

Well, good morning. Again, it's good to be with you this morning. I just take one small issue with the introductions this morning is I don't want to give the impression that I am planting a church in Lexington, when the reality is we are planting a church in Lexington. The vision for church planting is one that's come out of First Pres under the leadership of Dr. Thomas, now continuing under the leadership of Dr. Stewart and I have just been so thankful to be able to be here. We've been here consistently for these last three or four weeks now as we've been in town and to be able to be here with you and to find that this is a church that has a great passion for taking the gospel to every corner of Columbia and beyond. to find that this is a church that has a real sense of mission, and a real sense of purpose, and a real desire not to simply gather and huddle for ourselves, but a desire to see the gospel go to all the nations. And so that has been a great joy, and I'm glad to be here, and I'm glad to partner with you in this new work of bringing a new congregation to pass in Lexington County. As several of the previous speakers have noted, we were all assigned a title slash topic for this lecture series, and the title that I was given was this, Born from Above, colon, The Life of God in the Soul of Man. born from above, the life of God in the soul of man. And you hear that first part, born from above, and I imagine for almost all of you, your mind goes immediately to John chapter three. The conversation that Nicodemus has with Jesus when Jesus says to him that you can't, unless a man is born again or born from above, Perhaps the Greek of that word is maybe intentionally ambiguous, but unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The second part of the title, The Life of God and the Soul of Man, is also perhaps known to some of you, although I might guess it would be known to a bit fewer, as the title of a book that was written in 1676 by Henry Scougal, a man who was 26 years old at the time, and yet, even so, he was the professor of divinity at Aberdeen University. And this was a book that is very short, a work on the nature of the Christian life. And though it is a short work, it is very profound. It's very insightful, it's very deep, and was claimed by none other than George Whitefield as being one of the most influential works in his life and his view of the nature of a heart that is in union with Christ. And so then we have both in the title. We have first the necessity and the reality of the new birth, and then we also have hints at the very nature of what that new birth is like. But I want to begin this morning where the title begins. born from above, the nature and the reality of the new birth brought by the Holy Spirit. And I can tell you this morning, one of the reasons that I am excited to talk on this topic, born from above and the new birth, has something to do with our history. Over the last maybe 75 years in the history of evangelicalism, it seems somewhere around the middle of the 20th century, perhaps with the great success of Billy Graham and his crusades and his evangelicalism, we had this phrase, being born again, that started to become almost shorthand for the process of conversion, the need to be born again. And it also became shorthand for not only conversion itself, but what followed conversion, and the nature of the Christian life. As people would say, they are a born-again Christian. It sort of became synonymous with evangelicalism itself. And of course, born-again is a great phrase. It's a biblical phrase. It's a phrase that comes from Jesus himself in John chapter three, but there is a liability when a phrase becomes shorthand. When a phrase becomes shorthand, we have the tendency to allow lots of glorious realities, glorious biblical truths to become eclipsed and to be overlooked in that shorthand. They can become forgotten over time. Of course, we can assume that in the beginning, everyone knew what that meant and they simply

assumed that the theology of the new birth was there and they knew the role of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Perhaps they knew some of the key biblical texts behind that. But over time, the things that are assumed become the things that are forgotten. And I believe we got to a point in our history of evangelicalism where that phrase, born again, began to lose some of its meaning. This great, deep, biblical phrase that's filled with theology, that gives glory to the Holy Spirit, that speaks of his role in the conversion of sinners, all got eclipsed in this phrase that we use to say simply, I am born again. You see, in one of the ways that we are always in danger of domesticating the gospel is when we begin to see it as something less than this entire glorious life-to-death, life-transforming experience of being regenerated and born from above by the work of the Holy Spirit. And so we need to recover the theology of the new birth. Biblically speaking, the means of the new birth is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit regenerating a person's heart. And through the new birth, we are then made partakers in both the new covenant and the new creation. It is a supernatural work in which the spirit sovereignly raises the dead, in which it gives life to those who are spiritually dead, and it is a change so radical and so all-encompassing that it can only be described as perhaps being born again. being born from above with an entire newness of life. And so what I want to do this morning is a bit of a deep