

Sermon—July 10 & 11, 1999  
Powerful Encounters in  
The Book of Acts  
Acts 18:24-19:20

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### The Normal Christian Life (Part 2)

Last week I gave the first part of this talk that I call “The Normal Christian Life” as we’ve been continuing in a series from the Book of Acts. My premise last week and now in this second part of the message is very simple and that is that much of contemporary Christianity, at least in its American variety, is abnormal or better, subnormal as we compare it with the model of the Christian life that’s presented to us in the Book of Acts. And I am convinced that by and large Luke intends us to be presented with a pattern or model of the Christian life.

So, last week we explored normal Christian conversion—the way that somebody enters the Christian life. And we discovered that for Luke the way that someone normally becomes a Christian is by repenting of their sins, believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit. And then having become Christians, this is normally expressed in a person’s life by water baptism. Water baptism doesn’t save a person but in the New Testament, having become Christians it was unthinkable that a person wouldn’t very shortly after be immersed in water in the Christian ritual called baptism.

Now today what we’re going to discover is that the normal Christian life confronts the prevailing powers, the controlling issues, the dominant thought processes and spiritual forces

that are active in any particular community. You see, as the kingdom of God advances through individuals' lives or through a church community's life, it is going to bump up against the dominant spiritual powers in a community, the dominant forces, the things that really control people's lives, the issues and habits that hold people in bondage.

And in the normal Christian life we ought to regularly see this bumping up against, opposing forces and opposing powers. John Wimber, the late president of our association, the Association of Vineyard Churches, used to describe these kinds of bumps as "power encounters." An illustration that he often used was of 2 storm fronts that collide.

Whenever you have a cold weather system meeting a warm weather system, very often when those storm fronts collide, it's at the collision points that you get, you know, the lightening, the thunder, and the tornadoes.

So in the normal Christian life, as the Kingdom of God advances, it's going to bump up against opposition. And it's always been troubling to me when our Christianity doesn't address the real issues and things that hold people in bondage. When I sit and listen to a sermon and it only marginally addresses the things that are really going on in people in the audience's lives. See, in the normal Christian life there ought to be this collision—God confronting the powers.

Some years ago my family and I took a vacation and while we were on vacation we attended a church in that particular community. And the message was delivered with marvelous skill; the preacher was extremely articulate. He discussed a number of sins in the course of the message but I left feeling terribly unsatisfied. In talking about the message with my wife

after I said to her, “My difficulty with today’s message was that the pastor never seemed to address the sins that were actually being committed by his audience. The word of God never confronted the real places of bondage that this community was held under.” The community that we were visiting was a leisure community. It didn’t take but 5 minutes of visit there before you could see what the prevailing addictions and bondages, spiritual problems of that community were.

Certainly the people there were struggling with materialism. Certainly the people were struggling with sexuality. You couldn’t go into any store without there being a lewd photograph, lewd posters, lewd magazines. Certainly the community was struggling with the appropriate place of leisure in the Christian life and yet materialism, sexuality, leisure, the prevalence of divorce, none of these things were addressed in a message on repentance from sin.

Now what we see in the Book of Acts is that when Jesus Christ invades a community through his messengers, the issues that he deals with are not irrelevancies; they’re not the kind of peripheral issues that religious people like to talk about, you know, whether you smoke a cigarette or have a tattoo or drank a beer in complete moderation. God confronts the real powers, the real issues of control, the real stuff that holds us in bondage and guilt and shame. When the kingdom of God comes into a community or into a person’s life, it’s going to confront the things that continually defeat us, things that continually rob us of joy, the stuff that really wrecks our homes and wrecks our marriages and wrecks our intimacy with God, kills our self-image, disables our ability to live freely.

So today as we look at the normal Christian life in this 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the message, we're going to be examining the confrontation with certain powers that were present in the city of Ephesus and we're going to see how Christ wants to confront powers that hold you and me and this community in bondage. Before we look at the text, let's pray.

