

I. Introduction to Spiritual Growth Stages

Well, if you have your Bibles this morning, let's turn over to Proverbs chapter 1. We're going to go a number of places today, but we'll start there just a little bit. As you know, we have been engaged in a study to prepare ourselves for some of the ministries that God is going to open up for us this year. In just a few short weeks, I'll be having some of you who want to learn how to teach somebody the Bible one-on-one. We'll be getting together where we can meet at my house, and I can begin to bring you through the material and get you ready for sitting down and touching somebody's life with the Word of God.

I want to emphasize this, and I've said this before: it's not something that's a one-time deal where everybody has to get on a bandwagon. I know that there are times in your life that are busier than others, and maybe not all of you can do it at this point, but it's okay. It's something that we're going to do on an ongoing basis. Once I finish with this group, then I'll wait a couple of weeks or a month, and then we'll pick up another group. It'll be something, as we grow together, that you can put into your spiritual life to really help you become everything that God wants you to be, because that's our goal. There's nothing greater in this world for ministry other than teaching somebody the Bible.

We've had a year and a half now where we've really focused on trying to help you get the Word of God laid out in your life. So we started this study, which I think is a very necessary study for you to understand how the process of spiritual growth goes about in your life. We started this study on what the Bible talks about as seven stages of spiritual growth. I told you last week, we looked at the first aspect of it in 1 Peter 2, and we looked at newborn babes. We talked about how that when somebody gets saved, they're like a newborn baby. The Bible says that new Christians don't have a lot of understanding about spiritual things; they need help.

As you come through the Bible, and I said this last week, a great study emerges as you just go through the Word of God and pay attention to some things. You'll find seven stages of spiritual growth that we are in the process of going through. In those seven stages, this is where you build your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I'm not going to, and I don't want to give the impression, that you go for a year and then a year later you get to stage two, and then you go four years and you get to stage three. It's not like that. It's a gradual thing that takes place, and many times, those stages overlap in your life. It's one of the greatest studies you'll ever take in the Word of God.

I showed you how the parallels between raising your own children and raising God's children are the same. I told you how a parent reproduces themselves in their children, and a pastor reproduces themselves in his people. That's just the process that it is. We talked about the four concepts that you build through these stages of spiritual growth.

> The Discipline Concept

- The Relationship or Fellowship Concept
- The Responsibility Concept
- The Leadership Concept

These are four areas of teaching that you instill in a young child's life from the time they're born up to the point where they become an adult. As I told you last week, the way that God designed it was if you and I as a parent would understand these things, when a child gets to be 15, 16, 17 years old, where most parents are putting more restrictions on them, the way it should work, by that point you ought to be taking restrictions off of them and transferring responsibility to them as they move into that area of life where they become leaders and become responsible for their own life and everything in their own life.

II. The Book of Proverbs and Spiritual Growth

We're going to really try to look at this together today, and we're going to go to the next level. We looked at babes or babies, babes in Christ, last week. But I want to go to Proverbs chapter 1, and I want to talk about Proverbs 1:1-6, because as I said this last week too, the book of Proverbs is a great book. It's the book that really lays out. It's the book that really defines the issues of life. If there was one book in the Bible I wish I could get in total recall in my mind, a book where every principle I could just bring into total remembrance that I could use it, it would be the book of Proverbs, because in the book of Proverbs is everything that we need to deal with every issue in life that's going to come up.

In Proverbs chapter 1, you see these seven stages very clearly here, because all of this material in the book of Proverbs is stuff that you and I will put into our lives that help us grow.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

Now, Father, we thank You and praise You today for the Lord Jesus. Help us as we look into this next area of spiritual growth, how You help us to pull it together in our own lives. Help us to see the process that we have to go through to build a relationship with You the way it needs to be done. Lord, I'm excited about the people that are excited about teaching the Bible, excited about learning how to teach somebody else the Word of God. And Lord, as we take our little group and we begin to work with them, I pray, Father, that You'll help instill in them all the aspects that they

need to really be a good teacher of the Word of God. And we'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

III. Five Concepts of Spiritual Growth

Now, I don't know if you could pick it out, maybe you've already picked it out, but in Proverbs 1:1-6, you have five concepts. These five concepts line up with what we're talking about here in these seven stages of spiritual growth.

- To Know (Proverbs 1:2)
- To Receive (Proverbs 1:3)
- To Give (Proverbs 1:4)
- To Increase Learning (Proverbs 1:5)
- To Understand (Proverbs 1:6)

All of these concepts fit into our growth process of spiritual growth.

To Know would focus on the babies. When you start to deal with baby Christians, you're teaching them the concept of knowing, the basic fundamentals of a relationship with Christ and the discipline that goes along with it.

To Receive is where we're at today, with little children and children. They're now able to receive the instruction. They're able to do something with it. It isn't about just telling your little baby, "Don't touch that, don't do this, don't do that, get away from there." Now it's more that they can receive it. You have the ability to communicate.

To Give (Proverbs 1:4) would bring us up to our spiritual level of young men. We're going to look at this one next week. At this point, a young Christian comes to the place where now they understand how to give back to God what God has given to them. They begin that basic mindset of giving back to God because they're beginning to understand what God has given to them.

To Increase Learning (Proverbs 1:5) is for fathers. At this level, you continue to add to your faith, you continue to grow spiritually, you continue to put the things in your life that God wants you to have.

To Understand (Proverbs 1:6) is for the last two stages, the elder and the aged. Remember I told you a while back that the whole concept of Proverbs is really about facts, wisdom, or knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Knowledge is something that everybody gets just through the process of life. When you go to school, you get knowledge. A little bit later on, you learn how to use that knowledge, and you get what we call wisdom. But not too many people get understanding, because an unsaved man can have knowledge that's just facts. He can have wisdom, that's the ability to use those facts. But the concept of understanding, and I've told you this before, is the concept of how God figures into the equation. That's something that you only get by building a relationship with God. That really is the goal for every child of God. My goal

simply as a Christian at its bottom level is to get to the point where I see God and what God is doing in everything. That's called understanding.

So you begin to see how we're going to rely on the book of Proverbs heavily as we come through here, because you're going to see us making references to all those verses: to know, to receive, to give, to increase in learning, and to understand. That's the exact same process you and I go through in our biblical growth process.

