

I. The Greatest Blessing in Ministry

This is also given to me in the hearing that I know I want to accomplish, and on the basis of how I have talked to some of you and our time together in the Bible. I think, without a doubt, probably in my own life—and I say this based on a number of years of doing this—I think the greatest blessing and reward in the ministry, without a doubt, is actually being in a position where you get to see the changes that God makes in people's lives.

We have now been over here for over four years, and enough time has passed for me, anyhow, to really see God doing some things in many of your lives. It does not take four years; some of you we have been working together in the Word of God for much shorter than that, and already I begin to see enough time has passed to really see God doing some things in many of your lives.

I heard a preacher say one time, and he was talking—he was not really bragging or boasting, he was making a factual statement from his standpoint. He had said that his messages that he had preached over the years had literally changed thousands of people's lives through his ministry. I thought when he said that, the real truth of the matter is, there never was a message from any man that changed anybody's life. It is very simply and plainly the Word of God that changes your life.

I think so many times we fall into the trap that we think that because a message is powerful or good, or it moves you emotionally, that we think that alone is enough to make the change in somebody's life. That is simply not true. It is the Bible and your attitude toward the Word of God, and really what you do with the Word of God, and how God takes it and begins to change about you what needs to be changed.

I remember when we talked about raising children, in the training classes of training up your children, how I talked about the fact that the first thing you have to do to change your child is be willing to change yourself. It is the same way when it comes to God using you, however He wants to use you. I think the most exciting part of my work and my life is actually watching that transformation process take place as God literally molds you and makes you into what He wants you to be.

II. The Downside of Ministry: Wasted Potential

At the same time, I think the downside of the ministry is looking and seeing the wasted potential that people have, that they simply will not make the commitment or do what they have to do to be able to let God do in their life what He wants to do. I think that is true in every church, and our church will be no different from that. There will be men and women in this church that really will submit themselves to the things of God. They will allow God to do with their life whatever He wants to do.

Then there are others that will only go so far. You are only going to go so far in the fact that you are going to begin to do some things in your life, but you are going to come to a point in your life where there are some real issues that have to be dealt with. That is the way God does it. God starts out, and we drop the big things in our lives when we want to really be what God wants us to do. That is really not the problem. The problem comes in when, as you begin to grow—say, maybe you get discipled, or you begin to work and learn the Bible, or you start coming to Thursday night, which is absolutely vital if you are ever going to put the whole Bible together, and come on Sunday morning, and then we work together in some of the special programs that we have.

As you begin to do that, it would be just fine and absolutely wonderful if that is all you had to do. But in changing you and I to be what God wants us to be, for that process to take place, we have to make some hard decisions in our life sometimes. Sometimes things have to go. Sometimes people have to go. Sometimes relationships have to go. Sometimes something in your life just has to be put aside. The thing that stops most people is they get to that point in their life and they do not want to go that far, so they just maintain where they are at. Then the problems begin to start in their lives from there.

I think the downside of the ministry for me, anyhow—and I am just speaking from my own perspective—is to watch people who grow to a point and then simply do not want to go any farther than that, or are not willing to change any farther. I think that is a sad side of the ministry.

III. God's Hand on Lives and the Art of Preaching

I have no doubt in my mind that as I deal with some of you young guys and some gals, God has His hand on some of your lives. There is no doubt in my mind that some of you guys are going to make good pastors someday in your life. You really are. I watch your life, and I see what I see, that maybe you do not even see it yet. I see the number one basic quality that I look for in a young man as far as his potential to be a pastor or someone who is absolutely vital in ministry. There is one bottom-line characteristic, and you cannot teach this to anybody. This does not come because you come on Sunday morning or you come on Thursday night. This comes because you begin to take the Word of God in your life and you begin to do with it what God wants you to do, and in the process, begin to grow.