Let's look at Acts 19:1 were we read, "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus." Paul is traveling west in the country that we now know as Turkey and he reaches the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the entire Roman Empire. And what is it that he discovers there? Look down with me at verse 18. It says, "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

What Paul would have encountered when he went to Ephesus was a city that was the center of magical practice for the whole Greco-Roman world. You know when we speak of magic today in America; we're usually talking about illusion, slide of hand, nothing supernatural. Just people who are very good at trickery, the hand is quicker than the eye, pulling rabbits out of hats and coins from behind peoples' ears. But magic as practiced in the ancient city of Ephesus and in the New Testament world was totally different. It involved using various kinds of means like charms and spells to achieve supernatural power over nature and over people, over circumstances.

Ancient historians tell us that Ephesus literally swarmed with sorcerers and soothsayers and purveyors of charms. There actually have been through archeological digs, the discovery of what has become known as the Ephesian letters written back 500 years before the time of Christ. These various tablets, which contained formulas for casting spells and magical names—terms that would give you power. Literally hundreds of texts have been discovered along with various kinds of amulets, these charms and lead curse tablets. People used to write down little curses on their enemies and engrave them in pieces of lead and then throw them in magic waters.

And the discovery of this great amount of material has enabled people to reconstruct what life would have been life in ancient Ephesus and what the people believed, the powers that held them in darkness. People would often wear charms—protective charms—like a necklace to ward off evil demons, harmful spirits. The charms would be engraved with the name of various supernatural spirits who would be called upon to ward off other demons. Similar to, you know, the old practice of carrying around a rabbit's foot, basketball players, wearing their lucky socks, golfers wearing their lucky shirts. But with far more attachment to these things—protective charms.

And there were recipes for love potions. Some of the magic was used to induce a perspective lover to return your love. People would mix up magic potions. It was, of course, a place for black magic—casting spells designed to inflict harm and people would take pieces of lead, a thin metal plate and inscribe them with a bronze stylus and through a ritual, smearing it with various kinds of blood, they'd roll it up and call upon spirits to inflict harm on their enemies.

As scholars have looked over the magical texts a picture emerges of ancient Ephesus and that picture is that people back then believed that spirits, gods, angels, demons actually existed, that they're involved with the everyday lives of ordinary folks. But they also believed that these spirits could be manipulated, brought under control to do the bidding of the sorcerer. Now in the 1960s, all of this would have seemed rather bizarre, irrelevant, part of ancient superstition that had been completely overcome by the rise of modern science.

If you went back 30 years ago and tried to talk with people in the United States about the practice of witchcraft, you would have been mocked and laughed at in any educated circle. "Oh come on, what are we back in the middle ages? What, are we in Salem, Massachusetts? Are we going to start burning witches again like the Puritans?" Now there isn't a week that goes by where you don't read about some group or other practicing witchcraft down at the state house or in a high school or in the movies. This morning's paper had a front page article about a fellow who was part of a satanic group who murdered some people in a small town just north of Columbus.

You have films like *Practical Magic* or *The Craft* and a film that is made to look like a documentary but is entirely fictitious; it's coming out in a couple of weeks—*The Blair Witch Project* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* on T.V. Just go to any Blockbuster's and look at the number of recent titles that are devoted to the practice of witchcraft, magic and casting spells. And then as you read your daily paper, note the number of articles that refer to the rise of the practice of magic and witchcraft. Just recently the Army at Fort Hood in Texas

gave some space to practitioners of Wicca to practice their religion at a U.S. Army Base. They faced a firestorm of criticism.

In many high schools, high school students are encountering people who say that they're practitioners of Wicca or some other form of witchcraft. Drive through the Clintonville area of Columbus and you'll see a number of shops devoted to selling books on casting spells and amulets and charms. Visit Yellow Springs, Ohio, if you want to see a town that is dominated by the practice of witchcraft. All of this has not been swept into the bin of ancient history. Indeed there has been an incredible rise of the practice of magic.

