtick (Green)</th>
<th>Johnson (Purple)</th>
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</table>

For color coding in Table 10, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Table 11 shows the usage of the Millennialism code (X-value) versus Government positivity (Y-value) in a scatter plot. Both X and Y values are measured in speaking
time (H:MM:SS). In Table 11, things get more randomized; Bickle (Red) has his most significant spike during his least millennialist sermon. Johnson (Purple) stays mostly consistent yet bumps up toward the end, while Ahn’s (blue) similarly placed aberrant sermon dips down in the opposite direction.

Table 10: Government Positive vs. Millennialism

![Graph showing government positive vs. millennialism](image)

For color coding in Table 11, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Table 12 shows emphasis on Government Positivity theme (Y-Value) varied from event to event (X-Value). Government Positivity is measured in speaking time (H:MM:SS). Ahn (blue), Furtick (Green), and Johnson (Purple) appeared to stay relatively consistent on government positivity from one time period to the next. Ahn’s positivity averaged a little higher during the insurrection. In contrast, Bickle (Red) spikes up for one sermon while the others remain relatively the same. It is worth noting that virtually all government positivity was directly related to President Trump.
Table 11: Government Positive: Lockdown vs. Insurrection ratio

For color coding in Table 12, Ahn is represented as Blue, Bickle as Red, Furtick as Green, and Johnson as Purple. Millennialism (X-value) is measured in time (H:MM:SS). Other Negative (Y-Value) is also measured in time (H:MM:SS).

Overall, the discourses directed at the government (Table 13) and outsiders (Table 14) skews oppressively in the negative direction. The discourse on government was just over 9,000 words with about 73% of them disparaging. The only pastor whose discourse skewed more positive towards the government was Furtick. Ahn’s and Johnson’s sermons were nearly 5x more hostile, and Bickle’s almost doubly negative.

When it comes to non-believers the discourse size more than doubles (compared statements about government) encapsulating nearly 19,000 words, with 64% of those words skewing negative. Overall, Ahn’s rhetoric targeting outsiders’ skews an astonishingly 94% negative within his own discourse, and his negative othering accounts for nearly 44% of all negative other statements made within the entire corpus. Bickle accounts for almost 34% of all othering statements made within the study, and he also had the second highest negativity ratio,
where nearly 61% of his statements regarding non-believers were vitriolic towards them. Only Johnson and Furtick managed to stay more outreaching than negative towards outsiders.

Table 12: Government: Positive vs. Negative ratio

Table 13: Government Positive vs Negative

- Positive Word Count – 2430
  - Ahn – 787
  - Bickle – 1175
  - Furtick – 357
  - Johnson – 111

- Negative Word Count – 6588
  - Ahn – 4215
  - Bickle – 1864
  - Furtick – 0
  - Johnson – 509

Table 13: Other: Outreach vs. Negative ratio

Table 14: Other Outreach vs Negative

- Outreach Word Count – 6877
  - Ahn – 338
  - Bickle – 2647
  - Furtick – 2430
  - Johnson – 1462

- Negative Word Count – 12116
  - Ahn – 5360
  - Bickle – 4103
  - Furtick – 1685
  - Johnson – 968
7 DISCUSSION CUDA

Returning to the research question of how Millennialism and Dominionism offer an underlying exigency to the radicalization of mainstream Evangelicalism, a correlation is conceivable if the rhetoric of these pastors can be read against the context of a radicalization terminology. A thematic overview of the radicalization terminology collates into two broad categories. The first to manifest itself was a dualistic theme: Dominionism appears to encourage grievance and othering. The second revelation is that these pastors appear to invoke feelings of inadequacy in their followers, generating an existential crisis that only a quest for significance can alleviate. In effect, the pastors seem to be making a call to action, whether to vote, pray, give money, or serve in the Kingdom. Therefore, an existential crisis may be the inciting incident that draws their followers into the call to action. The dualistic nature of these categories stems from their semantic entanglements embedded within the language. Citing a grievance instigated by a communally foreign actor easily walks alongside hyperbolic dehumanizing rhetoric that creates othering. Likewise, any discord that attempts to stir action via a meaning-giving construct that aims to elevate one’s sense of significance will be null if the follower doesn’t feel a lacking need for more of it. The rest of the paper focuses almost exclusively on Ahn, Bickle, and Johnson. Furtick’s discourse was by far the least radicalizing than his peers since his sermons displayed the least amount of negativity, Dominionist, and Millennialist encoded language.

7.1 Grievance and othering

The empirical results from the CCM studies strongly suggest that negative othering is happening, and the negative statements towards the government indicate that grievances are also happening. A starting point for tracking this potential correlation is to follow how these Dominionist preachers emphasize the active involvement of angels and demons in human affairs.
These links are rarely explicitly connected to othering. Bill Johnson asserts that demonic influence results from personal choices by saying that “the demonic realm is attracted to decay. In thought, and morals, values, that's why what we say, is going to attract one of two worlds. That's why there's life and death in the power of the tongue” (Johnson, 2020, March 15, 34:11). By saying that certain kinds of actions attract demonic influence, the implication is that such individuals who engage in activities that are deemed as sinful invite the demonic into their lives. The repercussions are inherently othering for outsiders as demonic influence strips them of human agency.

Grievances enter into the picture with the idea that other peoples’ sins effect the faithful. Bickle made this idea very explicit at the start of Lockdown: “man sins, man contributes to pressure and destruction in the nations. His sin hurts himself and hurts other people, hurt cities” (Bickle, 2020, March 23, 25:59). The implication of this thought forms a means-ends schema: if Christians and unbelievers coexist together and sinful behavior gives demons license to operate in this world effecting the just and unjust alike, then the sins of these non-believers make Christians complicit in their crimes. The insinuation is that believers can get caught in the crossfire, whether in demonic activity or through divine punishment from God. It falls to these pastors to make sense of what spiritual hand is behind every event, which brings out themes of judgment and punishment in these Dominionist preachers.

The most common example of grievance in the corpus stems from the theme of abortion. Abortion is consistently tied directly to the idea that God punishes sinful behavior. Johnson, Bickle, and Ahn all made this connection. During the lockdown, Bickle and Ahn both took turns interpreting the cause of the virus and tried to reconcile why God would let a demonically induced virus grind America to a halt. Ahn, before lockdown, claimed it was Chinese abortions
that led to the virus’s demonic inception (Ahn, 2020, March 8, 49:58). Ahn explicitly incites a grievance by insisting that the actions of others effect God’s faithful. Bickel, however, at the start of lockdown, prophesied that it was American abortions that allowed COVID-19 to spread to America, saying this:

> In the last near 50 years, 60 million [babies have been aborted] and their blood is crying out and the blood of Jesus is the only answer. But we got to cry out for the blood of Jesus that if we will come and repent and call for His blood. He says that, okay, that blood will cover it, but our government, our nation, the majority… there isn’t quite the moral outcry that needs to be happening. (Bickle, 2020, March 23, 9:50)

In Bickle’s assessment, a lack of repentance enabled the Devil to topple the American economy. Almost a year later, on January 17th, as America neared 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, Ahn shifted the blame for COVID onto American culture. Ahn’s rhetoric tied an eisegetical noose between the Old Testament’s concept of murder to be a literal curse brought on the land today by abortion which he considers to be a form of murder “you see if this [murder] does not go punished it leaves a curse on the land. The whole nation is cursed” (Ahn, 2021, January 17, 35:45). Ahn’s statement is radical because he frames divine punishment as something within the believer’s perceived control forming another cognitive link. That if the believer does not police and punish sinful behavior, then God (rather indiscriminately) will.

By framing abortion as murder the result of which is a curse, Ahn is also explicit that COVID-19 is a curse. Ahn thus theoretically invokes a grievance. On one level, the grievance is parasocial for the aborted; the audience is encouraged to grieve for unborn humans they do not know, potentially creating a form of “identity fusion” to heighten the grievance. Ahn also
strengthens the othering/dehumanizing aspect of this curse by saying that there is but one solution for it… and it isn’t prayer:

No expiation or no atonement, or there's nothing, there's no sacrifice that can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it. Except by the blood of the man who shed it. In other words, there's going to be a curse on the land, polluting the land. Talking about a curse on the land. The only way that could be done is by justice, by the man who committed murder has to be executed. There has to be capital punishment (Ahn, 2021, January 17, 36:16).

This reference to capital punishment is the closest Ahn or any other Pastor within the corpus comes to an if/then schema that could induce a justification for violent action. A little later in the sermon, he does walk the thought back a little:

How many of you want things to go well with our nation? Come on! How many want all things to go well with us? As individuals. Is it possible we are reaping the consequences of 65 million babies having been aborted since 1973? Because there's been no justice for that yet. It's just been hands that have shed innocent blood over and over every 30 seconds, here in this country. I believe the only way to reverse it, is to reverse the laws of the land that has legalized abortion. (Ahn, 2021, January 17, 37:21)

While on this dehumanizing aspect of Spiritual Warfare, Johnson takes an interesting ideological twist, where Jesus in Matthew 18:22 preached that one should pray for those who wrong you ad infinitum (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Johnson expresses a limit to his patience:

I will let you in on a secret if I in my prayer, Lord, if they absolutely refuse to repent and they will not turn. Then please use your dealings with them to release the fear of God to the people of God. Awaken us to this to this reality (Johnson, 2020, March 15, 25:37).
Put another way, if they don’t repent, God, please punish them in such a brutal and public way as to make an example out of them. Reframed like this, it becomes clear that when bad things happen to people who have wronged Johnson, he feels no pity; they earned it.

Dominionist preachers operate as mediums, that is, interpreters who translate terrestrial events through a spiritual lens to push an Eschatological agenda. By claiming that unfortunate events result from demonic forces acting out through non-believers, Dominionist preachers are inducing feelings of grievances for people that get defined by the spiritual (non-human) hand that drives them. The results are somewhat paradoxical. Spiritual activity is only ever given license by human agency, but the more someone succumbs to the influence, the less agency they have for their actions.

7.2 Significance and crisis

The challenge with Dominionism and/or Millennialism that relies on the human agency to enact divine schemes is in getting the followers of these ideologies to act on their beliefs. Now Christianity has this concept of grace, the promise of a peace that surpasses all understanding. No matter what happens in this life, if a believer has faith and repents of their sins, their afterlife is secured. But, if God waits on Christians to meet his conditions, to trigger the rapture or the second coming of the Savior, then the notions of grace and blessed assurance can disincentivize any effort towards achieving that goal. The discourse appears to nudge its congregants into activity via a quest for significance that starts first by creating an existential crisis that can only be relieved via a quest for significance.

The existential crisis consistently begins by characterizing the basic Christian walk as insufficient by inciting a fear of missing out. Johnson gives voice to this thought by saying, “dissatisfaction is a holy, holy, gift. See sometimes, our satisfaction, in the absence of revival, is
what prohibits revival… Sometimes my dissatisfaction, in those moments, maybe the very thing, that propels…. that glory” (Johnson, 2021, January 24th, 39:57). The carrot that incentivizes action within the Dominionist worldview is glory the reward of elevated status in the afterlife. With Dominionism, to be just a Christian is no longer good enough; in Heaven, complacent, passive believers will be the lowest of the low for all eternity.

Bickle’s rhetoric is even more urgent. Three days prior to the insurrection, Bickle said that:

When there's no hunger for a sustained period, you die! So many believers have opted out to be content with such a minimal, minimal, spiritual hunger, they're in spiritual ICU, and they don't even know it. They have a chronic sickness in their spiritual life; they're not hungry. They're not… oh, that I would know you, I want you to enter into more power! (Bickle, 2021, January 3, 49:24)

Bickle’s remarks are interesting in that his goal is not to avert spiritual death – he is, after all, talking to born-again believers, and the soul is immortal. Bickle insists that his followers are missing out on power, that a relationship with God is a quid pro quo power transaction.

The existential crisis that stems from an inadequate relationship with their creator has another interesting variable. In his February 3 address, Bickle frames a relationship with the creator as a kind of retirement plan, in that the sooner one starts, the larger the reward. Bickle explains, “I can't lay hands on you and give you my intimacy history with God. It doesn't work that way. I can't impart spiritual preparation… We can't give you our intimacy, but rather go buy it yourself” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, 36:10). Bickle tries to walk this comment back by insisting spiritual intimacy with God can’t be “bought or earned” but explains paradoxically that its more accurately a “costly investment” which is still by any other name a merited purchase.
The quest for significance finds its incentive in a stratification of heavenly affluence in the eternal afterlife. Bickle references this concept the most clearly as a specific kind of “glory” when he speaks of a crown (referencing 1 Corinthians 9:25):

Everyone competes for the prize. Talk about a natural athlete, they win a perishable trophy. We are reaching for an imperishable crown. That's the prize. The crown on the other side. But the crown's only given to the people who go clear to the end reaching.

(Bickle, 2021, January 3, 41:38)

Bickle then amps up the quest for significance by insisting that some believers can earn an even better status in Heaven. Bickle gives a veiled reference to 1 Peter 5:4 when he’s quoting 2 Timothy 4:7, saying:

I finished the race, I’ve ran the marathon, I’m at the end. There's laid up for me, a crown of glory, that's the prize. The lord will give it to me on that day. That's the prize he wanted... No, this is not what he's talking about. It's not talking about the automatic thing [crown] that every believer gets. This is the victor's crown, he fought against resistance of darkness, hitting his body, his mind, his heart, his relationships. Darkness! Hitting him, hitting him, and he kept going. He got the crown, that's the victor's crown. He didn't quit the race. He stayed pressing in until the end. That's a unique crown in the Bible. (Bickle, 2021, January 3, 47:11)

Bickle’s rhetoric emphasizes an existence of relentless struggle and competition. Anything less than that, and a believer will miss out on ultimate glory. The psychological dissatisfaction evoked by this rhetoric is profound. Bickle demands an absolute commitment, where one must always be at the edges of burnout, striving, hungering, and toiling, risking all to gain heavenly
prestige. Bickle’s rhetoric would lead all who fall short of this standard to feel depressingly inadequate, a motivation leveraged to induce action.

At the heart of Dominionism’s quest for significance is a power struggle with the spiritual realm. Mike Bickle’s sermon on March 23 uses the word binding to say that spiritual authority has an element of merit behind it “we don't have authority to bind in the society that which binds us in our personal life. We don't have authority to drive [demons] out of others if we're living in it [sin] and will open the door willingly” (Bickle, 2020, March 23, 17:31). Ché Ahn touched on a similar meritocratic theme during this period. Still, his angle inflected more on sin's stratification effects on believers:

Each time you sin, you're losing some of your authority. And that's why it's so important to be righteous, not in your own righteousness, but in His righteousness, and walk out what God's called you to walk out. Because you see, we all have authority, but there's others who have more of a measure of authority, Metron of authority. (Ahn, 2020, March 8, 15:46)

The authority Ahn speaks of is a Dominionist idea that believers can bind and loose spiritual forces via thought and action.

In a Dominionist view, every event, be it natural or man-made, has a spiritual hand behind it. Even falling under a virus can be evidence of sin. On March 15, 2020, Bill Johnson appears to induce yet another form of existential crisis, shaming his believers for their desire to seek protection first:

To sit idly by and just pray oh God please protect me, protect me, please keep me from harm. To think that way is almost is almost yielding to the virus. In this case the coronavirus. But just in general, in the life of a believer to just try to be the protected safe
person is the opposite of our calling. The opposite of our design. The safest place in the Kingdom is the front lines of battle. (Johnson, 2020, March 15, 36:25)

Johnson made that statement just four days before the Lockdown, before the hundreds of thousands of American COVID-19 deaths that followed that year. The unstated premise is that Johnson would prefer his followers to be offensive or proactive with their actions and faith rather than defensive. Such rhetoric creates a call to action that can be radicalizing if the perceived norms of the cognitive enclosure allow for more violent expressions.

Rhetorically, the pastors surveyed in this study circumvent Grace by offering an incentive program that downplays the blessed assurance and equality messages in the New Testament, favoring a new power structure based on the merits of one’s actions. Dominionist preachers often frame wealth, success, and power as evidence of merit and God’s approval. Paradoxically in the New Testament, Jesus’ criticisms were most consistently leveled against those with excessive wealth, success, and power. Statements about crowns in Heaven and spiritual jockeying for authority in the afterlife are reminiscent of the Apostles in the New Testament as they bickered over their own significance and were missing the point of their Master’s teachings (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 9:33-36; Luke 9:46-47). It took Jesus to redefine what achieving greatness (or transcendence) in the next life was like in this life, that it is better to be innocent like a child. As Jesus warns in Matthew 20:16 that “So the last will be first, and the first last” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matthew 20:16). In this context, ironically, any quest for significance that manifests in some form of material power, prestige, wealth, greatness, or domination through violent actions will not aid a believer in achieving that goal.
8 DISCUSSION CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC

While the radicalization terminology offers a good overview of the milestones that facilitate a person’s potential radicalization, a rhetorical examination provides something equally important, by theorizing how these pastors persuade. Constitutive rhetoric provides a very nuanced toolset needed to deconstruct the underlying rhetorical maneuvers within the existential crisis, and the quest for significance.

To unpack that statement further, an existential crisis functionally stems from identification with a problem. The problem being a fundamental lack of ultimate meaning to life. The quest for significance that solves this identity problem gets its meaning prescribed by the ideological framework (Millennialism and Dominionism) that is used to interpret a Biblical text. The path from crisis to quest (from problem to solution) is the constitutive narrative. Audience gets constituted or interpellated into the quest through an eisegetical metaphor, where the Biblical text illustrates or prescribes a solution (meaning) onto a social problem. The utopian promises found in the Book of Revelation, plus the Dominionist emphasis on spiritual authority, seduce believers to strive ever harder toward the narrative end state (based on whatever text is selected to fit the chosen context) as the interpretive solution to the problem.

Oddly enough these pastors have become very adept at turning failure into a further radicalizing opportunity. Dominionism’s seduction comes with an expectation, that is spiritual power requires spiritual perfection. Any sin, fault, doubt, or stumble only serves as validation that perfection has not yet been achieved and therefore the perfect scapegoat is always available, the errant believer. Paradoxically failure helps the radicalization process because it intensifies the existential crisis even further, the only alleviation is a radical recommitment to the cause. Thus,
these pastors will often drive their followers ever harder promising that larger sacrifices yield greater rewards.

While mortification is a potent motivator, over application risks disillusionment. Likewise, when it’s the pastor’s failure that’s under scrutiny, another form of scapegoat can be brought to bear, this time against non-believers. In this context, when a non-believer gets blamed for stopping a move of God. The subsequent wrath of God makes believers the victim of these punishments and setbacks. This victimization forms a strong grievance against outsiders for stopping them (victimage). Victimage can be erotically seductive in its own right as it encourages people to fight. And while all the themes are at play in each sermon in one form or another, some get used more than others.

8.1 Overview of the rhetorical analysis

For the rhetorical analysis it will be useful to briefly overview the three sermons and summarize what makes them similar and distinct from each other. Each pastor is charismatic in their own way highly manipulative for their audiences. When times get tough, they ask for more from their audiences. Each of their sermons reek with toxicity: toxic commitment, toxic positivity, or toxic hate.

All three pastors do reference the Bible to back up their basic points, yet utterly fail at any form of exegetical setup for the text. The pastors do not talk about the author, the chapter or book encompassing the passages they pull from. Furthermore, these pastors fail to establish other critical contexts that might facilitate a faithful exegesis, by establishing who was the intended audience, how they would have understood the text, and or the social context of when the passage was written. Additionally, how and what these pastors do with the text varies greatly. Bickle for example, pulls from just one section of a chapter for his sermon, and eisegetically uses
that text as a metaphor for his believer’s daily lives. Johnson’s eisegetical twistings get far more complicated, as he will take one block of text, and mix in other passages, his own revelations, his personal experiences, and his audiences experiences to alter the text to fit his needs. Meanwhile, Ahn pulls from the Bible the least, and will never read more than a sentence at a time, preferring to jump from book to book cherry picking verses that he eisegetically needs to make whatever political point he is working towards. To his credit, Ahn is equally abusive to current events making bad faith arguments, using some facts, and skipping others that would invalidate his argument.

All three sermons are also similar in that the pastors want something from their audience whether more money, service, or activity. Yet they differ in how they choose to motivate their audiences. As an illustrative example of what’s to come, consider each pastor’s sermon as if it was talking about a glass of water. Based on his sermon, Bickle’s message would choose to mortify his audience by saying the glass is half empty, and his audience needs to fill it. Johnson would say the glass is half full, and seductively suggest there are all of these wonderous possibilities available to the believer if the audience can fill it. Ahn’s sermon would accuse the liberals drinking half the glass, spitting in the rest, and blame the congregation for letting it happen. Therefore, all three pastors choose to mortify explicitly in the case of Ahn and Bickle, or implicitly for Johnson. Bickle intentionally mortifies to guilt his followers into action, Johnson indirectly guilts his listeners by setting up a seductively impossible standard that leaves only self-blame for when the congregant does fail, and Ahn goes beyond mere mortification to further victimizing his followers into hating or resent democrats, liberals, communists, and or other scapegoats.
Lastly, all three pastors are interpellative of their audience. Their messages to their audiences and use direct pronouns (e.g. you, we, us, etc.). And because they want their audiences to act in a certain way, they often choose to present a problem. Both Bickle and Johnson seem to prefer using the Biblica text as a narrative model for how they want their followers to act. Therefore, their sermons are the most eisegetical, but fall on the milder side of what a constitutive rhetoric could be. But what sets Ahn apart from the pack is that his rhetoric is far more constitutive than the rest. Ahn’s preferred tactic appears to set up a series of smaller narratives based around an overall theme, and along the way he gives his audience repeated binary good/bad choices as he leads them into his main conclusion.

Each pastor offers a different glimpse into the nuances of how they use their millennialist and Dominionist viewpoints to get their audiences to act out. Each sermon adds value for unpacking the meaning of perspective. While these sermons offer only small snapshots into the rhetorical repertoire of these pastors, they reveal variance in styles and tactics.

8.2 How Mike Bickle uses Metaphor, and Mortification to Persuade

To understand Bickle’s persuasive strategies, one needs to understand the rhetorical basis of his authority. Setting aside whether Bickle still claims the mantle of Apostle, what is apparent from the corpus is that Bickle still uses the title of prophet. This is the key to his appeal and the crux of expectations placed upon him to create new meanings. From the four sermons surveyed, Bickle more than any other pastor in the corpus likes to invoke prophetic prognostications for future events. He is also the one pastor who most frequently gets his prophecies wrong, and arguably from the text of his sermons, he seems sometimes to know it. To cover for this, Bickle likes to be vague with his prophecies and predict one of two binary (good or bad) outcomes that are diametrically opposed, and cannot exist in the same reality.
On the surface, Bickle’s rhetoric is very loving. He speaks to his followers often invoking the term *beloved*. He’s easily the second most animated pastor within the group, behind only Furtick, who is far younger. Bickle can be loud and boisterous when he wants to (like Ahn), or soft and gentle (like Johnson). But beneath the surface, Bickle’s rhetoric is extremely mortifying. Where Johnson’s focus tends to be on possible futures, Bickle chooses to focus on how his followers are missing out.

In Bickel’s February 3 video, for example, he starts his message with a claim that God has spoken to him to deliver a message to the body of Christ. This beginning, of course, automatically invests authority in himself as an arbiter from God. The core of Bickle’s message forms around interpreting the first third of Matthew 25, which is the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The point of the Parable of the Ten Virgins is a metaphorical message to the body of Christ that because believers do not know when the Savior will return, Christians cannot take any day for granted, nor prepare for his arrival with any calendar specificity. Preparation in this parable is illustrated by five of the ten virgins acquiring oil for their lamps prior to a wedding ceremony. The other five virgins who failed to prepare for the ceremony are excluded from the party, which is consequential because the wedding celebration represents Christian salvation. To make his constitutive point, Bickle rightly interprets the virgins to be representative of believers, therefore interpellating his audience. But Bickle recodes the meaning of the oil as the oil of intimacy. “You need to get oil” Bickle says “when that negativity is increasing and the kingdom opportunity, and power is increasing. It is a huge mistake to get too busy. and then neglect the oil of intimacy.” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 64-66).

The problem is that the oil does not represent intimacy, a fact obvious to anyone who reads Matthew 25 in its entirety. Matthew 25 contains 3 parables: the Parable of the Ten Virgins,
the Parable of the Bags of Gold, and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. The Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Bags of Gold are both thematically similar; in each account, the returning savior rebukes his followers who procrastinated. However, the third parable of Sheep and the Goats is different. The third parable recontextualizes the meaning of what the oil and gold (or talents) mean. Where Bickle sets up the oil as intimacy with God, Matthew 25:34-36, and 40 recontextualize them differently in the parable of Sheep and Goats:

Then the King will say to those on his right [the sheep], ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ (New International Version, 2011, Matthew 25:34-36)

In verse 40, further clarification is added about what the sheep did, and the goats didn’t do to enter the kingdom: “the King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (New International Version, 2011, Matthew 25:40). By encoding the verse to mean something else (i.e., something more nebulous and abstract as intimacy with God) and by dropping the connection with the other parables in the chapter, Bickle mystifies the passage’s meaning. In doing this, paradoxically, Bickle sets himself up as a great teacher by revealing a new meaning no one has gotten from the passage before.

Following this new interpretive meaning, Bickle sets up an account of mortification, in which some followers do not receive the “oil of intimacy.” Being vague about who is and is not getting the oil leaves a listener to imagine or fill in on which side of the line they fall. Bickle heightens the prospect that his subjects fall on the inadequacy side of the line by saying:
It will be common for believers to do that [i.e., neglect the oil of intimacy]. Now not all believers are going to do it. Because there’s a great revival and a transformation of the end-time church, as a prepared bride, millions are staying on the right path, and they’re getting oil. But a lot of others who start off even good in that hour of conflict. That hour is some years, by the way. They drift away from their intimacy. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 66-70)

Bickle encodes what the ten virgins represent by saying “I want to point out here, all ten of these ministries are born-again believers; they’re virgins before the Lord, they’re going strong. So far, so good.” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 93-96). Bickel continues, “They have lamps, it says in verse 1. lamps in the New Testament clearly speaks of ministries. Shining light to others.” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 96-97). Bickle again constitutes his audience with the ten virgins, a reading in which “every person has a lamp, a ministry assignment, and they’re shining to ones and twos, tens and twenties, hundreds, or thousands, it doesn’t matter the size. Your shining is the point” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 101-103). By saying that every believer has a ministry, Bickel is injecting purpose or meaning into the metaphor, potential fuel for a quest for significance, in turn making his message attractive: “Now Jesus has always been a bridegroom, king; I like to say he’s a king with power, but a bridegroom with desire for relationship.” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 109-112).

