

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Portland, Oregon, featuring a large bridge spanning a wide river. The city skyline is visible in the background, and the bridge is filled with traffic. The image has a torn paper effect at the bottom.

The Bridge City of God

Missiology and Portland
Dr. Ed Stetzer
Dean, Talbot School of Theology



The Nature of God

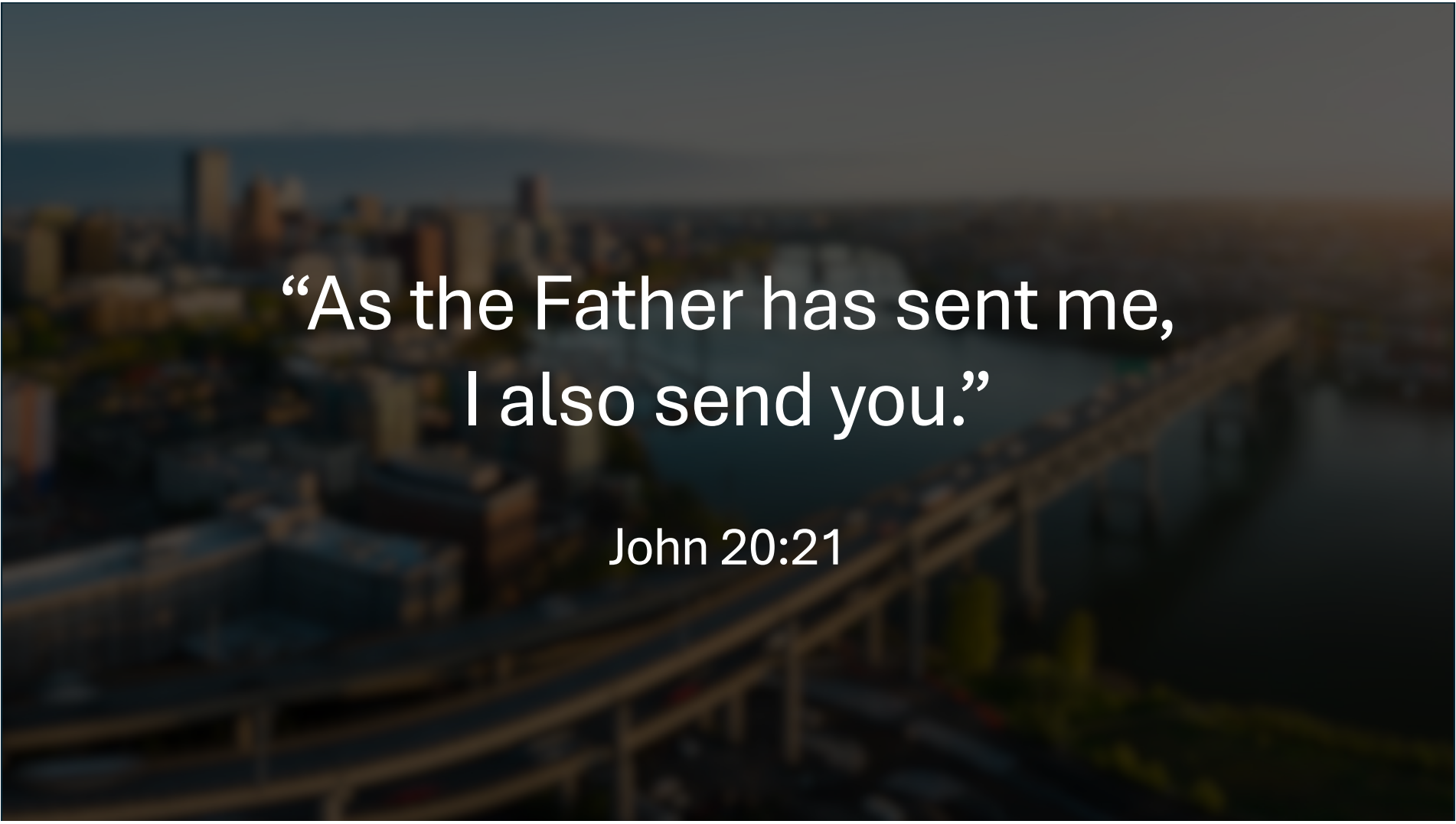
Trinitarian theology:

