



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

The Unwavering Pastor with Jonathan Dodson Season 5, Episode 6 Transcript

[00:00:00.280] - Announcer

Welcome to the Gospel for Life Podcast. We help churches make disciples. Now Here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:09.670] - Darryl Dash

Well, welcome back to the Gospel for Life podcast.

Once in a while, a book comes along that I think every pastor should read, and I don't say that lightly. I actually believe it. For instance, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor* by D. A. Carson is one of those books I just think every pastor should read. *The Imperfect Pastor* by Zack Eswine is one that I just recommend all over the place. And a third one that I've added recently is The book that I have in my hands as I record this, it's called *The Unwavering Pastor: Leading the Church with Grace in Divisive Times*, and it's written by Jonathan Dotson. It's just one of those books that I've highlighted, I've dog-eared. It's challenged and encouraged me. In fact, I just bought copies for all of our elders to read as well. And if you're a pastor, you should read it. If you're not a pastor, you should check to see if your pastor has it. And if not, you should buy them a copy.

So today, I'm so glad to talk to Jonathan about his book and also about his ministry.

[00:01:17.810] - Darryl Dash

Jonathan is recently the new theologian in residence at Citizens Church in Texas. And he's a husband and a father to three children, the founder of Gospel Centered

Discipleship, and also the author of a number of other books, all of which I've really appreciated. I've talked to him before about some of the other books.

Jonathan, good to talk to you again.

[00:01:40.440] - Jonathan Dodson

Hi, Darryl. Thank you for the warm endorsement. It's good to be chatting with you again about the deepest things of life.

[00:01:48.270] - Darryl Dash

Well, you're one of the guys, and I don't know if I've told you this before, but early in our church planting journey, I was reading, I think the first book I ever read of yours, and I can't remember the title, which one it was, but it just met me. I think as a fellow church planter, it just met me in some of what we were dealing with. Then some of our conversations before, I know I've just felt like I've been pastored by you, so good to talk to you. But I want to ask you, what is a theologian in residence?

[00:02:18.190] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah, well, I'm trying to figure it out. It is a title they gave me this position here in the North Dallas area, where in a church in the suburbs, and it is a church that loves the Lord and values the Bible and wants to grow in theological depth. Yeah, the Theologian in Residence, I'm responsible for starting a theological institute, and that is to help the church grow in theological depth and in spiritual formation. I also tend to be the guy that people come to with theological questions. I'm helping develop preachers in order to communicate God's word. One of the things I love doing is I'm actually like an advisory staff member. When people are working through things, particularly the lead pastors of the church, thinking through vision or something like that, or just having done this for a while, I can see a crack or a crevice that could get pretty big if we didn't act or ask some questions. It's been really fun just, hopefully, use some of my experience and my failures to help the church avoid failure and to walk in wisdom.

[00:03:40.010] - Darryl Dash

You and I have both been founding pastors of a church. I love the church planting journey. It was really one of the hardest things that I've ever done, and yet one of the most joyful things that I've ever done. I know tracking along with your ministry, you've certainly experienced the joys and the challenges of planting a church. What was it like to finish at church that you loved and have a sense from the Lord that it was time for your ministry to transition? What was it like to make that transition and move into a new era of your life and ministry?

[00:04:10.880] - Jonathan Dodson

Well, it was a transition that was both joyful and sorrowful, as you can imagine and as you can identify with. I mean, this was not just a job. These people were not just a part of an organization that was trying to achieve some great purpose. We were family, and we still are family, but we're distant family now. There are people that I've counseled through rough marriages I've prayed for, rejoiced with, we've seen people come to Jesus with. It's been the highs and lows for two decades. It's hard to say goodbye to dear family members. It was hard. At the same time, it was also very exciting because I knew it was a clear call from God, not a vocational adjustment or a climb up the ladder. There was absolutely clear this was God's calling. So into a new chapter of ministry to pastors and more theology and more writing. So there was a lot of excitement and there was a lot of grief. I can remember we announced it to some key people before we announced the whole church. And then before the whole church, we had some very close members to our home, and we announced it there.

[00:05:33.320] - Jonathan Dodson

Man, the grief in the room just hung like a cloud in the living room. Then people would poke a hole in the cloud. I remember one couple saying, If you're going to help the helpers and pastor the pastors, we are 100% on board. In fact, we've had a sense that you were going to do something like this. In that grief, to have family members also not only grieving but rejoicing seeing and invalidating what we discern was such a sweet comfort.