When I see that one characteristic in somebody's life, to me it is a lot like Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch over there in Acts chapter 8, where God saw something in that Ethiopian eunuch that nobody else saw. Did you ever stop and contemplate in your mind why God picked that one guy? There must have been a hundred thousand people around at that particular time that were going through the same emotional struggle and finding God. Why did God choose that one guy? He was absolutely so important to God that God basically pulled the head evangelist out of Samaria, who was leading a revival where literally thousands of people were coming to Christ, and brought him to one guy on the backside of the desert and gave him what he needed and changed his life.

I know that it changed his life because even though the Bible does not really tell us much about that Ethiopian eunuch after Acts chapter 8, it does tell us one thing which really says volumes: it says that he went on his way rejoicing. He took what that moment had done in his life and he did something with it wherever he went.

I remember a number of years ago, and I was just eighteen or nineteen years old at the time, that a missionary had come back. He had spent most of his life in Africa, and his job or his mission was that he would try to get into places where nobody else had gotten, where many times they had never seen a white man, and certainly from his perspective, had never heard the Gospel. He had worked with a number of tribes. When he got into their camps and into their cultures, they knew about a man named Moses. They knew about a God who had a Son. They knew about things in the New Testament that they never had a New Testament. He said, "I remember it as long as I live." He said, "I really believe in my heart that that Ethiopian eunuch went back and led a revival in a nation of Africa, and to this day we still see remnants and parts and pieces of it in the tribes that maybe have lost the central truth but have the fragments of what God must have done with that man's life."

So when I see somebody that has that basic characteristic that I look for—and I will never tell you what that is, I will tell you right now there is nothing to do with how much you know about the Bible—when I see that basic characteristic in a young man's life, or a young couple's life, or even a young lady's life (even though I know she will never pastor), when I see that basic characteristic, it is almost like what God said to Philip when He said, "Go join thyself to that man's chariot."

I know that in some of your lives God has His hand on your life. It is so obvious to me. I know that God has called some of you that if Jesus tarries His coming and we continue to do what we do and God continues to bless us, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year, but someplace down the line, you will make a good pastor. I see it in you, and maybe you do not see it yet. Probably most of you do not. I know a couple of instances where right now I know that probably the farthest thing from your mind is pastoring, but yet I see within you that basic characteristic that is the key, I think anyhow, for whatever. I know some of you will make good preachers.

We talked about, and I watch, and I love to watch what you do with what I give you. We talked a while back, and we were doing our leadership thing one night, I talked about how to be a good preacher, what it takes to be a good preacher. I actually watch some of you actually put it to work. I actually watch some of you go back and really do and work on it. I remember telling you, this is so true, what most people think of, and it is as far from reality as can be. Most young men think that what makes a good preacher is getting a lot of opportunities to preach. Of course, that is not true. All that does is give you the opportunity to preach more bad messages.

You have to learn that preaching is an art. No man who ever wrote a great sonata, or a great Bach or Beethoven, or a great symphony, nobody who ever, like Van Gogh, who ever painted a great picture, just picked up a set of brushes or a piece of manuscript paper and began to write. They found that there was a key to their being an artist at what they do. If there is anything in God's work that requires the work of an artist, it is preaching.

We see that there are a lot of things. When you go down to Branson, one of the unique things about Branson, especially in Silver Dollar City, I think—and I love going to Silver Dollar City, I love the cave down there, I love the history of all that, I love the caramel apples with a little sprinkle, I love the whole thing down there—but the thing that I like is that so many of those things down there, they have trades that men do that nobody does anymore. They are really lost arts. They are really things that people do not do anymore that at one time required a man to fine-hone his abilities to be able to do that. There are some guys that still do that, and they become a novelty today.

I think that is the problem in Christianity today: preachers have lost the art of preaching. They have lost the ability to take the Bible and paint a picture in their messages. I remember coming up, and I told you guys that night, I have had a great advantage over most people today, as I heard some, probably in my young life, I have heard some of the greatest preachers that came out of the end of the Philadelphian church age. I heard men that were masters. I remember one time hearing Victor Sears and Howard Sears, John Rawlings from Cincinnati. I remember Bob Jones the second, who was an apostate as far as his theology was concerned, but I had never heard a man before that had more of a command of the presence of the English language to be able to convey his thought through preaching that just incredibly painted a picture.