IV. Little Children and Children: Building Relationship and Fellowship

Now today, as I said, we're going to talk about little children and we're going to talk about children. It is very important, now you want to turn over to 1 John chapter 2. This is very important because from a physical standpoint, when you're raising your own kids, the little children will be ages 4 to 8, somewhere in there, and the children will be ages 8 to 12 in a physical sense. In a spiritual sense, this is the next level that you get to in your spiritual growth as you move out of the babe in Christ stage, the new Christian stage, and you begin to learn some things about God. This is the process that we all have to go through.

Now I want to make a note on this and I want you to remember this: In the Bible, a man up to 20 years old is called a child. You've got to remember that because that will help you when you put some things together in the Word of God. We don't think of it that way, but in the Bible, somebody up to 18, 19, maybe even 20 years old was still designated as a child. The Bible has a different way of looking at things in the Old Testament when it's dealing with the nation of Israel, so you want to remember that. But we're going to deal today with little children and children.

Once a person gets saved and that person trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior, we saw this last week, now they're a new babe in Christ. We talked about how babies have a low threshold of understanding. They don't really have any concept of anything, but as they grow and they get into the Word of God and somebody works with them in the Bible, they begin to build a relationship with Christ. They begin to understand the concept of fellowship with Christ. This is the natural process, and we're going to look at it.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Now that's a great passage, and in this passage, we begin to see he talks to little children, and in the little children mode, as I've already said, this is where you begin to build the relationship mode. This is where you begin to build the fellowship mode. This will run you from somewhere around 3 to maybe 4 or 5, 8 years old. As your child begins to come out of that baby stage, you see a baby can't communicate, a baby can't reason, a baby can't put thoughts and words into action, he can't express himself. All he knows, and we talked about this last week, is by your voice inflections or the sternness of how your body language is, that's what he relies on. He can't sit down and communicate on a level.

How many times has your baby been sick and you don't know really what's wrong with him? If that baby could only tell you what's wrong, what he's feeling, where it hurts, but he can't do that. He doesn't have any ability to be able to communicate to you. But as he grows, as he grows to the point where he begins to get into that little children stage, when he comes to the place when he gets around 3 or 4 years old, for the rest of his years then from that point on, this is when you're going to build that relationship and that fellowship mode on top of the discipline mode that you've already built.

This is where you get into your child's world. This is where you can communicate to him. Now it's not a matter of the voice inflections or raising your voice and the child responding to that, now you have the ability to communicate. Now it's not a matter of just telling them "don't do that," but now it's part of the relationship and the fellowship of telling them why not to do that. It's not a question now that you just say, "your behavior is not acceptable," but now you sit down and explain to them why it's not acceptable. This is where you get into your child's world. This is where you begin to talk to him and begin to be part of their life. This is where you begin to shape their spirit, and the spirit of anybody is the will.

I've told you before that will, that spirit, is like the rudder of a ship, and when you get saved, your soul gets sealed in the day of redemption. Your flesh you have continual problems with, and whether you walk for God or you walk for the world is dependent on what you do with your spirit. If you lend your spirit to the things of God, then you'll follow after God. If you lend your spirit or your will after the things of the world, then you'll walk after the things of the world. This is where you shape your child's spirit. This is where you begin to mold their will in the right process. Discipline now has come from the baby stage to a new communication level. It broadens into a new forum from which you can talk to them.

When you bring up a child, there are times that you have to spank that child. There are times that you have to discipline that child. No parent should discipline that child when they get into this state. Now when they're a baby, nothing you can do about it. You have, and I'm not saying you should spank them at that age, but I'm saying when they get to this age now is when you have the communicative skills. What you don't have is a baby. You can't sit down and reason with a baby, "Why did you do that?" He doesn't understand that. But when they get to this age, and when they do something wrong, this is where you've got to understand your part. I'm giving this thing in a

physical sense now to bring it around in a spiritual sense here, that when you're teaching somebody the Bible, you understand the same thing because the parallels are one and the same.

You have to discipline your child. That child now is four or five years old, and they do something wrong. When you discipline that child, whatever form of the discipline is, there never should be a time where you just yell at that child or you just tell that child not to do this or that or just whack the child. If you have to go to the place where you have to whip that child, then there has to be a process involved that that child understands why they're getting a whipping, that you're simply not going to, that you love them so much that you're not going to allow.

I remember when my kids were growing up and my daughters would do something wrong, and I'd have to deal that kind of punishment to them. I'd take them into the room, and in their bedroom, and we'd sit down, and I would explain to them what they did that was wrong. I wanted them to understand that there are certain things that I'm not going to tolerate as a father, and yet at the same time, I wanted them to understand that this act had nothing to do with whether I loved them or not. It had nothing to do with whether I loved them. I would love them forever no matter what they did. But, and I remember so clearly telling my kids this, "I'm not going to allow you to do these things now, because if I don't deal with it, then when you get to be 16 or 17 years old, you will do a lot worse things, and I'm going to stop it right now because I love you." If I had to give them a whipping, if I had to deal with them in that aspect, after that whipping was over, we'd sit down there, and I would hug them, and I would love them, we would pray together. You see, you've got to spend the time going through those things with young children. You can't just whack them alongside of the head, and you can't just, you know, you've got to take the time to build, because what you were doing at that point in your life, what you were doing is you are building the relationship with them that that child knows that you love them unconditionally, that you don't love them less if they do something wrong, you don't love them more if they do something right, that you love them unconditionally no matter what they do, and they've got to be able to separate your love from the punishment, and they've got to be able to see that, because that is exactly what God is going to use in time to win that little boy, that little girl to Christ.

Right now in their life, they're seeing by the way you build that relationship fellowship aspect, by the way you discipline them, by the way that you sit down and explain the process. I'll tell you, if there are parents here that you don't understand that, you see me and sit down with me, and I'll walk you through the whole process and show you how it needs to be done. I don't want anybody ever to do it wrong, but it happens all the time, and you realize that what you're doing is paving the way in that young person's life to salvation through the building of an unconditional love concept, through a building of a relationship and your fellowship with him.