[00:06:05.220] - Darryl Dash

It was actually encouraging to watch you in that period. I think in a way, you modeled for me what it looks like to finish well at a church that you planted. So, yeah, thank you for your example there.

I'm not even getting to the book yet, but I want to notice just your social media presence, Twitter and places like that, Instagram, less so, but can be one of those places that you wonder, is this helping or not? But your social media ministry and leading into encouraging pastors, I've just appreciated. So I'm sure there's a lot of intentionality that goes behind that. What are you thinking as you open up your text or whatever to post something? What are you thinking? Because it seems to be a very intentional strategy to try to encourage other people in ministry with a sense of realness. You have to explain that. Was that part of the calling that you sensed to have a platform, even on social, to encourage pastors like me and others.

[00:07:05.570] - Jonathan Dodson

Well, it is interesting. I haven't done a lot. I don't have a master plan, so to speak. But as I was younger, I tweeted more about theology because I was in that. As I got into ministry, I probably communicated more about some of the challenges of ministry. I think it probably mimics my growth as a person and the calling church planting, theology, and then now ministry to pastors. I think it is just simply an overflow of what God is doing in my heart. He's pastored me to pastor pastors, and so that's an overflow into the social spaces. As I scroll, man, there's just so much disheartening stuff and so much bitter conflict and acrimony and no benefit of the doubt, very little graciousness or magnanimity. When I post something, I don't want to be like that. There's a place for healthy debate, but I don't think that's the place. But maybe I could put something out there, and I'll often just pray before or after, Lord, would you use this to encourage whoever reads it? Yeah, so it's nice to know that you think that it's encouraging.

[00:08:17.130] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, absolutely. There's something, and it's part of the book as well. There's part of what you write that could only be written by a pastor who's hurt. I remember reading about Ray Ortlund, how he went through that awful period of being dismissed in a

church in his 50s and thought his ministry was over. And out of that came, I think, his most effective ministry of his life at Immanuel Nashville. But it was only on the other side of being through a period of deep pain. I don't know, there's something about your writing where I feel like you couldn't be writing some of what you're writing now if you were on the other side of the experience that you've been through, the experiences of pastoral pain that I think all of us are going to go through in ministry. So, yeah, man, I really appreciate that so much.

[00:09:08.290] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah. Well, thank you. That manuscript in particular was tears stained. I had about 70% of it written, and then I actually had an emotional collapse in ministry. I was walking towards our church and building, and I felt my heart decouple from the church in a way that... I mean, I had bad Mondays. I'd had messy conflicts. I'd had I'd blown it days, but this was a magnitude higher. I called my elders and said, Can we talk? We sat down and I just told them, I can't do it. The thought of being preaching on Sunday is unimaginable. The idea of walking to a room full of people that I'm spiritually responsible for is harrowing. One of my elders and friends turned to me and said, I think it's time just to sit in the dirt and weep with you. What a gracious response. It wasn't like, Hey, get some counseling, then get back on the field, or, We'll pray for you, and then You got a sermon coming. But they actually wept with me, and in that moment, I felt a heavy blanket of divine love fall on me, and I just wept like a baby.

[00:10:25.440] - Jonathan Dodson

I wept in the arms of divine comfort that was expressed not only through the Lord's presence, but through those brothers. That led to a two-month sabbatical in which I was able to really work through the pastoral pain that you're talking about and complete the book. That was very much informing the last 30%. So it was very raw and real.

[00:10:52.180] - Darryl Dash

That experience, was it something that you sensed building over time, or was it just almost hit you out of the blue that you You face this feeling of detachment as you talked about?

[00:11:03.560] - Jonathan Dodson

It's funny because I've always tried in ministry to maintain healthy rhythms, to exercise, to eat well, of course, to abide in Christ and make priority of prayer and communion with God, to be present with my family. And although not flawless, I think if my wife was here, she would say, Yeah, he did that. So it wasn't like I was worshiping an idol, and then the idol just cracked me over the head and I was no longer able to do anything. I put it in the Hosea 6 category where the prophet says that God wounds to heal. I think there was a sovereign wounding that came through Yeah, through attacks and criticisms and jabs and betrayals over time. That sovereign wounding took me to a place with Jesus, a depth of communion with Jesus that I had never had before. We think about our systematic theologies. We turn to our Christology, we've got the humanity of Christ, we've got the atonement of Christ, we've got the two natures of Christ, whatever. But often what's missing is the suffering Christ, not just for atonement, but the weeping Messiah. In that period of sorrow, I came profoundly aware that Jesus weeps with me in my own sorrows, that he is the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