To further authenticate Bickle’s position as a spiritual leader, he imparts what appears to be new interpretations or hidden meanings, adding that:

Since Jesus’s generation, the first generation, for 2000 years, the Holy Spirit has not emphasized that part of his identity. For 2,000 years, 99.9% of the church – [chuckles] I
don’t know the real number, of course – has seen Jesus as king, savior, maybe healer, shepherd, provider, protector, many of these glorious facets of his function and identity. But very few in history have seen his identities of bridegroom. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 117-122)

Here Bickle invokes a mystification, altering the identification relationship between savior and subject. Unlike “king, savior, maybe healer, shepherd, provider, protector” Bickle’s use of bridegroom is more characteristically sexual and therefore a metaphor more seductive in nature. To reinforce this arousal tactic and identity swap, Bickle elaborates “well, the church only sees herself as a cherished bride when she sees her leader, her king, as a bridegroom. When we see him different, we see ourselves different?” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 125-126). To bring the message to the modern times Bickle eisegeses’ the text by directly speaking about the millennium “end-times generation”, saying:

When Jesus says the kingdom will be like born-again believers, with lamps that are burning and they’re encountering the bridegroom. Clearly, that’s the end-time generation. It’s never happened before. The last five or ten years, a little bit longer, this bridal paradigm, this bridegroom revelation of Jesus, our king. Bridegroom king is growing so fast. Still, many don’t see it yet. But the numbers millions are getting it. It’s in worship songs; it’s in sermons, it’s in blogs, it’s in media presentations, I mean, yes. But the holy spirit could whisper and say you’ve only seen the beginning. I’m gonna show him as a beautiful bridegroom king to the earth. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 136-143)

However, this seductive message is quickly withdrawn in a criticism of the larger Christian movement as guilty of failing the Gospel:
Ten ministries, of course, representing millions of ministries. Half of them only continued in a spirit of wisdom. The other half, sincere born-again ministries, with functioning lamps, good ministries they, have drifted into what Jesus called being foolish. Only half of them stayed the course of what Jesus called wise. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 150-153)

By insinuating that half or a large number of believers are failing to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Bickle invites mortification, and here he is quite direct:

I mean, these are ten ministries that, they either went to the bridegroom conference, or they were the teachers or the worship leaders, and or the singers. I mean, they were all involved. But something happens, and there’s a shift, and they get busy. These five that are drifting, Jesus calls foolish. And they drift away from the bridegroom connection.

(Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 156-161)

What’s interesting here is that a conference attendee pays extra money to attend the event, making them the exception to the general congregation. Likewise, worship leaders and singers are a specialized, active, and very visible group of church volunteers. By citing these three possibly elite groups of believers as failing to enter the kingdom, Bickle’s statement is potentially crisis-inducing to passive believers.

Bickle elaborates that the problem is metaphorically lacking the Oil of Intimacy, that is an active relationship with Jesus by saying:

We can drift away from the actual interaction. Now the reason I know this because I’ve done it, and I know how easy it happens easy. And Jesus knew that, so he’s not giving like a railing rebuke. He’s giving a shepherd’s warning, an alert. He’s giving a bridegroom, passionate like, my beloved, don’t drift from my heart, in that day. that is the
most critical hour of history, because with all the negative things escalating you won’t be able to stay the course right. If you’re not interacting with me, the negative will engulf your thinking and your emotions. The negative will grow in you unless you’ve got a counterbalancing reality. A counter reality that’s resisting that negative growing in you called encountering the bridegroom god. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 170-178)

The preceding passage marks a significant rhetorical shift in that before, Bickle was ’ostly talking in abstract terms: virgins, brides, lamps, ministries. Now Bickle is using more direct pronouns, interpellating his audience into the consequences of lacking intimacy. Again, Bickle presses the metaphorical relationship to convey a sense of mortification, this time through the vehicle of himself:

> When I cease to contend for this at the heart level in my private life, my authority to impart it to others goes down a little bit. It’s not like we’re earning the authority. It’s that this is such a real and vibrant reality; it can’t be imparted if it’s not real in the vessel, wanting to impart it. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 189-193)

By saying “if it’s not real in the vessel” Bickle invokes Burkean mortification and Baudrillardian seduction: “One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced.” (Baudrillard as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 326-327). Bickle again tries to clarify who has this problem:

> He says the foolish, they took their lamps, but they took no oil. But the wise they took their oils, and then their laps say okay… break that down. Verse three, the foolish, he defines not being wicked, not evil, not repulsive, not how dare you, nothing like that. But I feel, I hear longing in his heart. He goes, you started off with a ministry flowing out of encountering me as a bridegroom. A few years have gone by the great revival is
exploding. The kingdom opportunities opened up, so many of them that you gave 
yourself, you gave your ministry, such a high priority that you did not prioritize getting 
oil in your heart. In your intimacy with me. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 
201-209)

Now, admittedly Bickle’s message is tailored to people working in ministry, but the video is 
public access on YouTube. It is a common belief that most Christians are passive in the sense 
that they are not working or serving in church ministry. To claim that most active serving 
believers are failing, is potentially devastating to passive believers.

To further drive the point of mortification Bickle sets up a false equivalency between the 
civilizations of the Northern hemisphere and those of the mostly global South:

There are more people coming to the Lord than any hour of human history right now. Not 
so much in the western world but around the nations in Asia, and Africa, and Latin 
America. Many are coming to the Lord in many places. But it’s going to be global. When 
those increased opportunities come, a lot of folks not paying attention to this incredible 
exhortation of Jesus. Incredibly important one and they’re going to end up over 
prioritizing ministry because the opportunity is so many of them. And they’ll think, well, 
I’m doing it for the kingdom, I’m doing it for love. I’m doing it, I’m doing it, I’m trying 
to be helpful, and their hearts will get smaller and smaller. While their ministry footprint 
is maybe getting bigger and bigger. But there's something bad happening sooner or later. 
(Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 213-222).

To alleviate the crisis, Bickle provides the corrective action to facilitate the constitutive 
narrative. All problems require a solution within the audience’s ability to perform. Bickle says:
The wise notice, they took oil first that’s the priority, and their ministry lamps are second. so, verse 3 foolish, ministry first, no oil. Wise, oil is first priority, ministry still there still going hard, but it’s second. And it takes an intentional, regular, not every day, but regular, decision to realign. For our ministry priority to be second in our intimacy, cultivating intimacy, to be first. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 222-226)

To further his identification with his audience, to make himself consubstantial, Bickle admits he shares in this problem:

What I am talking to the Lord in my personal conversation more about my kingdom opportunities or my kingdom setbacks. My pressures. More than my interaction with him as a king, a bridegroom king. When I talk to him less about who he is to me, and my adoration and my desire to see him more clearly. To love him more dearly, to give myself to him. When that conversation is second, I want to tell you, you flip the order, and we’re in verse three. We’re on the pathway of the foolish virgins. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 256-262)

Potentially the preceding statement is a form of false humility, but what is arguably more mortifying is that by admitting that the Apostle, Prophet, leader of the International House of Prayer, Bickle who represents the pinnacle of his network, and chief model for how his congregation should act, occasionally fails at intimacy with God sets up a direct comparison with his audience. Bickle again builds the pressure by vaguely prophesying or implying that more troubles are coming:

Because the times are gonna get bad, and the betrayal and the accusation, and the lawlessness, and the propensity to get offended, and to get fearful. And to get just tweaked, tweaked is a soft word. Just, ughhhhhhh. Is big. You’re going to need that oil to
Hijacked Christianity

 protect your heart. You’re going to need that oil to line back up. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 265-269)

Originally, Bickle took the Parable of the Virgins out of it’s Biblical context to change the interpretive meaning. Now he alters the meaning again by projecting his life experiences into the parable, so his congregation can identify with him as both hero and relate to him as a penitent sinner. However, this becomes a mortification because now Bickle is the analogue against which his congregation is being measured. One might cynically read this as a form of false humility. After all, Bickle is a prestigious millionaire, far more successful in ministry than most of his peers, full time employed in ministry. His congregation, by contrast, can only serve as part time at best, and must do the work of other occupations to survive with fewer resources – the message is precoded to set up congregants as less likely to meet this high standard. Bickle says:

 Now, why is it called foolish? Because I’ll tell you my story, okay, and then you can apply it to yourself. Here’s why it’s foolish, is that you get away from the kingdom priority, and our ministry is first opportunities and pressures. That’s what we talk to God most about. And the interaction becomes second. and that can happen for a month, or two, or three in my experience. And I don’t even know it. And I am so grateful to the Lord. And it’s not like I’m clocking it, like okay, it’s been a month, or two, or three. And the order got reversed in a negative sense. And the holy spirit reminds me, hey, line back up. I go, oh my goodness, I did it again. will I ever not do this? and the answer is, the holy spirit if you keep talking to me, I’ll keep helping you realign. You’ll never, on your own, pull this off. Okay, good to know. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 270-279).
For Bickel, the answer to the problem of burnout and setbacks is to double down. Bickle is preaching this message after Biden has become President, after Republicans have lost the Presidency and both chambers of Congress. His message is a direct challenge against disillusionment as his church is very active in politics:

You know here I am in the midst of a difficult situation. Do I persevere, do I resist the temptation, do I bless the enemies? Do I overcome the setback? or do I just go? I don’t know; I don’t know if I can take it anymore? That’s folly speaking. And that’s all over the body of Christ. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 288-291)

Bickle again stands in as an “Every Person” believer:

Now here’s the, I don’t know if this is good or bad, encouraging or discouraging. But for 40 years, probably a little bit more than 40 years. Probably, at least 40 years, I’ve been teaching on Matthew 25. So I know better. That’s the point, but I have drifted. I don’t know if it’s two or three times a year, once or twice a year. It’s not like I’m, you know, putting it on the calendar or measuring it. But when I look back over the years, I go, wow, does it happen? I know better. I say it all the time, not to do it. But I still drift, and the holy spirit is so gracious, he’s saying yeah, but if you'll keep returning. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 301-307)

An even more interesting quote is when Bickle makes another play at false humility by saying that, “I’m not energized like I used to be, that’s the foolish.” (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 306-307). On one level, this statement is blaming the victim for burnout. On another level it eschews toxic positivity:

Now here’s how you know you’re staying in the in the wise. Because it still seems wise to you to be radically committed or to try to be. It still seems wise to you to contend for
the full breakthrough. It still seems wise to you to bless your enemies and not cave in to your accusers. It still seems wise to you to keep going when the resources are not like you thought; the delays that’s the wisdom. It’s not that your track record of staying connected every day; all day is that deep and great. But the wise mindset stayed intact. I recovered you before you lost it. Whoa. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 316-322).

Note Bickle’s use of the word radical. He wants totalizing commitment from his followers at Forerunner Church before it’s too late. Bickel says:

I believe we’re in that beginning of the midnight hour. I mean the midnight hours right before the Lord returns. And it’s not so far out; in the my mind, an hour, a cry has heard. The Lord’s gonna release a forerunner cry to the nations. and you can hear that cry emerging in the land. It’s not real strong, but it’s getting stronger and stronger. All over the earth, that cry is going forth. Here’s the cry; it’s a three threefold message. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 334-338)

Bickle prophetically proclaims the end times are near providing exigence for what he shouts into the camera next.

Number two, he’s coming! He’s about to intervene into human history and shift everything. The coming will shift everything; it will be the culmination of the most unique time frame of history of escalating darkness and escalating power revival. He is stepping into human history to shift everything. Nothing like it. Greatest moment of history. It’s worth everything to be ready and connected. He is coming! This is not a… well, some people [say] I’m not really into that. Well, it doesn’t matter who’s into it; He’s coming. And it will shift everything. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 345-351).
Part of the trick with Bickle is that he doesn’t always signal that he is prophesying. But lines 345-351 offer a simple glimpse at how he uses prophecy. Bickle likes to make a prediction about the future in a dualistic way “of escalating darkness and escalating power revival” and in doing so offers no discernable details what-so-ever (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 347).

For Bickle’s third prescriptive point to his audience, he shifts strategies and utilizes a utopian narrative to emphasize that the rewards are worth the efforts. Bickle:

Number three message go out to meet him. Exert the energy. Put in the effort to meet him, to interact with him, to recover that. To stay with that. Because the forces of trouble are gonna want to steal the narrative of our emotions and make our mind and emotions fearful, so preoccupied with the negative. No. make it first. About meeting him. Then we will be sustained in our ability to have a vibrant spirit. We’ll be able to thrive spiritually when the negativity comes. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 357-362)

Bickle drifts again into Toxic Positivity, by saying those that admit burnout are failing. Worse, Bickle insists that the spiritual haves are unable to assist the have-nots by speaking in a first-person scenario to his listeners:

In verse 9. the wise says no, it doesn’t work that way. They acknowledge their limitation; they go, I can’t give you my history in God. I can’t lay hands on you and give you my intimacy history with God. It doesn’t work that way. I can’t impart spiritual preparation by laying out of hands. You’ve got to get it yourself by interacting with him. That’s the only way it comes. So, they actually say no. we can’t give you our intimacy, but rather go buy it yourself. And buy it well that sounds like we’re earning it. And I’m going to bring this to an end with this. Jesus actually comments on this in revelation 3:18 he goes, go, buy gold refined by fire; here in Matthew 25, go by buy oil. It doesn’t mean earn it. It
means invest yourself in a costly way, to be in the god-ordained process of acquiring it.

It’s costly, is the point. Invest yourself! (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 377-387)

In essence Bickle is saying he cannot or will not help his followers with spiritual burnout. Any spiritual burnout is their responsibility first and foremost. While also declaring that the only option is to redouble one’s commitment despite any possible burnout.

The idea of earning salvation is typically understood as antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus, but by recoding the meaning of the oil within a new metaphor, a maneuver accomplishes a rhetorical reversal. Bickle twists scripture into a new meaning, facilitating a new call to action. Bickle closes his sermon with a final exhortation by insisting that God audibly speaks to his followers:

But beloved, many of you know the story; He will intervene and interrupt us. And He will whisper to us right now. He’s whispering to some of you, go invest yourself in a costly way, in the god-ordained means of a getting oil. And that boils down talking to the Lord. Those things we know to do. Open our bible, making time for personal conversation, talking to him at the heart level, and making our ministry problems and opportunities secondary, and acquiring oil primary. (Bickle, 2021, February 3, Appendix A, line 395-401).

This call to action feels more benign than some of the other sermons, but it nonetheless a call to action, to keep his followers active within the cognitive enclosure. Viable action is essential for constitutive rhetoric, and this sermon represents a shifting of priorities after the elections and his followers can no longer (for now) effect political change.
8.3 How Bill Johnson uses Numinous Eisegetical Metaphors to Seduce

Bill Johnson’s March 15, 2020 sermon, “Safety in the presence of God,” is illustrative of his ability to adjust the meaning of a Biblical text by using multiple eisegetical metaphors layered upon one another. If one were to describe Bill Johnson’s rhetorical style, one might say he is both dualistically seductive and mortifying; that is, Johnson’s focus is on the allure of supernatural benefits that accompany Godly perfection, largely leaving it to his followers to conclude that worldly failure stems from personal faults that restrain the supernatural angelic forces at play within a Dominionist Ideology.

Johnson is distinct from Bickle and Ahn in that he appears to be the least charismatic of the group. He is not loud or boisterous like the others. Nor is his rhetoric laced with fire or brimstone. A listener will never confuse his sermons with a Nuremberg rally. His delivery is gentle, soft, friendly, grandfatherly even. However, make no mistake. Johnson is highly charismatic and no close reader can evade the sense in which he is wholly bound up in charismatic ideology. More than any other pastor within the group, Johnson pushes the numinous subliminal concepts of Dominionism. In nearly every sermon, he is moved to the point of tears over his topics. Johnson wants so badly for his followers to be able to partake in the supernatural gifting he has enjoyed, he trembles and emotionally quivers when bringing up his encounters with God, and that is exceptionally persuasive to listeners attuned to his charismatic persona and his paternalistic sincerity. Any person not gripped with charismatic purpose in their life could potentially find themselves existentially lacking when measured against Johnson’s passion.

Because Johnson abhors routines; he wants his followers to literally feel God, and to accomplish that purpose, he makes basic Christian actions – prayer, Communion – into hyper-emotional, overwhelming numinous encounters with the manifest presence of God, where his
rhetoric presses an overwhelming, awesome, awfulness onto his listeners. Furthermore, Johnson wants his followers not just to know how to recite the Bible, but also to focus on and always feel God’s presence. Instead, he implicitly discourages his followers from committing the Bible to memory at times.

Johnson gave this sermon at the start of lockdown and used the virus as a metaphor for the spiritual battle between mankind and the devil, as did Ahn and Bickle during the same time. Johnson starts by remarking about the worship song that had just finished, saying the song “is like a prescription God wrote. You know, a couple of weeks ago, for what's going on right now and the blessings beat curses.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 4-5). What is immediately interesting about lines 4-5 is that Dominionists know not to openly discount sola-scriptura, the Bible alone. This maxim articulates that God’s word alone is what spiritually feeds, sustains, and, more importantly, communicates God’s feelings, intent, and instructions to his followers. Nevertheless, when Johnson says a song is “like a prescription God wrote,” Johnson is putting song lyrics on par with Scripture.

In lines 6-10, Johnson used the term people as his first attempt at constituting his audience. The people he is referring to are the Old Testament Jews, but Johnson makes his followers concomitant with them. As he will set up shortly, promises made to the Jews in the Old Testament passages he is about to read apply to modern-day followers through scriptural eisegesis.

Johnson sets up this seductive and constitutive discourse by communicating how blessings are more powerful than curses, and this concept is vitally important for the rest of Johnson’s sermon. Johnson says:
In the Bible, people would suffer with a curse to the third and fourth generation, but blessings go to the thousandth generation because it's superior in every way. And it's critical that we adjust our thinking, our anticipation or expectation our prayers, or everything according to the lifestyle of heaven. The way God thinks, the way he lives, and he's not intimidated about anything. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 6-10)

Johnson will also eventually establish the idea that COVID-19 is a curse, and by saying now that blessings trump curses, he is setting the precedent that spiritual living can overpower the virus. Johnson also emphasizes that spiritual living requires action if one wants to reap spiritual benefits. Johnson has also set up an initial logic of mortification by saying God is not scared nor intimidated by anything. In lines 6-10, Johnson is telling his believers to be like God, fearless in the face of a pandemic that has just happened started. In lines 41-44, Johnson presents the first call to action:

So I would encourage you those of you that at home or your place of business if it's possible at all for you to get communion supplies together, I'd like for you to do that so that you can join us I believe it's going to be a prophetic release of power for us our church family our households as well as for this nation in the nations of the world so.

(Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 41-44)

The “prophetic release of power” is the expectation that Johnson sets up to lure his followers into the quest.

Johnson’s next step utilizes some humor to lighten the mood. Johnson often starts his sermons with a joke or series of jokes prior to getting into the meat of a message. As Horkheimer wrote, “amusement always means putting things out of mind” (Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noeri, 2002, p.116). Johnson jokes by saying:
I want us to look today at Psalms 91, so if you had open your Bibles to that, do that; please, by the way, I want to suggest that everybody download the antivirus software called the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s the antivirus software his name is Jesus, and he is manifest through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a philosophy. Remains a philosophy you're vulnerable to the virus. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 45-49)

The comment is disarming. After the soft humor of lines 44-49, Johnson has to make a disclaimer, namely, that his sermon is going to draw a comparison between righteous Christian living as meriting divine protection and that, among other things, offers immunity to the virus, and he does not want to guilt those who are suffering.

Next, Johnson shifts his focus to the possibilities that follow Godly perfection. Johnson, in lines 62-69, again starts with a disclaimer about the virus, then doubles down on the idea that positive vibes on God will defeat COVID-19:

So, what if, what if fear threw a party and nobody showed up? That's kind of what I'm thinking about this whole thing that's this is just my opinion, but I believe the virus is real; I believe it's very serious, but I believe what's happening around the nations is 5% virus, and 95% fear. And right now, it seems to me that viruses is riding the wings of fear, and you can't; you know you can't embrace fear and love. The embracing of fear is the rejection of love, and … abiding in love actually repels affliction infirmity and helps us to live integration. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 62-69).

Johnson reiterates the cognitive link that dwelling on God and manifesting his presence leads to supernatural health:

I believe that the manifest presence of God upon his people is the key to divine health.

And learning to host him learning to yield to her, to him learning to cooperate with him is
what he is going to train us in and teach us in in this particular season. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 76-78)

Johnson’s words were spoken at the start of the COVID lockdown before hundreds of thousands of Americans were to die from the virus that very year. In this sermon, Johnson repeatedly tells his followers that they have nothing to fear as long as they stay focused on God. In lines 82 – 98, Johnson reads the 16 verses from Psalm 91 in their entirety. Afterward, he unpacks each verse’s eisegetical meaning line by line, starting in line 99. Pertinent to Johnson’s style is that he will hop from one text to another or from text to context and vice versa to alter or reshape his reading for the rest of this sermon. To Johnson’s credit, he is fairly plain in that he is going to use Psalm 91 and other texts as a metaphor by saying, “I want us to go through this because I believe there are some specifics that the Lord would want us to take hold of today, especially in light of this that is going on all over the world” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 100-103). But importantly, when Johnson says, “I believe there are some specifics that the Lord would want us to take hold of today,” he is invoking that he is hearing from God, a claim he reinforces later; this invests Johnson with Divine authority, in that he hears from and speaks for God to his followers.

Johnson begins to re-read Psalm 91 again, starting with verse 1; he jumps back and forth between the Old and New Testaments to make a new point starting with Psalm 91:1. Johnson reads:

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Stop right there. He who dwells. You remember the Scripture talks about abiding in Christ. [Possible referencing 1 John 2:3-6]. If we abide in him his words abides in us when it talks about dwelling in the shelter of the Almighty, we're not talking about a point of theology. We're talking about a lifestyle. In other words, it's not just a
verse you've memorized it's supposed to be the developing of an ongoing lifestyle of a consciousness and awareness of the by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 108-114).

Johnson’s words in lines 108-114 are a bit of a mystification. When talking about Psalm 91:1, Johnson quickly mixes in a possible reference to 1 John 2:3-6 without citing it: “

And by this, we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 John 2:3-6)

The ESV text is clearer than Johnson’s nebulous paraphrase. According to 1 John 2:3-6, abiding in God is knowing God, especially His commandments, His words, and living them out.

Johnson’s mystification is that he puts down memorizing Scripture (that is, knowing God’s word) in favor of an active consciousness of God. In essence, rote memorization (that is, head knowledge) is not enough. One must actively think and dwell on God as often as possible. The difference may seem subtle, but Johnson cultivates this ambiguity to create further uncertainty within his followers, providing him the room to rhetorically engineer a potential existential crisis that his concluding call to action will satiate.

In lines 115-120, Johnson again downplays head knowledge to emphasize a Postmillennialist belief that reinforces a Dominionist viewpoint. Johnson explains:

Many people stopped short of a divine encounter because they’re satisfied with good theology [head knowledge]... This is not supposed to be just a verse I quote. That's
valuable. It's supposed to be the endeavor of my heart is the discovery of the manifest presence of God upon me as a surrendered Son. Upon me as a yielded vessel. He says he who dwells in the shelter of the Almighty shall abide under the shadow of his wings. The shadow of the Almighty. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 115-120)

Johnson’s rhetoric in lines 115-120 is decidedly Postmillennialist. The point of Postmillennialism maintains that heaven is being revealed on earth even now. And in a Dominionist framework, believers are literally trying to manifest the presence of God on Earth. That is why Johnson keeps using the words “manifest presence.” In a Dominionist mindset, spiritual forces are made tangible by human thought and action. To dwell upon God is literally to manifest His presence on earth, a notion Johnson will make explicit in this sermon.

In lines 121-125, Johnson lays the groundwork for a new kind of metaphor. Instead of using the Biblical text to recontextualize modern events, Johnson will now use previous experiences to recontextualize the Biblical text's meaning. The effect creates a second metaphorical layer to recode the first layer. Johnson starts in line 121 by giving an anecdote about his grandmother and how he had to read devotionals to her after her eyesight had failed. The point of Johnson’s anecdote begins in line 126:

I remember she [Johnson’s Grandmother] wanted me to read her a particular book by Corrie ten Boom, and in this book, it was as I recall it was some sort of a – devotional book that she had written. And in this book, she talked about dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty, and she made this statement… that sometimes it's dark because he's so close. Sometimes, it's his nearness that causes things to be out of focus. It's that shadow of presence. And sometimes we, we mistake the moment that we're in by, by natural

Johnson uses the anecdote to shift the language of Psalm 91 around, moving from shadow to darkness. In Western culture, darkness carries a negative connotation, symbolizing mystery and danger, whereas shadow can imply shade (or protection from the sun) has a more comforting feel to it. Granted, at this point, Johnson is not explicit in this meaning, but the metaphorical shift soon comes into plain view.

By recoding the meaning of the word shadow, Johnson lays the groundwork for the sermon's main point, which is that the believer is safe under the (dark) shadow of the Almighty. Specifically, when under the shadow, things seem dark, and when things seem dark or dangerous, we are closest to God and occupy the safest place possible. Johnson says as much in the next line, “so, the people who turn their affection towards the ongoing manifestation of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Those people dwell in a habitation that, even when it's dark, it's only a testimony of his nearness.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 134-136).

In lines 137-139 after a brief distraction, Johnson quotes Psalm 91:2 “I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and my fortress, and my God in him I will trust. I will say of the Lord is my refuge my fortress my God in him I will trust.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 137-139). To interpret Psalm 91:2, Johnson transposes the meaning of the text onto what it means to him in the here and now, skipping what it would have meant for the Psalmist or the Jewish people of the Old Testament. Johnson reinterprets Psalm 91:2 to mean:

This is the only – proactive – position in the Psalm. One is implied later, but this one is the action point of this Psalm, and as I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my portion in him I trust. I always take this, and I turn it into a personal declaration. God, you are the
one that I trust you, and you are my refuge, and for years, when I come to that, I don't like the wording because I want to make it personal. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 140-144).

Johnson then uses this eisegetical musing to make a prescriptive proclamation – it’s important to remember that Psalm 91 is a poem about God’s promise of faithfulness to the Old Testament people. What makes the text a mystification is that Johnson ignores Biblical context, particularly that the Psalms are Old Testament verses bound by the Mosaic Covenant. In the Old Testament, receiving the promises of God required meeting of all his conditions, including those established in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Apostle Paul writes as much in Galatians 5:9 “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Galatians 5:9). In other words, if part of the Old Testament gets claimed, all of it is claimed, both the requirements of upholding the legal, ceremonial, and cleanliness/kosher laws to get the spiritual blessings.

But for Johnson, a more personal musing has revealed to him that “the wording is chosen for a reason. We are supposed to confess and declare that he is our trust. But this is actually a confession we are to make to one another. I will say of the Lord.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 145-147). With Johnson’s focusing on the word confession, he switches to his next theme in line 184. Spiritual forces are released into the world when we talk:

There's another place in Isaiah 35 where it says, … we say to the one with weak knees with feeble heart, be strong, take courage. And the very next verse says, then the eyes of the blind will be open. Then the ears, the tongue of the dumb will be loosed. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 184-187)

What’s mystifying about Johnson’s words here is that Isaiah 35 is a prophecy about the children of Israel returning to their nation after the diaspora, the Babylonian imposed exile.
Johnson does not talk about any of that, instead choosing to twist the text to equate speaking in faith to cause miraculous healing.

Johnson then recaps Psalm 91:2-3: “So, here's the one intentional action in this Psalm is, I will say of the Lord he is my refuge, my fortress, my God in him will I trust. Verse 3 surely, he shall deliver you from the snare of the Fowler and from the perilous pestilence.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 194-196). From here, Johnson interprets or twists the text for his follower by using eisegesis, saying, “to me, this [Psalm 91:3] implies snare of the Fowler. They would set a trap for a bird to catch, to catch a bird, Fowler, snare. He will deliver you from the snare. To me, it implies that maybe you got caught in the snare. And he's gonna release you.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 197-199). Often, the most common utterance that eisegesis is about to happen gets signaled by the phrase “to me [this means]...” So, Johnson eisegetes Psalm 91:3 to mean God will release his followers from the snare (line 197).