dive into the doctrine of regeneration. into what it is to be born from above. I want us to see that the Holy Spirit in his ministry of regeneration, this ministry is first the powerful creation of new life in the hearts of those who are spiritually dead, in which he removes the heart of stone and he gives us the heart of flesh. It is the resurrection of the dead as by faith we are united to Christ in his death that we might also walk with him in newness of life. But I wanna go a step beyond that. I also want us to see that regeneration is more than just a personal inward reality of the spiritual life. We must also think of regeneration as a cosmic and eschatological reality that just as the spirit himself was involved in the beginning in creation, breathing life into Adam's nostrils, so the spirit is involved now in the beginning of the new creation. as he gives life to those who are dead, true life, eternal life, so that we, even now, are citizens of that future kingdom. And finally, because this is my hour, because I'm not gonna be shy about it this morning, I also wanna talk about our hope of regeneration and the reality of church planting. Because without the Holy Spirit raising the dead and giving new life to dry bones, there would be no hope of planting new churches. This is the hope and the promise that the spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is still at work, that he is still able and willing to give life from above, even to those who are stone-cold dead in sins and trespasses. We may be tempted to look on people like that and simply write them off, but Jesus never does, and the spirit is able to transform everything about them, which we know to be true because he has transformed everything about us. And if he is willing to do that, then we will plant new churches with great hope, with great expectation, that we're able to go into Lexington and to the ends of the earth and to preach the gospel with expectation that Jesus, through his spirit, is going to do a great work. So here's four points today. First, the need of the new birth. Second, the reality of the new birth. Third, the hope of eschatology and the new birth. And then finally, some more thoughts on church planting and the hope of the new birth. But first, we need to begin by seeing the need for the new birth. I grew up in a navigator household. My dad was a campus minister with the Navigators at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana when I was born. He spent his entire ministry career with the

Navigators with the mission of reaching the world through the campus. And if you know the Navigators, perhaps you know that one of the things that they are very good at is simple little illustrations that teach biblical truth in a simple and clear way. Perhaps some of you are familiar with the bridge illustration. The bridge, I learned it through the Navigators and I know it's gone out far beyond the Navigators. Perhaps you have become familiar with it too. But it is one of the first ways that I learned to explain and to share very simply the truths of the gospel. The bridge illustration is very simple. It pictures first two cliffs. Two cliffs on either side. On one of these is represented man, and perhaps you draw a little stick figure on that cliff to represent man on one side. And on the other side is God. And perhaps you draw a throne or a crown to represent that God is on this side of the cliff. And you explain that our sin has made this deep chasm that is between these two cliffs. There's a great rift that's been made such that man now is separated from God on this side. He's unable to cross over to God's side. He has no access. He has no ability to be in the presence of a holy God because he is separated by sin. And his sin separates from God. But then you can draw a cross in the middle, and the horizontal beam of that cross sort of spans this chasm. And it gives you opportunity to talk about how it is only through the cross of Christ that man is able to be reconciled to God, that our sin can be dealt with in order that we may have access to the presence of God, and that we may come into salvation through Christ. I think it's a good illustration. I think it easily and simply illustrates some of the big picture truths of the gospel. But I remember when I was in seminary, I had a friend who, in some of his classic seminary zeal, decided this illustration was no longer good enough. And he decided he was gonna have to tweak that illustration. He said, maybe, excuse me, put that out of my way. He said, maybe what we need to do is make God's cliff much higher than man's cliff. Or maybe we need to give God a lasso, right, because we can't give the impression that it's simply up to man to decide when he walks a cross. He made these suggestions, and it seems a little bit silly, of course, but we recognize that what he was trying to do was to somehow bring that illustration more in line with some of the biblical truths of regeneration, right, to demonstrate that and to make that more clear, because what is regeneration? It's God's work of giving spiritual life to a person who is spiritually dead. A person who is spiritually dead. Ephesians 2.5 says, even when we were dead in our sins and trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. In other words, before Christ, we are not simply those who are spiritually sick, we're not just a little bit misguided. We're not just a little bit misdirected. We're not just uninformed. We're not just in need of just a slight mid-course correction, right, in light of