[00:12:34.410] - Jonathan Dodson

He is the suffering servant. That was precious to experience that. It was a healing encounter with Jesus. I came out of that restored and renewed. It's a longer answer to your question, but I didn't see it coming. I knew I hurt, and I've tried to repent of my own sins and seek healing for hurts along the way. But I think, and many pastors probably can identify with this, there can be an accumulated nature of pain that you just can't deal with on the fly that requires some time off.

[00:13:17.770] - Darryl Dash

Yeah. I always struggle with thinking that pastoral ministry is necessarily harder than other roles, because I know people well enough to know that a lot of people are doing hard stuff. A lot of jobs are not very glamorous. There's a lot of... I think of people who deal with a lot of... My brothers are firefighters, and responding to accident scenes and dealing with some of what they do. It takes a toll as well. And yet I think there is. I don't want to say that pastoral ministry is harder, but it's different. There's something different about what we do. I think as Spurgeon said, who can bear the weight of souls without

sinking into the dust. So what are some of those unique pressures you think that just make pastoral ministry a little bit unique and the pain unique?

[00:14:06.210] - Jonathan Dodson

Well, maybe one place to begin is with preaching. A lot of people will say on Sunday after preaching, they're exhausted. And you see the staffs floating around. An hour of verbal communication is like the equivalent of an eight-hour work day or whatever. I don't think that's really it, although that might be true. I don't know the science. But when we stand up to proclaim God's word, we aren't giving people just a Bible lesson or enriching their intellectual life or even giving them tips on how to live. We are, according to Paul, preaching against the powers. When we stand up and proclaim God's word as true and authoritative we are challenging idols, and behind every idol, there is a power, a satanic power, that Christ has, yes, shamed through the victory of the cross, Colossians 2, but yet they are still on the loose. I think that is what is exhausting, that if you are faithful to the word of God, particularly in a time in which all authority is suspect, and yet you, with conviction and compassion, are proclaiming Christ as Lord and savior. You're doing battle with the powers. One place we feel that is the utter exhaustion after preaching on a Sunday.

[00:15:20.630] - Jonathan Dodson

But it's not just the exhaustion. You'll be sitting there and I can think of getting ready to preach, and suddenly it's like a massive finger appears above my head, pointing at me, and all of a sudden, all these condemning voices rush into my head. You haven't done enough cultural exegesis. That application isn't going to land. That story doesn't even fit. You didn't spend enough time in the Bible. My goodness, where is this coming from? It's Satanic. It's spiritual warfare. It's not my father. It's not the God who's delighted in us, who rejoices He's over us with great... That's not the sound of his voice. Man, that's exhausting. Maybe that's just an illustration of the pain that can come around just preaching, which is a gift and a joy boy. But my goodness, it can be incredibly exhausting. I mean, there are other much more intimate pains.

I think I saw a statistic recently that for every Every friend that an ordinary person loses, pastor loses four more. There is a... And some of that is just turnover in the church, but

that's not quite losing a friend. There is a betrayal. There's betrayal. You thought you were friends, and now, apparently, you're enemies.

[00:16:53.790] - Jonathan Dodson

Pastors aren't innocent. They're not flawless. There are times in which that's your fault and you need to repent and you need to reconcile. But then there's a pain that comes along, like I think of Paul in 2 Timothy, who says, Alexander the Coppersmith did me great harm. The word harm can also be translated evil. He did me great evil. This was years later. This is sage Paul in Rome in a prison waiting to be executed and to meet his Lord. Years and years later, he remembers the betrayal of Alexander the Coppersmith. There are deep betrayal wounds that happen in ministry that just linger in their sting. Those relational wounds are of a frequency and depth in vocational ministry that aren't quite present in a lot of other jobs. And some of that is sin, some of that is spiritual warfare. Sometimes we're at fault, sometimes others are at fault. But it is another area in which we experience profound pastoral pain.