Now Johnson needs to metaphorically interpret what the snare is in the modern context, COVID. But in doing so, Johnson also sets up another disclaimer:

Some of you are an absolute divine health, others of you are struggling. He will deliver you from the snare. If you got caught in this snare [COVID], it's not shame; it's not condemnation; we live in a world of sin. We get exposed to stuff, and it's not your fault. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 202-205)

Lines 202-205, Johnson equates the snare and the petulance to COVID, which believers are exposed to by living in the world. Thus, Johnson is reinforcing the cognitive enclosure of his church, and implying that succumbing to sickness and fear, denotes worldly sinfulness, living too far from a daily focus on God.
After a small tangent, Johnson then returns to reading from Psalm 91 and recoding what the imagery in Psalm 91:4, shield and buckler can symbolize in a modern context to recode the meaning of the text; Johnson sneaks in a new Biblical text to eisegetes both of them together:

Verse five, you shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day; this is important – the distinction in the New Testament the arrows. Are the enemy's thoughts, you remember that the example of the armor of God, the shield of faith? It's to absorb the shield of faith, is to absorb the thoughts, the ideas, the suggestions, the temptations, all the junk that the enemy throws our way. So that's what the arrow comes during the day. When you're alive and thinking. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 213-218).

The armor of God is a reference to a New Testament verse, Ephesians 6:10-18. While Psalm 91:5 is thematically similar, both texts use armor as a visual illustration. However, the passages have no relationship. But Johnson is using one to alter the meaning of the other. Now Johnson is directly equating negative thoughts with demonic influence, and he fuses the armor concepts referenced in Psalm 91:5 and Ephesians 6:10-18 to interpellate his audience (using the word us) into the solution in the modern-day starting in line 224:

The Lord is actually equipping us to take a position shield and buckler. The figure, the shield of faith to absorb the stuff that comes at us during the day. But to do it so well during the day that when it's time to go to bed, we can go to sleep in rest knowing that he will defend us. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 224-227)

Starting in line 228, Johnson tells another personal story, laying the context he will use to alter the meaning of the Biblical text, “Now I'm going to throw in a word. It's not a biblical word. It's a word, it's the one of two times in my life I've had the Lord wake me up in the middle of the
night with his voice.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 228-230). The word Johnson refers to is not a single literal word, but rather THE WORD, as in God audibly spoke to a revelation to him. And this is important. Johnson has claimed in the past to be an Apostle of Jesus, whereas the Capital A in Apostle denotes that Jesus personally anointed him to be a leader. It is an important point since only the Apostles appointed by Jesus were allowed to write Scripture. When Johnson claims God audibly spoke to him, that is the theological equivalent of starting another book in the Bible that follows Revelation. If God speaks, it is utterly important, not just on par with Scripture, to a Christian God’s word in any context it is given in Scripture.

Johnson, after some brief context, explains what this revelation was, “it's about maybe 23 years ago I was awakened in the night with this phrase. He watches over the watch of those who watch the Lord. He watches over the watch of those who watch the Lord.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 232-234). Now, Johnson is aware of the Apostolic distinction, and he makes a quick disclaimer on it, after which he will summarily disregard it. Starting in line 235:

After I heard that he awakened me with that voice, I don't ever want to equate that with Scripture. I'm just saying he spoke something to me that was important for me to hear in that season but also right now. He watches over the watch. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 235-238).

For Johnson to use this revelation that he claims is not on par with Scripture, he first needs to interpret its meaning by assigning it a visual. Afterwards, he will apply the meaning of his visual to Psalm 91: “We know what a watchman is. A watchman is positioned on a wall... The watchman keeps [thieves] away. And this verse [Johnson’s revelation] said he will watch over my watch if I'll watch him.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 239-243). It may be a Freudian slip, but Johnson referred to his revelation as a verse (line 243), like it’s a verse in the Bible.
Johnson then returns to Psalm 91:5 and mixes the Psalm in with his personal revelation, ignoring what he said before (to not hear him as equating his dream with having the authority of Scripture). He notes, “so, this terror by night thing is that. Is that we go to sleep literally with our eyes on him, knowing that He will watch our watch on our behalf. Amen. No, that was an excellent point. All right.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 244-246).

Then Johnson goes on a tangent by making an interesting statement that sounds like an sympathetic statement but is not. Johnson starts by saying, “I always am praying for mercy. I don’t care how lost they are now. You know how demonized they are. How they may be a self-proclaimed devil worshiper makes no difference to me; I'm gonna pray for the mercy of God” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 254-257). Lines 254-257 may seem like its humanizing to outsiders, but the rhetoric is nonetheless dehumanizing when referring to an outsider or a non-believer as corrupted, lost, and demonized, even a devil worshipper. Johnson is not evoking empathy or mercy for these people, as he clarifies in his next statement. Starting on line 258 admits that when he prays, he says, “Lord if they absolutely refuse to repent and they will not turn. Then please use your dealings with them to release the fear of God to the people of God. Awaken us to this to this reality” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 258-260). In essence, Johnson prays that the unrepentant get punished so profoundly and publicly that it will scare the rest of the community back to the faith. Johnson then pivots back to the main point of his sermon, which is that faith and sinlessness merit divine health and protection.

But first, he reiterates a disclaimer from earlier that suffering and fear is not evidence of sin. He reminds his congregation, “now another thing I need to say is just because you have difficulty or are struggling or you're sick or whatever, that's not the judgment of God” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 261-262). Johnson keeps making these disclaimers because he is getting
progressively more explicit that godly living, and focus, equates to super-natural immunity/ability/prosperity. And arguably, he knows that suffering is logically the evidence that one has failed to achieve the divine state he is calling for. The distinction from Bickle is he intends to not make one feel guilty about having not achieved that state yet. But, claiming that such a state is possible and realizing that suffering, doubt, and failure are evidence of one having not achieved that state because of sin is most likely mortifying.

Johnson then quickly moves back to quoting Psalm 91:9 and reinterpreting it. Johnson’s interpretation of verse 9 equates faith with divine protection:

Because, you have made the Lord who is my refuge even the most high your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you nor any plague come dear you’re dwelling. Stop right there! I just want to re-emphasize learning to live in the manifestation of the presence of God. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. I cannot overemphasize the importance of us learning to live with continuous affection for the person of the Holy Spirit. There's something about that abiding presence. It's not just that he protects us. It's that the closer I stay to his heartbeat, the more I know what to do in a difficult moment. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 270-277)

To prove the preceding point that faith gives the believer divine power, Johnson quickly references Matthew 17:19:

The disciples come to Jesus and say why couldn't we cast the demon out of the child? Jesus says it only comes out with prayer and fasting. And he didn't pray or fast. Why. Because the tenderness the closeness was already there, the devil was on his shoulder and remain. So, there was a continuous ongoing relationship and awareness of the Spirit of God. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 278-282)
Now, lines 278-282 revealed an interestingly seductive heresy known as Pelagianism. Pelagianism is the idea that humans have the ability if sinless and faith-filled enough to manifest the full power that Jesus manifests in the Gospels. When Johnson interprets the text to say, “Because the tenderness the closeness was already there” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 280), he implies his followers might achieve the same power level as Jesus. Johnson tries to rhetorically evoke this understanding by asking:

What is fasting for? It's to refine our focus to the kingdom. It's to say no to other appetites... Jesus didn't fast in the moment. Why? He lived with a refined focus. He lived with the connection to the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 282-287)

Again lines 282-287, Johnson uses the interpellative language of we to direct comparison to Jesus to seduce. In effect we fast, to be like Jesus, to gain spiritual power, like Jesus.

But while seduction is the primary goal, the comparison masks a strategy of implicit mortification, that the failure to manifest this power is itself evidence of sin. With the Pelagian cognitive link firmly established, Johnson then extrapolates how the heresy works in a COVID-19 context:

The Holy Spirit is with us. Always think. It's the invitation to develop an awareness… not just to protect me from plagues. It's to keep me in the center of what He is doing on planet earth. It makes me the offensive weapon… Unwilling to cower. I will not, I will not give honor to a disease. I will not give honor to a disease. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 288-294)

For Johnson expressing or being afraid of a deadly virulent disease reduces one’s spiritual authority over it. Johnson again doubles down on this point that the tangible is subservient to the
spiritual, and the spoken word activates the spiritual. Johnson says this starting on line 299, “how about seeing people that live in that abiding presence and making that confession over them. Realities are released through decree. Not what we choose to say. I mean, life and death is still in the power of the tongue” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 299-302)

Interestingly, Johnson next chooses to preemptively illustrate his upcoming point that the voice can release spiritual forces on the earth by telling how a church staff member needed to declare in faith that a barren family in the congregation was going to get pregnant. But for God to bless them with a pregnancy, Johnson says:

It's got to be declared -----; remember that time you prophesied about the people who couldn't have kids that were trying for 13 years or whatever the Lord spoke to spoke to --- -- and said tell them they'll have a child by this time next year. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 306-308)

Johnson caps his point by emphasizing in a way that his followers are directly responsible for enabling God and His angels to work miracles in the world by saying, “if you don't say that won't happen. So, he did, and they did [get pregnant]. Some things actually have to be declared to happen... that's how we function.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 311-313).

Lines 324-327 start a new theme that fully articulates Johnson’s concept of human authority over the spiritual realm. Here, too, he starts with another disclaimer, which he summarily ignores immediately after it is said, “Now personally, I do not believe in me telling angels what to do. I won't go, I won't go there, I will not go there. But what I will do is…” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 324-327). Johnson is, in effect setting up another seductive form of Pelagianism, where if we speak for God, and God agrees with it, only then will the Angels act on it. Johnson's pregnancy metaphor was the conceptual proof of what he is about to
claim. Starting in line 305, Johnson says, “I would like to suggest that a decree that comes from the throne room carries the fragrance of the father… That the angelic realm have a sense this came from the throne room, and this is their assignment” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 328-331).

To prove and or mystify the point, Johnson pivots to a brief paraphrase of Psalm 103 before quickly elaborating the reference. And this is where Johnson fully undoes his previous disclaimer by claiming that Psalm 103 “says that the Angels give attention to the voice of His word. In my experience, I believe the voice of His word that's you and me. It's when God speaks in the quiet of our heart, and unless we declare, it goes unsaid” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 335-337). The interpellative elements (you, me, and we,) here are strong when Johnson says “in my experience, I believe the voice of His word that's you and me. It's when God speaks in the quiet of our heart, and unless we declare, it goes unsaid.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 336-337). It is worth stressing that Johnson is disregarding his disclaimer. He emphasized that humans have no authority over angels; only God does, but if humans speak for God, then when we do, and in some cases only when we speak for God, will the Angels be moved to action. Commanding Angels is highly seductive rhetoric in that it reinforces the expectations of believers who act in faith that by making bold declarations with an expectation they are acting on God’s behalf, then angelic forces will be dispatched to obtain the objective.

The idea that human declaration has the power to enable angels into action carries a negative implication as well; the same concept also applies to demons. Starting on line 343, Johnson gives one of his most mortifying statements:

We know flies are attracted to decay. Satan is called the Lord of the Flies. The demonic realm is attracted to decay. In thought, and morals, values, that's why what we say is
going to attract one of two worlds. That's why there's life and death in the power of the tongue. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 343-346)

Johnson uses the concept that spiritual power is manifest by the spoken word to reinterpret the Psalm 91 passages to eisegetically mean that true sinless, faith-filled believers are immune to worldly affliction. He says, “here's an important thought in this passage… The protected the ones who have been kept in safety... Those folks are now released to tread upon the powers of darkness that cost, that cause the disaster in the first place” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 357-363). And that last part of Johnson’s thought on line 363 “to tread” is his action line, his call to action. Johnson recklessly takes his toxic positivity to its main conclusion that faith alone isn’t enough; action is required:

We are summoned not to sit idly by and just pray oh God, please protect me, protect me, please keep me from harm. To think that way is almost, is almost yielding to the virus. … To just try to be the protected, safe person is the opposite of our calling. The opposite of our design. The opposite. The safest place in the kingdom is the front lines of battle. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 364-369).

Lines 364-369 reiterate an extreme logic of mortification. Johnson, in effect, is saying that even the recognition of fear reduces spiritual authority, implying that the solution is to charge into the danger.

Starting on line 381, Johnson sets up his main point in the form of a cognitive link. Interestingly, the passage/cognitive link is an inversion: “[then] because He set His love on me, [if] I deliver.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 381). For this transaction to happen, the believer must get the creator to “set His love on them,” Johnson will spell out how his followers are to
accomplish this. But first, he tells another personal story as proof of concept for how believers should treat God. Starting in line 382, Johnson says:

I know when I'm home, I tell my wife that I love her many times a day, many times a day. Many times, sometimes during a meal. It's going to be repeated frequently. I'm going to reset. I've already set my love on her, but I reset. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 382-384)

Johnson then connects the personal example that for a spouse to feel loved, one must perpetually reaffirm that love, to alter the meaning of Acts chapter two, that the Apostles earned their spiritual power by “they [the Apostles] continually re-upped the contract re-signed the contract. There's something about this passage that provokes me. [returning to Psalm 91:14] Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 387-389). Here Johnson warps the text, cutting and pasting various texts to suit his needs. Weaving in and out of each one, Johnson offers no setup, context, or distinction as to where one ends and the other begins.

To spell out how believers get God to set His love upon them, Johnson connects the personal example from lines 382-384 to Acts 2 and Psalm 91. The move sets an impossible standard: “I hate to reduce it to a discipline, but if that's what it takes, do it. The ongoing resetting of our affection for him. Throughout a day. If you need it, set it on your alarm to remind you.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 390-392). By Johnson’s rhetoric, one must continually perpetually fixate their thoughts on God for one to be immune. Any failure or setback becomes proof of a cognitive lapse and thus a mortification. An implicit scapegoating logic inevitably gets established: it was the believer’s fault all along when things do not work out.
In line 434, Johnson has set up an interesting idea (a Pelagian idea, for sure). It’s the idea that dwelling on God and by cognitively thinking about Him invites Him into the believer’s presence. God’s presence then affects the believer; in so doing, they become more like God. Johnson makes the thought explicit that “resetting of our hearts of affection towards him becomes so ongoing that… our burning heart of affection for him and his burning heart for us brings us into such a place that our perception changes… we think and see different” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 434-439). Lines 434-439 invert an idea earlier established in line 344: “The demonic realm is attracted to decay. In thought, and morals, values, that's why what we say is going to attract one of two worlds” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 344-345). So logically, if the manifest presence of God alters the believer “abiding place of presence, we think and see different.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 438-439). Then, equally so, demonic contact could have a similar effect. Ultimately Johnson’s point reduces human agency in a world where faithful abiding believers become divinely influenced demi-gods, and unbelievers succumb to inhuman demonic cohabitation.

Johnson affirms the supernatural ability that comes from perpetual abiding in God’s presence even more vividly with another visual metaphor:

If you take a garden hose and you put it in foul, putrid water. Whatever is in that puddle is going to leak into the hose. The only way to keep the inside of the hose unaffected is that before you put it into the stuff. Make sure the waters turned on. And if there's a continual flow through the hose, you can put it in any environment, and it doesn't get infected. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 443-447)

Johnson’s point is that perpetually abiding in God’s presence, and acting on that faith, produces divine protection. And despite the three prior disclaimers that he intends no guilt or shame, one
cannot escape the fact Johnson’s rhetoric strongly implies that failure is the result of a fault, in faith or deed, or belief.

In one of only a handful of times in the sermon, Johnson makes his mortification explicit. He notes:

If all you see is the enemy, then you need to readjust get back to what God has said about your life. Find the table of Communion, but in that table of fellowship with God, is yours is all of our place of great strength, great confidence, great life, great health. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 464-467)

In other words, if the enemy does manage to reach the believer, then they are not focusing enough.

From line 473 on, Johnson starts down a new line of thinking that has a very tragic context behind it that, once understood, recolors the rest of this sermon as incredibly cruel, mortifying, and tone-deaf. The new track starts with, “Continuous answers to prayer are what we were designed for. To not have them is abnormal. And that needs to matter. It needs to matter.” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 473-474). By declaring the absence of the miraculous to be abnormal, Johnson is heavily guilting his audience or any believer for not being able to invoke the miraculous, that being content with normalcy is deficient. But that’s not even the worst part.

To fully understand the significance of lines 473-474, some extra context into Bethel’s recent history is needed. Just four months prior to this sermon Bethel Church, at Johnson’s behest, collectively tried and failed to resurrect the deceased daughter of its two worship leaders, who were probably in this audience (Bethel Press, 2019). For at least two weeks around the preceding Christmas (this sermon was delivered in March), they held a non-stop prayer vigil to resurrect the toddler corpse in vain (Lati, 2019). An attempt that must have been nothing short of
tormenting to the parents. Johnson, in effect, is saying that they and him, if they had more faith, then they could have resurrected the child. The context of that tragedy makes Johnson’s next statement all the more hurtful:

What I see happen for us is that we’ll pray about this pray about that have no breakthrough and just assume it's the will of God. The disciples tried to cast a demon out of a child. If we could bring that analogy into today. When the child wasn't delivered, we would just assume that in the sovereignty of God, it must be His will. He works in mysterious ways, which is the cop-out answer. It's the cop-out answer to explain away our powerlessness. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 475-480)

Johnson continues hammering the point and remember they failed to resurrect two-year-old Olive Heiligenthal in that very same sanctuary. He explains that the disciples were “stunned by the fact they couldn't bring deliverance. Why. Because they have a history of success... They are the most trained people in deliverance of anyone to ever live except for Jesus up to that time” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 481-488). Again, it is worth mentioning that three times in this sermon, Johnson has made the point that his intent is not to guilt his followers for lacking spiritual power. Johnson ignores his past disclaimers when he asks, “It's supposed to bother us enough that we look at the lack of a breakthrough as an abnormality. Something didn't work right… I'm not gonna do the cop-out thing and push it under the sovereignty of God” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 495-498).

With the existential crisis firmly set, Johnson now pivots to the quest for significance, that is, the action he wants his followers to take to alleviate their guilt, or the obliteration of COVID-19 with glorious faith. Johnson starts on line 502 by asking, “if it's physically possible, to fast and to cry out to the Lord... This is our greatest opportunity for advancement... It needs to
come in miracle power. It needs to come in economic release” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 502-506).

Johnson then sets up the issue that the enemy is using COVID to stop a myriad of Evangelical institutions throughout the world. He reflect:

What's happening right now? Corporate gatherings around the world of tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands. … [he rattles off a long list] … All over the world, this stuff's going on. And what's happening right now, all of it is shut down, why the enemy fears the impact of that, of that. And the assault is on the business community because that's what funds the movement. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 516-524)

By invoking all of these institutions, several of which he leads, Johnson is telling his followers in lines 516-524 which businesses need their support; he places special emphasis on the business community, which is a weird place of emphasis until he says “that's what funds the movement” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 524). What is interesting about lines 516-524 is that Johnson implies God needs human intervention; if the devil can use the virus to shut down businesses, and those businesses fund Evangelical movements, then God needs his followers to keep them functioning.

As Johnson wraps up his sermon, he spends the next 20 minutes doing Communion; what is the most interesting part of the Communion is how he starts the ceremony. At first, Johnson starts by introducing the topic, “All right, we're gonna share a communion. I want you to stand. You've been sitting forever. If you're at home, please grab your elements. And we're going to share a communion together” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 594-596). However, from here, Johnson gives possibly the best example of how he seduces his audience through numinous encounters.
Communion is one of the few ritualistic hallmarks commanded in the Christian faith. Most believers will go through the ritual hundreds if not thousands of times within their lifetimes. Johnson’s goal is to seduce his audience with overwhelming numinous encounters in God’s “manifest presence”. To build this feeling, Johnson likes to use abstract words like *beauty* and *power*. Johnson says, “I believe more now than ever in the beauty and the power of Communion... I won't make this as long as I do when it's me in Jesus alone because I like to take time. I like to take time” (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 596-598). Johnson’s repeat of the phrase “I like to take time” is a key delivery choice; he is both saying that this ritual is extra special because God is present while modeling to his listeners how to handle it. Johnson continues:

I like to be careful, to never do anything just out of a routine. I believe in discipline, but I try to make sure that whatever I've disciplined myself in, that I can, that I can turn my passion towards that thing. So that, so that I am all in, I so always want to be in no matter what it is I want to be all in. (Johnson, 2020, Appendix B, line 599-602)

Johnson’s performance here is both seductive and mortifying. He consistently emphasizes the importance of keeping an abiding presence and that manifesting that presence is sacrosanct. Johnson takes those moments with intense trepidation and emotional sincerity. Johnson’s performance is intended to showcase as a model for his followers to imitate, that is, to be seduced into the Dominionist ideology just as he is. As a model for his listeners, he is inspiring, but as someone to follow, he is also mortifying because the standard he sets out is unsustainable.

A generous assessment of Johnson’s rhetoric would be to say that it synergizes far too well with toxic positivity. In Johnson’s view, feeling worried or afraid, admitting that something hurt, or admitting failure is ultimately evidence of sin and results in a loss of authority. Authority is the
chief concern for Dominionism. In seduction, authority works off of expectation. Faithful believers expect to be entitled to angelic assistance to achieve worldly objectives for the kingdom. What is equally important to remember is that when expectations fail to reflect reality, that is when what was supposed to happen does not happen. When one’s authority is short-changed or cheated, anger is the resultant feeling.

Johnson never made anything remotely close to a call for violence; instead, Johnson’s radicalism is very subtle. Johnson delivered a message that believers can have supernatural power if they have radical faith, which results from fixating on God at all times, focusing only on the positive, so the negative and demonic cannot touch them. It is a wildly seductive message; a believer can be like Jesus. Yet it can also make his followers intensely insecure. When failure happens, followers implicitly know the fault is theirs from Johnson’s rhetoric. The only solution is to suppress all doubt and act out on faith.

Johnson’s mastery of his rhetoric is that his mortifications, unlike Bickle and Ahn, are mostly enthymematic. His arguments are unstated, hidden, and glossed over by the positive associations that come from focusing on success. Johnson’s rhetoric is toxically positive and dangerous when uttered in the face of a pandemic about to claim over 400,000 American lives that year. Johnson’s rhetoric inadvertently blames those deaths on lack of faith directly on the victims of COVID-19 and indirectly on their loved ones who also lacked the faith to save them. Johnson is undeniably the master of metaphor within this corpus. His ability to weave multiple different texts and contexts into a cascading tapestry of reinforcing meanings that constitute his audience into the seductive power fantasy of a Dominionist ideology is peerless and dangerous.
8.4 How Ché Ahn uses Grievance and Victimage to Persuade

For Ché Ahn’s textual analysis, his January 17th, 2021, Sermon “All lives are Sacred” was selected due to his mastery of the constitutive rhetoric. Ahn’s sermon is arguably the most constitutive out of the entire corpus, using vicimage, grievance, and rhetorical questioning as the catalyst for engaging his audience into action more than any other pastor. Ahn is also far more likely to spread falsehoods and mischaracterize his political targets. He constantly paints believers as victims and dehumanizes the non-believers that grievance them. Within the corpus, who openly espouses a Dominionist Ideology, Ahn is also the most conflict-focused with his language. And to be clear, Furtick is the only one who does not use Dominionist language for the time being.

For context, Ahn’s sermon was delivered two Sundays after the January 6th Insurrection but just days prior to President Biden’s inauguration. And while most of the other pastors were moving beyond the political topics of the presidency and the election, Ahn was arguably still fuming over both. It is no exaggeration to say that Ahn’s rhetoric in this sermon stops just short of calls for violence and Civil War. At the time, he still characterized the election as stolen, and therefore his sermon puts forth two goals. One is he will victimize his audience by abusing Old Testament verses, telling them that the godless liberals in the election cheated them and that Biden’s election is proof that God is punishing the entire nation with a curse for its infanticidal obsession on abortion which also loosed the Coronavirus across America. The cure for the curse is, as Ahn puts it, “life for life.” The primary objective of Ahn’s sermon was to obligate his followers to swear before God to never vote for a pro-abortion candidate again and to give money to his ministries. Much like Johnson and Bickle’s sermons, these pastors all ask for more from their followers in the face of problems. Ahn’s response is unique to Johnson, who a few
weeks prior also gave an anti-abortion message for Christmas. Johnson’s sermon focused more on blessings and possibilities; Ahn will be more curse-focused and fatalistic. To Ahn, if God allowed the democrats to steal the election, then it is because He is displeased with His followers and is disciplining them.

At the start of Ahn’s sermon, he begins recounting all the things that he did during the election to help re-elect President Trump “you know there's so much has happened even since I was going through the battleground states. for those who don't know, I took September and October out to mobilize uh the battleground states. Eight states” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 4-6). In a way, Ahn is a humble braggart; like most Pastors, he likes to brag about his accomplishments and the reach of his networks like H.I.M. and TheCall. But in line 7, Ahn immediately begins his victimage, grievance, and othering rhetoric:

They've blown up to over a thousand people when they started; they only had 200. but they opened up, and they grew to a thousand. They're the only church in Detroit that's open because Michigan is very liberal. They've locked down Michigan. Even though he's gotten death threats for opening up, um, Bill Bolin, our H.I.M. pastor, has been bold. He opened up, he had me come out, and it was amazing time of mobilization. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 7-12)

Lines 7-12 will be the first salvo of many against Democratic politicians. Ahn uses a form of negative seduction that works by way of othering and grievance. To motivate his audience in this sermon, Ahn will do everything short of calls for violence to get his followers to hate liberals, socialists, pro-abortion Christians, non-believers, and outsiders. All will fall within his vitriol.

In lines 13-21, Ahn recounts all the cities and states he visited in his effort to help Trump. He went so far as to imply that Trump was following him:
He's [Trump] just following me wherever I go. no, he was everywhere. It so happened that coincidentally I would be at the places that he would be also going as well. But I do believe the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. Amen. Your steps are ordered. You're here. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 22-26)

Ahn’s rhetoric here is, in effect, ego-stroking for himself by implying that he and President Trump coincidentally campaigned in the same cities at the exact times for multiple cities in a row. Ahn could be trying to elevate the perception of his prestige as circulating on a level with world leaders like Trump, while at the same time, putting Trump, spiritually on his level. When Ahn says, “But I do believe the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord,” in the context of Ahn campaigning for Trump. Not only is Ahn implying that his steps are righteous, but also that Trump's steps are righteous as well. In doing so, Ahn is elevating the stakes of his rhetoric within a Dominionist Ideology; if Trump is righteous, then opposing him is evil. He has not gone there yet; he is just setting it up for now.

Ahn also sometimes trades in a form of heresy called the prosperity Gospel. This heresy is not Dominionist per se but synergizes well with the ideology. Prosperity Gospel is a form of quid pro quo transaction, where God will bless his followers with worldly success if they give His chosen leaders money in the form of tithe and offerings. Dominionism can work off a similar logic. Those who support the work of the kingdom merit influence, affluence, and or wealth in the kingdom. As Ahn requests donations, his rhetoric shifts into Dominionist language, “you can give to that expense. All of it will go to the kingdom and advancing God's kingdom.” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 45-46). “Advancing the kingdom” in a Dominionist framework means that whatever action “advances the kingdom” increases Christian influence
and worldly power. Such a process pleases God, who blesses the followers who supported that leader.

Again, it is typical that all pastors have drives and initiatives. Ahn, however, seeks to use mortification through accountability in his monetary request by having his followers commit to giving money over time:

all of you were given a pledge card… and I’m gonna ask you to prayerfully sign this...

But I’m also going to ask you to give money… We want this to be a movement on every local level. We want people to vote for life… we have expenses, and I’m just starting a ministry on a national basis. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 51-57)

By having his follower’s sign pledge cards, Ahn plans symbolically at least to hold his followers accountable for committing to stop abortion and giving money. Within the corpus, not even Johnson or Bickle went this far.