a little bit of new information. We are those who are spiritually dead, and we need someone who can raise the dead. Those who are dead don't need good advice. They need good news. They need someone who can come from outside of themselves. Those who are dead do not have the opportunity to eventually work up a ledger of good works. They are simply spiritually dead in need of new life. If you do have your Bibles, I'd ask you to turn to Ephesians chapter two. I wanna look at some of those verses in Ephesians two. Ephesians 2 verse 1, he says this again, very plainly, verse 1, and you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked. You were dead. And Paul is speaking here to the church in Ephesus. He's speaking to those who are now believers but telling them because he feels that they need to know, for the good of their soul, for the edification of their own hearts, they need to know what God has done. that they were at that time dead in their sins and trespasses. Now, perhaps you will know that for many who are

yet unbelievers, this truth can be a bit uncomfortable, perhaps. Perhaps you remember a time in your own life when you found this truth uncomfortable, maybe even offensive. I've heard unbelievers say, well, sure, I'm not perfect. Right, yes, perhaps I do sin on occasion, but I still do some good things. Right, they say perhaps I'm even nicer than some of the Christians I know. Maybe they have a point. Right, but certainly they do not see themselves as being dead in sin. And yet we do not get to the point of appreciating the fullness of the grace in Christ unless we appreciate first our dilemma. Dead people do not have a say in when they become alive again. that dead people need divine rescue. In Ephesians 2, these following verses show us a little bit about what spiritual death looks like. What that spiritual death actually looks like, he says you are dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. He actually describes three things in these verses that give us a picture of what spiritual death looks like. The world, the flesh, and the devil. Except not in that order. He begins by saying that those who are dead in their trespasses and sins follow the course of the world. following the course of this world. Now that is a truth that is actually even perhaps more offensive, particularly for those who are in my generation and below, to say that part of the reality of being spiritually dead apart from Christ is that you are merely following the course of this world. Because one of the idolatries du jour of the younger generations today is this idea that you are free to build your own life. It's the 21st century. You can have whatever life you want. We tend to think that, sure, if you had been born several generations ago, you would have had very few options in life. You would have been bound to live basically the same kind of life that your ancestors had lived. But not anymore. We're free to form our own lives, to curate our own identities. We pick our own path in life. We do what we want to do. We know and we love the lie of self-determination. Not only are we free to choose our own career, which we can, but we think, well, I'm free to choose my own lifestyle. We can define ourselves by our choices, our hobbies, the things that give us a sense of purpose and identity. We curate our own specific identities, perhaps through social media. Perhaps we think we're even free to define our own gender. That's the extreme, but that's simply at the end of the road that we're all on. But Ephesians 2 says, you are not nearly as free as you think. To be separate from Christ is to be following the course of this world in much the same way that a raft without a motor follows the course of the river. You go where it takes you. Because you are spiritually dead. You may express your deadness slightly differently than those in previous generations did, but it's still the same spiritual deadness, just a new variation on that spiritual rigor mortis. Your offering might be slightly different than the other guys, but you're serving the same idols. We're following the course of this world. Second, those who are spiritually dead are following the prince of the power of the air. Now this is perhaps the most dramatic statement that Paul gives of what spiritual death is like, to say that we are following, apart from Christ, following the prince of the power of the air. That is, you follow the devil. And we don't like to think about it in those terms. That's not very socially or politically correct. But Paul says in the spiritual world there are two options. You can follow Christ, or you can follow the devil. And there's not a third way. following the prince of the power of

the air, and that is dramatic, and that is rather fearful, but I notice in this passage that Paul is actually careful not to set up an us versus them mentality in this. He doesn't allow it to become a source of pride that we can say we in here are better than them out there because they are the ones following the devil. Rather, the way he deals with this in this passage is to say, verse three, among whom we all once lived. He doesn't allow us to take this as a point of spiritual pride and to get puffed up in our own minds. He wants us to embrace this as true and yet use it properly at the same time. To embrace it as true, but also to use it properly, not to allow us to become puffed up with pride, but to be a point for our own humility, our own gladness at receiving the grace of Christ, our own sincerity in worship, our own nearness in