[00:17:59.870] - Darryl Dash

I love that you've delved into 2 Timothy and the unwavering pastor. I think that it, along with 2 Corinthians, they're just so rich for any pastor who's beginning to become acquainted with the nature of suffering in ministry. How did 2 Timothy begin to become precious to you? I mean, obviously you were working through it before you hit that period of where you took a leave, but how did it begin to become precious to you in the middle of pastoral ministry?

[00:18:29.580] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah, Well, the first time I preached that letter, I preached it to the church, and I preached it from that angle of how to help the church become a good soldier, a good athlete, a good farmer who waits patiently for the rains, who lives for the reward of the fruit of the crop. So trying to help the church press into both the contending and fighting and tilling of the spiritual life, but also keep an eye on the reward and placing the juicy fruit in your mouth and taking a bite of the satisfaction of Christ and keeping those two together, not pushing them apart and saying it's worth it. It's worth it to be a Christian. But I think I ended up coming back to that and looking at it and saying, that was good

and that was pastoral, but man, this is a letter to pastors. It was written to a struggling pastor in a pluralistic city where there was a lot of spiritual warfare and there was tons of division. Yes, the church needs instruction on all those things, but my goodness, pastors need help in division and in their own pain. And so it just came alive to me, really, as I began to read it again, not through the lens of how can I help my church, but through the lens of how does God want to help me?

[00:19:54.620] - Jonathan Dodson

How does he want to help pastors? And it's stuffed with candor, a level of transparency in old Saint Paul that we don't find often in Romans. I think it's an invitation to pastors to lay down the sword and allow the Savior to pick up the scalpel and to cut away some scar tissue and to do some healing work that we probably desperately need.

[00:20:28.000] - Darryl Dash

There's a level of honesty, as you mentioned, that Paul has in that letter. And I noticed in your writing as well, you have that same transparency and appropriate transparency. Some people you read and you're just like, a little bit too much information. I'm not talking about that transparency. I'm just talking about, I think, an appropriate honesty about the complexity of life and ministry. You know, Jonathan, I didn't grow up with that. I grew up in an era where pastors didn't really talk about their weakness. They didn't talk about their periods of struggle or whatever. How does the gospel, modeled by Paul, Paul is at near the end of his life leaning into the riches of the gospel, and yet he's got that gut level honesty. How does the gospel actually allow us to be honest about ministry and life, even as pastors?

[00:21:19.440] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah. Well, there's a number of different ways that the gospel frees us to be brutally honest about who we are. And one of those is, I think, Romans 8. Romans 8 says, Those whom he called, he justified. Those whom he justified, he sanctified. Those whom he sanctified, he has glorified. And often we tend to look at ourselves from sin forward. My habitual sin of lust or my contention with pride or my bouts with anxiety and despair. Our self-conception is sin forward. But as you read closely Romans 8, in other places, you recognize that God looks at us from glory backwards, that God sees us as

already glorified and sees us within the sphere of the righteousness of Christ. If that is how he sees me, and he knows me better than I know me, he sees the sin and yet sees me through the glory of Christ, well, A) I've got nothing to lose in terms of confessing what's there, and B) there's more than I could ever confess or aware of, and I'm still seen as glorious. Like our pastor said on Sunday that the Father loves us the way that he has eternally loved and set his eyes upon the Son.

[00:22:42.960] - Jonathan Dodson

If that's true, I've I have nothing to lose in telling you who I really am. That's very freeing. The more you internalize that, it's not just a theological construct, but the more that you internalize that in prayer with God in your own silent moments of confession and repentance, and you experience not condemnation, but forgiveness, and you experience love not holding the nose, you experience the profound felt forgiveness of God in Christ your heart and become so convinced that this is how he sees you, that you know you have nothing to lose by telling people who you really are. Man, that is amazing.

[00:23:29.630] - Darryl Dash

I'm picturing the pastor who might be struggling and feels like it's not safe to go to the elders and just say, Hey, man, I'm having a hard time. I don't know what's going on, but my heart's not in a good place. Not every elders board is going to react in a healthy way to that pastor. What would you say to somebody who just doesn't know if they could take the risk of being that honest with their leaders?