There are places out west like Sedona, Arizona, where tens of thousands of people descend on the town because they can get in touch with various spirits there. People make pilgrimages to Stonehenge and to Glastonbury in England. The fact is, friends, that as the hold of a biblical worldview, as the hold of a biblical worldview weakens on our culture and as the power of Christianity lessens in our universities and our government, in places of power. As the hold of Christianity weakens, and people are increasingly biblically illiterate, we will witness an enormous rise of the practice of witchcraft and magic and we will be plunged back into a world very much like the world at the time that the New Testament was written.

We are going to see, I believe in the next 10-20 years, far more interest in American culture in casting spells and amulets and charms and so-called ancient nature rites that are really modern inventions. Just as a parentheses, if you are meeting people who are practicing Wicca and you want to be better informed about what it teaches and where it comes from

there is a book out called Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neo-Pagan Feminist Spirituality, by a man named Philip Davis.

It is a complete myth that Wicca was some ancient Celtic practice that has been going on since before the time of Christianity and has been passed down through the centuries in Europe. The real fact is that a man named Gerald Gardener who was an Englishman practiced seances and various kinds of sexual perversions. This man names Gerald Gardener actually invented Wicca out of whole cloth. He wrote about his supposed findings of ancient rituals and ancient law in a book called Witchcraft Today in 1954. But the fact is that there were no ancient sources cited. Gerald Gardener made it all up. Wicca doesn't have a long tradition. It goes back exactly 45 years. In fact, the name Wicca, which is supposed to be this old Anglo-Saxon name meaning "wise one," was invented by this guy Gerald Gardener. But enough of that. Suffice it to know that Wicca is built on a very thin foundation.

Nevertheless, the fact is that the western world is being pulled back into the kind of world view and practices that existed before the rise of Christianity, belief in, curiosity about the practice of magic and witchcraft. So what does Paul do when he gets to Ephesus? How does he confront all of this magic, all of this witchcraft, all of these people who are casting spells. What does he do? Let me ask you, what would you do? I'll tell you what much of the church today would do. We would hold lengthy prayer meetings in which there was an attempt to discern the names of the various demons that controlled all of the magic in the area.



And people would engage in what they call strategic level spiritual warfare, shouting at the demons that live in the heavenly places. Some Christians would be paralyzed in fear as they saw witchcraft coming into their neighborhoods. Some would move away. Some would be intimidated. Some would get into exotic practices, almost combating magic with a Christian form of magic.

What does Paul do when he gets to Ephesus? Verse 8, “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them... and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for 2 years, so that all the Jew and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Paul’s major weapon for battling magic and witchcraft and the casting of spells was evangelism.

He preached the good news of Jesus Christ, his powerful life, death and resurrection. He did not spend 99% of his time on the defensive trying to discern what demon is over the city. He wasn’t looking for some secret key that would unlock a community. Paul went on the offensive, he had the key, he had confidence in the key. The key was the Gospel. Let me underline this for you, because Christians feel so overwhelmed as they see the rise in practice of witchcraft and magic. So many Christians are disempowered by other Christians who claim that they have all of these esoteric visions, keys regarding what will unlock our communities and our high schools. See the issue is never what is Satan up to in our community. The issue is always what is Jesus up to. So many Christians spend so much time consumed with what Satan is planning to do. My concern has always been what is

God going to do. When the 12 spies returned to Moses after scouting out the Promised Land, 10 focused on the giants. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb focused on taking the Land. They said, “If the Lord delights in us, then he will give us the land. Don’t fear the giants in the land, the Lord is with us.” Too many Christians are wasting their lives focusing on the giants, fearing them, our question should not be who are the giants but who is the Lord?

Friend, if you’re a high school student and you’re encountering someone in school practicing Wicca witchcraft, is dressed in black, talks about casting spells north of County Line Road here in Westerville. If you’re living in the Clintonville community and you’re aware that there’s a practice of some covens there, or down in the Short North and you walk by some of the stores with all of their witchcraft material. Understand that you already have what people need to get free from those powers. It’s called the Gospel. Not some secret rite. Not some super-spiritual practice, just the Gospel.