The Son and Spirit proceed from the Father

The Father sends the Son

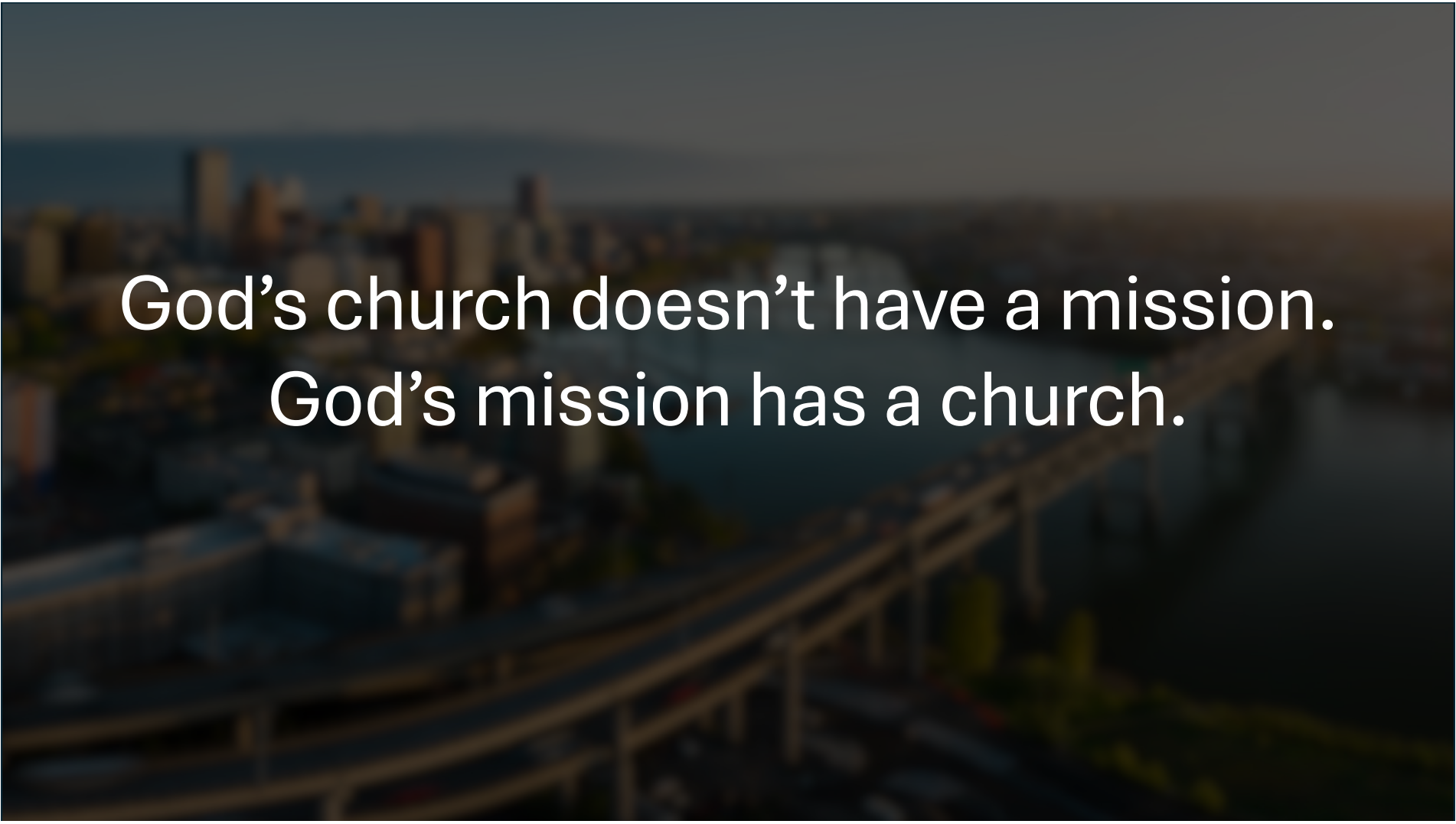
The Father and Son send the Spirit

The word “mission” comes the Latin word for “send”
(*missus*)



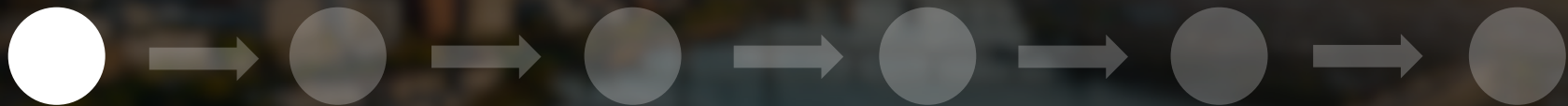
“As the Father has sent me,
I also send you.”