drawing close to Christ. For we too were once among those who followed the prince of the power of the air. And then the third thing is the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. And if the last one about following the devil is the most dramatic, we would look at this one and say, well, this is perhaps the least dramatic. To say that one picture of those who are spiritually dead is to say that they carry out the desires of the body and the mind. They do what they wanna do, right? They take instructions from no one else. And it's interesting to me that these two are side by side. That there are times when spiritual death is incredibly dramatic and you can't miss it. But there are other times as well when spiritual death simply looks like following our own desires. It simply looks like doing what we want to do. It simply looks like not listening. F.F. Bruce puts it this way. He says, spiritual death can manifest itself in respectable forms, as well as in the disreputable pursuits of first century paganism. But regardless of the form, it is still a horrible bondage. You see, that's the reality of spiritual death. It can take a very respectable form, or a very unrespectable form. But regardless, it is the same bondage. Now we start with this. This is the need for the new birth and the reality of spiritual death. And we find this might be somewhat off-putting to think about. But it's important, not only for our own humility, but it's interesting to note that there is some interesting apologetic value here. That regeneration, I believe, is one of the primary ways that the gospel of the kingdom is able to answer some of the very practical, real-life questions that people are asking today. Particularly, perhaps, among the younger generations, but again, not limited to them, I believe people are asking the question of how to find life. In a generation where we live in this particular culture, people are asking the questions of where do we find life, with a capital L, where is true life to be found among the many options that our society gives us? The younger generations are seeking life and asking these kinds of questions. When they are asking questions about work-life balance, I would suggest they're asking questions about what kind of life is worth living. How should I spend my time? What do I pursue? When they're asking questions about working remotely, the home office versus office culture, I would again suggest these are questions about where do I find life. The rise of influencers on social media. perhaps even social media itself, perhaps even the backlash against social media itself, points us to a generation that is still asking questions about where to find life. There was a time when I was on social media and I was particularly interested in following one of the hashtags, hashtag van life. I don't know if any of you know it, but living in a van is super popular these days. This is one of the things that my generation grew up fearing that would happen to us, and now it's something to pursue. And I was so fascinated to look at this, and you can find all these pictures of different people's setup, what their van looks like, and they

give these little tutorials of how do you cook, where do you store stuff, how do you park, where do you work, do you go to a gym to take a shower, what do you do? And it's very, I won't say interesting, because that's not the right word. But it can drag you in for a while. But van life, like every hashtag, is an attempt to find life. Is this the life that's worth living? Where do I invest my life? What do I give myself to? What do I pursue? Where will I find life? And the older generations may shake their heads, and I'm getting to the point of including myself in that. But we recognize that these are good questions, and these are questions that we have an answer for. We have an answer for those who are looking for life, and it's not found in working remotely out of your van parked somewhere in Baja. And so we have a need, but we also have an answer with the reality of the new birth. The reality of the new birth, and I would suggest to you that perhaps, as we're looking at the ministry of the Holy Spirit over the course of this summer, Perhaps one of the most necessary and glorious and hope-filled ministries of the Holy Spirit is simply this. It is the Spirit who gives life. It is the Spirit who gives life as a supernatural work of spiritually raising the dead that changes everything about a person in a way that is so radical and all-encompassing that we describe it as being born again. being utterly made new. The Spirit is the sovereign agent who creates and gives life. I imagine that some of you this week, as you were doing your devotions, and you picked up your copy of the Nicene Creed, as you do daily, perhaps, you got to that line in the Nicene Creed where we say, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. He is the Lord and the giver of life, which is true, because John 6.63 says it is the Spirit who gives life. Romans 8.11, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. 