You see, friends, we need to regain our confidence in the Gospel and in the power of the Gospel. Very often we’re looking for lots of other different weapons. Gee, somebody is a witch; somebody is involved in magic, in casting spells. What do I need? Do I have to read up on all of this stuff and become an expert in witchcraft? I don’t think Paul was an expert in witchcraft, but he was an expert in the Gospel. And he had real confidence in the Gospel in a way that modern Americans don’t. That’s why he was able to say in Romans Chapter 1, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew then the Gentiles.”

So what does Paul do? For 2 years and 3 months he doesn't go racing around the city trying to figure out what the controlling power is over the city. For 2 years and 3 months Paul preaches the gospel. He preaches it to the religious. It says he entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for 3 months arguing persuasively about the Kingdom. The religious community, the church community needs to understand how to really be saved. Just because people are attending church doesn't mean they've been converted. We talked about that just last week.

But there are a lot of errant notions regarding conversion. There are many people who have never repented of their sins; they have never received the spirit. They've just given some kind of an agreement to a set of statements regarding Jesus Christ. There's no life change; there's not alteration in their marriage practices, in their sexual practices.

So Paul goes into the religious community and it is appropriate for us to preach the gospel to the church. But then Paul goes out into the city and into the lecture halls and it says, "Paul took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Now let's think about this for a moment. Here was Paul's daily schedule. He would probably have begun work in the morning, sometime around 6:00 a.m. where he would work as a tentmaker. He did his secular occupation, the job that he did to make a living.

At about 11:00 in the Mediterranean world at the time, all the shops would close and people would go home and actually go to sleep. In the Mediterranean world, like parts of Spain

today or Mexico, more people are asleep at 1:00 p.m., that is 1:00 in the afternoon than there are asleep at 1:00 a.m., 1:00 in the morning. People took a siesta because of the heat. So during this break from work Paul would lecture. And from 11:00 – 4:00 he would hold these lectures at this public hall. Anybody who wanted to come and argue, discuss things with him, would do it then and they would frequently eat and then Paul would return to work, perhaps for a little while in the evening and then go to sleep.

In 2 years and 3 months, Paul would have spent about 3,000 hours preaching the Gospel. I want you to note the words that are used for his preaching. It says in verse 8 that he “argued persuasively.” He persuaded people, he used reason. It says in verse 9 that he held discussions, he dialogues with folks, he debated with them. If you look at chapter 18, verse 4, it says, “Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”

You know, we lived in a very subjective culture and even a very subjective Christian culture that devalues the place of the mind, the place of persuasion and debate and discussion and reason. Much of these kinds of things are seen as overly intellectual, irrelevant, especially when we’re dealing with spiritual powers like magic and witchcraft. But Paul believed and the New Testament believes in the power of truth. Truth is not the only power but a major power in setting people free.

What would set you free from the bondages, the habits of mind, the ways that you relate? What would set your free? I’ll bet in almost every one of your cases what would set you free is truth. Really grasped and really believed at the level of your heart, the truth about who

God your Father really is. How many of us would be set significantly free by a deep appropriation of the truth, that God our Father was for us and not against us. That God our Father in heaven intends good towards us. Discovering the truth regarding where God was during a tragedy or personal suffering. That turning to him will always result in our good and never our bad.

How many folks would be significantly set free by discovering an appropriating fresh truth about the Father? How many would be set free here by simply discovering our identity in Christ who we really are, what authority has been given us. How we don't have to live under the power of sin. How we can be dead to past sins in our life and alive to Christ. We live in a culture that has pushed truth and the Gospel to the periphery. But Paul saw these as his major weapons and he spent thousands of hours proclaiming truth because he knew that this was what was going to significantly set people free.

Now we read on. It says, "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul" so that even "Handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them." There was more going on through Paul than proclamation of truth. Apparently some of the sweatbands and work aprons that Paul used at his job as a tentmaker were taken and these were invested with spiritual power—power so great that they brought about healing and deliverance.