You know what you want your kids like? You want your child when they do something wrong, the goal that you want to have is you want that child to feel worse about the fact that they disappointed you and fellowship is broken between you and them. You want them to feel worse about that than any other thing. You know why? Because that's the exact same concept when they get a little bit later on in their Christian life, that's the exact same concept when you and I sin against God. The thing that ought to bother us more than anything else is not that we got caught,

not this or not that, not the circumstances, but the fact that we broke fellowship with our Heavenly Father. If you can get your child to that point where they care about fellowship with you as mom and dad more than anything else in this world, you're on the right track, and you're building an unconditional love concept that's going to lead them to salvation.

This is when you do it, because now you can communicate, now you can talk, now you can sit down and you can talk about what they did right, what they did wrong. Now you can lay out and show, you can open up the Word of God and express it and show and say, "You know what? I'm not going to allow you to live that lifestyle now because you're my responsibility." God's going to, you can lay out the whole concept every time. The whole thing is a teaching experience of laying out in your child the aspect of relationship with you and fellowship with you as the mom or the dad and the child. This is the time, as I said, when you shape that spirit and you mold that will.

I'll tell you something else, this is also the time where you fix forever that no outside influence will ever, ever have more influence in your child than you. My daughters right now are 29 and 26. They're married, one of them's got kids, the other one will never have kids. To this day, if somebody else tells them something, not their husband, but if somebody out on the outside world tells them something, they'll ask me first before they'll believe it. You know why? That's the way it's got to be. I'm going to explain this in a very biblical way here in just a little bit. But I'm telling you what, if your child gets to be 16, 17, or 18 years old, this guarantees that no teacher will have more influence. My kids were going to school. I don't care. They went to a public school. I wasn't afraid that they were in a public school. Somebody said, "Well, I don't know how you raise your kid without sending them to Christian school." Oh, they went to Christian school. Christian school was at home. There wasn't a thing that my teacher said on evolution. There wasn't a thing that the teacher said on anything that my kid didn't believe me over them. All I had to do was say, "That's not right. This is what it is." And that was the end of it. There was never a person in their world that believed them over their mom or their dad.

I'm telling you, when he gets to be 16 or 17 or 18, this thing of peer pressure, this thing of your friends, the thing of being more in close to a baseball or a football coach, or your friends pulling you away or taking you away, or some boy or some girl. How many times I've seen that where some guy will come in and take the girl right out of the family, and she'll just leave her family and go do whatever he wants to do, or vice versa. You know what? This is where you ensure that that will never happen, because this is where you build. You can't do it with babies, but when you get the little child and you get to the children mode, that's when you absolutely ensure through your relationship and fellowship with them that no one will have more influence in their life than you do.

This is the process because the Bible talks about in Ephesians chapter 6 and Daniel chapter 1, we've talked about it before, that in every child's life there comes an evil day. That evil day is when your child grows up and your child comes at a point, maybe when they go to school, or maybe when they do this, or they start hanging out with kids in their neighborhood, or they go over to their friends for a sleepover, or whatever the case. That evil day is when everything you taught them is now tested. The authority of doing what's right when they're not with mom or dad

is tested. The only thing that'll make that thing work is what your training has been in shaping their will, molding their spirit through the unconditional concept of love and relationship, and the aspect of fellowship that they don't want to do wrong because they know it will break fellowship with mom and dad.

You see, God's plan is foolproof. You see, a baby and a young child can't get to God. A little baby and your little children in a nursery right now, they can't get to God. Oh, I know they're over there right now making a little whatever they're making, you know, and putting on their stickers and, you know, making a little "I'm in the Lord's army" helmets and all those things. You know, and they're over there singing all the songs, and your kids sing all the songs. But you know what? That's just kind of like a monkey see, monkey do. I mean, they'll talk about God, they'll talk about, you can get into memorized verses and all of that, but they don't understand it. I mean, give them a Bible and say, "Hey, Maddie, would you lay out Romans chapter 1 for me?" It ain't going to happen. They can't get to God. They mimic what they see. They mimic what they see, and God's plan is foolproof, because a baby and a young child can't understand God, they can't get to God. So what God does is He gives them parents, parents who love God, who love the Word of God, and those parents in the baby stage, in the early stage, really in essence, represent God to that child, and they see God through those parents.

If a parent is paying attention and he understands this, that parent comes at a point where he is everything that God should be to that child, and where that child can't build a fellowship relationship with God at three and four, he builds one with a godly mom and dad at three and four. Then by the time he gets nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, if mom and dad got it on the ball, they're transferring that fellowship from them, and they're walking through the process and are transferring it to God. They are the models by which that little child begins to build the fellowship relationship with God by building the fellowship in relationship with you, and you deal with them just like God deals with you. You operate the same way. You operate in everything. God doesn't come down and whack you and I when we do something that's wrong. God says, "Come, let us reason together," saith the Lord. God spends the time. He wants to talk to you about it. He wants to work it out. He wants to hear what you've got to say, and He wants to show you why.

God, in the same sense, God wants you to worry more about breaking fellowship with Him than doing what's wrong. God wants you to come to the place in your life, and in my life as a Christian, where you look at sin and you look at saying something or doing something, and you simply say to yourself, "You know what? That looks good, but you know what? I'm not going to break my fellowship with my Father today just for something that stupid." If you can get to that place in your life with a child of God, you're on the right track. You're on the right path, and that's exactly what you have to begin to instill in your children. The parallels are unbelievable. The plan of growing up God's people: a child only sees and understands God through his godly parents, and as they build the relationship and the fellowship, that's what he uses five years down the line to build a relationship and fellowship with God as he comes to the point where he can.

You know what? Young Christians are the same way. Now, there's going to be a time in the next year or two that some of you are going to be given somebody by me. Somebody's going to come

into our world, and I'm going to sit down with them, and they're going to have some problems. They're not going to know anything about God or the Bible, and it's going to be your job and your responsibility to begin the process of spiritual growth in them. They might be 40, 50 years old, but they're still a baby. But it's going to be your job to bring them through that growth process, just like it's your job when you have children to bring them through that growth process, and they're one and the same. Because just as a baby only sees and understands God through the people, his parents, young Christians are the same way, and they can't get to God. They don't know the Bible. They've got a measure of faith, as the Bible says, that allowed them to get saved, but they don't understand how to make the investments. They don't understand how to get to God. They don't know anything about the books in the Bible. They don't know anything about building a relationship with God. They can't see God. They don't have faith in God yet. They don't have anything in their life that they need, and you know what? All they do is see the person that's working with them, and you do for them exactly what a parent does for somebody in his family. They see God through you. They see God through you.