Ahn then sets up the context for why he is starting his anti-abortion pledge during this time. The following statement will form the political agenda for the rest of Ahn’s sermon:

For those who don't know, President Reagan in 1984 declared and made an executive decision. Made a proclamation that January 22nd will be the sanctity of human life day. Now, why January 22nd? It was January 22nd, 1973, the Roe v Wade was voted on by the supreme court. Made abortion legal in every state. I think that was the worst supreme court decision in the history of America. Even worse than the Dred Scott decision of 1857 because even though the Dred Scott said that blacks could not vote and they're not, can't be citizens. It didn't mandate to kill them. Whereas Roe v Wade has mandated the right to murder a child in the womb. Since then, 65 million babies have been aborted.
Three every minute. one every twenty-second. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 63-71)

The critical phrase happened on line 70, when Ahn characterized abortion as murder, forming the grievance in his chief narrative through negative seduction that he wishes to impart on his congregation. By framing abortion as murder, Ahn sets a narrative that anyone who supports abortion is also a murderer. From here, Ahn will constantly frame outsiders as abortion supporters and, therefore, murderers. At the same time, however, he constitutes his audience as not supporting abortion and, therefore, more innocent, but still culpable and eventually cursed.

And while abortion is a federally mandated issue, Ahn directs his Harvest Rock Church located in California to some local grievances and false comparisons. He notes, “California is the number one abortion state. It's crazy that they locked down the church, but they said abortion clinics are essential during this lockdown. COVID19. Every year we abort in this state almost 200 000 babies” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 72-74). Ahn here consistently frames those who receive abortions as they to other them. At the same time, he uses mortification with his followers, positioning them as culpable by using the word we to make them complicit to the crime. Ahn has also been the most hostile pastor within the corpus to the Lockdown mandate. However, he never blames Trump for it; instead, he focuses on California’s governor Gavin Newsom.

Next, Ahn's focus is on what he wants for America. The following statement is arguably the example of why Evangelicals support Trump the way they do, that abortion is “the most critical issue... As we our values and for life and the culture of life as that goes. Then everything else falls into place. Even the value for family hinges on this. Even just being conservative hinges on this” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 85-89). In Ahn’s mind, the flipping
of the Supreme Court 6-3 in favor of conservatives sets the groundwork for challenging and overturning Roe vs. Wade. Rhetorically lines 85-89 communicate that Ahn is planning on the next steps and building a network to overturn state and local laws once the Supreme Court strikes Roe down nationally.

With the ideological agenda set, Ahn wants to undo the abortion laws in the country; Ahn then proceeds into the body of his sermon as to why he is so opposed to abortion. From lines 108-112, Ahn describes some more of the history behind TheCall prayer movement, But starting in line 113, Ahn discusses something very interesting; he describes his involvement on January 6th:

But up to a half a million on the Washington D.C. mall on September 2nd, 2000. I know what crowd size is. When I was at the rally Trump rally on November [January] the 6th, it was much bigger than TheCall, and that was 500,000, so I know it's more than 500 thousand, maybe seven hundred thousand. Some say a million. I don’t know. There's no one that really knows because it wasn't just the crowd. It was the way we're packed in I could not move. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 113-118)

Admittedly Ahn does not describe any nefarious activity on January 6th, maybe to avoid culpability, but probably more so to control the narrative of the event. The Evangelicals that this researcher personally knew who attended January 6th maintain that it was a peaceful event. To admit that January 6th was violent would legitimate everything negative about January 6th breaking the sacrosanctity of their cause.

With the historical background covered, Ahn then contemporizes his ask by interpellating his audience into his apostolic movement. He insists:
Who would have ever known that God would lead our apostolic center to birth a pro-life movement called One Race 4 Life? And that at the main thing that we're trying to do is get people to make a pledge to vote life. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 139-142)

Ahn’s rhetoric here is constituting, as he constantly interpellates his audience into the movement's actions with words like *we* and *our* inducting them into his narrative. The theme of the narrative is that abortion is murder, and he wants his followers to support life. There is no room for disagreement or dissent on the issue.

Ahn’s next rhetorical maneuver is to address the issue that since California is a democratic majority state, some of his followers face the quandry where both candidates on the ballot are pro-abortion (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 143-148). Ahn’s response is:

I don't want to say condemnation; I’m sharing my opinion. I feel there's, again, there's a spirit of deception if you're a born-again Evangelical believer and you voted for Biden. To vote for someone who believes in abortion to the last day of the ninth month is monstrous. It's criminal. To vote for someone that, [applause] with that radical of a position on abortion to me, is deception. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 148-152)

Ahn’s demonization of abortion is a bit of a mischaracterization; he characterizes virtually all abortion laws, federal and state, as allowing for abortions up to the last minute when most, if not all, do not. Ahn also puts out a disclaimer with “I’m sharing my opinion,” and like Johnson, Ahn abandons this disclaimer hard and fast. Ahn claims that anyone who votes for pro-abortion candidates are criminals and deceived. Ahn claims a “spirit of deception” on those who voted for Biden, which is code for Demonic influence.
Oddly enough, Ahn calling people who voted for pro-abortion candidates criminals will be his mildest insult that he lobs against them in this sermon. Ahn continues to hyperbolically mischaracterize all democrats as supporting late-term abortion. Such beliefs serves as the impetus for his champaign activity: “That's why I went to the battleground states to say you may not realize… all the democrats came out with that position of late-term abortion” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 155-157). Ahn then uses lines 147-152 to explain the divine consequences for supporting abortion:

By the way, look at the states. What's going on in each one of those states? ... You reap what you sow. You want the culture of death; you could have it. God says okay, I’ll lift my hand of grace off of your state, and you could have it. It's a mess. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 160-166)

Interestingly, Ahn’s statement in lines 160-166 is that he talks about other states, but in line 72, he claims California was the leader in abortion, yet he neglects to claim God is removing His grace from his own state.

Now, sola-scriptura is an interesting confrontation point between Charismatics like Ahn, Bickle, and Johnson versus fundamentalist Christians like John McArthur, Wayne Grudem, or Justin Peters. In fundamentalist circles, sola-scriptura is antithetical to prophesy. The idea is that if God speaks through prophecy, then it is concomitant with scripture, as most prophecies form the bulk of Biblical text. Ahn continues with his point:

Solar scripture this is the foundation. This is the authority God's given. In the beginning, was the word the word was with God the word, the word and God are inseparable. Just like Jesus is the word, and he has all authorities the head of the church. He has given us the word to have authority. Be the foundation of the church. So, with that in mind, I want
to go to the most important foundation of what we believe in, a Judeo-Christian value of
God. Who created every person here in the image and likeness of him? (Ahn, 2021,
January 17th, Appendix C, line 181-186)

When Ahn says, “He [Jesus] has given us the word to have authority. Be the foundation of the
church,” the pastor is loosely paraphrasing the great commission found in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have
commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (English
Standard Version Bible, 2001)

Matthew 28:19-20 verse largely forms the foundation for Postmillennialism and Dominionism’s
conquest. Dominionism is an ideology that likes to invoke biblical, prophetic, and apostolic
authority as part of its seductive power play. Ahn interpellates his audience into the narrative
with the word *us* into action *be* (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 181-186).

To further characterize abortion as murder, Ahn’s next maneuver is to establish that all
lives are sacred and that humans reflect the essence of their creator. Ahn’s claim that humans are
made in the image of God may align with traditional Christian theology, but his point that
abortion is murder is far more debatable. Ahn begins citing Genesis 1:26 as his first proper
biblical quote roughly one third into his sermon: “let us make man in our image according to our
likeness, again plural. God created man in his own image in the image of God. He created him
male and female. He created them” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 189-191). In
stark contrast, Johnson would try to extrapolate or interpret the meaning of the text he is pulling
from by using some other text. Ahn instead chooses to hyperbolically warn his audience of the
consequences society faces when they loosely cite the biblical fact that God made man in His
image. Ahn makes his first big constitutive claim by juxtaposing belief in God to be synonymous with valuing human life: “if you don't believe in God. Then all of a sudden human life becomes nothing” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 194-195). Therefore, Ahn constitutes his audience. Only people who believe in God value human life, and all others in effect support murder.

What makes Ahn’s rhetoric constitutive is that he only offers binary choices and comparisons. Non-believers support abortion and are murderers, while only true Christians value life and oppose abortion. Would anyone choose murder over life? Ahn capitalizes on this point with a new metaphor to illustrate the value of human life:

If you see a man drowning in the river, but at the same time, your dog is drowning in the river. Who would you rescue first? ... You rescue the human being. We know that. But God says every human being matters. So, we say all lives matter here because we're all made in the image. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 212-219)

Again, Ahn only presents a binary option with one apparent correct choice. There is no middle ground, grey area, or room to disagree. Ahn’s next maneuver is to relativize abortion to what communist dictatorships have done worldwide. Ahn goes on a long tirade about communistic regimes, uses of torture, murder, and how they required their citizens to self-report or snitch on believers (in a system oddly akin to Texas anti-abortion law SB-8) and equating it with L.A.’s Mayor Garcetti COVID mandate reporting program (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 220-240). Ahn caps his anti-communist rant with “but communism, but I can’t even describe how they tortured. To make false confessions. They knew they were; they were not guilty. It was their way of eliminating the masses because they couldn't even support them financially” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 241-243).
From this point, Ahn makes an interesting contradiction to his previous sermon. Ahn continues his demonization of socialism by saying, “because socialism promises you'll get a paycheck, we'll take care of your medical well-being. Where's the money coming from? There's no amount of money to do that. Life became so cheap because of their warped demonic ideology of no god.” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 243-246). Ahn claims that poverty is an unfixable problem for a secular state in this statement. There is not enough money in existence for any state to eliminate poverty. Line 243 contradicts Ahn’s words from the last time he spoke at Harvest Rock Church, and he only seemed to preach about once a month during this time. During the preceding sermon, approximately 21 days before December 27th, Ahn claimed that the goal of all Christians is to bring Heaven on earth. Which is decidedly a Postmillennialist thought, and in doing so, Ahn went full prosperity Gospel heresy by further saying, “how many of you know there's no poverty in heaven” (Ahn, 2020, December 27th, 21:30). So the contradiction seems to be that poverty is unfixable, that there isn’t enough physical money to eliminate it, that is until Christians using their Dominionist mandate can pull Heaven down to earth, then poverty gets eliminated, at least for believers.

With that tangent out of the way, Ahn returns to his main point on abortion. Ahn’s second point of the sermon is that “life begins at conception. This is really important that you see a Biblical basis. Because they said when you know what developmental stage of the child is that a child from a fetus to a baby. No one knows” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 269-271). Curiously, Ahn’s admission that “no one knows” when a fetus becomes a baby is striking (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 271). In other words, Ahn admits that it’s a moral grey area that even the Bible does not explicitly talk about, or else he would cite it. Ahn’s position prefers caution, but his rhetoric strategically does not refer at all to any Christian
concept of Grace. Through faith and repentance, believers receive forgiveness for all of their sins. By using binary good/bad questions and only pulling quotes from the Old Testament, Ahn is constituting Christianity to be concomitant with the anti-abortion position.

Starting in line 276, Ahn changes tactics; now, he quotes from Leviticus and uses the Old Testament (not the New Testament) as the foundation for the consequences of supporting abortion. On line 276, Ahn quotes Leviticus 17:11:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood. For the life of the flesh is in the blood... When does that drop of blood begin? Three months into the pregnancy, four months, six months, no, at conception, there is blood. That's why the Bible says life begins; life is in the blood. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 276-281)

Ahn is now solidifying his theological argument for why abortion is murder; if there is blood in the womb or fetus at conception, then aborting the pregnancy at any point is murder. Ahn’s rhetoric is highly damaging and mortifying to women who have had abortions.

Ahn expands his no-compromise rhetoric on abortion, claiming a one or two-month-old fetus is, in fact, a one or two-month-old baby:

Yet we play Russian roulette and make an arbitrary decision and say, well, this person is a fetus at this stage, and now it's a baby. How crazy is that? Make sure play it safe you don't know. Only God knows, and God says life is in the blood. Why would you kill a two-month baby? Why would you go three months, baby? By the way, the viability outside the womb is because of modern science is amazing now. Three months the baby can survive. Yet that's when you're encouraged. Do it while it's safe get abortion now before it becomes more complicated. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 326-332)
Ahn’s misdirection here is poignant; if only God knows, how can He hold His followers accountable. And if His followers have Grace, then they are protected from His wrath.

With Ahn’s argument firmly established that he believes all abortions are murder. Ahn’s next step is to plot out what are the consequences of murder for the individuals who commit such acts and the societies that permit them.

Starting on line 338, Ahn begins making his most radicalizing argument against abortion, that those who commit and/or permit it are cursed. Ahn builds on his previous argument about the presence of blood; if blood is in the fetus, then abortion is murder. During lines 338-349, Ahn sets up the importance of the ten commandments in the Old Testament. In line 349, he gets to his point:

God puts [the] number six [commandment] thou shalt not murder. For your translation, it is the old King James version it says kill. Is a bad translation. They're different words for the word kill. The Hebrew, this is murder. Taking an innocent life. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 349-351)

Ahn then quickly and abruptly jumps from talking about the 10 Commandments (found in Exodus and Deuteronomy) to the book of Proverbs in the Bible with no setup, context, or chapter meaning. Ahn specifically prooftexts from Proverbs 6, to talk about the seven abominations the Lord despises, but only pulls the verses he needs while omitting important details. Ahn sets up Proverbs 6:

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him. Let me underscore the word hate, is a very strong word. Abomination is a very strong word. … I don’t want that word [hate] to be used in our house; it’s such a strong word… Yet God says there are some things I hate. One of them is an abomination. That on abominations
hands that shed innocent blood. Hands that shed innocent blood. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 354-361)

Interestingly, Proverbs 6 lists the seven things that are abominations to the Lord; however, what Ahn omits to mention is that they are all equally abominable. Proverbs 6:16-19 says:

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. (New International Version, 2011)

Ironically, Ahn’s entire sermon has been doing the last abomination “stirs up conflict in the community.” Ahn skipped reading all seven abominations because it would have undercut his argument that murder or, more accurately, the shedding of innocent blood is especially repulsive to God since lusting eyes and lying also equally made the same list.

To fully constitute his audience, Ahn needs to interpellate them into the problem. And this is where his rhetoric gets incendiary. Now Ahn is going to get specific on the consequences for murder. Starting on line 363, Ahn begins quoting from Genesis 9:6:

Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image. Here's the penalty if you shed innocent blood—life for life. Here we have the foundation of capital punishment coming into our legal system. If you shed innocent blood is so heinous to God that your blood will have to be shed. If it doesn't happen, then justice will not be met. He's a God of justice. He is a God, has the foundations of his throne is righteousness and justice. But look what he says, and this is what's really stunning here. It's not just to meet justice, but you see, if this does not go punish, it leaves
a curse on the land. The whole nation is cursed. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 363-370)

Ahn’s statement starting in line 363 is both intensely mortifying and victimizing. Firstly, victimizing is appropriate over simply inciting a grievance because if the “whole land is cursed,” as Ahn interprets things, then all suffer, making believers victims to that curse for coexisting with non-believers who permit abortion, which Ahn frames as a curse. Secondly, abortion exists in America, and Christians can either vote for pro-abortion candidates or simply permit abortion to happen within the nation and be cursed for it. Ahn is making them culpable for their complicity for living in such a society and therefore deserve God’s curse on the land. With the concept of a cursed land established, Ahn needs to set up how his followers can undo this curse. Ahn jumps to Genesis 9:33:

And no expiation or no atonement, or there's nothing, there's no sacrifice can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it. Except by the blood of the man who shed it. In other words, there's going to be a curse on the land, polluting the land talking about a curse on the land. The only way that could be done is by justice, by the man who committed murder has to be executed. There has to be capital punishment. Today we say put them in the electric chair. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 374-379)

Lines 374-379 contain extremely radicalized rhetoric. By creating a narrative that starts with framing abortion as murder, and therefore is an abomination to God. The act of abortion causes God to curse the land. Ahn uses the word land to be concomitant with the word nation, and saying that only justice, that is, capital punishment will undo the curse. Ahn’s rhetoric here is dangerous, and worse yet is a mystification of how the Bible’s Testaments work together.
Ahn is abusing the Old Testament by proof texting select passages from within it, and intentionally omitting any New Testament passages that explain how Christian Grace functions in that covenant. Christians in the New Testament are bound to a second Covenant that replaces the old. Specifically, that Jesus’ sacrifice fulfilled in perpetuity all of the legal and ceremonial requirements for salvation in the old law (*New International Version*, 2011, Matthew 5:17-20). Specifically, Jesus in the New Testament died for everyone’s sins as it says in 1 John 2:1-2, “but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, 1 John 2:1-2). Therefore, God’s wrath is satiated through Jesus, who imparts His Grace onto any repentant believer (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Matthew 2:3-9). Ahn’s emphasis that abortion is murder, which induces a curse, that can only be alleviated with a “life for life” is simply a mystification meant to incite a grievance. It would be egregious for Ahn to not talk about the New Testament context at this point, but instead, he jumps from Genesis 9 to Deuteronomy 19:13 “purge from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people. Then all will go well with you” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 384-385)

Now that Ahn has his followers wrapped up in Old Testament concepts of curses and is still ignoring the New Testament, Ahn now, in a near-full shout, asks a Constitutive question:

How many of you want things to go well with our nation? Come on. [applause] How many want all things to go well with us? as individuals. Is it possible we are reaping the consequences of 65 million babies have been aborted since 1973? Because there's been no justice for that yet. It's just been hands that have shed innocent blood over and over every 30 seconds here in this country. I believe the only way to reverse it is to reverse the
laws of the land that has legalized abortion. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 385-391)

The answer to Ahn’s question is already embedded in his narrative. A choice between a good and bad option is no choice at all. Ahn gives his followers no nuance or alternative. And with this context of curses and justice established, Ahn’s next move is to push the 2020 election lie to recontextualize it through his narrative of curses. Starting on line 392, Ahn says:

I’ve been crying out to God over the election results... I felt so strongly that President Trump had won, and I believe he has won. Okay. So, you know, but still, but still people chose to steal the election. But God is still sovereign. He still allowed it to happen. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 392-396)

Ahn pushes the concept that not only was the election stolen but that God allowed it; the conclusion Ahn is building to is that America is cursed for allowing abortion.

Ahn’s argument that America is cursed begins with line 397. To prove his point, Ahn jumps to another Old Testament text to set up another scapegoat, that is Christians who opposed President Trump. Ahn sets up his scapegoat by reading from the Book of Daniel 2, then quickly uses it as a metaphor for the election “he raises up kings and replaces kings. Ultimately, He will have the say. So, when we get the government that we now personally have, we deserve that government” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 398-400). Ahn then cements his scapegoating of other Christian groups; beginning on line 404, Ahn says:

To have pastor after pastor who’s born again saying that I’m voting for Biden… I’m talking about evangelicals… if that is the reflection of where the body of Christ is at. Then I’m saying God; we deserve what we have. Forgive us. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 404-411)
Ahn’s vitriol is now on full display for all groups; even other Christians are disparaged; Ahn gives no grace, no understanding, no quarter. All who support abortion for any reason incur a curse on the nation, and all will suffer for it.

Ahn’s next jump uses a portion of the Gettysburg address to eisegete the consequences of a cursed land like it has the authority of a Biblical text. Ahn starts on line 413, saying:

See Abraham Lincoln understood this... Fondly we hope, fervently we pray that this mighty scourge of war will speedily pass away. But if God wills that, it continues until every drop from the lash is paid for by another drawn from the sword... What was he saying? He was saying that the 650,000 soldiers that died in the Civil War were payment for the atrocity and the murderous killing of innocent life through slavery. (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 413-421)

Ahn’s rhetoric here is especially dangerous; not only has he, up to this point, made the argument that supporting abortion has cursed the land and, in so doing, victimized his followers. Now Ahn is connecting a metaphorical parallel to slavery. And in Ahn’s narrative, the curse of slavery was lifted by the blood spilled during the American Civil War. Ahn is treading dangerously close to saying that it will take another Civil War to lift the curse of abortion. Ahn continues with his Civil War analogy starting on line 424, “God is not mocked. We get the government we deserve... I’m asking if you are a believer and you voted for Biden; I believe there has to be repentance. There has to be repentance” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 424-426).

Ahn never quite explicitly goes to a direct invocation for war or violence, but arguably his listeners are implicitly primed to accept such a message if he ever chooses to go there in the future.
To recap, Ahn has established that abortion is murder, and murder brings a curse on the nation and all who live in it. Furthermore, in invoking God’s Old Testament judgments while ignoring New Testament contexts, Ahn has mortified all believers who may have voted for a Democrat; he’s victimized his audience to harbor grievances for other believers and non-believers who do support abortion. Now Ahn needs to close his narrative with instructions for his believers.

Ahn cites three things his followers need to do to reverse the curse on the land. Ahn begins by commanding his followers to pray like never before (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 439-440). Ahn then other’s President Biden by saying, in effect, that Catholics are not Christians (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 447-449). Ahn’s final step as he begins to close his sermon is to give out prescriptions for what needs to happen to heal the nation of this curse and potentially avert another Civil War.

For Ahn’s second prescriptive, he asks his followers to commit to voting for pro-life politicians in perpetuity (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 465-469). Ahn completes his second point by referring back to his pledge cards from the beginning of his sermon: “I’m going to ask you to make a pledge before you leave. That from this point on, by the grace of God. that you will not vote for anyone that's pro-abortion. That you'll find out. Do the research” (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 470-472). What makes lines 470-472 interesting is that this is the first time in a very long while, since line 313 specifically, Ahn is finally using the term Grace. However, it's not the Grace that forgives mistakes. Ahn’s invocation of the term grace exerts grace as that which prevents one from making mistakes. Ahn is using grace to mean perfection, which is the opposite of Heavenly Grace. Ahn then declares his final prescriptive to give money for a prophetic blessing from him:
And here's what I’m going to do. You know, I just feel really led to do this. that if you give a significant amount, let's say 250 or more to One Race 4 Life. I want to get your name address, and I want to get this sign; I want to sign this book and ask God to give me a prophetic promise for you. Mail that to you. I’ll take the time to do that. I’m going to ask you to be very generous. By giving to One Race 4 Life. Will you do that? (Ahn, 2021, January 17th, Appendix C, line 486-491)

Lines 486-491 are a direct Prosperity Gospel heresy. Give money to his ministry and he will bless the believer using his Apostolic anointing. Furthermore, Ahn is pay walling his blessings. He will only bless those who give over a certain amount. Ahn’s prayer is both mortification and victimage. Ahn repeatedly invokes the term grace and again uses it to mean perfection, the grace to not stray from the narrative he sets forth, lest his followers suffer further from the curse on the land.

Ché Ahn’s discourse is by far the most politically active and vitriolic. His positive to negative coding ratio for outsiders skews almost 16 times more negative than his outreaching rhetoric. Ahn’s style is loud and boisterous like Binkle. But unlike Bickle, Ahn is very sarcastic. Indeed, he uses a very whiney form of sarcasm. He frequently asks rhetorical questions that have built-in answers. Ahn is also like Bickle in that both are willing to mortify their audience overtly. The critical difference is that Ahn’s mortifications are also laced with grievances for outsiders. Bickle does this as well, but not to the extent Ahn does. No one else comes close to how Ahn victimizes his followers to potentially hate non-believers by abusing the Old Testament as a metaphor for his believer’s modern context while simultaneously ignoring the covenant of his followers. And arguably, in this sermon, Ahn has done everything he could short of drawing up a
legally binding contract to get his followers to pray before God, and Him, to never vote for a pro-abortion candidate again, lest they be cursed. Ahn’s rhetoric is dangerous and reckless.
9 LIMITATIONS

The results of the study are not without their limitations. Most prominently is the issue of the agentive turn within Christian eschatology. Does Pre- and Post-Millennialism always require human intervention to fulfill divine schemes, or was this a latter advent? And if it is a latter advent, when does the change happen, and who advances them? Finding more definitive answers could illuminate the epistemology of these eschatologies and their enthymemic agendas.

The lack of an audience examination or an affective study is also a further limitation of the study and potentially one of the biggest advances future studies can build off of this foundation. Future studies into the subject matter would greatly benefit from examining the eschatological and ideological beliefs of Evangelicals involved in Christian isolationism Christian Nationalism, and other extremist activities, be it the January 6th riot to involvement in groups like the Klu Klux Klan. Were Evangelical extremists consciously acting on their Eschatological beliefs, and do they knowingly believe in ideologies like Dominionism, Seven Mountain mandate, Kingdom Now theology, or even Christian Restorationism?

Eschatology is in and of itself a thorny topic as it is one that most Evangelical thought leaders rarely talk about it openly from the pulpit. More often than not, if a pastor is unwilling to admit their eschatological position, then it needs to be decoded from a pastor’s rhetoric. Pastors are further disinclined to admit that the community is divided over the issue, as advancing one possible interpretation, let alone explaining the range of interpretations given the cryptic nature of the source text would, more often than not, undermine a leader's spiritual authority by admitting uncertainty. Resolving such questions could further strengthen the ties between certain Evangelical eschatologies, ideologies, and extremism beyond the correlative.
The last major limitation of the study is a multidimensional question of influence. Firstly, most Evangelicals typically spend considerably more time-consuming cable news, or plugged into social media than in church-related activities. Exploring church versus media is a valid question that future studies can test which cognitive enclosure has a stronger influence on individuals. Such a study could prove very enlightening when ideological divisions form between church and media and how believers reconcile them. Another question worth exploring is the circulation of influence news media, social media, and other spiritual leaders have on pastors? Are pastor’s coming up with their sermons or are they borrowing or taking inspiration form others. All four pastors brought up giving at the start of lockdown. And Ahn and Johnson gave anti-abortion centric messages within a month of each other, but they were wildly different in tactics. Even Bickle weighed in on abortion, during this time (December to January 2021), but his sermon’s focus was on the (to use his words) “stolen election”. Secondly, is an issue that religious leaders and news outlets potentially fall victim conforming to audience expectations to make their discourses more seductive, and the acceptable to the norms of that community. Are pastors forming and influencing the beliefs of their followers, or are they giving their audiences what they want to hear? Future studies can look at the times pastors have been forced to walk back their inflammatory rhetoric out of fear of losing their audience. If so, what were the conditions that precipitated such accountability. Understanding the boundaries of Evangelical follower and leader relationships and how they influence each other would be very interesting.
10 CONCLUSION

Dominionism is an ideology that places human agency at the forefront of fulfilling certain forms of Millennialist eschatologies. Without Millennialism, Dominionism has no agenda or objective to achieve. Without a strategy like Dominionism, Millennialism lacks a coherent plan for achieving its objectives. January 6th, 2020, in many ways altered America’s perception of what white militant Christianity can look like. Much like September 11th, 2001, redefined the exigent need to understand radicalized religious extremism; this time around, the ideology at play is far more domestic. Be it Fundamental Christian Restorationism or Charismatic Dominionism, both are decidedly American and xenophobic. And again, it is worth stressing that a wide gap exists between radicalized beliefs and radicalized action. Virtually all the radicalization scholars recognize that violent actors will only ever consist of a fringe minority of the population. Considering the size of that fringe when it overwhelmed 1,600 capitol police, as thousands of Americans looked on chanting their support, is a disturbing thought.

As pluralistic liberal democracies continue to decline, populism appears to persist in society for a time yet. It falls to researchers to find ways to uncover the ideologies that permit means-ends schemas that foster cognitive enclosures and dehumanizing rhetoric and feelings of grievance that could incentivize violence in a quest for significance. This paper submits but one more avenue to this research a correlation between radicalization and Millennialism and Dominionism.