John 20:21



God's church doesn't have a mission.
God's mission has a church.

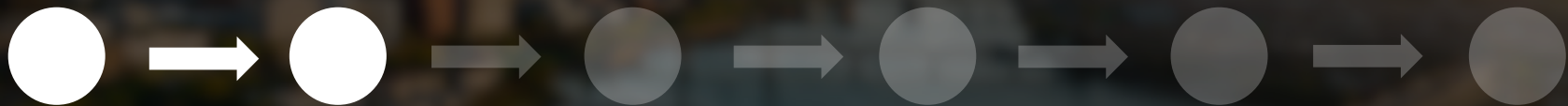
The Biblical Plotline of Mission



Creation

God sends humanity to “fill the earth” (Gen. 1:26-28)

The Biblical Plotline of Mission

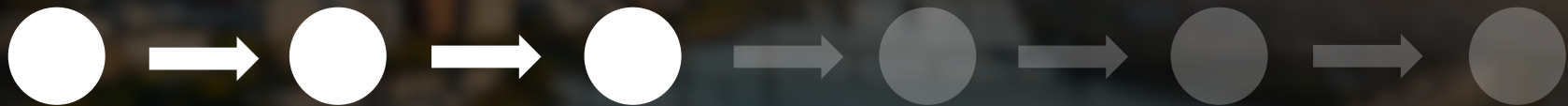


Rebellion

God seeks the lost.

“Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9)

The Biblical Plotline of Mission



A Chosen Nation

“all the peoples on earth will be
blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3)

The Biblical Plotline of Mission



Incarnation

“The living Father sent me” (John 6:57)

The Biblical Plotline of Mission



Great Commission

“Make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:18)

“I send you” (John 20:21)

“You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8)

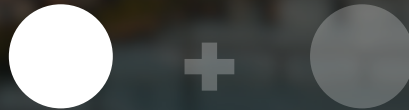
The Biblical Plotline of Mission



New Creation

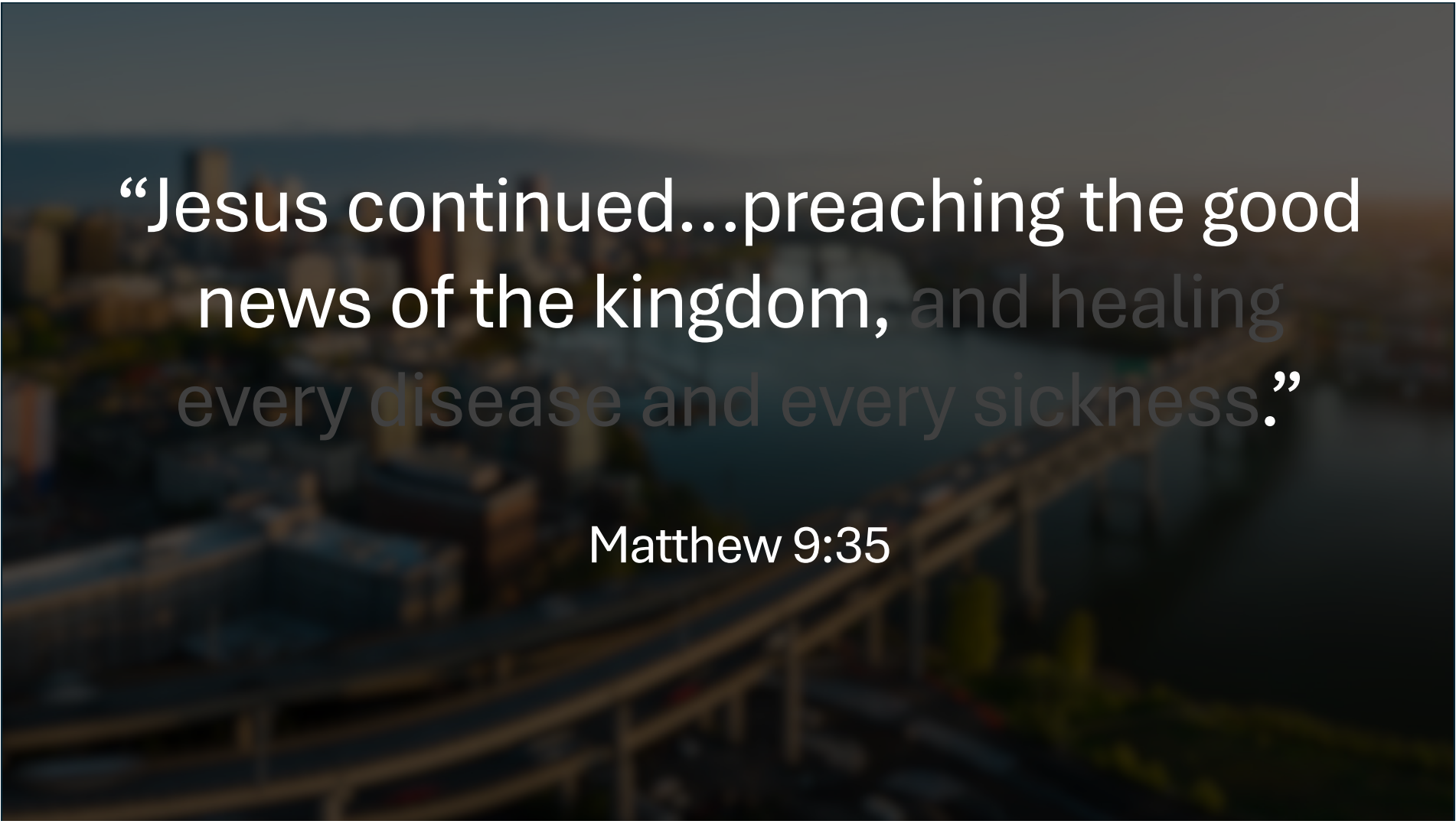
Humanity from “every tongue, tribe, people, and nation” gather around the throne (Rev. 5:9, 7:9)