I remember as a young man growing up, when I came back to God when I was 20 years old, and yet I was a babe in Christ. I didn't know anything. But I had a man in my life that walked with God probably better than anybody I ever met in my life, and he began to work with me and began to help me. You know how I learned God? I learned about the great things of God by watching God through his life. I didn't know book, chapter, verse where I could go on a great verse on faith, but I watched him live by faith. I didn't know where to go in the Bible to talk about winning people to Christ, but I watched him win people to Christ. I didn't know where to go to put all the Bible together, but I watched his exuberance and his excitement about the Word of God, and that's what I lived on for a while till I figured it out where it was myself. That is the most crucial thing you have got to understand when you are taking some young Christian and you're working with them step by step through this growth process: allow them to see God in your life, because that's the only way they can get God. They can't reach out and grab Him. They can't get a hold of Him. They don't understand faith. We talk about investments and making investments, and they don't know what it means, how to make the right kind of investments. You see, you and I represent God to them, and in time, the process of showing how God works through your life, they'll stop being dependent on you, and they'll learn how to trust God for themselves. You are just a conduit to get them there, just like a parent is the conduit to get that little baby and that little child to the place where they build their own relationship with God.

You know what this is called over there in 1 John chapter 2? This is called perfecting the love of God in verse 5. That's what it is. When you start to bring somebody through these spiritual growth, you can sum it up in one phrase: you're perfecting the love of God in their life. You're perfecting it daily, daily. Last Thursday night, Joe asked the question on fasting, and we got double whammy, we talked about prayer too, but that's exactly what I'm talking about now. Here's a couple that love God, want to learn the Word of God, have a desire to learn the Word of God. That's how you do it. He didn't, he got it worked. Somebody was talking about fasting. He didn't understand it. He wanted to know where does he go? He comes back to where he's supposed to come back, and he gets it answered. But I bet he understands it now, don't you, Joe? And I bet if you get back in one of those conversations, you can lay it out and deal with it now,

can't you? I know you can. You see, that's how you learn. That's what a good parent does, and when you start to work with somebody in the Word of God through the process of bringing them through, you're going to have a thousand Joes and Christinas. You're going to have people that want a lot. I mean, you're going to have some duds. I mean, you will. I learned a long time ago, this book is light. If you ever went camping, you know what? You put your light on at night, wherever you got light, you got bugs. Not everybody is going to be a hundred percent. Some are going to be real screwballs, but you've got to wade through that. But when you get the good ones, like there's so many of you in here that just love God, I want to learn God. You know what? Man, you could put up with the bugs because you guys are worth it.

But there's going to come a point in your life where you're going to be sitting down with somebody, and you are going to be teaching them the Bible, and they're going to ask you questions just like that, and because they don't understand how to figure it out, I guarantee you three or four years from now, he can be able to teach Bible study just like many of you will be able to, and he's on the process of growth. It's like many of you are, you're in the process of making that book work for you. You know what? He's doing the same thing many of you are doing, and his wife, you're perfecting the love of God in your life. That's how you learn. Because Joe, I love you to death. Chris, I love you to death, but you know what? You can't always come to me for the questions. It's okay now. It's okay now, but you don't want to stay here the rest of your life. You know, when I first got to ministry, I called my father in the Lord probably four times a week to ask him what I should do about this, what I should do about that. You know what? I don't call anybody anymore. You know why? I've learned what to do. You know why? Because for a while, I had to lean on his spirituality till I built my own. But sooner or later, folks, you've got to get your own spirituality. Sooner or later, you've got to get your own promises. You've got to get your own principles. You've got to get your own style in preaching. You've got to get your own abilities. You've got to build your own spirituality. You can't lean on mine forever. Just like a little child growing up, your family, you give him money for this, you give him money for that, you help him out here, but sooner or later, he's got to get a job himself. He has got to begin to take responsibility as part of the growth process. It doesn't mean you won't have things that you ask about, but you fellowship around the Word of God, and in time, it isn't as you're just getting from me. I learn as much from you as you learn from me. It's a two-way street.

You see, this is what 2 Peter 1:5 talks about when it talks about adding to your faith. When you get saved, you've got to add to your faith. There's a process.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

And you go over to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, of all the spiritual gifts, charity's the greatest. The process just goes on and on and on. It's the process of growth. Hey, you know what? There is nothing I love better in the world than taking young Christians who really want to learn the Word of God, and you can have all the time you want. I will give you whatever it takes. You know

why? Because that's the right kind of investment to make, and you'll pay good dividends on it, because you'll do something with it. You'll develop your own spirituality, and it won't be too long that I'll say, "Joe, Christina, I got a couple I'm going to give you. They just come in, they got some marital problems, nothing serious. You know what? They really need somebody to love them, hold them accountable, and teach them the Word of God." I'm going to say, "Marian, I got a couple for you and your wife. I want you to take them. You're going to work with them, and you're going to take them. They're not serious. I mean, anything, they got serious, they don't have serious problems. They just need somebody to love them. They need somebody to take the Word of God and just build it in their life." I'm going to say, "Brad, I got a guy for you. I want you to take him. He's a good guy. He's a homicidal maniac, but you can handle him. I'm going to give him to you." Don't I know my people or what? And you're all going to be in that boat. If I had time, I could go down and name every one of you this morning, because that's how I feel about it. Because that's why God has put us together. Somebody's already doing it right now, don't even know it. Some of you do know it, some of you are being used. I stand back and look at God using some of you, and you don't even see it. And I ask God, "God, don't ever let them see it, because you know what? Then when you get all busted up with pride and everything, just let them be humble instead." But I've watched God using you people in some of your life. I watch some of the things you do for other people. I see the burden you have for other people. That's where it starts. That's where it starts.

V. Doctrinal Concepts for Spiritual Children

Now look at this thing in 1 John chapter 2. He says, "my little children," and in this passage, we see the great concepts beginning of fellowship and relationship. We see exactly what little children need. It's incredible that every place you go with one of these stages of spiritual growth, the doctrinal material matches up to the material that that person needs at whatever stage they are.