These men understood, and they were the last great artists of the Philadelphian church age. They understood that preaching was an art. It was not something that you just do because it was not about how loud you are. We got that idea, we get up and we scream and we yell, and that makes for good preaching. No, that makes for people with ear problems a little bit later on in life. No, preaching is an art. As you begin to understand how you have to put these things together and use these things into your life, some of you will make good preachers.

Some of you will be excellent at one-on-one dealing with people. Some of you will be excellent at discipleship. Some of you, when it comes, you have the ability to deal with people in their problems. You have that base of compassion versus knowing the scriptures. This is what it takes to make a ministry successful. Not everybody will be a pastor. Not everybody will be a good preacher. I think after three or four years down at the mission, you can tell now the guys that really have a passion for it, who have done a good job with it, and have really worked at it, and the guys that simply do the same old stuff that they do every time. Some of them can actually paint the picture of what you want to see. Some of them, it is no different than if you were driving up and ordering a hamburger at McDonald's through the drive-thru.

It is an art. It is something that you have to develop. It is something that you just do not have. It is not a natural ability. There are no classes in public speaking that will help you with it. No, it has to come from deep within, and it is built on your personal relationship and understanding of some things that I want to talk about this morning. As you grow in time, God will reveal to you and to this body what your strengths are and how He wants to use you. Everybody in this church is valuable, but you are only as valuable as you see how valuable you are.

IV. God's Calling and Our Abilities

There is a story in the Bible that I think is one of the great stories in the New Testament, and it is found in the Gospel, and it is the story of the talents, where a man takes the—and talents are a Jewish form of money—where a man is given a certain amount of money, and another guy is given a certain amount of money. The one guy takes the money that he has and he invests it, and when the master comes back, he says, "Hey, look, you gave me one talent, I invested it, brought you back a hundred talents." Somebody else said, "Well, you gave me a talent, I brought you back thirty." Then there is one guy that says, "You know what? You gave me a talent, and I just hung on to it. I buried it. I did absolutely nothing with it."

I take that, and even I understand the concept there is the kingdom of heaven, and I understand what he is talking about the nation of Israel and how it fits into dispensational truth. Yet the practical application is so clear: God has given all of you abilities, and you have to decide if you are going to use them or not. You have to decide if you are going to be great for God, or are you going to be great on your softball team? You have to decide what you are going to be good at in life. You have to decide if you are going to be great at this or you are going to be great at this. You are going to have to decide what you are going to do with what God has given you, and you are going to have to decide the investment that you are going to make for Him. Nobody can decide that for you.

I can lay out the Bible and teach you the Bible. God can give us a building, and we can put an educational center in it. One of the things I want to do is develop a library over there, a resource center where the guys and the gals that are really into this thing, that we can just really fine-tune a lot of things that we are already doing and do them better. But at the end of the day, we could spend a hundred million dollars outfitting something, and it still would not make you what you need to be. You have to decide to do that. Buying you a piano does not make you a piano player. You have to spend the hours and the time developing the abilities that may be in you but have to be cultured and pulled together and refined as you grow in music. It is the same way when it comes with the Word of God.

V. The Body of Christ and Individual Importance

The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 4 that the body of Christ should be fitly joined together. That is so true. You and I need to understand that not everybody is going to be a pastor. Not everybody is going to be a preacher. But there is something for everybody to do. I think part of the problem comes in, especially in the day and age that we live in, because the Spirit of God is so lacking in most people's lives. I think that in most churches—and I would probably say that this church is no different, maybe it is on a lower scale—there is always a spirit of competition about things. Everybody has to do something, and somebody else wants to do it too. It just does not work that way. Everybody has to find out what your abilities are, and then you develop those abilities to their fullest extent.