2 Corinthians 3.6, where the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Galatians 6, the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap life. It is the Holy Spirit who is the Lord and giver of life. We think back, perhaps, to the very beginning of the story of the Bible, with the story of creation, and it is the Spirit who is hovering over the waters as an agent of creation. And when God forms the man out of the dust of the earth, He then breathes into him. And the text says he breathes his ruach into him, his spirit, his breath, his life. He breathes into him and he becomes a living being. Why? Because the spirit is Lord and giver of life. I would take you to Ezekiel 37, and we don't have to turn there. You probably know the vision. this great vision that Ezekiel has of being carried in the spirit and being set down in a valley that is full of dry bones. And he describes this, and at the end of the description he says, and behold, they were very dry. The dry bones are dry, right? As though if these bones were perhaps wet, right, if there was just a little speck of flesh that was left, perhaps he worries that we would be too optimistic about it. Right, we think, hmm, maybe these can come back to life. But he wants us to know, no, these are dry. The dry bones are very dry, these are white, these are bleached by the sun. There has not been life here for quite some time now. There's no chance that these bones are gonna come back to life until God speaks and he asks Ezekiel, can these bones live? Can these bones live? Remember, they're very dry. They're very dry. But Ezekiel says, oh Lord God, you know, which is either a very faith-filled response or maybe it's just a stalling tactic, trying to buy some time to see what God is up to in this, because he's not really sure. But God tells him to prophesy to these bones, see what happens. And so he does, and the wind, the ruach, we know perhaps that Hebrew word means both wind and breath and spirit all together, and the wind begins to blow over those bones, those very, very dry bones,

and they begin to rattle. And the sinews come back on those bones, and the flesh begins to come back on those once dry bones, and they begin to stand up. and life comes where there was previously only death, very, very dead death. And he says it's now an exceedingly great army, and the message of that chapter to the nation of Israel is this, I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live, because it is the spirit who is the Lord and giver of life. And to those who are spiritually dead, the message is that though those bones be dry, that is no hindrance to the sovereign spirit who blows where he will and who gives life even to dry bones. You see, the power of these vivid images is to press home the reality that apart from Christ, we are all dead. Our spiritual bones were very dry. and it was not up to ourselves to stand up. We were dependent on the action and the movement of the sovereign spirit who blows where he will over the dry bones of your soul and sovereignly causes those bones to live. And Ephesians 2.5 says that though you are dead, but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. You see, to be born again, to be born from above is not merely a change of mind. It's not merely a change of Sunday morning habits. It's not a small change in our religious belief. It is a resurrection from the dead. It is the gift of life to very dry bones. Which in some sense we see that this gift of regeneration, this work of the spirit, is in some sense nothing less than reversing the effects of the fall. Is it not because we know when Adam sinned, the word of God was that in the day you eat of it, you shall die. And all of us, being descended from Adam, by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in that first sin, But when the Spirit then, now, unites you to Christ, you who had died in Adam are now united to Christ as your covenant head instead, and instead of being dead in Adam, now you are alive in Christ. The Spirit now sovereignly blows in order to undo the effects of the fall now in the redemption that is purchased for us by Christ. The life that he gives is gospel life. The life that he gives is gospel life. Consider Colossians chapter two, and if you have your Bibles, you may turn there a few pages to the right. Colossians two, 13 and 14 says this. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. And I want you to consider this, that we were dead in our sins, and the Spirit makes us alive, but how can he do that? After all, we were not dead merely by an accident. We were dead in sin. We were dead because the sins and trespasses were an offense against the holy God and our death was a judicial death, a sentence that was passed upon us. It was a death that we deserved. How then does the spirit come and give new life to one who deserves to be dead as a judicial statement? Well, it happens because it's part of the great exchange. It's part of the great exchange that Paul writes about in these verses in Colossians, saying that Jesus, who was alive in his righteousness and who deserved to be alive, he died for you. It's saying that Jesus who took the death that you deserved in order that we might receive the life that Jesus earned and that he deserved. The only way that we become spiritually alive is through the great exchange, that we have a savior who chose death in order that we might have life. We did not choose it. We received it justly through our sin. And yet, there was a record. There was a record that had to be canceled. There were trespasses that had to be forgiven. And therefore the biblical imagery for the new birth and for regeneration is very dramatic. It's dramatic because it has to be dramatic. Because it speaks to the severity of sin