Now he says in 1 John 2:1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." All right. What he's saying here is, "I've written you the Word of God that you don't sin." And you know what he says in the next part of that verse? "And if any man do sin." Well, that isn't a contradiction of terms. One place he wrote there and he said, "I wrote these things so you wouldn't sin," but "if you do sin." You know what you start to do when you start to work with somebody? You can't do it with a baby. A baby, you know what I do when I start working with a young Christian and they just got saved? A lot of the things that I'll do before I ever try to teach him anything is I let them ask me whatever they want to ask about anything in the Bible. I'll just spend time because I'm on no timetable. I'm not on the clock with you. We got the rest of our lives till Jesus comes back, and then if He does come back, we'll all know it anyhow, so it won't make any difference. But I'll just spend time letting you get out of your system whatever you want to ask me, whatever you want to know. I don't care about what, because I always want to set the format that you get what you need, not what I think you need, and nobody knows what you need better than you do. So we start with that, and then as they, two or three weeks, two or three months, as they come through there, we start talking about basic concepts. Then I'll bring

them to the point here where now they move into that little children realm. I will start to talk about some of the great concepts.

You know what the first concept is? It's this: "these things write I unto you that ye sin not, and if any man sin." The first thing you need to understand as a child of God growing up is, what do you do with your sin? You know how many people are screwed up on that today? If you ask everybody, and you hear everything, the teaching is so bad on it today or non-existent, that young baby Christians, young children Christians, they don't have a clue what to do with their sin, and they get confused because if God died for all my sins on the cross, what am I sinning for here? And what did he say? "I wrote you the Word of God that you sin not." Well, then I do sin, so there must be something wrong with me. If you don't understand that great doctrinal concept that yes, you are saved, and on the cross of Calvary, God paid for all your sin, but you and I are going to sin anyhow, and you better know and understand what that doctrine is, as 1 John 1:9 lays out so clearly, you better understand what to do with your sin.

Let me tell you something, you can have the worst day in your Christian life, and you could end that day, it can be the best day of your life. Let me tell you how my day goes, and your day goes the same way because we're all the same. Now tomorrow morning, after this dynamic message, you're going to be motivated all day to serve God, and just a little bit, we're going to give an invitation, and everybody's going to hit the aisle, rededicate their lives, and you're going to go out of here on fire for tomorrow, and you're going to be all fired up, and you just can't wait to get out back in the world tomorrow and get out there and just, you know what? You get up in the morning, and boy, you're brushing your teeth, and you're combing your hair, and fixing your face, and you're doing all those things, you're singing, "I got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart," and you're out there, boy, and you're on your way, and you get in your car, and you're going to go to work, and you're thinking of all the people you're going to witness to and how God's going to use you today. And you don't get 15 feet down the freeway till some idiot pulls out in front of you, and before you know it, you lost your testimony, and you know the day goes from there. Then you get to work, you know, and you get into work, you know, you got all this thing, and then something goes bad, you know, or somebody snubs you, or somebody says this, and somebody says that, and then you get your attitude out of joint, and then somebody makes you mad about this, and you know, and then you just think, "Oh, what the heck," so you just get into some good sin, you know, and just think whatever you want to think and do whatever you want to do, and then you come home at night, and then you come there, you know, and you're flopping in bed, and you say, and now you're defeated. See, you're defeated now. And now you're defeated, so you get in bed, and you say, "Lord, I really blew it today. This was the most terrible day of my life. I started out wanting to do what's good for You, and I got that idiot on the freeway. Lord God, kill him wherever he's at, because it ruined my whole day. And God, I just, I want to ask You to forgive me." And sure, God forgives you at that point, but you know what? You spent the whole day out of fellowship with God.

Now, let me show you how it should work. Same procedure. You get up in the morning. Somebody pulls out. You got the best attention. You got, "Sir, Lord." Somebody pulls on the freeway. Now, in time in your life, you're going to have to react to these things, or instead of it,

you're going to have to respond to these things that are reacting. Road rage is the name of the game today. A person pulls out in front of you, you know, and you do something totally inappropriate, whatever that may be. I can't let my mind go there today, but it's different for people. You know, some would have shot the guy in the back of the head. You know, somebody else would have offered up obscene hand gestures, and some of the other would have just mouthed nasty things as you drove by. See, me, I would say, "Now look at that. That's a honey. Now that, that is a woman driver for you every time." We get up alongside, and she'd say, "Honey, I got news for you. That's not a woman. That's a man. Next cop I see, I'll say arrest that man for impersonating a woman." You know, it goes. If right there on the spot, you confess your sin and say, "God, that was stupid of me. I'm sorry. Put it under the blood. I'm sorry, Lord. That's not what I should be." Fellowship restored. You could fall down 500 times that day, and if you confessed that every time and dealt with it, you see, that's what I call God consciousness. That's what a young child needs to learn that God's people don't know today. They don't know what to do with their sin, so they spend the whole day out of fellowship with God when you can have the worst day of your life, it can be the best day of your life, because you, and any day you stay in fellowship with God all through the troubles and trials of the day, is a good day. But you've got to know what to do with your sin.

I'll tell you something else, 1 John 2:1 says, "Jesus Christ my advocate." I wonder how many of God's people even know the doctrine of the advocacy of Christ. You know what it means to be an advocate? You see, these things are fellowship concepts. These are relationship. You can't have a relationship with God. Do you understand? That's why he says, "my little children," and then he talks about what to do with your sin. Then he tells you in 1 John 2:1, "Jesus Christ was your advocate." Then in 1 John 2:2, he says the concept of "He's my propitiation for my sin, and not only for mine, but for the whole world." You couldn't find 20 Christians in this town that understood what the word, the doctrine of propitiation meant. That's why we get in a mode where we think that, "Why would a holy God want anything to do with me?" That's why we get down on ourselves because we, and we think, "Well, God can't love me," or we think then that God, "If I do something wrong, God's just waiting around the corner, and when I step around that corner, God's going to give me cancer, or He's going to give me this, or He's going to do that. We're going to put me in a bad car accident, or He's going to kill one of my kids." It's because as a young child, you never got trained and taught in the Word of God to have a relationship and fellowship that is unconditional, that Jesus Christ is your advocate, and He is the propitiation for your sin, and those are things you've got to learn.