Now let's note what this text does not say. First of all, the text doesn't say that Paul was responsible for distributing these cloths and these aprons out in the community. It is very possible that these things were taken without Paul's knowledge. But it's absolutely the case

that we never read of Paul “selling” prayer cloths and making money on them. There is no suggestion either that there was some sort of automatic conveyance of power in Paul’s clothes or handkerchiefs, that this sort of thing occurred in Corinth and everywhere he went. It wasn’t Paul who had this power—it was God. And for a brief period of time God in his grace invested certain objects with power. But that was at the determination of God.

Now here’s the deal. Luke clearly intends us to understand that this investing of objects with power was highly unusual, even in the life of Paul. In verse 11 it says that “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.” The better translation is “God did not the ordinary.” He did something in Ephesus that was uncommon. It’s an interesting Greek word. It’s not just extraordinary, it’s better translated “unique, uncommon, quite outside of normal Christianity.” The point is that there is nothing here to justify the current practice of selling cloths or selling holy water. We have an instance of God doing something through Paul on one occasion but we need to be careful that that doesn’t become a precedent for lots of foolish practices or beliefs that everything in the universe could be invested with spiritual power.

Friends, this just isn’t a challenge to the modern church. A long time ago in the 1500’s, Martin Luther, the great reformer had challenged these beliefs that all of this power resided in objects so that if you went to a certain place where a holy object was, you could get your healing or your deliverance. Back in the 1500’s these things were called relics. The church at Wittenburg in Germany supposedly had a genuine thorn from the crown of Christ certified to have pierced the Savior’s brow. They had one tooth from Saint Jerome, 4 pieces of Saint

Augustine, 6 of Saint Bernard. From Mary they had 4 hairs, 3 pieces of her cloak, 4 from her girdle. They had 7 from the veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

Supposedly among the relics at Wittenburg, there was a piece of Jesus' baby clothes, a wisp of straw from the manger, a piece of gold brought by the wise men, 3 of myrrh, one strand of Jesus' beard, one of the nails driven through his hands, a piece of the bread eaten at the Last Supper, a twig from Moses' burning bush, over 19,000 holy bones. Luther found all this ridiculous. It took away from focus on Jesus and the gospel. Can an object be invested with spiritual power, either good or bad? Yes. Occasionally God may direct a person to go pray using water or oil. But if you look over the biblical record, you'll find it is highly unusual, extraordinary, not an everyday occurrence. This is something of a gracious initiation of God and I think that God did it in this instance to show his superiority over the power of the demonic in Ephesus.

We don't read that Paul sought for this, that this was part of Paul's practice, that we should seek for these things. But what was Paul's practice that is for us? I believe they precedent what was Paul's normal practice. Regarding the supernatural Paul's normal practice in verse 6 is that "When he placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." The laying on of hands in which we pray that the Holy Spirit would come, and the result of the laying on of hands being tongues and prophecy is so frequent in occurrence in the Book of Acts.

It's so repetitive that we would guess that Luke is laying out for us a model. And it is taught in 1 Corinthians so plainly that, apart from the so-called cessationist churches who believe

many of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 have ceased who have reached what I believe is quite an erroneous conclusion that the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy has been withdrawn from the church, apart from some cessationists churches and teachers, one would read the New Testament in a natural fashion you would come to the conclusion that we ought to expect these gifts as much as in the day of the New Testament. In our lives and in our churches.

Should everyone speak in tongues or prophesy? No. The Bible doesn't say that everyone will speak in tongues and prophecy. But the Apostle Paul does say that tongues are so valuable that he would like everyone of us to speak in tongues if that were possible (1Cor 14:5). And tongues and prophecy are a normal part of the Christian life. Indeed the apostle Paul tells us to seek for these things, to ask God for them using very strong language. In 1Cor 14 he says, "eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." Prophecy is the gift of being able to hear from God and articulate to others what you've heard.

Now in this church we have hundreds and hundreds of people who have had the experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon them and as a result they have spoken in tongues or prophesied. Just as a little aside, in my own private devotional life I pray in tongues and while I don't often speak about it or preach on this subject I actually consider it to be extremely valuable. More valuable than many of you would expect, I believe, it to be. As Paul says in 1Cor 14, the results of speaking in tongues are marvelous. It enables us to worship God; it enables us to pray to God more easily.