and the life-giving power of the spirits working. That our conversion would not merely be a minor change of mind, but it is the spirit giving life where there was death. And that's what makes it so glorious, that he is the spirit, he is the Lord and giver of life, it is the work of God himself. And it's utterly filled with hope. It's utterly filled with hope to think of it this way, because regeneration teaches us first there is no one so far from God that they are beyond the hope of his spirit working in them. Take just a moment and think of the person for whom you see them and you think there is no hope. They are so far, they are so far gone, they are so dead, those bones are so dry. And yet the Spirit is the Lord and giver of life, who sovereignly blows and brings life out of stone-cold spiritual death. Yet there is hope because this tells us that the Spirit is actively at work, to bring life, to grow his kingdom, to redeem his people, to build his kingdom so that the gates of hell will never prevail against it. We see the need for the new birth, we see the reality of the new birth, but I wanna go a little further in one particular point, and that is to speak of the new birth and the hope of the new creation. the new birth and the hope of the new creation because the Bible gives us another image that is perhaps even greater in putting regeneration into the full context of the scriptures. The scriptures being the story that goes from creation to new creation. From creation to new creation in this grand overarching narrative. And to say that we learn the new creation does not simply come all at once at the very end of the story in Revelation chapter 20 Right, it begins actually by breaking in to the old order of things, to the present creation. It breaks in first with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, that he is the first fruits of the new creation. He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, not meaning that he was the first one to come back alive after being dead, right? Others had done that, such as Lazarus. but that he is the first fruits of the new creation. Because when he was raised, he was raised in power, never to die again. He was raised with a body of glory, incorruptible, part of the new creation that God is making. It's interesting to note that the word regeneration only occurs twice in our English Bibles. even if you have the right translation, which we'll get to. It occurs once in Titus 3, 5, and 6, where Paul uses this phrase, the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. The washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. And I don't have the time right now to do a deep dive into those words, but both of those words have eschatological overtones. regeneration and renewal are both pointing us forward to something greater that they are a part of. The one other time that regeneration, the Greek word there, well I won't try to pronounce it, there's professors in the room, but the Greek word there occurs one other time in the New Testament in Matthew 19, 28, referring to the final renewal of all things. And if you read the older translations, they will sometimes refer to that new world that the son of man will bring in his glory as being the regeneration. That is the renewal of all things, the final state of the new creation. But he says also that word now refers to the current change that's made in us by the Lord and giver of life. So that we now, in newness of life, when we are born again, when we are born from above, we now are citizens not only of this creation, we become citizens of the new creation. Because that new creation is now breaking in little bit by little bit. As the spirit is sovereignly doing his work. In preparing for this, I was reading again a work on the Holy Spirit by Sinclair Ferguson. which I was led to believe is a good source to cite in this room, and this is what he writes. The renewal which is affected in regeneration is therefore not merely an interchange. It is the incursion of a new

order into the present order of reality. Thus regeneration and similar words not merely denote the phenomenon of spiritual change from within, or from below as it were, but transformation from without and from above, caused by participation in the power of the new age, and more specifically by fellowship through the spirit with the resurrected Christ. He is saying that regeneration is nothing less than an incursion of the new order from above into the present order of reality. That there are cosmic and eschatological changes going on when a person is united to Christ by faith and by the spirit is made new. When he takes out that heart of stone and gives them the heart of flesh. When he raises them from spiritual death and gives them spiritual life. He says we should not think of that merely as a private inner change, only a spiritual change that is limited to them. He says we should think of that as a cosmic reality, an incursion of the new age breaking into the current age. So that now, as we are regenerated, we participate in the power of the new age. This is why Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 5.17, therefore if anyone is in Christ, new creation. He is a new creation and I believe that Paul is not merely saying that there's a subjective change, that you feel different, that you feel as though something is new. He is saying you are now part of the new creation. This new creation that will come in its fullness on that great day when Jesus makes all things new. But that's a new creation that doesn't come all at once on that day, it begins little by little. As those dead in sins and trespasses are brought to Christ and made alive by the power of his spirit. Regeneration means the participation in the grand narrative, the life of the new