1 John 2:3-4 says, and this is the definition of real Christianity, "to know Him and to keep His word." Then 1 John 2:5 says, "this is how you perfect the love of God in your life." You see, all these things are relationship-based. That's why he says, "my little children," because when you get to that little children stage in teaching people the Bible, that's what you focus on. You teach them what to do with their sin. You teach them about the doctrine of the advocacy of Jesus Christ. You teach them about the doctrine of propitiation for their sin. You teach them these concepts so they understand how the concepts work in their life as a little child, and then you add to their faith. These are the things a 20th and a 21st century Christian don't have a clue on. That's why God's people are so confused today. That's why they're so defeated. That's why they don't

have any power in their life. That's like I talked about a couple of weeks ago, but they don't know who they are in Christ because they don't have that. Nobody today is spending the time teaching anybody anything, the things about God and the Word of God. You get saved, you're just slapped on the back, you get put on a bus route. You get saved, you're slapped on the back, "Just come to church and tithe. That's all you need to do. God will take care of the rest," and heavy on the tithe. No.

There has to be more to it than that. You have to take somebody, and you have to be willing to invest your life in the life of somebody else. That's why I'm saying, ministry as defined in the Bible is not singing in our choir. We don't have a choir, and I got some news for you, we'll never have a choir. You know why? You're the choir. I never understood that. I never understood pulling out people and putting them over here and then letting them sing when what does that say to you guys? Hey, you know what? You are the choir. You want to move me? Just get singing "How Great Thou Art" or "The Power in the Blood." I mean, I'm telling you, you're the choir. You're the one that, you're the one that, you're the ones that together is the body of Christ. We get so screwed up in our concept. We get so confused. God's people don't have a clue today of what it means to have the relationship with Christ that they need, so they get defeated.

That's why I love the book of 1 John. I call the book of 1 John the Christian Declaration of Independence, because he declares some things in 1 John that you've got to get. You know what the Declaration of Independence is? It's the declaration we gave back there in 1776 that declared our independence from England. You know what 1 John is? It's the Declaration of Independence for the child of God that God declares your freedom in Christ, and that's what every young Christian needs to know.

I told you before, you go to the average Christian bookstore, and you'll find in there that you go pick up a commentary on 1 John, and you'll find that commentary on 1 John, every commentary will always say, "Well, the theme of 1 John is love. The theme of 1 John is love. You know, 1 John is love. It's the great love book. It's the great love chapter. It's a great love this, it's a great love in John is a great book on love." And yet, you know what? I don't have to even, all I got to do is read for myself. Got five chapters, 105 verses, 2,523 words. 27 times in five chapters is the word "know" or "to know." The theme of 1 John isn't love. The theme of 1 John is to know. But you see, that's so typical of American Christians, because we want to love God before we know God. That's what's wrong with marriages in America today. People fall in love, they don't ever learn to love, and I guarantee you, when you fall in love, boy, 20 years down, or five years down the line, two years down the road today in our society, you'll fall out of love. That's what God's people do with God. They go to some church, and they hear some guy preach up there, you know, and it tickles them and moves them when they go see some movie, you know, "Burning Hell" and "The Passion of the Christ" or whatever, you know, and they get that real sense of wow, urgency in their heart and their soul, you know, and they run down and they get saved. You know that they make a confession for Christ, and then they go out, you never see them in church. They never get baptized. Nothing ever else goes through in their life, and everybody said, "Wow, we had a hundred people saved in our movie last night." No, you didn't. You had a hundred people come down that were confused and left confused. That's all you had. My Bible says, "If

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." You say you get saved, there's no change in your life. Let me tell you something, you just fell in love with Christ at the end of the movie, and you fell out of love with Him when He went to the bar afterwards to get one before you went to bed. That's all.

No, no, no, you have to learn to love Christ. You have to, you have to learn, you have to know Him, because knowing Him is loving Him, and you have to know Him. The process of 1 John is bringing those little children to the point where they love God because they know Him. You don't do that by just getting saved and being put out to farm someplace or put in the field of work or put in a church to work. You do that by somebody sitting down, just like you take your little children, walking them through every stage and being God to them and showing them God through your life and answering whatever questions they have that they can begin to build that relationship. Then you have to be smarter than the people that you're working with. You have to know what their needs are. You have to know what they need at this point. You have to know how to give them this when they ask for it.

John is a critic. The Apostle John is one of the greatest studies in all of the Bible. He writes three sets of books. He writes the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and the book of Revelation. Even in those, I see the process of growth. I see the Gospel of John as the milk. I see 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John as the growth process, and certainly the book of Revelation would be the meat of the Word of God. It's incredible.

VI. Children and the Principle of Separation

Now we're going to move from the little children, and we saw how that the little children, the emphasis on relationship and fellowship on the basic level, a basic understanding of what God has done with your sin, the advocacy of Jesus Christ, the propitiation for your sin, and all of those things. By the way, the advocacy means that He was the go-between between you and God. Propitiation means that He reconciled two opposing parties, and the whole concept of the holy of God. If you understand the advocacy and the propitiation of Christ, you'll never get messed up on losing your salvation or screwed up on who you are in Christ. They're two vital concepts.

Now, the next level is not little children, but just children. This would be somewhere between the ages, oh, I don't know, 7 or 12, somewhere in there. The aspect is still fellowship and relationship, but it's developing on a higher level now as you grow. For this, we want to turn over to 2 Corinthians 6:13-18.

I told you last week about the book of 1 Corinthians. The book of 1 Corinthians is a book where they're completely a church of babies. They are so messed up in the book of 1 Corinthians, it's unbelievable. Every chapter, and I gave you some of them last week, every chapter, every chapter, every chapter, you find where he straightened them out on some kind of screwed up issue. Now someplace along the line, they say, "Okay, we want to do what's right." And then he writes the book of 2 Corinthians. Now in the book of 2 Corinthians, he teaches them how to minister, and almost chapter by chapter, in fact, in 1 Corinthians, he shows them what's wrong chapter by chapter. In 2 Corinthians, he shows him how to minister chapter by chapter, and every

chapter, and I call the book of 2 Corinthians the handbook of the minister. Every chapter he's dealing with a different aspect of ministry and how to minister.