This paper offers two possible frameworks for examining radicalization. First is the radicalization terminology which helps researchers better understand these dimensions: grievances (how is a person angry), othering (who is the person angry with), cognitive enclosures (what communities share this anger), existential crisis (what problem causes a lack of meaning),
and quest for significance (what action or actions solve create, or validates ultimate meaning). As more steps become identifiable, more concern and scrutiny should be given. The radicalization terms can function as identifiable markers for how ideological based social movements move a person into a socialized radicalized posture primed for action.

Meanwhile, Constitutive rhetoric serves as a deeper dive into how the thought leaders persuade their followers, but the drawback is that it requires more work and a deep understanding of the social codes at play to work reliably. Ideology requires an understanding of the end goals, the ultimate meaning that any practitioner could hope to gain from the following. Understanding of the ultimate meanings, and the rewards that come with them form the basis of the ideologies seductive appeal. Likewise, any utopian promises should be indicative of potential false promises.

Understanding how eisegetical metaphors work can help uncover how meanings are getting infused and altered when texts and contexts are mixed. Exegesis of a holy text entails examining the context: who wrote the text, to whom was the text originally intended, when was the text written, what were the social conditions under which it was written. Additionally, a passage’s meaning is gleaned from understanding the thematic point of the book, chapter, and or passage can help uncover what the original meaning was. Knowing the original meaning of the source text, should simultaneously illuminate what the rhetor shifted the meaning to using eisegesis. Mapping the eisegetical shift would further unpack the ideological agenda at play.

Identification terms are also very important to pay attention to when a narrative is employed on an audience. Constitutive terms, whether pronouns (I, you, we, us) or terms of social identification (Ex: Athenian, Christian, Suburban, etc.) help interpellate audiences into the narrative. Understanding that a narrative prefigures a solution to a problem is an important
reminder to look at what other choices are being redacted from the follower. In addition, they/them pronouns are fast ways to track who is getting othered as the enemy in the narrative. A more complete understanding of othering language will require decoding culturally specific hyperbolic labels if they are being applied to outsiders.

Mortification and victimage should also serve as important touch points for some of the most potent manipulation tactics leaders can use when challenges to the ideology arise. Does a leader use the setback to guilt or mortify their audience back into action? Or do they frame their followers as victims of outsiders to incite lasting grievances? Both can be very damaging to the follower.

To recap, the research appears to correlate that Millennialism and Dominionism rhetoric synergize with grievances and negativity towards non-believers, generally as one increases so does the other. And Dominionism specifically seems to propel these pastors into the political foray to influence policy in their favor. Pastors who place less emphasis on Millennialism in their sermons appears to correlate to a more humanizing rhetoric towards outsiders, less talk about punishments and curses, and a reluctance to engage with secular politics, which reduces the need for activism and significance quests.

Governments on the most basic level, would do well to meet the needs of their populations. People have a safe shelter, food, and a hope for enacting a better tomorrow. Ensuring these things can help defang the tangible grievances a demographic may feel. It falls to society and the people who find themselves in the tangential orbits of friends and loved ones descending into radicalized isolation to give these people safe havens to interact with, and out of these radical cul-de-sacs, if possible. It will be a difficult task to engage with faulty ideologies that may induce grievances. For believers, it will mean a return to Biblical literacy, sound
exegesis, and knowing the meaning in God's word, not just listening to and blindly accepting without critical thought the eisegetical twistings of trusted authority figures. And while these things are good, there is something still more powerful we could do.

The pathway to deradicalizing a culture, will be a complicated and multimodal process. As such there will be things that governments, businesses, communities, and individuals need to do to counter radicalizing ideologies. Ideologies hidden behind constitutive rhetorics are notoriously difficult to combat with exegetical facts due to their reliance on narratives, utopian myths, and metaphors – that satiate non-tangible felt desires within an individual through affirmation, guilt, purpose, and desire. Put another way, ideology operates on beliefs that generate strong feelings. Most critically, is Weaver’s emphasis is that “the second level is that of beliefs, convictions, theories, laws, generalizations, or concepts that order the world effects.” (Weaver as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 160). Put succinctly, beliefs give order to facts, the latter is subservient to the former.

However, therein lies the solution, if emotions or affect form the irresistibly seductive death grip of a radicalized, ideological-laced, constitutive rhetoric, then those same functions are the keys to uncoiling it. Not with hate, but with empathy, as Margaret Wetherell (2019) wrote that “positive emotion is organised with the making of meaning and identity” to give voice to the voice-less, disenfranchised, and or victim (p. 6). When violence and terror strikes, or micro-aggressions, and discrimination happens: it falls to governments, institutions, businesses, media platforms, search algorithms, communities, and individuals to give the disenfranchised, specifically the people they don’t identify with, a platform to air their hurts emotionally. The image of a person in pain is a powerful affective communicator according to Hariman, and Lucaites, (2001) who write that “we believe that visual practices have long been important yet
undervalued constituents of democratic culture precisely because they are media for emotional representation that lead to performative identification rather than rational deliberation” (p. 19). Giving the victim a platform and a voice affectively rehumanizes them (Wetherell, 2019, p. 5). And sending that voice out to penetrate every cloistered community, echo chamber, and cognitive enclosure could arguably do more than any other program to combat an ideological radicalization that is not fueled by tangible grievances like a lack of, food, shelter, security, and that create hope for a better tomorrow.

The key then from a policy or institutional standpoint is to disrupt the cognitive enclosure with counter affective messages that rehumanize the objects of their aggression, the people that they hate. Or as Larson (2018) theorized when studying ways to combat cultural mistrust of rape victims, “communicating through visceral tactics exposes an orientation to violence felt within the body’s deep insides – at the level of the body’s organs – and instills a bodily intensity in audiences, which offers an alternative framework for understanding rape.” (p. 127). Likewise, Charland (1987) also appears to agree with this position by writing that:

various contradictory subject positions can simultaneously exist within a culture: we can live within many texts. These contradictions place a strain upon identification with a given subject position and render possible a subject's rearticulation. Successful new constitutive rhetorics offer new subject positions that resolve, or at least contain, experienced contradictions. They serve to overcome or define away the recalcitrance the world presents by providing the subject with new perspectives and motives. (p.142)

In American media there is a strong trend when tragedy strikes to give authority figures the main platforms to recontextualize the meaning of the event constructively. It works well when its Jacinda Ardern as in the case of the Christchurch shooter (Wetherell, 2019, p. 5). It works less
well, when it’s a populist politician. Both media platforms and responsible Democratic leaders need to habitually share their platforms with the victims of violence and discrimination, as well as the protestors who constructively rail against the systemic faults in society. When real victims are hurting, everyone should all listen.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Transcript of NOW with Mike Bickle, by Mike Bickle, February 3, 2021.
Well, I want to welcome you to another episode of Now with Mike Bickle. I really appreciate these short little sessions, we aim at about 25, 30 minutes. And I like to highlight a theme that I believe the holy spirit wants emphasized in the body of Christ, to equip us for the hour, the unique time frame we're living in. And I say this every episode, probably, that in the generation the Lord returns the escalating darkness, many aspects of that. But the escalating release of the glory of God. the two of them are increasing in the same generation to an all-time high. Creating very unique dynamics that have never been navigated before in human history. Well, in this episode, I want to look at a very important well-known passage in Matthew chapter 25. so, I want to encourage you to open your bibles Matthew chapter 25. and I typically will have teaching notes most of you that are familiar with my ministry, for many years I give teaching notes. And you can go to Mikebickle.org where my library, my teaching library is there, and my notes are there under the now with Mike Bickle and several other categories of teaching as well. Well, Matthew 25, I'm looking at my notes. You can get them if you want to follow along with it.

The context of Matthew 25, verse one actually begins in Matthew 24, verse one. And the reason I say that because I've taught on Matthew 25 it's the it's the famous passage of getting oil, the oil of intimacy. It's so well-known everybody knows it. They go, oh yeah, I got it, okay, Matthew 25. I've taught on this passage for 40 years, but for most of those years, I began Matthew 25 verse 1 in Matthew 25 1. I wasn't even thinking that often well. Actually, for years I never put it together. It's in the middle of a conversation in Matthew 25 verse 1, is in the middle of a teaching that begins in Matthew 24.

And if you don't understand or you don't grasp the Matthew 24 message, you lose some of the urgency of what this exhortation is about, the need to prioritize, getting oil, the oil of intimacy in our relationship with the Lord. Well, Matthew 24. let's go back for just a minute. I'm not going to give a big teaching on it, but uh, Matthew 24. most of you are aware it is the passage where Jesus gives the most details about the generation that he returns. Matthew 24 is the famous end time chapter. Although Jesus taught on the end times, recorded in other chapters, but that's the big one Matthew 24. and mostly Matthew 24 gives details of the negative relational dynamics and the negative events. There's a little bit of positive, a couple real big positives, but most of the chapter is the negative. Negative relational dynamics that are happening in the generation the Lord returns, and then some negative events and trends. And in the context of those negatives, Matthew 24 verse 14 is the great harvest. The gospel of the kingdom goes to every nation on the earth in power. Whoa. I mean, now, that's a positive one. That is like fantastic, but it's interesting that the kingdom opportunity of the greatest revival in history happens in context to these intense negative relational dynamics happening in the culture. Even in the church, not all the church, but part of the church is buying into the negative relational dynamics, and these disturbing events happening and the culture and trends...

So, Matthew 24, let's go back for just a second; I have here on the notes verse 9 to 14. and I'm not going to break this down. Most of you that are tracking with me in these episodes you're very familiar with these passages. But he's talking about, verse 10, people offended and betraying one another. Verse 11, false prophets. Verse 12, lawlessness and the culture abounding, the need for endurance. Like this doesn't sound very encouraging, but then verse 14, this great light of hope the gospel goes to every nation in power.
Right now, there's about 200 nations in the earth. Can you imagine there being a spirit of revival released in every single one of those nations? I mean, that is a glorious high point of Matthew 24. Of course, the ultimate high point is verse 29 to 31, when Jesus comes and every I see him. I mean, that's the ultimate high point. But most of the chapter is negative. Negative relational conflicts, betrayal, offense, lawlessness, people standing against each other. Now this betrayal culture. Now, by the way, betrayal, you realize, isn't a stranger accusing you, even in a false way horrible things. Betrayal means there's a previous relationship that's important that's being betrayed.

You know, you can have a lot of folks on social media, or wherever, say negative things about you, but if they don't know you. You know. You don't like it. But it's like, oh well, but when you have a friend or family member where there's a previous relationship, and they do it, that's called betrayal. Betrayal's far more stinging than just accusation by itself. Well, in the midst of this betrayal and accusation, it's been all these negative things. The gospel goes forth, great kingdom opportunity.

Its paragraph B in my notes, that's when Jesus says, right in the middle of his sermon, Matthew 24 and 25 is one message, right in the middle he goes, oh, I want you to know something. And I'll give you the take away, which you've already surmised it already. he says you need to get oil when that negativity is increasing, and the kingdom opportunity and power is increasing. It is a huge mistake to get too busy. And then neglect the oil of intimacy. It will be common for believers to do that. Now not all believers are going to do it. Because there's a great revival and a transformation of the end-time church, as a prepared bride, millions are staying on the right path, and they're getting oil. But a lot of others who start off even good in that hour of conflict. That hour is some years, by the way. They drift away from their intimacy.

And Jesus's point here in Matthew 25 is it's more common, and the tendency is greater than you might think. So, he starts Matthew 25 verse 1. he says then that's a keyword. Then, I'm reading from the new King James. The kingdom of heaven shall be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Now there's four points I want to make in this one verse here. And I've got them all on the teaching notes, but I'll be brief. Right here. First of all, he says then, of course, the question is when is then? Well, if you were there that afternoon. that Tuesday afternoon. Jesus dies on Friday, that Tuesday afternoon. You knew he was right in the middle of a message. And he goes then, in the context of the Matthew 24, escalating negativity. And then Matthew 24, gospel revival going to the nation's billion soul harvest. Then that is the context he's talking about. Now, of course, Matthew 25 has been relevant for 2000 years, but it has a particular urgency and relevancy in the hour when the intensity, good and bad, is increasing.

Then, that's the first point I wanted to make. He says the kingdom of God will be like this. This is how it will function. This is a description of it. It will be like ten virgins who took their lamps to go meet the bridegroom. So, it starts off well. Now the ten virgins in the New Testament born-again believers are described because of the greatness of the gift of righteousness and the free salvation. Paul says it the clearest in 2nd Corinthians 11 verse 2, we are like pure virgins before the Lord. I don't care how messed up your life is, how perverse, how angry, how defiled, how dirty, the power of the gift of righteousness that Jesus gives us, of his heart of mercy, and his goodness cleanses us, and we're all like pure virgins. I mean that we should just stop and talk on that point the rest
of the session this episode. But I’m not going to, but that's a big one. Like whoa. I want to
point out here, all 10 of these ministries are born-again believers; they're virgins before
the Lord, they're going strong.

So far, so good. They have lamps, it says in verse 1. lamps in the New Testament
clearly speaks of ministries. Shining light to others. Now that lamp, you might be shining
light to ones and twos. That light might be mostly to your family, or your neighborhood.
or to your homeschooling children and the group that meets with them. It could be to the
soccer league. That lamp might be a small number. Maybe a big number, but it's every
minister, every person has a lamp, a ministry assignment, and they're shining to ones and
twos, tens and twenties, hundreds, or thousands, it doesn't matter the size. Your shining is
the point. You're bringing the truth of Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom to other
people, believers, and unbelievers. You're strengthening believers, and you're winning
new believers to the kingdom.

So again, so far, so good, they're all born again, they're like virgins before the
Lord, made clean, and their lamps are shining. Like wow. How could it get better? Well,
it gets better, and they go out to meet the bridegroom. Now that's a very big statement.
Because Jesus, the bridegroom god. he is the holy spirit, is going to reveal that aspect of
his identity, and the generation he returns… way beyond any time in history. Now Jesus
has always been a bridegroom, king; I like to say he's a king with power, but a
bridegroom with desire for relationship. In the gospels Matthew chapter 9 particularly,
and other places. Jesus identifies himself as the bridegroom, so he doesn't begin to be the
bridegroom at the end of the age. He has been the bridegroom since back then.

The Old Testament talks about the God of Israel. Even the messiah, being a
bridegroom god. So, it's biblical; it's recorded in the word of God, it's solid, it's sure, it's a
long-term truth. It's not a new idea. But since Jesus's generation, the first generation, for 2
000 years, the holy spirit has not emphasized that part of his identity. For 2,000 years,
99.9% of the church, [chuckles] I don't know the real number, of course. Has seen Jesus
as king, savior, maybe healer, shepherd, provider, protector, many of these glorious facets
of his function and identity. But very few in history have seen his identities of
bridegroom. As a king, a savior, a healer, yes, but not bridegroom. He's always been one,
but the spirit has not universally emphasized that aspect of him. But we find out,
particularly in revelation 22. the end-time church is in the identity of a cherished bride.
Wow. Well, the church only sees herself as a cherished bride when she sees her leader,
her king, as a bridegroom. When we see him different, we see ourselves different?

So, there's one generation in history where the holy spirit, across the planet, is
going to shine the light in emphasis on this aspect of Jesus's identity, a bridegroom. And
the corresponding spiritual identity of the church, a cherished bride, the spirit, and the
bride say come. Never in history was the church crying out in a bridal identity from the
understanding of the saints. I mean, even 20, 30 years ago, you hardly ever heard it
mentioned. a hundred years ago, I’ve done a lot of research on teaching on the bride of
Christ, almost not mentioned in history. A little bit by this one guy, a little bit, every now
and then someone rises up in history that emphasized it. Like Bernard of Clairvaux,
someone like that. The 1200s, very few have ever even hardly mentioned it.

So, when Jesus says the kingdom will be like born-again believers, with lamps
that are burning and they're encountering the bridegroom. Clearly, that's the end-time
generation. It's never happened before. The last five or ten years, a little bit longer, this
bridal paradigm, this bridegroom revelation of Jesus, our king. Bridegroom king is growing so fast. Still, many don't see it yet. But the numbers millions are getting it. It's in worship songs; it's in sermons, it's in blogs, it's in media presentations, I mean, yes. But the holy spirit could whisper and say you've only seen the beginning. I'm gonna show him as a beautiful bridegroom king to the earth.

Well, anyway, it starts off great. In the midst of the end-time conflict, when the gospel the kingdom's going to the nations, the born-again believers he picks 10 of them. Jesus does ten ministries. Their lights are shining; they're encountering the bridegroom; it couldn't be better; it's going great. The nations are hearing. Ah. Well, let's go to roman numeral 2 of the notes.

Verse 2 of Matthew 25. he says wait. something has developed, a new development, a negative development; these ten ministries, of course, representing millions of ministries. Half of them only continued in a spirit of wisdom. The other half, sincere born-again ministries, with functioning lamps, good ministries they, have drifted into what Jesus called being foolish. Only half of them stayed the course of what Jesus called wise. Like ewe. and I’m not making a big point of 50% or 50%, I don't know what the percent is, but a big number, continuing wisdom, and a big number drift from wisdom. I’m talking about anointed ministries who are encountering the bridegroom. I mean, these are ten ministries that, they either went to the bridegroom conference, or they were the teachers or the worship leaders, and or the singers. I mean, they were all involved. But something happens, and there's a shift, and they get busy. These five that are drifting, Jesus calls foolish. And they drift away from the bridegroom connection.

Now the problem with this is that, you know, the folks that I interact with and a number of you that are the follow these episodes. We are familiar with the language of the bridegroom, and we're familiar with this next negative point I’m going to say. But I want to highlight it again. that the language it's so easy for just become rhetoric. That we all got it, you know. He loves us even in our weakness, he delights in me, he's the beautiful bridegroom, we can say those phrases, and it's good to say the phrases. But it's easy to mistake the ability to say the phrases and to say them often with interacting with reality from the heart level with him in that way. The language becomes what we have confidence in, and we can drift away from the actual interaction.

Now the reason I know this because I’ve done it, and I know how easy it happens easy. And Jesus knew that, so he's not giving like a railing rebuke. He's giving a shepherd's warning, an alert. He's giving a bridegroom, passionate like, my beloved, don't drift from my heart, in that day. that is the most critical hour of history, because with all the negative things escalating you won't be able to stay the course right. If you're not interacting with me, the negative will engulf your thinking and your emotions. The negative will grow in you unless you've got a counterbalancing reality. A counter reality that's resisting that negative growing in you called encountering the bridegroom god. And I want to anoint my servants to bring the gospel to the nations, but I want the new believers the billion-soul harvest, is what has commonly been called recently. I think it's over a billion, but Jesus wants them brought into the bridegroom reality. He wants people that are alive in the message. To bring the new ones into it. So, Jesus as a jealous bridegroom. Jealousy might sound negative, but I mean a passionate, a committed, like hey... bring them into the message, and if you drift from, how can you do it? Because
this is not a message, you can be an echo; you have to be a voice, not an echo; it has to resonate in your being in order to communicate it to others.

Now we don't have to be that deep in it, but it's got to be something we're contending for in our private life, on an ongoing way. Not something we were contending for two years ago; five years ago, we taught that seminar on it we've moved on. When I cease to contend for this at the heart level in my private life, my authority to impart it to others goes down a little bit. It's not like we're earning the authority. It's that this is such a real and vibrant reality; it can't be imparted if it's not real in the vessel, wanting to impart it.

Well, anyway, he goes on Matthew 25, verse 3 and 4. and he breaks down he defines what being wise is and what being foolish is. Now at first glance, and again you all know this passage so well, half of you listening to this episode; you've taught it before, or you've sang it, or you put it on your social media, so I mean I'm talking to the right group. But if you're like me, we got to be double alert, because we can think, because we say it that we live it. And it's tricky. It's easy to drift from it. I've already made that point over and over, but verse three and four seems even a little simplistic. He says the foolish, they took their lamps, but they took no oil. But the wise they took their oils, and then their laps say okay… break that down.

Verse three, the foolish, he defines not being wicked, not evil, not repulsive, not how dare you, nothing like that. But I feel, I hear longing in his heart. He goes, you started off with a ministry flowing out of encountering me as a bridegroom. A few years have gone by the great revival is exploding. The kingdom opportunities opened up so many of them that you gave yourself, you gave your ministry, such a high priority that you did not prioritize getting oil in your heart. In your intimacy with me.

Look at verse three again, the foolish they took their lamps, not the oil. They prioritized their ministry, not the oil of intimacy heart connect. It's subtle, but it's a very important statement Jesus is making here. Beloved, when the revival, which in the global sense, it's already emerging, has been for some years. There are more people coming to the Lord than any hour of human history right now. not so much in the western world but around the nations in Asia, and Africa, and Latin America. Many are coming to the Lord in many places. But it's going to be global. When those increased opportunities come, a lot of folks not paying attention to this incredible exhortation of Jesus. Incredibly important one and they're going to end up over prioritizing ministry because the opportunity is so many of them. And they'll think, well, I’m doing it for the kingdom, I’m doing it for love. I’m doing it, I’m doing it, I’m trying to be helpful, and their hearts will get smaller and smaller. While their ministry footprint is maybe getting bigger and bigger. But there's something bad happening sooner or later.

Because I’m gonna say this negatively. Instead of just because there, there's a sincerity in it. But it's called when we're networking our ministry—and putting most of our time and seeing our ministry footprint, our sphere of influence increase whether it's a kingdom marketplace assignment. Whether it's a bible study assignment. Whether it's a media missionary assignment. It doesn't matter what kingdom assignment. When our growing our footprint, our influence becomes a bigger priority than growing our heart intimacy encounter. That's what Jesus calls foolish. Again, he's not saying you're wicked; he's not saying you're evil; he's not like I’m done with you.
He's saying this is the essence of a foolish mindset. Because what happens, the
goals are the opposite. And then give a few applications. And I’m not gonna go a whole lot further than
even these couple verses just right here. Even though my notes I have a little bit more on it. And on my website at Mikebeckle.org, I’ve got probably 10 or 15 teachings on this. all of them a bit different, emphasizing different aspects. With handouts and videos and all that stuff. And my copyright is the right to copy; you can have it. You can put your name on it. I always joke and say put your mother's name on it; you can do anything with it you want; as far as I’m concerned, just get the message out.

But here it says verse 4, the wise notice, they took oil first that's the priority, and their ministry lamps are second. so, verse 3 foolish, ministry first, no oil. Wise, oil is first priority, ministry still there still going hard, but it's second. And it takes an intentional, regular, not every day, but regular, decision to realign. For our ministry priority to be second in our intimacy, cultivating intimacy, to be first. Now it's not automatic to keep that focus. Matter of fact, it's the tendency, is to go in the foolish direction. That's why Jesus gave this very, very important teaching.

Now, how do I know when I’ve allowed my ministry to have the higher priority in my inner life than my ministry. Here’s how I know, and I’m sad to say, but I know because I’ve done it a number of times. I’m not proud of that, but I know what I’m talking about on this subject. In our ministry, we have kingdom opportunities, prophetic promises, open doors, new relationships, networking, exciting meetings, even twos, and three meetings. They don't have to be big ones. we feel as presence; it's happening. So, we have kingdom opportunities; then we have on the other side opposition pressures setbacks. The money didn't come through; the people didn't respond, I got betrayed by a friend in the kingdom. I got accused, I didn't feel his presence, you know there's 20 things you could put on the negative. What I am talking to the Lord in my personal conversation more about my kingdom opportunities or my kingdom setbacks. My pressures. More than my interaction with him as a king, a bridegroom king. When I talk to him less about who he is to me, and my adoration and my desire to see him more clearly. To love him more dearly, to give myself to him.

When that conversation is second, I want to tell you, you flip the order, and we're in verse three. We're on the pathway of the foolish virgins. We know the bridegroom message, we preach it, we sing it, we write it, we capture it, in media, we blog it, but we're not interacting with it. Because it's now become a ministry opportunity to increase our footprint. The Lord says that's good to do that but make it second. Because the times are gonna get bad, and the betrayal and the accusation, and the lawlessness, and the propensity to get offended, and to get fearful. And to get just tweaked, tweaked is a soft word. Just, ughhhhhhh. Is big. You're going to need that oil to protect your heart. You're going to need that oil to line back up.

Now, why is it called foolish? Because I’ll tell you my story, okay, and then you can apply it to yourself. Here's why it's foolish, is that you get away from the kingdom priority, and our ministry is first opportunities and pressures. That's what we talk to God most about. And the interaction becomes second. and that can happen for a month, or two, or three in my experience. And I don't even know it. And I am so grateful to the Lord. And it's not like I’m clocking it, like okay, it's been a month, or two, or three. And the order got reversed in a negative sense. And the holy spirit reminds me, hey, line back
up. I go, oh my goodness, I did it again. will I ever not do this? and the answer is, the
holy spirit if you keep talking to me, I’ll keep helping you realign. You'll never, on your
own, pull this off. Okay, good to know.

Now, when you get into that, two, three months, and it's a little backwards, and so
far, it's not so bad. But then it becomes two or three years. Here's what the foolishness is.
Here's the foolish it doesn't seem wise anymore to be radically dedicated. It used to be,
now we're buying into foolish mindsets, like, yeah, you know, I’ve been going hard, and
I've seen the power like I thought. And people aren't receiving me like I thought, and it
was going harder than I thought, that it's called foolish. that mindset is what it's talking
about. But it takes a little while before that mindset.

You know here I am in the midst of a difficult situation. Do I persevere, do I resist
the temptation, do I bless the enemies? Do I overcome the setback? or do I just go? I
don't know; I don't know if I can take it anymore? That's folly speaking. And that's all
over the body of Christ. That's people that were even really connected to the bridegroom
reality, but a few months went by, and they didn't catch it. Now a couple years went by.
and now a new mindset sets in, and new emotions are returning, those negative emotions
that they had some victory over for a while and those negative mindsets. They had
victory over, they're setting back in. that's the foolishness he's talking about. because then
it goes another two, or three years, bad things happen on that trajectory.

Now the good news is. If we ask the holy spirit, and this is what I’ve done over
the years, like holy spirit, I’m not good at staying focused; I’m not good at this. If you
will remind me and help me, I’ll sign back up. I’ll admit it; I won't make up excuses; I’ll
say yes, I’m off. Now here's the I don't know if this is good or bad encouraging or
discouraging. But for 40 years, probably a little bit more than 40 years. Probably, at least
40 years, I’ve been teaching on Matthew 25. so I know better. That's the point, but I have
drifted. I don't know if it's two or three times a year, once or twice a year. It's not like
I’m, you know, putting it on the calendar or measuring it. But when I look back over the
years, I go, wow, does it happen? I know better. I say it all the time, not to do it. But I
still drift, and the holy spirit is so gracious, he's saying yeah, but if you'll keep returning.
You know it's a couple weeks later, a couple months later, whatever. and there's not that
much lost in a short amount of time; it's when it becomes a couple years later that the
foolish mindset sets in. Doesn't seem worth it anymore. Like it used to. doesn't seem;
I’m not energized like I used to be; that's the foolish.

Now the wise. Now I think that we could be considered in the Lord's generous;
he's so generous, his evaluations are so kind. I think we could have those drifts moments,
weeks, or months, and we recover. and the Lord, over the years, looks down and says
yeah, you're staying in the path of the wise. You know well, Lord, through the editing
process of grace, you're very generous. Now here's how you know you're staying in the in
the wise. Because it still seems wise to you to be radically committed or to try to be. It
still seems wise to you to contend for the full breakthrough. It still seems wise to you to
bless your enemies and not cave in to your accusers. It still seems wise to you to keep
going when the resources are not like you thought; the delays that's the wisdom. It's not
that your track record of staying connected every day; all day is that deep and great. But
the wise mindset stayed intact. I recovered you before you lost it. Whoa.