If everybody would pastor in the world, then there would not be anybody to pastor, would there? If everybody was one thing, then there would be no need for anything else. The truth of the matter is, this group of people this morning is like your own body. I know that we take for granted parts of our body that we do not, maybe it is not displayed publicly a lot, like your feet.

You worry about how you look in your hair. You worry about your nails. You worry about all of the things. But we do not spend a lot of time, unless you wear open-toed shoes or sandals, thinking about your feet. Your feet are crammed into hot old leather things with socks on them, and after three or four hours, you pull them out of those boots, and everybody runs for cover.

Feet are not, I do not think, very pretty. I have never had a foot fetish, whatever that is. I think feet are basically ugly. I mean, I would not tell a lady that. I would not say, "Your feet are really big, are not they, ma'am?" You do not do those things. But I do not see that as a sexually attractive thing. Feet? I mean, I do not know. I mean, and I think guys' feet look... I saw a woman one time, and she was beautiful, but she had Fred Flintstone feet. I do not know if she never wore shoes when she was growing up, but her feet were about that wide. I promise you, she would never drown. She could paddle her way anywhere. I am telling you.

But you know what? Lose your big toe on one foot and watch how it throws off everything else in your body. We do not think about those things. We think that our beauty is important, or our intelligence is important, or the way we, our physique is important. You lose your big toe. In fact, one of the ways—this is a little key for you in the Bible—one of the things they did back in the Old Testament when they wanted to completely disable an enemy in the Old Testament, you know what they did? When they did not kill him, they cut off his big toes. You know why? Because he is worthless the rest of his life. He cannot run. He cannot walk. He certainly cannot fight. It is a dehumanizing thing. It is a thing where we take part, and this body here is the same way. You are all important. Everybody is important. You have to understand that the key is realizing that God has something that He wants you to do.

What happens is we get so focused sometimes, I think, on what somebody else is doing. Somebody is getting ahead of me. Somebody is getting this, or somebody is getting that. We get so caught up on what God is doing in somebody else's life that we lose what God wants to do in our own lives.

VI. The Pastor's Calling and Personal Testimony

I have one calling in life as far as I am concerned, and every man has to find out what his calling is in life. I basically have one calling in life. It is the one thing I do better than anything else I do. It is the one thing I know better than probably anything else in life. I think I am fairly successful at it, but God will have to work that out at the judgment seat of Christ. But I believe my calling in life is one thing, and that is taking young men and young ladies who want to learn God and learn about His Word. God has given me an ability and a burden to be able to take those people, work with them through a process, and help them come out the other side being and knowing what God wants them to do in their life.

I do that better than anything else I do. I have done it all my life. It started all the way back when I was just a young guy, was not even in the ministry yet, and God gave me a detention home ministry. I found one young boy in that detention home ministry that had no mother, had no father. He was up for stealing a car and armed robbery when he was fourteen years old. That boy got saved in that ministry, and I went to the judge and I said, "Judge, if you will let me work with

this kid and not send him to the reform school, I will do my best." The judge, I guess by his better wishes, gave me that kid, and my wife and I basically adopted that boy, brought that boy through, and now today that boy is pastoring a church in this country. From my very beginning, that is what God had called me to do. I do it better than anything else in this world that I know.

I do not know much about a lot of things. I am like a guy that said one time, "I do not know a lot of things about a lot of things, but what I do know is worth knowing." That is where I am at. I do not know a lot of things about a lot of things in life, but what I do know, I want to tell you, is worth knowing. God has given me the ability to be able to take a young man or a couple or a young lady and help them find where they are at with the Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of it He taught me through how He did it in my life.

In the Bible, there are some great examples of God calling a man for the work of the ministry, whatever God has called for them to do. In the New Testament, who could miss the relationship of Paul and Timothy? Yet in both their individual cases, how God called Paul and yet how God called Timothy and molded and brought him up. I think in the Old Testament, what a greater example than the life of Abraham. I think in the Old Testament again, Elisha and Elijah, how God brought them along and put them in. I think of Moses. What an incredible, probably one of the greatest examples of ministering that you are ever going to find in all of the Bible in his life.