I told you last week that in the book of 1 Corinthians, he called some babes, but they're not called babes in 2 Corinthians. You never find the word at all. They're called children. You know why? Because they begin to grow. So he didn't call them babies anymore. In 1 Corinthians, he calls them babies over and over again, but in 2 Corinthians, he doesn't use the word babies. He calls them children. You know why? Because they're beginning to grow.

Now watch this, here's what he says in 2 Corinthians 6:13-18.

Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Now all this has to do with the same thing we're looking at, except on a higher level. Because the children concept still deals with fellowship and relationship, but we're moving up the ladder spiritually here. Now in your spiritual walk, when you're dealing with people or in your own spiritual growth process, you'll learn not only physically but spiritually, you'll learn a great lesson at this point. The great lesson is, as you're taking up your little children now, you know, and they're in that age group, you know, between 8 and 12, one of the things that you're going to be able to do now that you've built the relationship is you're going to be able to tell them, "You know what, honey? You don't need to hang around with so-and-so. You don't need to be going out with so-and-so." I remember my wife telling our kids, "You know, there's people, there's kids that you can go over to their house, and there's kids that you can't." They never questioned it. They never said, "Why?" Because they learned to trust her more than anybody else. So she would say, "You know what? She can't be your friend." "Okay." "He can't be your friend." "Okay." Jason, "Hat out." Danny, "Ketticott out." Hey, yeah, it works.

As you grow spiritually in this stage, you learn a great lesson: there's some people and some things you just need to stay away from. You need to stay away from. The greatest principle for the church is one word. It really is what the one word that means what the church is. The one word that is the greatest concept of the church is separation. The church, in fact, the word "church" means "called out." You're called out from the world. You're separate. The whole aspect of the church is separation. I'm separated from the world. I'm not to be part of the world. The

Bible says in Ephesians 5:11, "I'm to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

You learn this as a young Christian at this point, that there's some things or some people they just need to stay away from, because young Christians don't always make the best choices, just like little children don't always make the best choices. You can tell them, and they can go make their own messes if they want, they have to learn that way. That's fine. But the bottom line is, when it comes to the things of Christianity and the things of the Word of God, let's just face it, there's some people that are older who know more about it than we do.

This 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 is just incredible, because the whole key here is 2 Corinthians 6:14. It says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Now, we always use this as a text for not marrying unsaved people, and certainly that's what a text is talking about. I mean, in one aspect, it's talking about the fact that there is nothing that an unsaved person and a saved person have in common to enter into the concept of marriage. It will never work. But more than that, he's talking about fellowship and who you can have fellowship with and who you can't. Now the key word here is fellowship. So he says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness" (there's a saved person) "with unrighteousness" (an unsaved person)? "and what communion hath light" (there's God's people) "with darkness" (there's the devil's people)? "And what concord" (that's togetherness, a concord is something that brings two pieces together, we're going to walk over here like a concourse, a concord) "and what concord hath Christ with Belial" (that's the Old Testament name for the devil)? "or what part hath he that believeth" (that's a saved person) "with an infidel" (an unsaved person)? "and what agreement hath the temple of God" (that's your body) "with idols" (that's the body of an unsaved person)? And he comes down there and he says in 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Wherefore" (because of what I just said) "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."

At this point, if the discipline has been instilled when they were in the baby stage and in the early little children stage, the fellowship and the relationship is explained and worked through, and the Bible doctrines laid out, the young Christian now begins to see the reality of life on Planet Earth. This is what the book of Proverbs talks about, the issues of life. They now begin to see the big picture of things. They now begin to see, "You know what? There's some people out there that'll hurt me spiritually. There's some situations out there that I'm not going to get into. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to go with that person. I'm not going to be part of that because now those things are going to hurt me, and I have no fellowship with them because my fellowship first and foremost is with the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am perfecting my love for God in that relationship." It's so simple. At this point, the young Christian simply begins to see life as it really is, not as it appears. He begins to realize that God has given him a responsibility, and now that responsibility is to reproduce himself.

VII. The Challenge of Balance in Spiritual Growth

Now during this phase comes another challenge, and all the Christian life is full of challenges, and it's the concept of balance. Now, let me just say this to you: balance will always be the

hardest thing you've got to deal with as a Christian. There's never a time that there won't be a balance in your life, and when you get the balance, balance will be another balance to balance that balance, and it'll be a balance to balance that balance. But here's the balance you've got to deal with at this point. This is where it starts to come in.

Now the Bible says in Luke 12:48, "to whom much is given, much is required." When God teaches you the Word of God, there's some requirements that come with it, some responsibilities that come with it. Ecclesiastes 1:18 says, "in much wisdom is much grief," because the more you learn and the more you know, the more you've got to deal with, and the more you deal with, the uglier it gets, and the more problems you get into. That's just part of it. That's what Jesus said when He said to you and me, or He said to the apostles, He's talking to you and me, He says, "greater things will you do than I will do." Well, how in the world am I going to do greater things than Christ? Because He went back to heaven, and then He turned it over to us, the church, to do and finish what He started.

See, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:20, "Brethren, be not children in understanding." You've got to grow up. He says in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." I was thinking of that verse just the other day when I was picking up all Maddie's toys. "Became a man, I'm putting away childish things in the toy box." Well, what he's saying by this is that you are to grow up. You're not to stay children in understanding. And yes, there was a time that you were a child, a baby Christian, and you spake as a child. You didn't understand everything. You understood as a child. You didn't have a whole concept of the Bible, and you thought as a child. You're limited in your thought process. But when I became a man, you went through the process of growth that you became a spiritual man, a father, an elder, the aged, which we're going to get into, you grow up spiritually. There was a time when I became a man, I put away childish things. You know what that verse says? It just means you grow up, and you don't deal with things in the ministries of a child anymore. You deal with them because you see it as it is.