Well, I have on the notes here the oil symbolizes the ministry of the holy spirit. I
have five different ways it tenderizes us it, illuminates us, etc., then look at top of page
That in verse five, it says the bridegroom delayed. Now nobody back when Jesus taught this thought it would be 2,000 years. Oh my, and they all slept. The wise and the foolish slept, so sleeping in this parable is not negative. You know, sleeping in some parable means spiritual dullness. But here it doesn't. It means that they're living in context to the natural processes, and the routine, and the mundanes of life. You know, there's natural processes, we sleep, we rest, we overwork, we refresh our strength, he says in the midst of the natural processes. At midnight, a cry was heard, the midnight hour of human history. I believe we're in that beginning of the midnight hour. I mean the midnight hours right before the Lord returns. And it's not so far out; in the my mind, an hour, a cry has heard. The Lord's gonna release a forerunner cry to the nations. and you can hear that cry emerging in the land. It's not real strong, but it's getting stronger and stronger. All over the earth, that cry is going forth. Here's the cry; it's a three threefold message.

The bridegroom is coming. Well, first, he has a bridegroom. He's more than a king with power. He's a bridegroom with desire. And he wants intimate heart connect; he's coming after your heart. He's a bridegroom. That's message one. Again, that's in 2,000 years of church history that's a new emphasis of the spirit. Revelation 22 we already quoted it, when the spirit and the bride say come. When the church in the end times is in her bridal identity, so that's point one the voice at midnight, a bridegroom.

Number two, he's coming! He's about to intervene into human history and shift everything. The coming will shift everything; it will be the culmination of the most unique time frame of history of escalating darkness and escalating power revival. He is stepping into human history to shift everything. Nothing like it. Greatest moment of history. It's worth everything to be ready and connected. He is coming! This is not a… well, some people [say] I’m not really into that. Well, it doesn't matter who's into it; he's coming. and it will shift everything. Big message, I’m not going to go on that. More on that in the third part of the message. First, he is a bridegroom. That's his personality and his nature. Secondly, he's coming, and everything is going to shift. And it's going to be worth the trouble you put to stay connected in terms of the flesh.

Number three message go out to meet him. Exert the energy. Put in the effort to meet him, to interact with him, to recover that. To stay with that. Because the forces of trouble are gonna want to steal the narrative of our emotions and make our mind and emotions fearful, so preoccupied with the negative. No. make it first. About meeting him. Then we will be sustained in our ability to have a vibrant spirit. We'll be able to thrive spiritually when the negativity comes. Well, all the virgins they rose, they said OKAY, and the wise found out they had oil. And they were meeting him, they're doing it, but the foodless said in verse 8. hey, in this transitional hour, we found out something we didn't know; we don't have any oil. You know, the last few years, we were shining our lamp so big, our heart, the oil of intimacy of our heart, went way down, and we didn't even notice it. We were so excited about our ministry, the opportunities, it's overly burdened by the pressures and the pushbacks. that we forgot about interacting. Hey, we don't have any oil. Our lamps are going out. That's a huge statement, in essence. I’m going to give the application of this. Jesus is saying… Jesus is making a statement that there's going to be ministry lamps that are going out. Ministry lamps all around the earth are going to be going out. People even that had big ministries
are going to lose some of their influence. Lamps are going out. Even in this hour of
history.

Paragraph D verse 9. verse 8, they go hey would you give us… the foolish ones
go, you know we know this intimacy message, we lived in it for years we got a little
carried away for the last few years. Would you give us your oil? In verse 9. the wise says
no, it doesn't work that way. They acknowledge their limitation; they go, I can't give you
my history in God. I can't lay hands on you and give you my intimacy history with God.
It doesn't work that way. I can't impart spiritual preparation by laying out of hands.
You've got to get it yourself by interacting with him. That's the only way it comes. So,
they actually say no. we can't give you our intimacy, but rather go buy it yourself.

And buy it well that sounds like we're earning it. And I'm going to bring this to an
end with this. Jesus actually comments on this in revelation 3:18 he goes, go, buy gold
refined by fire; here in Matthew 25, go by buy oil. It doesn't mean earn it. It means invest
yourself in a costly way, to be in the god-ordained process of acquiring it. It's costly, is
the point. Invest yourself! and the foolish go, no lay hands on us, at the conference, and
just give us your oil. he goes it doesn't, oil isn't transferred that way. I mean, you can lay
hands and bless somebody and kind of give them a little jump start. But you can't impart
your spiritual history or your preparation to another person.

Well, this is the hour for us to buy oil. I don't want to wait till my lamp goes out
then buy oil. I want us to wait till it doesn't seem wise anymore depressing to the Lord.
Yeah, I've lost my way. You, know, a couple months here and there at a time. Sometimes
a couple times a year, for years. But he helps keep recovering me. Thank you, Lord, for
real. I don't have the ability to keep this thing straight if you don't interrupt. But beloved,
many of you know the story; he will intervene and interrupt us. And he will whisper to us
right now. He's whispering to some of you, go invest yourself in a costly way, in the god-
ordained means of a getting oil. And that boils down talking to the Lord. Those things we
know to do. Open our bible, making time for personal conversation, talking to him at the
heart level, and making our ministry problems and opportunities secondary, and
acquiring oil primary.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I'm asking you to give your beloved people all over,
Lord, a courage for a new beginning. It's time yet again to go get oil. And I ask you that
you would inspire and give confidence that this is doable, even for weak and broken
people like us. in the name of Jesus, Amen, and amen.
Appendix B

Man, what an amazing selection of songs. I was about to get lost on that blessing song; that song was just written; by the way, if you don't know it, Steve, Steve Furtick, and Kari Jobe and the husband and the bunch. Yeah, Cody and bunch of them just wrote that, which is like a prescription God wrote. You know, a couple of weeks ago, for what's going on right now and the blessings beat curses.

In the, in the Bible, people would suffer with a curse to the third and fourth generation, but blessings go to the thousandth generation because it's superior in every way. And it's critical that we adjust our thinking, our anticipation or expectation our prayers, or everything according to the lifestyle of heaven. The way God thinks, the way he lives, and he's not intimidated about anything.

If you know, decide who's going to shape your thinking. Decide, hurry. If you have more input from the media than you do from the Word of God, your depression is your responsibility. Your discouragement your heaviness of heart is self-inflicted. Turn the thing off and turn this thing on [holds up the Bible].

I'm serious; just adjust why because we've been called to be an influence in the midst of difficulty and calamity. Doesn't matter what the situation is; we are always there to be not the we are not the answer, but we usher in the answer through the wonderful, wonderful message of the gospel. And this is the privilege that we have as believers.

An illustration I've been using for the last several years seems to be even more fitting than it has been in recent times. And that is what you see in scriptures; you see that Israel in the wilderness when it was in the heat of the day, God would manifest as a cloud covering the shelter to bring coolness. In the cold of the night, he was there as a pillar of fire. He shows up opposite to his surroundings. So how does he show up in a virus in a pandemic? He shows up as the solution. The redemptive solution to bring healing to people's bodies.

I agree completely with what ------ ----- in prayer is this is supposed to be the ignition point. The ignition point for a massive healing revival unlike the world has ever seen. I believe eclipsing what took place in the 50s which was the greatest thing I believe the world had ever seen. The things that took place in that particular period of time, I remember talking to one of the revivalists, a man who was alive during that era, to see what God was doing. And he told me at one time, there would be up to 350 revival tents scattered all across the nation with miracles taking place unlike anything had been seen before, and I believe what God is doing right now is going to eclipse that. But we've got a position of hearts for that. Our online community this is a we always are thrilled that you are there, but we you just grew in number because we won't let our people come to church today so.

And we'll let you know week by week what we're doing, but we're really thankful for our online community, and today, I just want to bless all of you; we're going to receive Communion at the end if you joined us just recently we're going to receive Communion at the end of the service we've got these little cups set up with the wafer included so I would encourage you those of you that at home or your place of business if it's possible at all for you to get communion supplies together, I'd like for you to do that so that you can join us I believe it's going to be a prophetic release of power for us our church family our households as well as for this nation in the nations of the world so.

I want us to look today at Psalms 91, so if you had open your Bibles to that, do that; please, by the way, I want to suggest that everybody download the antivirus
software called the power of the Holy Spirit. Its the antivirus software his name is Jesus, and he is manifest through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a philosophy. Remains a philosophy you're vulnerable to the virus.

To all things credit. So, I just I just declare the good news that Jesus is our antivirus software, and hopefully, every one of us can find something to really grab hold of out of this 91st Psalm today. So, it's my personal conviction. No guilt or shame for anybody who is suffering with this virus please we pray for it that that as a result of our gathering today that multitudes of people would be absolutely healed, a visitation of God. That we're going to set something up in in the coming weeks where people with the virus will be able to call in or do FaceTime or something. ----- ----- had a suggestion this week, so we're going to try to figure out how we can do that. And have our phones or our screens occupied by believing believers and pray for people around the world with this disease because we're we believe that in every hellish situation, Jesus has predetermined to get vindication. He is predetermined to reverse the effects into the promotion of the gospel. He didn't start this thing but he, he is prepared to reverse its effects.

So, what if, what if fear threw a party and nobody showed up? That's kind of what I'm thinking about this whole thing that's this is just my opinion, but I believe the virus is real; I believe it's very serious, but I believe what's happening around the nations is 5% virus, and 95% fear. And right now, it seems to me that viruses is riding the wings of fear, and you can't; you know you can't embrace fear and love. The embracing of fear is the rejection of love, and we're going to look in this particular study today that the love of God is one of the things that abiding in love actually repels affliction infirmity and helps us to live integration.

Alright, enough of the warm-ups. Let's just get into the word, and let's begin with verse 1. In fact, you know what? I want to read the whole Psalm, and then we're gonna back up and go back through verse by verse, all right, so let's just read the whole thing I'm reading out of New King James.

The title of the psalm is safety of abiding in the presence of God. And here's my prayer. I believe that the manifest presence of God upon his people is the key to divine health. And learning to host him learning to yield to her, to him learning to cooperate with him is what he is going to train us in and teach us in this particular season.

Come on in; guys, come on, we've got a worship team looking for places to sit, so let's come on in. We've got seats all over here. So, and those of you online just crawl through the screen. No, I'm just kidding, all right, all right.

Verse 1 of Psalms 91. He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord he is my refuge in my fortress my God in him will I trust surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the Fowler from the perilous pestilence he shall cover you with his feathers under his wings you shall take refuge his truth shall be your shield and buckler you shall not be afraid of the terror by night nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look and see the reward of the wicked because you have made the Lord who is my refuge. Even the most high your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you nor shall any plague come near your dwelling for he shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways in their hands they shall bear you up unless you dash your foot
against a stone you shall tread upon the lion and the Cobra. The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot because he has set his love upon me. Therefore, I will deliver him. I will set him on high because he has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer with it. Answer him I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him with long life. I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. This is a wonderfully well-known Psalm. Because of its, the element of safety, the element of protection, the element of vindication in a sense. Throughout this Psalm, so I want us to go through this because I believe there are some specifics that the Lord would want us to take hold of today, especially in light of this that is going on all over the world.

And today is supposed to be the day where we start a revival series. I am. But we're gonna restart. But I am. This is just this is. This is revival flavored antivirus software is what it is all right, but he who dwells verse one this we're gonna go through a verse by verse all right so please follow with me in your Bibles. He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Stop right there. He who dwells. You remember the Scripture talks about abiding in Christ. If we abide in him his words abide in us when it talks about dwelling in the shelter of the Almighty, we're not talking about a point of theology. We're talking about a lifestyle. In other words, it's not just a verse you've memorized it's supposed to be the developing of an ongoing lifestyle of a consciousness and awareness of the by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Many people stopped short of a divine encounter because they're satisfied with good theology; the word is the invitation to meet the person. This is not supposed to be just a verse I quote. That's valuable. It's supposed to be the endeavor of my heart is the discovery of the manifest presence of God upon me as a surrendered Son. Upon me as a yielded vessel. He says he who dwells in the shelter of the Almighty shall abide under the shadow of his wings. The shadow of the Almighty.

The shadow is a dark place. I'll never forget. I, my grandmother, my mom's mom, she, was losing her eyesight. Many of us would read. I would take turns reading to her from the Scripture. She would memorize entire Psalms, and my uncle would memorize books of the Bible. They were just into that memory thing which becomes contagious after a while, you know, and I would sit down.

I remember she wanted me to read her a particular book by Corrie ten Boom, and in this book, it was as I recall it was some sort of a – devotional book that she had written. And in this book, she talked about dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty, and she made this statement. And I've never been able to shake it; thankfully, she made this statement that sometimes it's dark because he's so close. Sometimes, it's his nearness that causes things to be out of focus. It's that shadow of presence. And sometimes we, we mistake the moment that we're in by, by natural interpretation instead of the realization of what Scripture says. Scripture says you're in the shadow of the Almighty.

So, the people who turn their affection towards the ongoing manifestation of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Those people dwell in a habitation that, even when it's dark, it's only a testimony of his nearness.

Verse 2, – alright, I'm back, I think. I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and my fortress, and my God in him I will trust I will say of the Lord is my refuge my fortress my God in him I will trust.
This is the only – proactive – position in the Psalm. One is implied later, but this one is the action point of this Psalm, and as I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my portion in him I trust. I always take this, and I turn it into a personal declaration. God, you are the one that I trust you, and you are my refuge, and for years, when I come to that, I don't like the wording because I want to make it personal.

And then it hit me the wording is chosen for a reason. We are so supposed to confess and declare that he is our trust. But this is actually a confession we are to make to one another. I will say of the Lord. It's important that we guard what we say to people. To one another. To the community.

You're in their grocery store. Yesterday I was on a plane flying back from New Mexico from a healing conference of all things packed with people that were living the antivirus thing. You know. And I sat next to a lady who she said, I, I wish, I didn't have to fly. I'd rather not be here, and she was wiping everything down with sanitizing cloth. Which I think is smart. Let me come back to that. Common sense needs to be embraced. Just don't let common sense be the hiding place of fear. There. There are some people that are, that are saying right now. Taking any precaution is an act of fear. Now don't be stupid. Don't play with a rattlesnake and call it faith.

I feel better, so the lady next to me was wiping everything down. She said would you like one of these I said now I've got the liquid stuff, I've already done it. I'm, I'm good, she said. I wish I didn't have to fly. I'm you know she's just very afraid, and that's where you step in. And just you don't want ever want to make somebody feel ashamed for their fear. You don't ever want to do that. You just want to throw them a lifeline. That's all.

Don't make people feel guilty because they're struggling with fear. Because you know some people have lost loved ones. Other people have they have a history of sickness. They've got a reason for it. You know, don't make people feel guilty for their struggle. Just throw them a lifeline. Just be Hope Centered. Both hopelessness and hope are contagious choose how infectious you want to be. Alright, so here it is he says he was I will say of the Lord he is my refuge my fortress my God in him I will trust.

So, when I was thinking about this, here's this passage in Colossians, it says let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom—teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

What is that?

It's actually a confession of truth, scripture, and even in song, it's interesting David would apply Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. Psalms are biblical songs. Hymns are things that were written. In things, songs that have been written, spiritual songs are spontaneous. And they actually there are times for them to be sung to each other, which is not a practice that we, that we do but we should maybe learn how to do it. Except some of you just sing softly. Yeah, I'm talking about, as a bad Joke, else yeah.

That was like when ----- went to visit my dad when he was in his final days. ----- said I feel like I'm supposed to sing over you. And my dad asked him to sing on the hill far away. And he said you mean the song on the hill far away; he says no on a hill far away. So, he was always good with a good sense of humor. Psalm. Excuse me, so here it says I will say of the Lord.

There's another place in Isaiah 35 where it says, and I'll just read it to you quickly. Here it says that, we say to the one with weak knees with feeble heart, be strong, take
courage. And the very next verse says, then the eyes of the blind will be open. Then the
ears, the tongue of the dumb will be loosed.

It's guarding what we say to each other. Being intentional in our decrees to one
another is a huge part of this thing we call faith. This life of faith, this thing that we call,
the faith that we are in this faith in Christ, this walk with Christ it's the, it's the caution,
but it's the proactive position of declaring what God has said, what God is saying in this
environment. And not feeding and fueling this, this fear element that is gripping so many
people's heart.

So, here's the one intentional action in this Psalm is, I will say of the Lord he is
my refuge, my fortress, my God in him will I trust. Verse 3 surely, he shall deliver you
from the snare of the Fowler and from the perilous pestilence.

To me, this implies snare of the Fowler. They would set a trap for a bird to catch,
to catch a bird, Fowler, snare. He will deliver you from the snare. To me, it implies that
maybe you got caught in the snare. And he's gonna release you. So, if you, if you didn't
get the protection, you're supposed to get to keep you from the snare. Once you're in it,
he's going to release you.

The whole point is, so all of you that are watching, some of you are an absolute
divine health, others of you are struggling. He will deliver you from the snare. If you got
caught in this snare, it's not shame; it's not condemnation; we live in a world of sin. We
get exposed to stuff, and it's not your fault. The good news is he will deliver you from the
snare of the Fowler and from the perilous pestilence.

Verse four, he will cover you with his feathers under his wings you shall take
refuge his truth shall be your shield and buckler. Buckler is a small shield, so it's more of
a hand-to-hand combat-type picture. All right. I always quote this verse when people
complain about feathers appearing in our meetings. He shall cover you with his feathers.
Well, that's not literal Bill. And I'd say I know that's what I thought. [laughter] All right,
verse five.

Verse five, you shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies
by day; this is important – the distinction in the New Testament the arrows. Are the
enemy's thoughts, you remember that the example of the armor of God, the shield of
faith? It's to absorb the shield of faith, is to absorb the thoughts, the ideas, the
suggestions, the temptations, all the junk that the enemy throws our way. So that's
what the arrow comes during the day. When you're alive and thinking.

At night is the terror. And so, he's distinguishing. If you go to bed with fear, you
are you're embracing this thing this says I could something could happen in the night it's
that it's that thing that foreboding spirits are ----- deals with a lot. The expectation or
anticipation of something wrong happening. Oh man, I hope our family member I hope
something bad doesn't happen to this person that person.

That foreboding Spirit is that terror in the night. The Lord is actually equipping us
to take a position shield and buckler. The figure, the shield of faith to absorb the stuff that
comes at us during the day. But to do it so well during the day that when it's time to go to
bed, we can go to sleep in rest knowing that he will defend us.

Now I'm going to throw in a word. It's not a biblical word. It's a word, it's the one
of two times in my life I've had the Lord wake me up in the middle of the night with his
voice. It happened about, oh goodness, 23, probably 23 years ago, here soon after we
came to Redding. We've been there. I think it's 24; maybe it's 25 years. I lose track.
Twenty-four years 24 years this last month, so it's about maybe 23 years ago I was
awakened in the night with this phrase. He watches over the watch of those who watch
the Lord. He watches over the watch of those who watch the Lord.

Which we know in pondering after I heard that he awakened me with that voice, I
don't ever want to equate that with Scripture. I'm just saying he spoke something to me
that was important for me to hear in that season but also right now. He watches over the
watch.

We know what a watchman is. A watchman is positioned on a wall to see what
might be coming towards the city. Good news here we have people coming in to trade
open the gates. Bad news here we have. We have people trying to sneak into the city, to
kill, steal, and destroy. The watchman keeps away. And this verse said he will watch over
my watch if I'll watch him.

So, this terror by night thing is that. Is that we go to sleep literally with our eyes
on him, knowing that he will watch our watch on our behalf. Amen. No, that was an
excellent point. All right.

Let's verse 6 is basically the same thing. Nor the pestilence that walks in darkness,
the destruction that lays waste at noonday verse 7 a thousand may fall at your side ten
thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you
look and see the reward of the wicked.

I want to be careful here; first of all, the judgment verses in the Old Testam
ent, I
don't want to ignore. I don't want to wash them away and pretend they don't exist. That's
not healthy, nor is it accurate. Whenever I see a person who lives in corruption in evil, it
doesn't matter how deep they are lost; I always am praying for mercy. I don't care how
lost they are now. You know how demonized they are. How they may be a self-
proclaimed devil worshiper makes no difference to me; I'm gonna pray for the mercy of
God.

But I will let you in on a secret if I in my prayer Lord if they absolutely refuse to
repent and they will not turn. Then please use your dealings with them to release the fear
of God to the people of God. Awaken us to this to this reality.

Now another thing I need to say is just because you have difficulty or are
struggling or you're sick or whatever, that's not the judgment of God. So, anybody who's
watching online hear we're going to pray for this. At the end, it's not the judgment of the
Lord that's not what he's doing. This is a quite a different deal here.

All right, verse 9, let’s move on from that because you have made the Lord who is
my refuge even the most high your dwelling place. Referring back to verse 1, no evil will
befall you nor shall any plague, near, come near your dwelling. For he shall give his
angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways.

Let’s go back over verse 10 and 11 again. I'm sorry, verse 9

Because, so here's a reason because, you have made the Lord who is my refuge
even the most high your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you nor any plague come
dear you're dwelling. Stop right there! I just want to re-emphasize learning to live in the
manifestation of the presence of God. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. I cannot
overemphasize the importance of us learning to live with continuous affection for the
person of the Holy Spirit. There's something about that abiding presence. It's not just that
he protects us. It's that the closer I stay to his heartbeat, the more I know what to do in a
difficult moment.
The disciples come to Jesus and say why couldn't we cast the demon out of the child? Jesus says it only comes out with prayer and fasting. And he didn't pray or fast. Why. Because the tenderness the closeness was already there, the devil was on his shoulder and remain. So, there was a continuous ongoing relationship and awareness of the Spirit of God. So, he didn't need to turn to say what is fasting for?

It's to refine our focus to the kingdom. It's to say no to other appetites so that we can truly hunger for the reality of the unseen promises of God there to become manifest. That's what it is fasting is refining focus. Jesus didn't fast in the moment. Why. He lived with a refined focus. He lived with the connection to the abiding presence of the Spirit of God.

So, this promise here is not just this casual. The Holy Spirit is with us. Always think. It's the invitation to develop an awareness of the Spirit of God upon our life in such a way. It's not just to protect me from plagues. It's to keep me in the center of what He is doing on planet Earth. It makes me the offensive weapon, if you will, the one who can bring hope in hopeless situation, the one who refused to cower in the face of threat and disease and all the junk that goes on. Unwilling to cower. I will not, I will not give honor to a disease. I will not give honor to a disease.

Cancer is with a small C. Jesus is a capital J. Always keep it big; let me see him silly to you, but that's what's going on in my head. Alright.

Because you've made the Lord who is my refuge even the most high your dwelling place. So, here's to people having conversation. Because you've made the Lord who is my refuge even the most high your dwelling place no evil will befall you. How about seeing people that live in that abiding presence and making that confession over them. Realities are released through decree. Not what we choose to say. I mean, life and death is still in the power of the tongue, but you know I'd rather just make sure I'm saying what he's saying.

But how about being in that moment where you can look at somebody say you know what? I've got a good word for you; no evil will come near your tent. No evil befall you. It's got to be declared -----; remember that time you prophesied about the people who couldn't have kids that were trying for 13 years or whatever the Lord spoke to spoke to ----- and said tell them they'll have a child by this time next year.

And he was struggling as every one of us would be to make that kind of a declaration to somebody who couldn't have children, and the Lord spoke to me said if you don't declare it, if you don't say that won't happen. So, he did, and they did. Some things actually have to be declared to happen. We have to understand we are a part of that economy. That's who we are, that's how we live, that's how we function.

Verse 10, no evil will befall you, nor any plague come near your dwelling. Why? For he shall give his angels charge over you. To keep you in all your ways in their hands, they will bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone.

I, as most of you know, one of my dearest friends is Randy Clark. I was just with him in New Mexico. And he tells the story of his time of ministry in Argentina. And Brazil both, but in Argentina, one of the leaders that he was learning from and partnered with as he ministers in that country made a statement to him, and I'm not going to get it exact, but I'll get to gist of it. Told him that basically, you in the Am----- an Church know a lot about operating in the gifts of the Spirit, but you don't know how to partner with the angelic.
Now personally, I do not believe in me telling angels what to do. I won't go, I won't go there, I will not go there. But what I will do is I have found that in Scripture our decrees that the angelic realm know what their assignment is. Our decrees when we say what he is saying.

I would like to suggest that a decree that comes from the throne room carries the fragrance of the father. Carries the fragrance of its origin. There's something about that that the angelic realm have a sense this came from the throne room, and this is their assignment.

In Psalms 103, it says that angels carry out his word; in my thinking, that's when God declares the matter. There are sometimes, he just declares the matter that's their assignment. You can vote yes; you can vote no doesn't matter. It's gonna happen anyway.

But the second part of the verse says that the Angels give attention to the voice of His word. In my experience, I believe the voice of His word that's you and me. It's when God speaks in the quiet of our heart, and unless we declare, it goes unsaid.

So, if you can picture this saying something that had its origin in the throne room – and we make that decree, His angels would give charge over you. That's a part of this confession that is made from one to another. His angels will give charge over you. What happens? As that comes from the heart of God himself, the angelic realm knows that's their assignment. I'm just supposing that's how it works.

I know that in the natural world, we know flies are attracted to decay. Satan is called the Lord of the Flies. The demonic realm is attracted to decay. In thought, and morals, values, that's why what we say is going to attract one of two worlds. That's why there's life and death in the power of the tongue—guarding ourselves to deposit in one another not just hopeful words but actually putting on them a bull's eye that the angelic realm will reinforce. That's our assignment, a people of courage that must deposit the bullseye, if you will, of the target of God in this situation. And its a, it's a lifestyle that we have the privilege of living. He will give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways in their hands. They shall bear you up lest you dash your foot against the stone.

Let's go to verse 13; you will tread upon the lion in the Cobra. The young lion and the serpent, you will trample underfoot. This is a passage that Jesus quotes at least in part in the Gospel of Luke. You will tread upon the lion in the Cobra. The young lion and the serpent, you will trample underfoot.

Here's an important thought in this passage. This whole Psalm is about protection; until this verse, then it basically says the protected are going to get vindication. They're protected are going to get vindication. The protected are going to trample on the very efforts of darkness to kill, steal and destroy. The protected the ones who have been kept in safety, the ones that death a thousand fall at your side ten thousand at the other side. Those folks are now released to tread upon the powers of darkness that cost, that cause the disaster in the first place.

We are, we are summoned not to sit idly by and just pray oh God, please protect me, protect me, please keep me from harm. To think that way is almost, is almost yielding to the virus. Is it, in this case, the coronavirus. But just in general, in the life of a believer, to just try to be the protected, safe person is the opposite of our calling. The opposite of our design. The opposite. The safest place in the kingdom is the front lines of battle.
You will tread upon the lion in the Cobra, the young lion, and the serpent. You will trample underfoot. Jesus made that statement to his disciples. He brought it into New Testament context.

Verse 14, because he has set his love upon me; therefore, I will deliver him. I will set him on high because he has known my name. He shall call upon me. I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. Go back to verse 14. Let's cover just that one for a moment. Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him. Who deliverance come from come to? The people who set their love on him.

I don't want to twist the meaning of this, so again, everything do everything to resist any kind of guilt, shame, or whatever. To me, this is an invitation by God to learn what it is, to fix the affection of our hearts, to be anchored in him continuously. He makes a point for a reason because He set His love on me, I deliver.

I know when I'm home, I tell my wife that I love her many times a day, many times a day. Many times, sometimes during a meal. It's going to be repeated frequently. I'm going to reset. I've already set my love on her, but I reset.