The gift of tongues also enables us to build ourselves up spiritually. It is a valuable gift and one that you ought to ask God for. These things are part of normal Christian experience.

We read on in verse 13, “Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.’ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?’ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.”

One of the more humorous situations, if I can call it that, in the Book of Acts. There were many Jews in the ancient world that practiced exorcism and there were many Jews who believed that certain names, certain ways of pronouncing things had power to release people from demons. The exact pronunciation of the Name of the Lord, Yahweh, was thought to be one of those names that could deliver people from the demonic. These sons of a priest thought they had discovered a new magic name, Jesus to deliver this poor man from the demons that afflicted.

You know deliverance is not just something that is performed by Christians. If you go into many 3<sup>rd</sup> world villages there will be the village witch doctor or local shaman, some village holy man who will by doing some sort of incantation release people from demons. And there were all these people in the ancient world, as I said, who performed these rites. But frankly I believe that the witch doctors and the shamans and the village holy men and these

people who were running around in the ancient world did their deliverances by the power of Satan not by the power of God.

You say, “Well, why would Satan cast out Satan? That doesn’t seem right.” But understand, friends, that stronger demons may throw out weaker demons in order to gain greater control over an individual. See the purpose, ultimately, is greater demonic bondage. And if I could just bring it down to earth I believe that there is real healing of a type through various kinds of holistic healers and people who would manipulate your aura and practitioners of various kinds of spiritual healing outside of Christ. People do find healing and relief. But at the same time those people are brought under greater demonic bondage, greater darkness enters their lives.

When somebody goes to a village witch doctor or in America, to a new age medical practitioner, the relief they find is simply the bait on the hook designed to pull them into greater bondage. And any relief that would have come from the seven sons of Sceva, I believe, would have pulled this poor man into greater spiritual bondage.

Now switching gears for a moment, it is apparent that what sets someone free is not a technique. These sons of Sceva believed that if they had the correct formula in the name of Jesus that a person who was afflicted demonically would be released. It’s not a technique that releases us. What you don’t need to learn is more rituals, more rites, more formulas. The sons of Sceva were operating out of their worldview, which was one of magic. We can manipulate the forces if we just learn the technique. Many Christians think that way when it

comes to healing or deliverance. Show me the formula, show me the technique and then I will become proficient.

That's what many people expect when they go to our prayer ministry training sessions or our training sessions on deliverance; they expect to learn a technique. Well, I've mastered calculus and in school I learned Spanish and I also took American history and philosophy 101 and I've mastered those subjects so I'll go to this class and I will become the master of healing or the master of deliverance. That's magical thinking. That's non-Christian thinking. That's the thinking that drives witchcraft. I can learn a technique that will enable me to manipulate spiritual powers.

What is it that brings about healing and deliverance? An intimate personal relationship with Christ on the part of the healer, on the part of the deliverer . A relationship with Christ that enables us to hear from God regarding what God wishes to do to discern what God is doing in the moment. To pray what's on the heart of God, to bring into our world, into this moment, what God is doing in the heavenly places. To be a vehicle for the will of God so that he would do on earth what he's doing in heaven.

Friends, here's the deal. No technique will bring about a healing for your friend or family member. No formula will do it. No formula or technique will bring about a deliverance. These sons of Sceva were lacking not in formulas or in rituals; they were lacking the personal intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ. But if you would lean into your relationship with Jesus, if you would say, "Jesus, I want to get to know you better, let me hear your voice. I'm

willing to take some risks and pray for the sick. I will open up my heart to you and pray what I sense you want me to pray, following you lead.”

Friend I’m telling you it’s out of that kind of intimacy with the Lord, seeing what the Father is doing and doing that, that we see healing and deliverance. We have taken dozens of people through deliverance but it’s not by way of a technique or a formula. It’s the result of listening to God and following God’s leadership in prayer. We read on and it says, “When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”

As people got in touch with the truth of God and as people discovered the power of God, the net result was what I’m calling normal Christian repentance. The scene here is not that unusual, people getting rid of what causes them to sin. This is a normal practice of repentance. Repentance begins by the discovery of the fear of the Lord. It says “they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.” By the fear of the Lord we’re talking about a point in time in your life where you begin to take God and his words seriously. You start saying, “This really is the truth” and God and his word takes on great weight in your life.