But now here's the problem. I know we understand that, but here's the problem. Here comes the first balance you've got to deal with. Now we all understand what I just said: "Be not children in understanding," and "once you were a child, you thought as a child, you spake as a child, you did as a child." The Bible says, "the child is known by his doings." You can see all that stuff, but there comes a point when you become a man spiritually, when you grow up, when you get established in the Word of God, you put away childish things. Now we all understand that, but here's the problem. Jesus said in Matthew 18:1-3, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now you see the balance. There's the balance, and this is the tough balance, and this is only the first balance you've got to begin to balance: that I'm growing up spiritually. I'm no more a child. I'm now growing up spiritually, and I'm a strong spiritual Christian. But I've got to balance the fact that I've always got to have a childlike mentality when it comes to faith. I've got to be a tough soldier for Jesus Christ. You can take it and take it and take it and never quit. But I've got to have the childlike faith just to always be a little child when it comes to my relationship with Him. That balance is sometimes hard to keep, but that's just the first of many balances that have come.

Through the process of you teaching somebody the Word of God, through the natural process of babies, little children, building those relationship concepts, it all comes naturally, and you have the ability to have the rule of your own spirit, like Proverbs chapter 25 says, "be a man." But as a child, you also have the ability of Romans 14:23 says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." You have the best of both worlds. You're a man on one side or a woman for Christ on one side who is strong and can take the stand. But you're a child on the other side that you never get smarter than God, and you always rely on Him. That is a tough balance.

VIII. The Importance of Discipleship and Mentorship

Training up people in the Bible is just like training up your own kids. It starts with a basic Bible discipline, and then building the characteristics of Christianity into their lives in both cases, through the basic discipline and then through the relationship and through the fellowship. It's parents being the only thing that those kids can see God, and because they are parents reproducing Christ in their children, and it's Christians who take young baby Christians or young Christians who want to learn the Bible, who don't understand the Bible, and because of your testimony, because of your life, because of your ability in the Word of God, that you can reproduce yourself in their lives. They see the balance. They see that here's a tough guy that's strong. He doesn't waver. He's got it together. But at the same time, he's like a little child when it comes to God. That is a tough balance, but that's the way it has to go. That is what is called perfecting the love of God in your life.

You know what? This week, terrible tragedy. In fact, my wife brought it up to me yesterday, and I thought about it when I had heard it, but most of you probably heard about the situation with golfer Jack Nicklaus, when they were all at their house, and they were all there, and they had, they were on a hot tub, a bunch of them together, and they all went back in the house, and a little 21-month-old baby or a three-year-old baby, whatever, kept slipping back out, got in a hot tub and drowned. That's a terrible thing, and Barb mentioned that to me yesterday. I said to her, "I said, remember that, remember the situation years, this has been 35 years ago. We had a missionary family." I heard a pastor use this example, and an incredible, incredible, incredible illustration. Had a missionary family that had come home on leave. They just had a new baby. Baby was, you know, two, three years old, where he could walk. They'd been on a mission field for a long time, came home, deputation, all the family got together, had a big party, and they were all enjoying each other, and they were passionate. Everybody wanted to see the baby. Now it is, you know, and grandma and have the baby, and then sister to have the baby, and then this person have the baby. You know, babies get passed around when they haven't seen him, and everybody's got to see the baby. Well, it went on and on and on for a while, and pretty soon, the mother said, "Well, I, I gave you the baby. Where's the baby?" She said, "Well, I gave the baby to so-and-so." "Now where's the baby?" "Well, I gave the so-and-so, I gave the baby." And come to find out that that little baby, somebody had put the baby down and did something else, and the baby went out, and there was a little pond out there, a little just a little pond, and the baby fell in that pond and drowned.

I'll never forget when a guy used that illustration. He said, "You know what? That's the problem in Christianity. Same problem they had in that family. Everybody thought somebody else was watching the baby. In actuality, nobody was watching the baby, and that baby died." You know, that's the problem in churches: who's watching the babies? Who's responsible for the young Christians? We all are. And when somebody else says, "Well, who's watching the baby? Who's watching the baby? Who's watching the baby?" You know what usually happens? Nobody's watching the baby. But that's the job of this church: is to bring you through the point where you learn how to take somebody else's life, take the Word of God, and then take your own life and train them up in the Word of God. That's what ministry is. That's my goal for you.

The only reason this church will be blessed of God, and I certainly believe this, I believe, I believe the first year and a half, well, I already told you this, I believe the first year and a half, God just gave us the people that we needed to have a core base of people, and I believe that those people now need to become the trainers and the teachers of the Word of God. Every one of you have the ability to be someone who can teach somebody the Word of God and bring them through the process. But you have to understand the process, and you have to understand what it's all about. I'm just telling you, it's, it'll be the greatest thing in your life, the greatest joy you will ever have.

I have to laugh at people. They're always apologizing to me when they come over to my house to spend time with me in the Bible. It's like they're, you know, taking me away from something. You know, let me tell you something, there is no, and maybe down the line you'll learn this, there is no greater joy in all the world. There is no funner thing to do in all the world than sit down with somebody and just have a good time around the Word of God. Is there anything in this world I would rather do? There isn't any ballgame that I'd put it off to watch. There isn't any experience, any hunting trip, any whatever to do it. There is nothing that gives me a high higher than sitting down with God's people and just enjoying them and the Word of God together and learning from them as much as they learn from me. If you ever get to that, you'll live in a state of revival, because the revival will be based on your giving what you've got from God to somebody else.

But to whom much is given, much is required. With much knowledge comes much grief. It always isn't pretty. Sometimes you have to deal with some nasty things. Sometimes you have to deal with some bad things. Hopefully, I'll protect most of them, and I'll deal with those. But in time, some of you will be raised up through the basic teaching mode, and you'll say, "You know, well, I really like this, Bob. I'd like to get on the next level up there with really counseling and working on that level." And I'll say, "Come on in. The water's fine. Get on in there." You've all got different gifts and all got skills. You're all saved. You all love God. I believe that. And you're all in different levels of your spiritual growth. The goal is: keep growing, keep learning. Boy, make Thursday night a priority that you're just going to learn and get questions and ask and learn and get what you can get. And you keep on adding to your faith. One person asks a question, everybody benefits from it. How many times I've seen Jan ask a question or somebody's asked a question, and everybody comes out of there saying, "Wow, I really learned something tonight," all because one person shared. You know what? In a very small sense, that's exactly what the

ministry is: sharing what you have with God for somebody else. That's all. That's what makes this thing work. And that's what makes this church as beautiful as it is. It's the people in it who love God and love God's Word, who have one thing in your life: you're perfecting the love of God in your life. That's the key. Let's pray.