See in Acts, chapter 2 it says, and they continually devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching to the breaking of bread to prayer to fellowship, etc. They continually devoted; they continually re-upped the contract re-signed the contract. There's something about this passage that provokes me. Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver.

There's something about the ongoing; I hate to reduce it to a discipline, but if that's what it takes, do it. The ongoing resetting of our affection for him. Throughout a day. If you need it, set it on your alarm to remind you. The resetting of our heart of affection for him.

There's something about that. On, he's such a lover that he's drawn that you know I've talked about this for the year through the years, but I in going to sleep at night I turn my affection towards him. When I go into a difficult, I'll stop turned my affection towards him until I can sense his presence resting upon me. It's not that he wasn't before, but something happens. Either he comes, or I become aware I don't care what it is; I like it. Turn my affection towards him, and something happens in that moment where there is a manifest presence of God upon me for whatever environment I walk into.

And I've told you before, I remember a story, I used to shop in that as a grocery store but had occultic stuff there too, and I'd love to shop there, and I remember the owner taking me aside one day before I'd walk in, I just stand at the door as I'd go the back to understand at the door and just turn my affection towards the Lord. Make sure that I could sense the Spirit of God resting upon me; then, I would walk in and just shop. I wouldn't do anything different than anyone else, but the owner took me aside one day and said Bill said something is different when you walk in the room. I know it's because the manifest presence of God resting upon me. So, this is what he's saying he said because you set your love on me. Therefore, I will deliver.

So, I just pray right now that every one of us, upgrade, that resetting of the affection of our heart for him, not just reduced to a discipline. But the increasing passion of the Lord would become our passion.

I remember a prophetic word I heard no goodness, as probably in 1972 it was before I was married, which is 73. I remember sitting in a service in Bethel Church, the other old location. And that's this woman prophesied, and she said – if you long for me as
I have longed for you, you will be satisfied. Ah. If you long for me, what does it mean to set your love on God? It means you've received his love. Do you know that? Do you know the Scriptures is we love him because he first loved us? Do you know when I love him, I'm only loving him back with what he gave me? He when I opened up my heart to receive his love, he gave me the capacity to love him back.

Strangely in Scripture, you see instruction on the husband to love the wife. But the wife to respect the husband. Why? Because if the husband does a good job loving – the wife, she doesn't need to be commanded to love and return. And all the women said, yes. But you get the point. You get the point. The point is it, it's actually carried on in the illustration of Christ in his church, the husband and the wife.

Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him. I will set him on high because he has known my name. I'm not sure what it means. My mind goes quickly to being seated in heavenly places. And it's at that particular passage we are seated in heavenly places with Christ is a wonderful, wonderful truth.

The problem that I have not with the verse but with the issue. Is it gets reduced to a point of theology and never becomes an experience. Heavenly places is supposed to be a place from which we think and from which we see. It's not a mind over matter thing; it's not a, you know, discipline our minds to imagine this and imagine that. It's not that it's that is that our love runs so true with him. Resetting of our hearts of affection towards him becomes so ongoing that we not only have the point of theology that is accurate, we are seated in heavenly places. But we actually think and see from that place because our burning heart of affection for him and his burning heart for us brings us into such a place that our perception changes. Everything changes. Because in that abiding place of presence, we think and see different.

See, it's that person that can say to the disease. It's that person as John G. Lake discovered to hold the disease in his hand, put it under the microscope, and watch it die. Not everyone could have done that what because not everyone has lifelong from them continuously. If you take a garden hose and you put it in foul, putrid water. Whatever is in that puddle is going to leak into the hose. The only way to keep the inside of the hose unaffected is that before you put it into the stuff. Make sure the waters turned on. And if there's a continual flow through the hose, you can put it in any environment, and it doesn't get infected.

We got people setting up barriers of protection around themselves because they don't have enough flowing out. You get this stuff flowing through you. That yieldedness, not yielding this just for the sake of power but yieldingness because of this romance, because of this love, because I've set my heart of affection on you. Suddenly there's stuff flowing from us that starts changing the atmosphere, so changing the environment that we walk into, we've been called into. This for this season, this is the season of advancement. All right, we're getting close to the end. That's right. Verse 14 again. Look at it in your Bible.

Verse 14 again because he has set his love upon me; therefore, I will deliver him, I will set him on high. It's actually a place of safety, in a sense, unreachable. By the way, the Scripture teaches pretty clearly, that we are out of reach of the enemy but not out of sight. That's why he prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. You're out of reach, but you, you're not out of sight. Why? I think the Lord loves to torment the devil. That's just my thought. I think he rather enjoys.
And you know what? You're sitting at a table, and you've got the enemy all around you. What is your attention on? Any situation where you feel like you're under heavy assault, if you'll, if you'll refine your focus, you'll find the table of fellowship.

[thumps the podium] He prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies. If all you see is the enemy, then you need to readjust get back to what God has said about your life. Find the table of Communion, but in that table of fellowship with God, is yours is all of our place of great strength great confidence great life great health.

All right getting down to the end verse 15. He shall call upon me. I will answer him I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him, with long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. Verse 15 again he shall call upon me I will answer him.

I'm not going to go long on this one, but I am so tempted. And let me just tell you why. – Continuous answers to prayer are what we were designed for. To not have them is abnormal. And that needs to matter. It needs to matter.

What I see happen for us is that we'll pray about this pray about that have no breakthrough and just assume it's the will of God. The disciples tried to cast a demon out of a child. If we could bring that analogy into today. When the child wasn't delivered, we would just assume that in the sovereignty of God, it must be His will. He works in mysterious ways, which is the cop-out answer. It's the cop-out answer to explain away our powerlessness. I'm trying.

So, what did the disciples do? Jesus comes along. He brings the deliverance. I made reference to it earlier. It brings deliverance to the child. He asked to the disciples how long am I gonna be with you, which seemed to be a question he asked often. How long shall I be with you? And then the disciples they're stunned, but first of all, they're stunned by the fact they couldn't bring deliverance. Why. Because they have a history of success, Jesus, since I'm not two by two. They've been with him in those moments. They've been in there with him. They are the most trained people in deliverance of anyone to ever live except for Jesus up to that time.

They're shocked when it doesn't happen. That's a good shock when something doesn't happen; the day is coming when we're going to be shocked when somebody isn't healed. So, Jesus brings deliverance, and it says the disciples took Jesus aside privately. They said how come we couldn't do it. How come how come and didn't work when we try. And of course, Jesus said this kind only comes out prayer and fasting.

What's the point? When they didn't get an answer, they took Jesus aside. What we tend to do is stop praying. It's supposed to bother us enough that we look at the lack of a breakthrough as an abnormality. Something didn't work right. I'm not going to blame it on the sovereignty of God; I'm not just going to say, well, somehow this must be God's will; I'm not gonna do the cop-out thing and push it under the sovereignty of God. I'm gonna take responsibility and come before the Lord until I find out why. Take Jesus aside. Take Jesus aside.

I'm asking all of the Bethel family, online community, and the Redding the local community. Take at least a day this week, if it's physically possible, to fast and to cry out to the Lord. We've got to hone our focus in this season. We have to refine the focus to what God is saying and doing. This is our greatest opportunity for advancement. This is our greatest opportunity. It needs to come in miracle power. It needs to come in economic release. Both for businesses, churches, ministries all over the world are being
unbelievably hit by this thing. What has happened? We are being set up for massive, massive revival.

How do we know this? Let me give you just one historic lesson. You know we talked a lot about the Azusa Street revival. I did not know until yesterday. The Azusa Street revival is 2006. Excuse me, 1906. Maybe I just prophesied. Alright, 1906 as the Azusa Street revival; what I did not know until yesterday is that there were sparks of revival all over the United States in 1905. And there were about a million, which the country size at that time is very significant a million new conversions in 1905. Which set the stage for an explosion in 1906?

What's happening right now? Corporate gatherings around the world of tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands. We have Luis Palau; we have Franklin Graham. We have so many others in the Calvary Chapel movement. The Evangelists are holding these massive Crusades. We've got The Scend, we've got TheCall, we've got all these things Daniel Kolenda we've got this stuff all over the worlds of the gathering Bethel music, and they're gathering of tens of thousands of people. All over the world, this stuff's going on. And what's happening right now, all of it is shut down, why the enemy fears the impact of that, of that. And the assault is on the business community because that's what funds the movement.

This is the moment for vindication, but I believe it takes aggressive prayer on your part in mind. Where we stand in the gap when we say not on my ship, not on my shift. What's been happening in the last couple years is 1905 all over again. It's that God has set the stage for an explosion to take place, then it's to take place right now. We're being positioned for it. If we'll posture ourselves with faith. Guard our hearts from those random fearful thoughts where we deny love and embrace fear. And position ourself to find out what God is saying. And make the decree get into the get into the battle get into the fight take that time take a day too fast. Cry out to God. Lift up your voice. Contend for those who are suffering. We have friends right now, people that I know that have been hit by this thing. They're suffering horribly. We stand in that place. We stand in that place. We make that decree. We took the Communion with me this week, and just walked in my hotel room, just declaring the names of these individuals. Jesus bore their affliction on his body. He bore yours mine on his body. There's no sense two of us paying the same price. No sense. Makes no sense.

So here he says I will be with him in trouble. He says I will answer him; I will be with him. I just I feel like. Do you know where every one of us started our life in Christ? All of us, you could take all of our gifts, all of our history, our heritage or all the stuff about our life. And just take it everything away until you come down to the one common denominator. The one common denominator is we called upon the Lord, He heard us, and he saved us. Our life started with an answer to prayer. Our life started as an answer to prayer. We lifted up our voice, we cried out to God, he met us, and he performed the greatest miracle we will ever see in our life. And that's the salvation of our own souls. We started in the miraculous. It was never supposed to decline. It was never supposed to decline.

So, he says he'll call upon me I will answer him I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him in honor. I will be with him in trouble. That tells me sometimes I'm in trouble. But he's with me. The table of fellowship is there in the presence. All right. I will deliver him and honor him. That's a strange conclusion. I'm not just going; I like this; I'm
not just going to set him free and protected. I'm not just gonna get him out of the snare; I'm gonna honor him as one of mine. I'm gonna mark him. I'll let him know. Let her know that this one follows me.

I'm reminded of Gideon's prayer. He told all of us the 300 soldiers around him. As you break, these pitchers remember they had these torches with pitchers over him. As you break those pitchers. Yell out for the Lord and for Gideon. There are times where he will actually have somebody honor you publicly for your courage. Maybe in front of another friend. I remember as a parent. I would I took on the intentionality of bragging on my children. While to another adult while my children are present.

I remember when ------ drew on a bedroom wall in our house, and he drew the city landscape of these high high-rise buildings, you know, with windows and everything. And I got home, ------ said you need to come to see what ----- did. So, in and I'm looking at this wall ---- standing there like this, you know, don't I remember how old you were four or five. So, I like that, so I'm looking at all you know he did it with crayons you know and marked all over the bedroom this spare bedroom wall I'm looking at these things I said son that's really good. You did a good job look at these, look at the details you look at these window windows here is you big building small buildings amazing we did a good job. So, I went on to praise them for all I'm gonna say; you know, next time you want to draw, they'll just let us know we'll get your paper.

And then, a week or so later, we had guests over for dinner. We had friends over for a meal. And after the beyond say hey you guys got to come with me come see this come back in a bit, so I took our guests back in their bedroom and ---- standing there all happy, and I said I said this, I want you to look at my, what my son, the artist drew, you know but what ---- you look at this look at the details here look at the windows look at all the stuff. You know that's what He does, and be the child that realizes the privilege that He promised, and I would honor Him. Don't deflect it. Don't deflect it. If we don't know how to receive honor, we'll have no crown to throw at his feet.

Last verse, with long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. It's the promise of the Lord to us.

Two wonderful things about today. Because there's not another service following, I don't have to tell you to go home. I love that part, and the other part is I don't have to watch the clock. There'll be no parking problem today. There'll be no parking problem. HeBrews is open though I encourage you to get coffee afterwards. But look at this, look at this promise. With long life, I will satisfy him. There's two things there. There's the promise of long life. But the long life is given to satisfy.

I don't know if I can say this very well the quest for life. Means, I must live longer. Some have lost the quest for life. Some have lost it. They've retired from this, that quit from that; all they have is just the routine of making it through every day. It's no longer the adventure of faith. For them is no longer the conquest. It's no longer bringing in fruit harvest for his glory. It's just been reduced to just abiding in Christian discipline and fellowship. But there's no quest for life. He says with long life; I will satisfy.

All right, we're gonna share a communion. I want you to stand. You've been sitting forever. If you're at home, please grab your elements. And we're going to share a communion together. And I believe more now than ever in the beauty and the power of Communion, of the broken body the shed blood of Jesus. I won't make this as long as I do when it's me in Jesus alone because I like to take time. I like to take time.
I like to be careful, to never do anything just out of a routine. I believe in discipline, but I try to make sure that whatever I've disciplined myself in, that I can, that I can turn my passion towards that thing. So that, so that I am all in, I so always want to be in no matter what it is I want to be all in. Jesus, do you need help there, ---- [Laughter]…

Jesus broke bread, and he turned his disciples, and he said, taking eat this is my body, now I don’t understand this part, but I don't, I don't feel I need to. I just want to honor what he said. He said this is my body. He didn't set represents my body. He said this is my body. So, my approach to this is supposed to be with that kind of reverence. With that kind of value. I don't need to understand. I don't need to explain. What I need is to approach it with the value he placed on it.

Later in Corinthians, He says many sick are sick, and a number even die because they don't judge the body correctly. He could have been talking about this [COVID], he could have the context been talking about this [Communion]. So today, we hold in our hand the testimony of His death. The stripes that He bore. When I partake of the bread, I used that as a moment to declare over myself, my family, my extended family, to declare over them. By the stripes of Jesus, I was healed. By the stripes of Jesus, I was healed.

I pray for different friends by the stripes of Jesus. I’ve taken you through this in times past. Something I added about three or four months ago is I remembered something out of the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. Where it says, Jesus bore in his body the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. He destroyed the power of division with this offering. So, I prayed not only for people with sickness disease friends of mine based on the payment has been made. I have then moved into praying, any place I know where there's division.

Jesus, you paid more than an adequate price for there to be no division in that situation. Doesn't matter to me whether it's a family conflict: it's racial reconciliation that needs to happen. Doesn't matter in what category how large or how small the payment he made was more than enough. More than enough.

So, I'm gonna ask all of you here, all of you at home. We're gonna take maybe two minutes. I want you just to pray for whoever God brings to mind, but I here's what I'm gonna have you do that's important in my walk. I have to make it a confession. By the stripes of Jesus, I was healed. By the stripes of Jesus. And then I'll pray for different people for --------- by the stripes of Jesus --------- who was healed. ------ was in a very tragic accident last night. Very tragic. I'm not going to go into it now. But one of our own, and we today need to stand in agreement. For an absolute creative miracle in his body right now. And you have different people. But let's take like two minutes. And I want you to pray for whoever God brings to mind. You won't be able to cover everything but let's do the best we can in two minutes. But make the confession, and I'm gonna ask you to pray this out loud. No one needs to yell. But I want to hear the sound of people before God, with the value for his body that has been broken for us. Let's do that now. We've got two minutes.

By your stripes, I was healed by your stripes by the stripes of Jesus. Alvin Murrah was healed. By the stripes of Jesus, Mary Burke lives in divine mantle by the stripes of Jesus. Cathy Valenton was fully restored. Elife Spooner fully restored. Jean Lo restored fully restored, entire house fully restored by the broken body of Jesus. By the broken body of Jesus. Remember pray for both for division areas and healing areas.
absolute peace. The peace of God to overwhelm the broken situations any broken
situation in our community. We declare the peace of God's rules and reigns over all.

And now let me pray over this, and we'll partake together; I'm glad that these are
hard little wafers. The reason is it's just a reminder to me it was broken. He was broken
that I could be whole. He was emptied that I could be full. He was despised that I could
be celebrated. He was rejected that I could be embraced. He bore affliction that I could be
healed. He became poor that I could become rich. He did everything in opposite to launch
us into what's available right now. So, let's just make this decree together; by His stripes,
I was healed. I pray for divine health to rest over my household, and over our extended
church family, in the name of Jesus, amen. Partake of the bread.

Now take the cup. I love this; I love this so much. This is why this is why I get to
pray for every one of my family members by name, and it my decree, my confession at
this point, is as for me in my house. We will serve the Lord. Say that with me as for me
and my house we will serve the Lord. I want you to declare it like you actually believe
that this is the gospel truth right here, all right. As for me and my house, we will serve the
Lord. Say it again. As from me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Now what I do is I open the cup, and I hold it before the Lord, and I pray for
specific family members. You may not be able to pray for everyone. I'm going to give
you just a minute or two but in fact, let me tell you what I want you to do. I would like
for you to take a minute to pray for family members by name. And this is what I do I just
took our I played the blood of Jesus over ---- and ----, over ----- and -----, And this is
my prayer Jeremiah 24 give them a heart to know you. I plead the blood of Jesus over ----
- and -----, Over ----, ----, ---- Moses and the new little one that's coming because
they're adopting another. I plead the blood of Jesus over them. God give every one of
them our heart to know you. I plead the blood of Jesus over ---- and ---- over ----, ----, -
----, and ----- give them a heart to know you. I want you to do that first, pray for family
members, and then I'll take you into the next phase.

Give them a heart to know God, every family member dreams in the night
encounters. Dreams in the night, divine encounters. Prodigal son, prodigal daughters,
prodigal parents, uncles, aunts, we just declare come home, come home. In fact, I pray
that every household here, we would see salvation extended to neighbors around us next.
To us across the street behind us, there would be this awakening that would take place in
home after home, were the dreams, the visions of the men in white, would no longer just
be in Muslim territory. But it would actually invade Am----- a have actually invaded our
own cities, that people would be awakened in the night with encounters with a man in
white.

Now, the next thing I do is I pray over those who, in my case, have opposed me
and spoken against me: videos, books, whatever. I pray for them that they would prosper
inside now and that they would have the joy of having children and grandchildren that
served him well. That they would have a rich heritage in Christ. Because these are all
people confess Christ, who well-meaning as they may be, I'm I you never have the right
to criticize a servant to their master. I will not do that. What I do is that pray to bless
them. So, anybody was affected you negatively, take just a moment to pray for them, and
then we're gonna share this together.

Yes, prosper them inside and out, Lord. Set the stage for them to step into why
they were born. But they would have the joy of a rich, rich heritage. Family line richly
devoted to you. For what it's worth, I'm always careful to not pray that they would have a
prayer, a power encounter with God because I'm not asking to be vindicated. I pray for
their blessing in their context like God choose how. Do you understand what I'm saying?
I'm not trying to sneak in my opinion about something. I'm praying for blessing in how
they walk. Alright. So, with the cup before the Lord, let's make this confession together.
As for me, in my house, we will serve the Lord. Let's share this together.

Wow, thank you, Lord. I would encourage you I we have a couple little jars next
door. A little couch sitting area, and we have jars with communion supplies in there
continuously. And we keep it focused for staff members just to be able to take
community at any time, and there's always a number of these cups in there. Today there
was only one left. So, I think our team has been taking Communion more often, which is
good news. I want to encourage you I ordered, I ordered, on, on amazon.com, I get these
little cups. I have them at home. I take them with me when I travel. It is a part of our
household routine. I encourage you guys online do something. You know if you want to
do the wine and the bread, however, it doesn't matter to me. Just in this season especially,
we need to upgrade our focus, and the broken blood of Jesus and the shed blood means
something. It's not just eternity. It's now. And it must be declared now. What we're gonna
do right now is we're gonna wrap this up .and obviously, you are the ministry team, and
at home, you are the ministry team. I'm gonna ask you here if you want any prayer at all
turn to the person next to you and just tell them they are drafted. Their assignment is you.
And honestly, ask them to pray for you. It may very well be we have people that are
watching that don't know the Lord. And I want to take this moment listen. Don't go
through life on your own it's just simply not worth it. It's not worth it. Jesus paid a price
for your salvation like you paid for mine. All of us were saved by the absolute grace of
God. None of us earned it. I don't care what you've done. You are being set up in this
moment to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. It means you turn for what you from what
you've been serving to follow him. And you do what the verse I quoted earlier he who
calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. His name is Jesus. Call upon that name
Jesus and ask him for the absolute full forgiveness of sin. Ask him to fill you in this holy
Spirit. And all of our church family at home.

You know what, now is a great time for you to learn to receive prayer from family
members. If you need a miracle, you can't turn to the one next year unless it's your son or
daughter or spouse or whatever. But do that take advantage pray God give us them or
cause us to be people with great courage in this moment, not to cower in the face of a
virus of all things? No. We come forth wash our hands. Wash your hands. Don't be
stupid, don't play with the rattlesnake, and call it faith. But please, let's go after this thing
in Jesus' name. Amen? Amen. Let's pray, father, we ask that you would take the Army of
God, the Bethel family, but every church across this nation and the nation's right now that
there would be a supernatural equipping of courage and faith to stand in the face of this
virus and say back down go back to your source in the name of Jesus. The enemy came to
kill, steal and destroy, not Jesus. Jesus came with abundant life. So, we stand in his name,
and we declare the all-sufficiency of Christ in Jesus' name. In Jesus’ name Amen.
Appendix C

Transcript of All Lives Are Sacred, by Ché Ahn, January 17, 2021.
Thank you so much. Thank you so much. We do have a lot to cover. I want to just give you a word that's been on my heart literally for the last six-seven months. Ironically, pastor Edwin's here. He's heard me speak this so many times, but it's different. It's different. Because um, you know there's so much has happened even since I was going through the battleground states. for those who don't know, I took September and October out to mobilize uh the battleground states. Eight states. I went to. I shared with you I started out in Detroit, and we have a great H.I.M. church there. They've blown up to over a thousand people when they started; they only had 200. but they opened up, and they grew to a thousand. They're the only church in Detroit that's open because Michigan is very liberal. They've locked down Michigan. Even though he's gotten death threats for opening up, um, Bill Bolin, our H.I.M. pastor, has been bold. He opened up, he had me come out, and it was amazing time of mobilization. Then I went to Madison, Wisconsin. We have an H.I.M. church there, right on university of Wisconsin. It was kind of funny because we uh we the this is honest truth. The day that I’m in Detroit, president trump flies in. he holds a rally, and then you know he was campaigning for his election, and then I go to Madison, Wisconsin. The next day he flies to Madison, Wisconsin. Then right after that, I’m in Philadelphia. He comes to I’m in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He's coming to Harrisburg right now. I know. We're talking. We're not talking about major cities. Harrisburg is the capital, but you know it could have been Pittsburgh. It could have been somewhere Allentown, Pennsylvania. He's coming to Harrisburg; I told uh Irwin and the people that was speaking at the next place I said president trump is following me. He has looked at my social media, looked at my schedule, my travel itinerary. He's just following me wherever I go. no, he was everywhere. It so happened that coincidentally I would be at the places that he would be also going as well.

But I do believe the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. Amen. Your steps are ordered. You're here. In fact, I want to just find out how many of you are here for the first time. This is your first time at harvest rock church. Well, thank you so much for coming. We love you. We're so glad you're here. I want to welcome those who are watching online as well. You know this is a very unusual day it is my birthday. I’m 65 today. I don’t feel that, and I do feel I have good genes. Because you know I just have good genes, my grandmother lived to 101. she prayed me into the kingdom if your mom grandmother's praying for you don't have a chance you will get saved. Amen.

But uh but um oh, by the way, I want to just say thank you for the gifts, and I want to just uh really thank all of you for giving to C.A.M. because people ask me, what I wanted. I said I don’t want anything for myself. I have everything I need. But I said we do need to raise money for our media ministry. We're able to reach millions around the world. We get free airtime with GOD-TV. Yet we just found out because of Covid, they had to cut their budget, and they canceled the production clause. They were paying for my production as well. Now it's back on our plate, and we have to raise literally hundreds of thousands every year too. This is not airtime; this is just producing the show. For those who don't know, I’m on Tuesday nights equipping the saints on God tv. Also, you could go on our YouTube and check that out. I said for my birthday. So, by the way, we're receiving offerings for the rest of this month. If you would like to give to C.A.M., all you do is go to reach out and scroll down to um to C.A.M. Ché Ahn ministry, and you can give to that expense. All of it will go to the kingdom and advancing God's kingdom.
Having said about an offering, I want to receive an offering for One Race 4 Life.

I’m so grateful for our pastors because as I was traveling around the country to the battleground states in September and October. One of the things I did was raise money for One Race 4 Life. I began to get people to make a pledge, and I’m gonna actually do the same thing in a moment. Because, uh, I think all of you were given a pledge card, and it’s perforated. You could just write down your name, and I’m gonna ask you to prayerfully sign this. Put it in the box. I think ushers will be by the door and just give it to them. But I’m also going to ask you to give money. Because we're going to have to raise up 50 state coordinators, district coordinators. We want this to be a movement on every local level. We want people to vote for life. Already we have a staff; as I introduce that to you, we have expenses, and I’m just starting a ministry on a national basis. If it was a local ministry would be one thing, but on a national basis because the only thing for this to really really take off it has to be a national vision. We need millions, to be honest with you, and I’m just stepping out right now. I was sharing this with the pastors, and pastor Gwen said why don’t we receive an offering? We haven't even received one offering for One Race 4 Life as a church. This is the church that birthed it.

And I said, you know the great time to do that would be on sanctity of life Sunday, which is today. by the way, for those who don't know, President Reagan in 1984 declared and made an executive decision. Made a proclamation that January 22nd will be the sanctity of human life day. Now, why January 22nd? It was January 22nd, 1973, the Roe v Wade was voted on by the supreme court. Made abortion legal in every state. I think that was the worst supreme court decision in the history of America. Even worse than the Dred Scott decision of 1857 because even though the Dred Scott said that blacks could not vote and they’re not, can’t be citizens. It didn't mandate to kill them. Whereas Roe v Wade has mandated the right to murder a child in the womb. Since then, 65 million babies have been aborted. Three every minute. one every twenty-second.

And in California, California is the number one abortion state. It's crazy that they locked down the church, but they said abortion clinics are essential during this lockdown. COVID19. Every year we abort in this state almost 200 000 babies. As California goes, so goes the rest of the country. By the way, I have some good news Missouri is the first state that now has eradicated abortion in their state. [thunderous applause] Come on! All the, all the planned parenthood, everyone there they have chosen to be out of business. Is still technically legal. But they've chosen not because they've added other laws to make it more difficult. People want abortion in Missouri. They have to go up to Illinois, for example, to get an abortion. That's what's going to happen, by the way. I believe with all my heart, Roe V. Wade will be overturned eventually. But then it goes to a state level.

Then every state has to make the decision if they want to make their state abortion-free, legal, or illegal. That's why even now, we have to start on a state level in California, every city, every district, and we have to vote biblically. We have to vote life. I believe that we can see real transformation of our state even. Because it's amazing how this is the most critical issue, and I’m going to share that from scripture in a moment. As we our values and for life and the culture of life as that goes. Then everything else falls into place. Even the value for family hinges on this. Even just being conservative hinges on this. That's why I believe that if we see a movement, a pro-life movement like never before. I believe that we could see revival and reformation in America beginning in California. That's why I believe he birthed One Race 4 Life.
Now I want to just go right into my message here. There's so much I want to share, and by God's grace. I want to just, first of all just, talk about the biblical perspective on life. The biblical perspective on life. I want a quote from Lou Engle. I’m quoting from this book, the reformers pledge. I need to highlight this book. A year ago, January 2019. how many you know James Gall heard of James Gall? I heard him speak okay; he's a best-selling author James Gall. had surgery, so he was in bed in January of 2019. this is before COVID hit. in his sleep, he had a vision. It was like a dream, but he said was more like a visitation. Jesus walked up to his bedside holding this book, the Reformers Pledge. Jesus said to him this is the book of the hour. Now James immediately calls me up the next day and said Ché, you won't believe it. You know the book that you edited. No, I write a number of chapters, but I’m more of an editor for this. I asked James to write a chapter. I asked Lance Walnow to do a chapter on the Seven Mountain Mandate. By the way, he gives the best concise understanding of the seven-mountain mandate vision. If you want to understand what that is, get this book. I asked Lou Engle to write a chapter on life developing a culture of life. I came up with ten pledges that were to make. That’s why it's called the reformers pledge.