The Biblical Practice of Mission



Share
Proclamation
Word

Show
Demonstration
Deed



“Jesus continued...preaching the good
news of the kingdom, and healing
every disease and every sickness.”

Matthew 9:35

The Biblical Practice of Mission



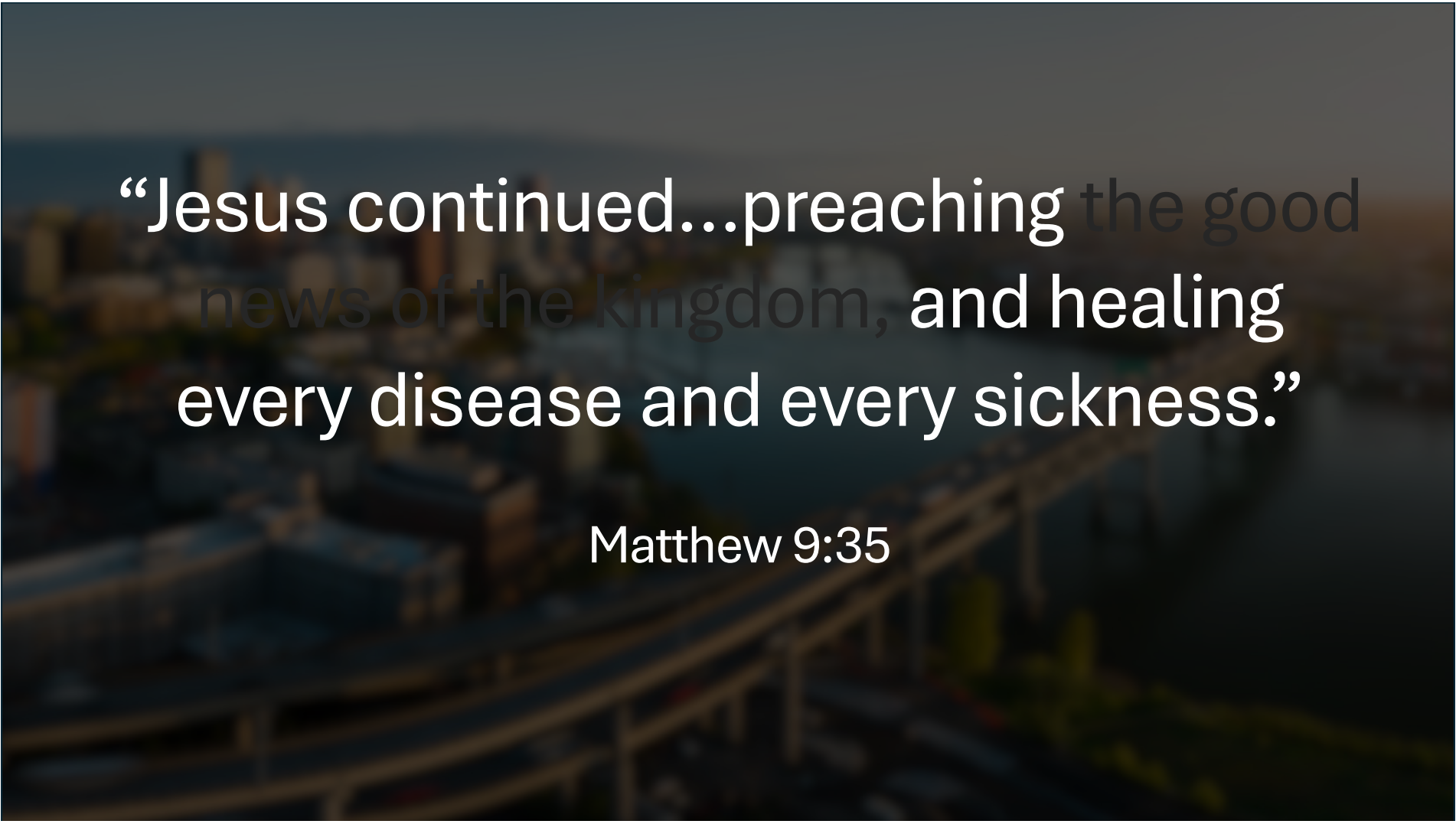
Share
Proclamation
Word

Show
Demonstration
Deed



"Talk has a short shelf life here."

— Portland Marketplace Executive



“Jesus continued...preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.”


Matthew 9:35



Tensions in Portland

Portland is known as a “livable city”

but many experience Portland unevenly and unequally,
and Portland’s housing situation has been in crisis.



"God keeps sending us to the same broken places
until we love them."