creation, a cosmic incursion. And here's how Ferguson concludes this section, he says, This is the note which became muted in the teaching of the post-apostolic church, but which must be recovered. And so I'm trying to do my part today to recover some of that teaching. That regeneration is not merely inward and spiritual, it is a cosmic incursion from above. Now, I want to take just a few moments here at the end to close with thoughts on church planting in the hope of the new birth. church planting, and the hope of the new birth, because here, I believe, is the truth. Nothing motivates and energizes mission like good theology. Nothing motivates and energizes mission like good theology, and so I want to make a few connections. As we think and plan and dream as a congregation about planting a new congregation, we need to remember the need for regeneration. And the fact that apart from Christ, people are dead in their trespasses and sins. Because this tells us that the situation in Lexington is worse than we thought. It's worse than we thought. It's easy to look and to see Lexington perhaps merely with the eyes of the flesh. And perhaps we look at it and we see, well this looks like a desirable suburb. Right? The quality of living indexes are high. Perhaps there's a little bit of traffic. David seemed worried about that. I'm not worried, I lived in L.A. But it's a nice place. It's comfortable. There's comfortable subdivisions. They seem new. If you're lucky, maybe you get a place on the lake. But the scriptures remind us that it's possible to have a comfortable upper middle class lifestyle and still be utterly dead. We must see it with the eyes of faith, adopt the missionary mindset, and say we see it and say the situation is worse than we thought because there is great growth in Lexington and therefore there is a need for these people to hear the gospel. We need the work of the Spirit. Second, we rely on the fact that it is the Spirit himself who is the Lord and giver of life. The Lord and giver of life. You see, the work of the Holy Spirit is the real hope of church planting. The work of the Holy Spirit is the real hope of church planting. I've been able to tell some of my friends over these last couple months that, to be honest, I've had a bit of

anxiety about being involved in this new work. Church planting is hard. It's a lot of work. There's a lot of unknowns. There's a lot of risk. What if people don't like it? What if they come and they say, oh, I'd rather hear Dr. Stewart preach every week? I say, so would I. But we're gonna do this thing. But thankfully, I have wise and godly friends who are able to tell me that the hope of church planting is not that I am the right person for the job, or that now is the right time, or that I will be enough, or that my preaching will draw the crowds. The hope of church planting is not that we will have the good music, or that our style of worship will be just right and attract people. That would be a very poor hope for church planting. You see, the hope of church planting is that the spirit raises the dead, that he is the Lord and giver of life. And if the wind of the Spirit will sovereignly blow across Lexington, taking the spiritually dead and making them alive with Christ, then there will be nothing, not an anxious preacher or ordinary music, that is going to be able to stand in the way of the growth of the kingdom. Our hope is that the Holy Spirit is the one doing all the heavy lifting here. He's the one at work, and we trust that he is. We will just be the instruments in his hands. And finally, let me give you one of our prayers for this new work. That this new work in Lexington County will be not merely planting a church, but that we will have the opportunity to witness the cosmic incursion. That we will see the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of people. that we will see him giving new spiritual life to those around us of whom we once thought that person is too far gone, those bones are far too dry. But we trust the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that as he is at work in their lives, we will witness the power of the new age, breaking into the present order of reality. I would put it this way, that our hope is not to do something new, but to do something thousands of years old, to worship, to work, and to witness, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, though we live in Lexington, and to trust that through our efforts, feeble though they may be, Jesus will build his church, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it. Amen? Let's pray. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and we praise your glorious name, as we are reminded even now that our hope, O Lord, is not in ourselves, and the glory must not go to ourselves, but to you and to you alone. To your name be the glory, O God. Would you, by the power of your spirit, remind us of these truths now and in the months and years ahead that we might not walk into a situation blindly hoping in our own abilities, trusting in our own strengths, for Lord, that would be a poor hope. But we go in the hope and the full expectation that your spirit is powerful, that he is sovereign, and that he is at work, and that he desires the good of people in Lexington far more than we do. And so, Lord, may we be on the same page that you and your spirit are on. May we lead where you follow. May we trust in your work. To the glory of Christ, to the good of his people, and to the good of his church, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.