This pledge is here. I’m going to ask you to make this pledge as well. Now, this was ten years ago. This came out ten years ago. I wrote it really because out of TheCall prayer movement, which I was so involved with back in 2000, 2003. I was the president of TheCall. That we would mobilize thousands of young people. The smallest crowd we ever had was 35,000, and that was in Dallas, Texas. The Bible belt, but it turned bitterly cold that day in the cotton bowl, and the crowds didn't show up. But up to a half a million on the Washington D.C. mall on September 2nd, 2000. I know what crowd size is. When I was at the rally trump rally on November [January] the 6th, it was much bigger than TheCall, and that was 500,000, so I know it's more than 500 thousand, maybe seven hundred thousand. Some say a million. I don’t know. There's no one that really knows because it wasn't just the crowd. It was the way we're packed in I could not move. I was like a sardine, which was good because then you get to know the people around you—waiting two hours just for the program to begin. That's when I share the gospel. I found out there was a Japanese man next to me who didn't know the Lord. He was a Buddhist from Hawaii. They flew all the way from Hawaii just to support president trump. There were two Catholics behind me from Boston, and they started to ask me questions about what it means to be born again. I just share the gospel the two pastors, two people in front of me were pastors. They were interceding. I shared the gospel with the three of them. All three of them gave their lives to Jesus Christ. So, it was just great again the harvest is coming in. so I know crowd size, but we couldn't move.

Every time we gather people together, we ask them to make a pledge. To vote for candidates who are pro-life. Now we didn't ask them to sign anything. Uh, we don't. We didn't hold them accountable. We just asked them to make a verbal commitment at the peak of each call. It was really, if you know anything about Lou. How many of you heard of Lou last week, this is his life assignment. So being the visionary founder of TheCall, he made sure at the uh the zenith of TheCall. time together when most of the people were there. We asked them to make a verbal pledge to vote life. Well, I thought, okay, that's great. But we need to write about it. We can't just, you know, we have to document this. Then we need to, uh, really get it out to the next generation. Because when I wrote this in 2010. you know TheCall had, was ten years after TheCall DC.
And a whole new generation there were young people there that were now uh following us we're not at TheCall DC. Now ten years later. Who would have ever known that God would lead our apostolic center to birth a pro-life movement called One Race 4 Life? And that at the main thing that we're trying to do is get people to make a pledge to vote life. We're going to actually do that. Prayerfully consider doing that. So, you say, well, what if you know we're in a democratic state. But you know most it's really a one-party state. Many elections are two democrats who are running for the same senate state senate seat, or you know, house seat, so if they're both pro-abortion, how do I vote.

We're going to ask you not to vote for neither of them. But to be consistent in voting your conscience. Based on the word of God. Because I cannot, that's why I, is to me I cannot. In any way for any believer. Again, I don't want to say condemnation; I'm sharing my opinion. I feel there's, again, there's a spirit of deception if you're a born-again Evangelical believer and you voted for Biden. To vote for someone who believes in abortion to the last day of the ninth month is monstrous. It's criminal. To vote for someone that, [applause] with that radical of a position on abortion to me, is deception. You don't know. I think there's ignorance. But that's why we have to speak the truth in love.

That's why I went to the battleground states to say you may not realize, but this is the Biden, Harris's position. by the way, all the democrats, not just them, all the democrats came out with that position of late-term abortion. Of course, New York and Chicago, Illinois and Portland, Oregon and Oregon and Washington state. Passed a bill in 2019 and 2018 to legalize late-term abortion, though there will be no criminal penalty of an abortion late-term. In this round, five states have done that. By the way, look at the states. What's going on in each one of those states? It's a mess in New York city people are moving out by the millions. Moving to Florida, it's a mess in Chicago. You can't go through one weekend without 40 homicides. Killing that's taking place. Of course, Seattle and Portland were just a mess with ANTIFA taking over. You reap what you sow. You want the culture of death; you could have it. God says okay, I'll lift my hand of grace off of your state, and you could have it. It's a mess.

I'm going to talk about this when I talk about the hands. the doctrine of hands shedding innocent blood. But before I get into even talking about the Bible, I want to read something that Lou Engle said in this book. That is so powerful. by the way, you could get this on amazon. I do believe that our resources are being opened up again. You'll be able to buy a number of my books. I mean all of them, actually.

But let me quote from Lou Engle, he says, if we will see abortion ended in our day, the church must submit her political preferences and rebellious reasoning to the measuring rod of God's truth. God gave us courageous men and women like Martin Luther, who challenged the whole religious system of his day. And its false ideologies of salvation with the trumpet phrase sola scriptura. Meaning scripture alone. Vast portions of the church today ringing with a hollow echo of relevance are dumbing down the razor's edge of Biblical truth for the sake of acceptance. Are following a pattern of apostasy that breaks away from God's fixed moral standards. Powerful well-written statement.

Sola scripture this is the foundation. This is the authority god's given. In the beginning, was the word the word was with God the word, the word and God are inseparable. Just like Jesus is the word, and he has all authorities the head of the church.
He has given us the word to have authority. Be the foundation of the church. So, with that in mind, I want to go to the most important foundation of what we believe in, a Judeo-Christian value of God. Who created every person here in the image and likeness of him? Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 then God said let us, I like that plural let us, it's within there you see the triune being, the trinity god the father, God the son God the holy spirit, interplay. One God but three personalities. All right, let us make man in our image according to our likeness, again plural. God created man in his own image in the image of God. He created him male and female. He created them. Now two things that need to be highlighted number one, God created the universe. At the peak and the zenith of his creation and created you and me. The second thing he created us in his image.

Now, why so why is that so important, so foundational. Because if you don't believe in God. Then all of a sudden human life becomes nothing. It's interesting that Marxism communism. Which is a political party, let's say China CCP. The Communist Chinese Party, CCP, you have to sign a pledge that you will never believe in God.

I've been to china around 20 times. I meet the people who have been former members of the party. I've had the privilege of leading a party member to the Lord. Who said I don't really want to leave because I will lose my privileges? He said when I retire; I retire next year, I can, I give my life to Jesus Christ then. That's what he said. We're having this discussion over dinner eating Peking duck. I said to him I said no, it doesn't work that way because you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. when you hear this voice, don't harden your heart. Now it's a time of salvation. Today's the day of salvation. He gave his heart to the Lord right there; thank God for that. But he was renouncing his atheism by doing that.

So, when you take God out of the equation, all of a sudden, we're not made in the image of God. This is so important because we know intuitively man is valuable whether you believe or not. Even our conscience tells us that. I remember a year ago again, a year ago in 2019, in January at the end of January, I was privileged to speak at the American renewal project conference in Anaheim. David Lane, our dear friend he's part of H.I.M., was hosting and organizing that, and we had people like Charlie Kirk there, uh Dennis Prager. I remember Dennis Prager speaking. He gave an illustration that just really valued life. He says listen. If you see a man drowning in the river, but at the same time, your dog is drowning in the river. Who would you rescue first? Someone said the dog, and I said man, they were joking. Because they were, you know, trying to because they knew. Even if, as a stranger, you know the life is more important than your dog, even if it's your pet dog. You rescue the human being. We know that. But God says every human being matters. So, we say all lives matter here because we're all made in the image. Like it has nothing to do with color. In fact, that's the least important thing. Is that the most important thing is we're made in the image and likeness of God.

The communist China, if you look at what communism has done. Look at the fruit of communism, and as a historian, I’ve studied this. Just look at three nations. Look at China. Under Mao. Russia under Stalin. Cambodia, which is now Kampuchea under Pol Pot. We're talking about killing a hundred million of their own people during they're their leadership time. During their reign, during their administration. A hundred million. If you've never read a book that you don't really want to read but it just to give you an idea how brutal, how evil communism is. You have to read Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago. I have to be honest with you. As a, as this is one of the books of the
century. Of the 20th century when it came out in 74 or 75 whenever it was. I started to read that. But I could only go through two chapters because I saw how evil the communist system. How people were snitching on each other. by the way, Garcetti is asking us to do the same thing right now. For those who don't know is that this past New Year’s Day. Someone snitched on someone that was having a New Year's Day party in their apartment with five people. They all got arrested because of the snitch. Under Garcetti here in Los Angeles, this is what's going on right under our nose. This is socialism! This is communism! I’m telling you, and that's why we have to say no to the tide that's taking place. Just allow the gospel of the kingdom that brings liberty and free, where the spirit of the Lord is serious liberty. That's the only thing that brings true freedom, and that's why we are here to be salt and light. To.

But communism, but I can’t even describe how they tortured. To make false confessions. They knew they were; they were not guilty. It was their way of eliminating the masses because they couldn't even support them financially. Because socialism promises you'll get a paycheck, we'll take care of your medical well-being. Where's the money coming from? There's no amount of money to do that. Life became so cheap because of their warped demonic ideology of no god. We're not made the image and likeness of God.

We have to go from there. But I want to just emphasize. This is something that's really interesting. God created man in his own image, verse 27, and the image of God he created him. What's the next word? Male and female created them. Now [chuckles] I don’t know if you heard what happened this past week with the house of Representatives under Pelosi. They passed past a house rule, law, that you cannot identify the gender of anyone when you make a speech or talk. You can't say, my father, my mother, can't say my husband, my wife, brother, sister, male, female. So, you have to say my spouse, if you're talking about your spouse, your wife. But if you're a woman and say said my husband and giving a little more detail identity of who you're talking about, you just have to stay spouse. You if you want to talk about your father, you can't say father. You have to say your parent. This is so absurd. It is so crazy we're in madness. Because your identity determines your destiny. What's so crazy about it they keep on overplaying their hand. They shoot themselves in the foot because in the name of transgender, uh culture of welcoming transgender. They're hurting even the transgender. Because if you're a woman and you think you're a man, you want to be known as a man. But you can't even be known as a man because now it's all gender blender. How crazy is that? Seriously. It's like the spirit of stupid is over the house; they just can't; it's really a spirit of demonic deception. that's what it is. [Applause] and all these dumb people say, okay, we'll vote for that, that sounds good, in the house, we got to get the house cleaned up; we got to get people that have a biblical worldview in 2022. come on. 22. I’m starting now.

Campaigning for 2022.

The second thing I want to talk about life begins at conception. This is really important that you see a Biblical basis. Because they said when you know what developmental stage of the child is that a child from a fetus to a baby. No one knows. No one knows as far as those who are secular humanists. So, they made arbitrarily, like the united presbyterian church. UPC. said after three months, prior to that, you could abort, which is madness where Church of Jesus Christ. to condone abortion at any stage. But here's what the Bible says God is so brilliant, so wise. he says this in Leviticus chapter
17, verse 11. For the life of the flesh is in the blood. For the life of the flesh is in the blood. Only 2,000 years later. The scientists understand that one drop of blood has the DNA of the whole person. They could know exactly what you're going to be like by one drop of blood. When does that drop of blood begin? Three months into the pregnancy, four months, six months, no, at conception, there is blood. That's why the Bible says life begins; life is in the blood, life is in the blood, it's beautiful. The DNA makeup is already there at conception.

Here's what the Bible also says. I love this about Jeremiah 1:5. he says before I informed you in the womb, he wasn't developed I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Is it possible, at the moment of your conception, God had a destiny for you. That he called you. that he knew you. Of course, he knew you. He made you. God created them in his image. He's all-knowing.

You know, I was uh just thinking reflecting on my 65th birthday. Isai, my goodness, time flies so fast. I can't believe I'm. I still feel like I'm like 35. what's amazing is that, um, you know, I was just hearing someone about I was sharing with you ------ and --------- on the conference call about how inner healing has impacted my life. Because I had this lie lodge in my head, I was rejected from birth until I went through this prophetic inner healing. My counselor took me back and just said what do you see. All of a sudden, I see myself being dedicated by my grandfather to Jesus Christ. My grandfather was an elder of the church, Presbyterian church. My father was late getting to my birth time. He was on a bus, I mean, back in 1956, that's the way he got around was a bus. he had to go based on the bus schedule. So, he was hurrying to get to my grandparents' home. Because my grandmother who lived to 101. Was a nurse, she was one of the rare women a professional. She was a registered nurse. She told my mom. Look, instead of at the hospital delivering your baby, won't just come and live with me. Let me take care of your last month, and I'll deliver the baby. So that's how I end up being born in my grandparents’ home. But the beautiful thing was is that I was celebrated. Because my mom had lost her first pregnancy through miscarriage and was a boy. Then my sister was born. In a hospital, and then two years later, I was born. Here's the thing. My grandfather dedicated; I mean; I didn't have a chance. I was going to be here preaching from the pulpit because my mom had a dream that I was going to be a pastor when she was pregnant with me. Then my grandfather was a godly man. I mean, he was a founding elder of Yannok Presbyterian, this conservative Evangelical church which is known as the world's largest Presbyterian church to this day 80,000 member. He was an elder he helped build that he was a banker he gave money to that building project. Billy Graham preached there when he goes to Korea. He preached at that church. that man dedicated me, my grandfather, to the Lord, and I just said, God, I'm here by the grace of God, 65 years later. Still loving you, serving you, preaching. I believe I was called in my mom's womb. I believe I was called the moment she conceived me. That God knew, the heart and the prayers of my parents and my grandparents they wanted a boy to be a pastor. Back then, they just believed in men in ministry. They just were very conservative. But they that was my grandfather's prayer. He wanted one of his kids to be a pastor none of them became pastors. They became Christians but not pastors. They're all in the marketplace. God answered that prayer through the grandson. You have a destiny life begins at conception. Not. You know, I mean it's like, why pick an arbitrary time like three months. How crazy is that? Listen. If you see a bag, let's say a paper bag
moving on the freeway 210 freeway, and you're driving your car, and you see that thing
move, you're not gonna run over it. You're gonna dodge. It because you think maybe it's a
kitten in there, maybe it's a dog, maybe it's some kind of life. Because it's moving, you're
not going to take a chance. You want to make sure, that you don't kill something that's
alive. Yet we play Russian roulette and make an arbitrary decision and say, well, this
person is a fetus at this stage, and now it's a baby. How crazy is that? Make sure play it
safe you don't know. Only God knows, and God says life is in the blood. Why would you
kill a two-month baby? Why would you go three months, baby? By the way, the viability
outside the womb is because of modern science is amazing now. Three months the baby
can survive. Yet that's when you're encouraged. Do it while it's safe get abortion now
before it becomes more complicated.

And now the governor of Virginia said, who's a medical doctor, and if somehow,
it's too complicated the baby's born outside after nine months, you have the right to kill it.
That is a slippery slope. It's infanticide. They rationalize. They think you have the choice.
What about the baby's choice? What about the rights of the unborn? We gotta get
righteous, righteous people into offices. The way they think is unbelievable.

All right, let's just talk about the curse of shedding in some blood. We know
murder is evil. Think about it 631 commandments in the Old Testament. A lot of
commandments, right. 631, most of them are ceremonial laws that don't even apply
today. But God reduced them to 10, 10 commandments. The reason why I’m saying this
is because people have criticized me; sir, you're so focused. You remember that statement
you have a love affair with a fetus. It's a single issue; you know, platform for you. It's all
about abortion. I said you know what? I’m concerned about immigration. I’m an
immigrant. I’m concerned about the poor because I was poor, and I know what the gospel
can do to the poor. There's other things I’m concerned about. But they're not in the top
ten. but abortion is. Out of all the commandments. All the things the Bible writes about.
Concerning immigration, showing hospitality to the foreigner. Because you were once a
foreigner in Egypt, God puts number six thou shalt not murder. For your translation, it is
the old King James version it says kill. Is a bad translation. They're different words for
the word kill. The Hebrew, this is murder. Taking an innocent life.

So, we have to understand the doctrine of taking an innocent life, and here's what
the Bible says. I want to go to, first of all, proverbs 6:16 because I want to just share how
God feels about taking an innocent life. There are six things that the Lord hates, seven
that are an abomination to him. Let me underscore the word hate, is a very strong word.
Abomination is a very strong word. In fact, you know ---- when we had our kids, and
they were small. they would say I hate broccoli. ---- would just say, don't say I hate
broccoli. Just say you dislike broccoli because hate is; I don’t want that word to be used
in our house; it’s such a strong word. I agree with her. Yet God says there are some
things I hate. One of them is an abomination. That on abominations hands that shed
innocent blood. Hands that shed innocent blood.

Here's what the Bible says. From going all the way back to Genesis chapter 9:6,
he says listen. Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for God
made man in his own image. Here's the penalty if you shed innocent blood—life for life.
Here we have the foundation of capital punishment coming into our legal system. If you
shed innocent blood is so heinous to God that your blood will have to be shed. If it
doesn't happen, then justice will not be met. He's a God of justice. He is a God, has the

foundations of his throne is righteousness and justice. But look what he says, and this is what's really stunning here. It's not just to meet justice, but you see, if this does not go punish, it leaves a curse on the land. The whole nation is cursed.

So, here's what the word says in numbers chapter 35 verse 31 a murder who's guilty of death he shall surely be put to death. Okay, life for life. Going back to Genesis chapter 9, verse 6 but in the next uh verse 33 says so you shall not pollute the land in which you are, for blood pollutes the land and no expiation or no atonement, or there's nothing, there's no sacrifice can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it. Except by the blood of the man who shed it. In other words, there's going to be a curse on the land, polluting the land talking about a curse on the land. The only way that could be done is by justice, by the man who committed murder has to be executed. There has to be capital punishment. Today we say put them in the electric chair.

Then he goes on to say in verse 34. you should not defile the land in which you live in the midst of which I dwell. I, the Lord, am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel. Then in Deuteronomy 19:13, I like this because this is more positive. Purge from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people. Then all will go well with you. How many of you want things to go well with our nation? Come on. [applause] How many want all things to go well with us? as individuals. Is it possible we are reaping the consequences of 65 million babies have been aborted since 1973? Because there's been no justice for that yet. It's just been hands that have shed innocent blood over and over every 30 seconds here in this country. I believe the only way to reverse it is to reverse the laws of the land that has legalized abortion.

You know I’ve been crying out to God over the election results. I said God. You know. I felt I felt so strongly that president Trump had won, and I believe he has won. Okay. So, you know, but still, but still people chose to steal the election. But God is still sovereign. He still allowed it to happen.

I want to go down here that could be kind of, kind of controversial. In Deuteronomy… I mean, in Daniel chapter 2. the Bible says. Clearly, he raises up kings and replaces kings. Ultimately, he will have the say. So, when we get the government that we now personally have, we deserve that government. In other words, it is almost like God gave us four years of mercy to really change some laws and to get people aligned, and it begins always with the church. Judgment begins with the body of Christ, first Peter 4:17 when I see major Christian newspapers, like Christianity Today magazine. Saying that, it would be egregious for us to vote for Trump. To have pastor after pastor who’s born again saying that I’m voting for Biden. I’m not talking about Liberal church; I’m not talking about the United Methodist, united, you know the uh the Presbyterian church of uh UPC, United Presbyterian Church of America. I’m not talking about I’m talking about evangelicals, that I listen to their teachings on. And as pastors go, so go to the congregation if that is the reflection of where the body of Christ is at. Then I’m saying God; we deserve what we have. Forgive us.

See Abraham Lincoln understood this. in the second inaugural address March 1865. We're talking about just a month and a half before he's assassinated. a few months before the war ends. He's giving his inaugural address, and this is what he says. Fondly we hope, fervently we pray that this mighty scourge of war will speedily pass away. But if God wills that, it continues until every drop from the lash is paid for by another drawn from the sword. Then what was said three thousand years ago must be said again. The
judgments of God are true and righteous altogether. What was he saying? he was saying
that the 650,000 soldiers that died in the Civil War were payment for the atrocity and the
murderous killing of innocent life through slavery.

So, if we have to pay for every drop from the last by another drawn from the
sword. He’s talking of the Civil War; then we have to say what it says in Psalm 19 verse
9. The judgments of God are true and righteous all together. God is not mocked. We get
the government we deserve. It needs to be a wake-up call. I’m asking if you are a believer
and you voted for Biden; I believe there has to be repentance. There has to be repentance.
In your heart, say God forgive me for supporting someone that believes in legalized
shedding of innocent blood.

We have a way to go. That's why I’m emboldened. You know someone said are
you discouraged? Are you ready to throw in the towel? I said that's the worst thing. No,
I'm not. I feel like John Paul Jones. I’ve just begun to fight. [applause] I’m ready to roll
my; I’m ready to roll up my sleeves. All the more, I’m emboldened that I got my work
cut out. I said lord. If I have 20 more years of life left, I’m hoping I live to 101. But if I
have 20 more years, I am going to give my life to revival and reformation of this nation. I
am going to do everything I can to see transformation of our society. It begins with this
crucial issue of life! Everything else falls into place. I find that those who are pro-life, is
pro-family. You know. It's just amazing is it is like an indicator where you're at. So, I
want you to develop a culture of life in your own heart.

All right, so in closing three things we can practically do. First of all, we've got to
pray like never before. We're not done; we never cease praying. Bible says pray without
cease, and obviously, we have a ways to go. Specifically, we need to pray for our leaders.
I, you know, I prayed for President Obama almost every day when he was president for
eight years. I prayed for president Trump almost every day. When he was president. my
wife and I agreed. This morning we just prayed for him again because he's still our
president until the 20th. But even after the 20th, even though I know the election was
stolen. If Biden is inaugurated on the 20th, I’m going to pray for him. I’m going to pray
that he gets saved. I’m going to pray that he gets; I mean, just because you're a catholic
doesn't mean you're just because you're born in a Christian denomination, doesn't make
you a Christian. Just like if I was born in a garage doesn't make me a car. It's not. It has
nothing to do with the upbringing has to do with you making an individual decision to
give your heart to Jesus Christ. [Applause]

I was for abortion. I told you I confessed to you. But when I gave my life the next
year at the age of 17. God completely shifted my heart. I said oh my goodness. There is a
God. I didn't know God existed. He made me in his image, every human being. That's
why every life is sacred. Every person is so important. We need to pray, we need to pray
that God would reverse Roe v Wade. We need to thank God that we have now three
supreme court justices that are pro-life. We need to thank God that all these federal
judges 300 confirmed, nominated, and confirmed under president Trump. If that's all, he
was called to do. I am grateful I’m going to thank God for it. But that means now he's
done his job. That means we need to do our job. We need to, on a local level, state by
state, vote life. That's the way abortion is going to be eradicated. But it begins with
prayer. Listen, history belongs to the intercessor. Walter Wink, a great scholar, said
history belongs to the intercessor. I love that, that we're to change history through
intercession.
Number two, we need to vote life. We need to vote life. You know, wherever I went, I emphasized. I didn't tell people to vote Trump. But you don't have to be a Ph.D. from MIT or CalTech to know when you vote for life in this particular election. Because we have the most pro-life president, Trump, that's done more for the pro-life movement than any president, including Reagan. So, I encourage people to vote life, and I’m going to ask you to do the same thing. I'm going to ask you to make a pledge before you leave. That from this point on, by the grace of God, that you will not vote for anyone that's pro-abortion. That you'll find out. Do the research if you don't know. Then do the research to find out what their position is. Some say you know they leave it blank. That's where you need to hear from the holy spirit, then. The other issues that are they aligned with the Biblical values. Right? But if you do know right off the bat, that's that, to me, is a no-brainer. If I know they're for abortion, then with the next. All right. I’m going to ask you to sign this, and right now, I’m going to actually take out a pen paper and sign it. If you need a pen-paper out there, I mean pen, because I’m going to ask you to write this down. For those who are watching, you know we'll send you this One Race 4 Life pledge card. We'll mail it to you. I’m going to ask you to do that.

The last thing I’m going to actually do is to give financially. You know, I just all the pro-life movements that are out there. They're all wonderful, but God has birthed this One Race 4 Life out of this house, and I want to encourage you to do good to all but especially the household of faith. Galatians chapter 6. I want to encourage you to give today. I’d like for us to shoot up uh the information on the screen at this time. And here's what I’m going to do. You know, I just feel really led to do this. that if you give a significant amount, let's say 250 or more to One Race 4 Life. I want to get your name address, and I want to get this sign; I want to sign this book and ask God to give me a prophetic promise for you. Mail that to you. I’ll take the time to do that. I’m going to ask you to be very generous. By giving to One Race 4 Life. Will you do that? So you go to H.I.M. 77977, and then I think you could scroll down to One Race 4 Life. We're working on our 501c4 status. our attorneys are working on it just takes time. We're trying to get it done before this administration's over. Trying to get done by the 20th, to be honest with you. Because when president uh Obama was president, it was so hard to get a 501c3 status. Non-profit organization, there was a real discrimination against the church. Um, so we don't know what the atmosphere is going to be like. But we need to believe God for the status. Until then, it's a DBA of H.I.M.; H.I.M. is legally overseeing it. So, by giving, you'll get a tax-deductible receipt. For eight from H.I.M. as you give to One Race 4 Life. Does that make sense? all right. So, let's all stand. I want us to pray.

Lord. Your word says how good and how pleasant is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity. It's like the oil coming upon Aaron’s head to his spirit to the edges of his robe. It's like the dew coming out of mount Hermon to the mountains of Zion. That's where you command the blessing, life, forevermore. God, you're a god of life. We know that Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. You said I've come to give your life and to give it to you abundantly. Lord forgive us for being complicit; as Daniel prayed in Daniel chapter 9, identifying with the sins of Israel, knowing that the breakthrough was imminent, we say forgive us. As a church, by being complicit and in agreement with the abortion, murder mill that's taking place in this nation. By voting for candidates who are for pro-abortion. By your grace, lord. We ask by your grace, by the
grace that's in our hearts, as followers of Jesus Christ. that you will give us grace and
wisdom to vote life in perpetuity. In the days and years to come.

Now I’m going to ask you to just talk to a lord. That's called prayer, by the way.
Just pray that prayer and just say by your grace, I’m going to vote life from this point on,
in perpetuity. Life is in the blood. I’m not going to play Russian roulette. Go by what my
denomination says, is when life begins, or a baby is a baby. No. that's nonsense. Scripture
has the truth that will set you free.

For those who have never given your heart to Jesus Christ. I want you to just do it
right now; you know, just the thieves on the cross said, remember me, when you get into
paradise just say Jesus, I give you my life be the Lord of my life fill me with your spirit.
Those who are watching online, I wanted you to go online. By the way, I forgot, instead
of mailing this One Race 4 Life, you could actually go online, and make that pledge, and
give us your name. just go to One Race 4 Life website. You can make the pledge. If you
would like to volunteer as a state coordinator, watching online from all over the United
States. City coordinator, district coordinator let us know because we need massive
volunteers to do this. But my people volunteer freely in the day of power. The Lord, I ask
you to bless everything that's been done here. Bless the pledges. Bless you offering for
your kingdom purposes. In Jesus' mighty name, amen. Amen. Gods bless you. Let’s give
Jesus a hand. have a great week. We start a new series next week on knowing Jesus going
through the gospels. Okay. It's going to be exciting. I’ve been studying already. I can’t
wait to share. God bless you. We’ll see you.