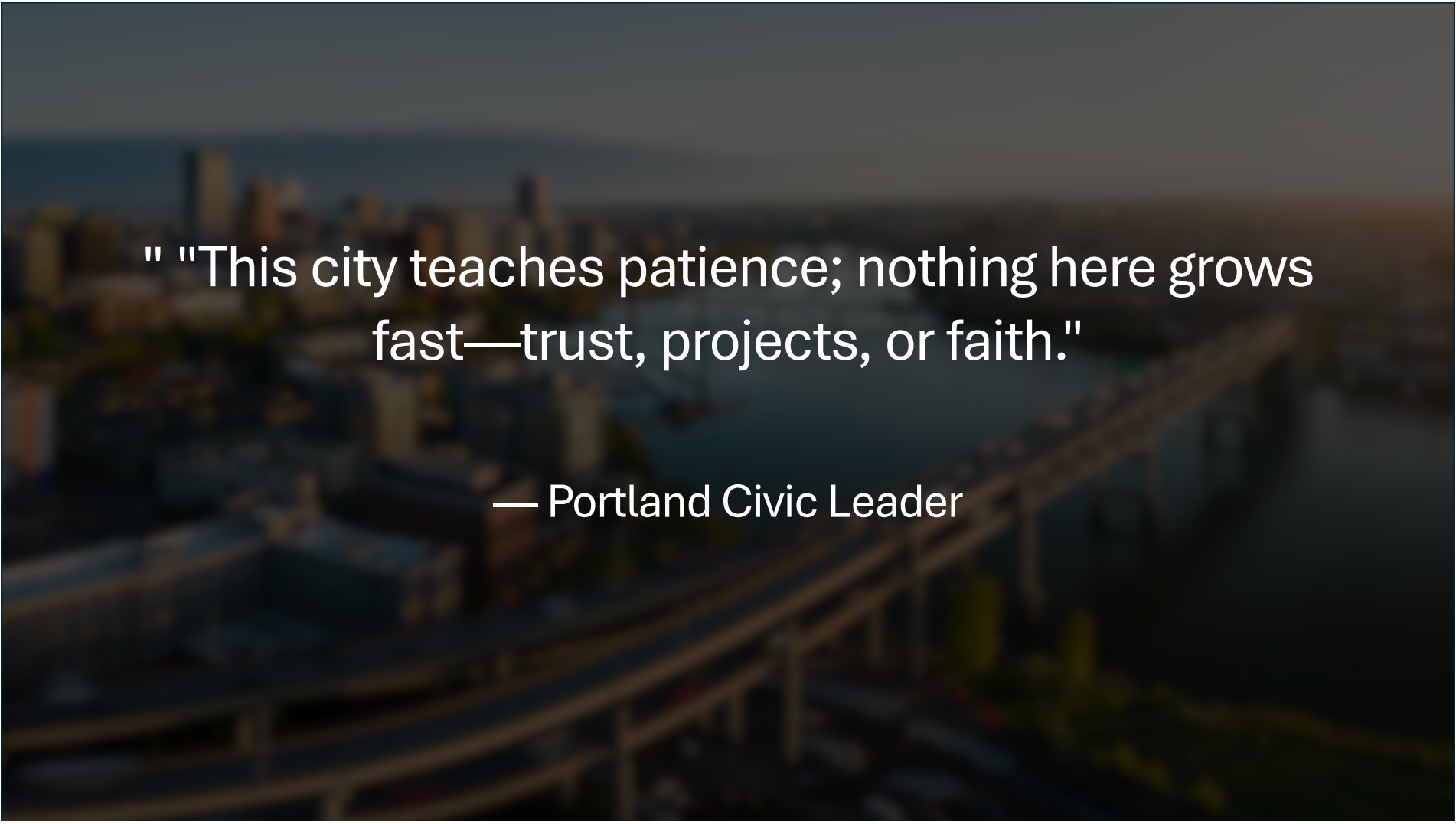
— Portland Faith Leader



Tensions in Portland

Portland is known as a “green city”

but many experience Portland in wide stretches without
tree cover, and in heat zones.




" "This city teaches patience; nothing here grows fast—trust, projects, or faith."

— Portland Civic Leader



Tensions in Portland

Portland's tech sector has boomed
but prosperity has led to further displacement for
marginalized communities.



"Displacement isn't the end—it's how God sends
us again."