[00:23:53.430] - Jonathan Dodson

Well, I would ask them, why? Why do you think you can't go to them with that? Sometimes it's because we fear losing our job. Well, you can trust God with that. Sometimes it's because we fear losing face. You can trust God with that. I would want to peel back the layers of why you really don't want to go to them and try to help bring the hope of Christ into that in order to get to a place where they'd be willing to go. But I also understand that there are teams and ecclesiologies and boards that perhaps are unable to grasp what you might be going through as a pastor right now. I serve in this capacity now where pastors come to me and they tell me things that they haven't told their

boards and their teams. I think there's a place to find someone who gets it, who's been in the war, who has the finger on Sundays and has the the littered past of relational wounds and can just listen to you and understand and then speak into it.

[00:25:08.360] - Jonathan Dodson

That happens over and over. There's a space for me to minister to a pastor because I can identify and I do sympathize with their pain. And then I'm able to say the hard thing, Now go tell your board. And they find strength and encouragement to open up. So, yeah, I just would want to peel back the layers with them, but I would also want to say there are people that you can go to first that you might need to unburden yourself with in order to find some clarity and light and refreshment before going to your board or your team. I also, looking back, my elders were fantastic. But there are things they just don't know or don't get because they're not in vocational ministry. And so what I had to slowly realize were there things that I needed to train them on, and it wasn't character and doctrine and shepherding. It was how to relate to me. I think there's a space for growth in that, opening up a conversation between a pastor and his non-vocational elders to talk about this, that they would be willing to listen and he would be willing to share.

[00:26:29.720] - Jonathan Dodson

It be really helpful if you did this, that, or the other. It's like when you first get married, your wife wants you to do this thing for her, but you don't think about it. She tells you, you're like, What do you want? Then she tells you because she says, Well, I really wish you would do it without even thinking or me having to tell you. So your wife has to train you how to love her. In a similar way, we have to train our elders on how they can love us in the shared challenge and reward of shepherding God's people.

[00:27:08.150] - Darryl Dash

I have a friend who is a great pastor. He's young, though. A few years ago, somebody said to him, You've clearly got the call and you got the gifts. But he said, There's not enough spilled milk yet. And he was just saying, Man, you need to suffer, basically. In a few years, when you've suffered more, you'll be a better pastor. I was really taken a part in your book where you talk about how the church doesn't just need well-prepared

preachers, but well-worn preachers. In what ways does suffering actually make us better pastors?

[00:27:42.360] - Jonathan Dodson

The suffering makes us better pastors for several reasons. Primarily, which I've already talked about, is it puts us in touch with a suffering Savior. We uncover his compassion for sufferers that we can't manufacture without experiencing it ourselves. You think of Corinthians, of being comforting with others in the way that you have been comforted. Another way it makes us better, pastors, is we understand the pathology of sin and the complexity of suffering firsthand. We're not getting it out of a book. We're not reading a counseling book. We're not generating imaginary application for our sermons. It's coming out of the trenches of felt suffering and sin. In that, seeing the complexity of our own our own faults and our own sufferings and just understanding what it's like to be a human. Living long enough and going through hard enough things to appreciate the complexity, emotional complexity, practical complexity, spiritual complexity of what it's like to be a human in a fallen, broken, hurting world. So suffering puts you in touch with people that you're pastoring. And they are sufferers, they are sinners, they are struggles, and they are saints. And all of those categories are so important if we're going to pastor well.

[00:29:12.690] - Jonathan Dodson

And then I think you just find in suffering that there's nothing else really to stand on other than the faithfulness of God, the truth of his promises, and the presence of his grace. There's really quick tips, nice breaks, therapy, a sabbatical. They're a means of grace, but they're not grace himself. I think the more we suffer, the more it becomes clear that the solution is the grace of God in Christ through the presence and power of the Holy spirit. Existentially, it becomes a felt answer and conviction. So You begin to counsel out of that and pastor out of that. Less preaching from above and preaching from below. Less counseling from above, more counseling from below. It just tempers your spirit, and you begin to lead with more grace. I know you know what I'm talking about.

[00:30:20.040] - Darryl Dash

Yeah. All of that is beautiful. The church where I'm at right now, one of the things that... Just a little bit of their history recently, they're a younger congregation. One of the things they were looking for, to my surprise, was they wanted an older pastor. I'm 56 now. 56 is not usually the age that when a church is looking for a pastor, they're like, We want a 56-year-old. What they were saying is, We want a pastor who's hurt. We want a pastor who has some of that, who preaches out of his own experience of enjoying the grace of God and hard things. So, man, there's a beauty in that as God uses even our hurt for his glory.