You stop treating God and his word lightly. You fear being separated from God. You fear God's discipline in your life. You fear offending God. You recognize that one day you're going to be called to account in judgement. The normal Christian life involves a strong element of the fear of God. Not a fear that you're afraid to come to God but a fear of running away from God.

Some people are afraid to come to God. They don't know what God is going to be like; they don't know how he's going to deal with them. That's not the normal Christian life or normal Christian repentance. Fear always had to do with the fear of being apart from God, the fear of losing God. And in normal Christian repentance people come clean. It says they "openly confessed their evil deed." They opened up about it, they came clean. And then they did something about it. They burned all of their scrolls at a very high cost. What these people were doing in repentance was shutting all of the doors to their former practice of magic.

Having come to Christ they were closing off the entryways in their lives to sin. You say how does this apply to me? Repentance from sin often carries with it a financial cost or a cost to your reputation or an emotional cost regarding breaking off a relationship. Here at the Vineyard we often talk with couples who come to the church and who are living together without the benefit of marriage. And they might come in to speak with one of the pastors and they might tell one of the pastors that they would like to get married at some future point and they'd like the pastor's assistance.

At the Vineyard we have a clear policy; we will not marry people who are living together unless one of them first moves out. Now, that policy is not designed to hurt people or to be mean to folks but people need to begin their married lives in a place of spiritual health with God if they wish to be successful. It's quite apparent from the Bible that living together with your intended mate is a status that God disapproves of. If 2 people are living like they cannot have God's blessing on their lives, they will enjoy far less than God's best for them or the futures.

We want to give people the best possible chance of success in life. We know that living together before marriage decreases your chance of a happy marriage. The stats are all against it. If you live with someone before marriage, you have only a 1 in 5 chance of a happy life-long marriage. We also know that it sets a terrible example for your children in the future. One day your child may wish to live with their boyfriend or girlfriend. What's going to be the basis for you to challenge them if you're a Christian? We also know that living together is a terrible witness to the community. If you're claiming to be a Christian and you're sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend; what is assumed if you're living together, people think that Christianity is hypocritical. You're claiming one thing with your words and with your life you're doing something else.

Well we often challenge that practice. And the response as a pastor that I know that I've received is "But Rich, it's going to be very costly to move out. I don't know if I can afford another place." And I say this with all affection. But normal Christian repentance often involves financial cost. And the fact is if you don't repent, there's also a cost, only it's a cost to your own soul. It's a cost regarding your own relationship with God and your potential

future relationship with your mate. So on the one side, yeah you've got some money, but on the other side you weigh your spiritual health and your marriage health and the potential for the spread of the kingdom and which side weighs heavier?

I've talked with people who have had affairs in the workplace and they've tried to break them off but they're still working with the person that they've had the affair with. And often that creates quite a bit of stress on their marriage. Their partners are jealous. They're not sure that they can trust them. Sometimes their partners want them to quit their job. They say, "I can't afford to do that. This is a great job. I can't afford it." Normal Christian repentance calls for us to pay a financial cost to escape from sin.

You may have objects around your house that led you to sin. You might struggle with the cable on your television or with your computer or with certain kinds of music or with some books or literature in your house. There might be sports or hobbies that really for you are a hook. Maybe for someone else they're not but for you they're a hook. They draw you back into a lifestyle that you're trying to escape from. So what if it costs money. If getting rid of those things gets you closer to Jesus then pay the price. It's just money. It's not eternal, but you are.

The normal Christian life involves repentance, a real breaking from sin even if it's costly.

The normal Christian life involves a strong dose of the supernatural life. The normal Christian life is sanctioned in truth and believes in the power of the gospel. The normal Christian life is the life that we find described in the book of Acts.

Let's pray.