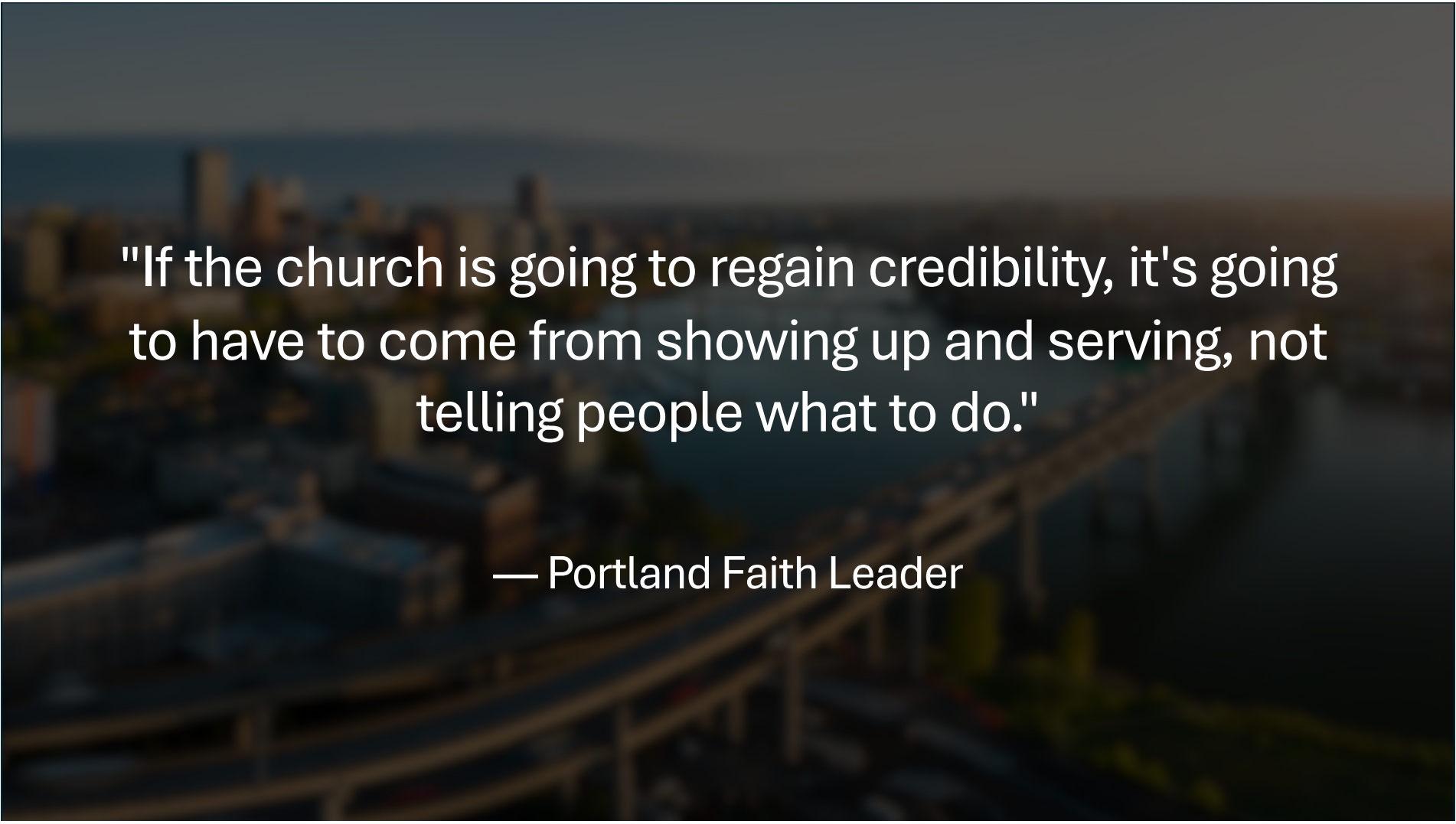
— Portland Faith Ecosystems Leader



Tensions in Portland

Portlanders trust churches
for demonstration but not proclamation

The Church can lead with “showing”
but cannot neglect “sharing”



"If the church is going to regain credibility, it's going to have to come from showing up and serving, not telling people what to do."

— Portland Faith Leader

SECTION 1

MISSION AS COVENANT REPAIR



Core Claim

Mission is not an add-on program for the church. Mission is covenant faithfulness — the lived outworking of God's ancient promise to bless His people so that they might become a blessing to others.

From the beginning, God's mission unfolds through paradox: He chooses a particular people for the sake of all peoples. This pattern threads through Scripture—from Gen 12 to Matt 28 and Rev 7.

1.7 Moving Forward: From Blessing to Repair

The foundation is laid; the question now becomes: How do we live this out faithfully in Portland's particular fractures? Mission will demand patience, imagination, and courage—the slow work of reconciliation that turns theology into presence.

Preview — What Comes Next

Section 2 — Reading Portland Biblically: discerning the city's story within God's story.

Section 3 — Missional Ecclesiology: living the covenant vocation together.

Section 4 — Paradox as Calling: holding power and weakness in tension.

Section 5 — Cultural Exegesis Toolkit: practical tools for discernment and repair.

Section 6 — Geography and Theology: mapping faithfulness in place.

Section 7 — Stories of Hope: testimonies of covenant repair in practice.

Section 8 — Concrete Practices: sustained habits of shared blessing.

Section 9 — Practices of Renewal: sustaining covenant repair in everyday life.

Reflection

- Where is God calling your community to begin the repair?
 - Where have you already glimpsed covenant repair in your context?
 - What small faithfulness could God multiply next?
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SECTION 2

READING PORTLAND BIBLICALLY



2.1 Portland as Theological Text

Cities carry memory in their streets, their bridges, their gaps. As Harvie Conn observed, "The city is not merely a context for ministry but a text to be read" (Conn, 1994, p. 89). Portland's text is written in broken promises and resilient communities, in progressive rhetoric and persistent inequality, in religious rejection and deep skepticism. The city's theology is not written only in sermons or statutes but in concrete, zoning maps, and river crossings.

As historian Carl Abbott noted, "Portland's citizens have made choices among park and highway systems, among styles of neighborhood and housing... decisions set in concrete and shingles for later generations" (Abbott, 1983, p. 2). The city's moral imagination is literally built into its design; its bridges and boulevards function as civic liturgy—visible expressions of what the city believes about beauty, order, and worth. Abbott would later describe this self-belief as