[00:30:59.220] - Jonathan Dodson

Amen. Amen. I love that picture of the Kintsugi bowl by Makoto Fujimura talking about the tea masters. They take those broken bowls and they don't fix them. He insists that they beautify them. And it's in the broken pieces of our lives that the golden grace of God seeps in to those pains and hurts that will open up. He paints golden lines. He doesn't just fix us or tolerate us. He makes us more beautiful. I thank God for your experience of suffering that I don't know intimately, but that they were willing to hire someone that has experienced that and believes in that and is ministering out of that.

[00:31:42.010] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, it's rich. One of the things I noticed last week, we were having dinner with somebody, and basically at the new church, and they said, the gist of the question was this, Are you going to be our friend? And what they were asking was, Are you going to be one of these pastors that believes the old adage that, Don't make friends with people in the church because you're going to get hurt? Or are you going to actually love us, or are you going to come close to us and not just be a professional, but are you going to be family? And when I look at Paul in 2 Timothy, there's this sense that even though he's been deeply wounded by people, he's still leaning into relationships. He's still got a tender heart. How do we do that? How do we stay open to people even after we've been hurt?

[00:32:23.740] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah, that's a good question. I think you can't stay close to people after you've been hurt if the hurts and the wounds go untreated. And scar tissue begins to form over them. And what happens is you become reflexively defensive, isolating and wary of people. And so that's how you don't do it. So one way to do it is to crack open that scar tissue and to allow the scalpel to begin to cut away and to be very honest with yourself and with God about what hurts. If the pain and the betrayal and the hurt and all of that stuff is constantly accumulating and we're not inviting the Lord intimately into that, then the scar tissue forms. But if we do uncover it, and it sees as we may need to step away to uncover it even more, but we are including God in that, not just reading a book or going to counseling, but we're having face-to-face conversations. I can remember in Colorado, I go every summer and I walk the mountaintop, and I can remember walking and I'm just saying, Lord, it still hurts. Lord, it still hurts. Tears streaming down my face. Just a brutally honest like, Lord.

[00:33:55.990] - Jonathan Dodson

I'm telling him, I know that you've already given me time off, and I know that I've encountered beautiful metaphors like Kintsugi, but it still hurts, Lord. To say that repeatedly, and it wasn't... I mean, you might need to say it angrily. It wasn't for me, but You can say it angrily. Just say it. Name the pains. Bring up the situations, describe the wounds. Even name the names to the Lord, to his face, and allow him to surgically remove the scar tissue and to bring his healing and forgiving grace down into your heart. That experience will keep us healthy and help us continue to experience the love of God in Christ. As Romans 5 says, Shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy spirit. You got to be open for it to get shed abroad in your heart. If your heart's closed up and the arteries are clogged, Staying open to that, then that love will flow out of you and you will want to move closer to other people who need exactly what you experienced. You don't want to keep that to yourself. You want to make friends so that those friends can experience the love of God in Christ shed abroad in their hearts through the Holy Spirit.

[00:35:22.340] - Jonathan Dodson

You know?

[00:35:24.610] - Darryl Dash

Yeah. Man. Jonathan, if you could go back and talk to the guy planting City Life Church in Austin all those years ago and give advice to your younger self, what are maybe two or three things that you would say to the younger Jonathan? Oh, man.

[00:35:45.620] - Jonathan Dodson

Well, I remember our first location, preaching downtown Austin, a little theater and behind a coffee shop in the back of a coffee shop, and I remember coming out one day and talking to a lady. She said, You do a great job preaching on repentance from sins. But what about sufferers? What about people who have been sinned against? And that landed on me in such a profound way. And that began to change the way that I preached. And so I'm grateful. In a sense, she came from the future into the past, and she answered this question for me. I began to see in the Bible sufferers and to spend time with sufferers. David Paulson says in one of his books, always spend time with a slow person. It's not a demeaning statement. It's just some people are running a five-minute mile in their leadership development, and they're going to plant a church or they're going to be an elder or whatever. People are lucky if they're looking at the finish line. That's grace in their life. That's obedience. To be meaningfully involved with people who are just looking at the finishing line. So I would say, Jonathan, always take time every week.

[00:37:05.500] - Jonathan Dodson

Make sure you're spending time with at least one slow person. I probably tell you you're going to suffer more than you realize, but it's completely worth it in Christ. Don't despair. Cling to Jesus. And remember, he is a suffering Savior with scars on his hands. Spend more time with seasoned, wise pastors. Not to talk about old stories or kick around theology, but really to soak in their wisdom. When you hit a problem or you're frustrated, just to be able to call them up or sit down with them and say, Can you tell me? To be humble enough to spend more time with people who are wiser, more experienced than you and just ask those questions regularly. Even to say, Hey, I don't know what I don't know, but can you just tell me, do you see anything in my life that's off or in my leadership that needs correction? Those are a few things.

[00:38:13.660] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, that's all so good. Good. So helpful. Jonathan, a couple of final questions. I ask these of every guest, more personal questions, although we've been pretty personal all the way along. But you're in a new season of ministry. What is God teaching you these days?

[00:38:29.790] - Jonathan Dodson

One thing he's teaching me is the joy of being myself in Christ. I feel like that's a lesson I've been learning my whole life. I think what I'm learning about that lesson in this season is that it's more of like, less be yourself in Christ and more settling in. I am learning the joy and contentment of just being the Father's Son. I don't have to preach every week. I don't need the accolades. I don't need the books to be a best seller. I just want to be enjoying Jesus and loving people around me and just taking my gifts and serving the best way I can. And that's just a great place to be. I don't feel like I got to prove myself to anybody. I don't feel like I've got to squeeze worth out of the social media. I'm just so wonderfully content in Jesus, and that's a gift. I didn't do anything to earn that. I'm learning just to chill out and just enjoy myself, being myself in Jesus.

[00:39:40.890] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, there's a gift. I remember, I think it was Scotty Smith that said a similar thing, but he said it took him until his 50s. I don't know how old you are, but it took him until his 50s and 60s to begin to learn that. There was a freedom and joy that he never had before as he began to settle into himself. It was the sense that he didn't have to earn the approval of the Father. He could just rust into it. Yeah, that's so good.

[00:40:06.640] - Jonathan Dodson

Yeah, and he's a great person to talk to that.

[00:40:09.590] - Darryl Dash

Absolutely. What's encouraging you these days?

[00:40:12.700] - Jonathan Dodson

Beauty. Walking in my neighborhood and looking at golden leaves and trees and deep, fiery red and seeing the beauty of Christ. The church. People saying things to me. They're encouraging at clip that I've never experienced in my life. I think for the first two decades of ministry, there was a drip of encouragement, and now I would say there's a hose of encouragement. That speaks of the culture that our pastors have created. In the staff meetings, there's a time of benedictions where you speak a word of blessing to other people in the staff, and there's 40 staff people. People will say the most observant, gospel-rich, personally attentive things of one another. It is a beautiful culture that they've created. It's not idol worship. It's not manufactured. It's like knee-jerk. It's coming out of their soul. I'm a part of that. It's really encouraging, the things that people say. The beauty around me, the beauty in my kids' faces, is they begin to become adults. I got a 16-year-old and 18-year-old. The beauty of creation, the beauty of Christ in his word. I mean, just beauty and encouragement from the body.

[00:41:44.530] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, that's amazing. Last question. This might be just out of my own personal interest more than anybody's, but do you have any other books in the works right now?

[00:41:56.310] - Jonathan Dodson

Yes, I'm writing a series of 12 short books for discipleship program called Foundations, and it's their shorter books. I don't see one around here. But yeah, so what is the gospel? What is the Bible? What is worldview humanity? The Bible one just went live on Amazon. They're meant to help train the local church in these doctrines, but I've tried to write them with a soft apologetic sensitivity to, how does the culture view authority in the Bible? How does the culture view, the claims of the gospel, has the culture view, what it means to be human. I think that's giving it a richness. Then we get into the doctrine itself. Yeah, it It's a real blessing to be writing them. I'm busy with those, but I'm also excited to write my own full-length book again. But, yeah, I'm pretty occupied with those right now.

[00:42:58.780] - Darryl Dash

Well, Jonathan, I want to thank you for the the way that you wrote this book. I think it'll be an encouragement to any pastor who reads it. And beyond that, I want to thank you just for your honesty and the way that the beauty of the gospel shines through your ministry and your encouragement to other pastors. So I've been the beneficiary of that. And I don't think you even know it, but just your posts, your books, and every time I get to talk to you, I'm so grateful for what you're teaching me. So thank you. Good to talk to you today.

[00:43:24.560] - Jonathan Dodson

Thank you, Darryl. And it's sweet to be with you.