But I think for you and I to see and understand how God begins that call in a very intimate way, we would have to look at probably one of the examples in the Bible that probably means more to me personally because it is exactly how God did it with me. In my life, when God called me and God began to move in my heart to do something for God, I want to tell you this: when God begins to work in your life, He sometimes can begin to call you. It is a very confusing time in your life. I liken it a lot like being when you are in junior high. You are not really an adult yet, and you are not really a child anymore. Your legs are longer than your arms, and your ears are bigger than your nose, and your nose is bigger than... you feel out of sorts. Your face breaks out with pimples, and you look like you are just out of proportion. Emotionally you are maturing, but the fact is, you are not to the point where you can handle all the emotions. You cry at the drop of a hat. Your friends look at you wrong, and the whole world hates you. You are going through a lot of time, and that is when a child, as we talked about, that is when a child needs his parents. That is when they need that reinforcement, sometimes strongly, but reinforced.

I am going to tell you something, folks, it is the same way when God begins to call you for whatever He wants you to do. Guys, it will be a tough time because you will not be there yet. You have a lot to learn, but God begins the very basic of pricking your heart for doing something for Him. Because you do not know how to deal with it all yet, it can cause ramifications in other areas of your emotions, of your life. It can upset you in a lot of different ways. It is probably one of the most crucial times that most pastors never see. Of course, most pastors never spend any time teaching anybody the ministry anyhow. But without a doubt, as a good pastor, just as a good parent, part of a pastor's job is to watch and look for the things in that young man's life, in that young lady's life, that even before that person knows it, even before maybe anybody else sees it, you begin to see and understand the hand of God beginning to woo that person. That can put a lot of things in a person's life. It really can. It can cause a lot of stress.

Sometimes when that happens, some events will come in a person's life, and God will just see how that person is going to respond to that event. Sometimes those events will not be good. Sometimes those events may cost you something. Sometimes those events may test your limit and your strength and your ability to see if you are really going to trust God. All these things are part of the making of God's man. Many, many times most young men never have anybody in their life that even sees it, and they are left to deal with it on their own, just like many junior high kids. That is why they find something else or somebody else to invest their life in, and you know how that turns out.

VII. The Call of Samuel

I think the greatest example of the beginning of a calling, and I want to talk to you about this today because we are at that point now. We are at that point, and there are some of you that there is no doubt in my mind that God is going to use you, and I have enjoyed watching what God has done. But I think the greatest example of that anywhere is found in particular in the calling of young Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 3. I want to turn there and I want to make some comments, and I want to talk to you in time about five things that God looks for. They are the same things that God has taught me to look for. They are the things that I believe that Eli saw.

I want to start out with this, and as always, I want to lay out a good solid base where you can grasp these great principles and these great truths. Because there are some of you here today who being here on Sunday morning or being here on Thursday night is the most important thing to you over everything else in your world. You want the Bible, and you want to learn it. You have down in your heart decided that you are going to buy into this thing, and God has got His hand on your life, and you would rather be here today than anywhere out in the world. Nobody or nothing else could keep you from being in God's house this morning other than just being physically ill, because you know that this is where the place is where you are going to get what God has for you. We want to, so I want to take my time this morning, but I want to begin reading in 1 Samuel chapter 3, and I want to basically read, I think it is the first chapter down to verse 21, and then I want to show you how this thing works. Now watch this, pay attention now.

1 Samuel 3:1-21

1 And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;

4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.

5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Now Father, we ask you today to help us. Lord, there are a lot of young men here today and a lot of young ladies, Lord, that I know that You want to use. Maybe this will be the turning point in

their lives. Maybe this will help them grasp it and understand it. Maybe this will help them separate out all the things in their life and come to some hard-line conclusions that every man and woman have to come to to be used of God. I pray Father, You will help me lay this out the way it needs to be laid out. Give me the wisdom and the ability. Lord, help me to always focus on that it is never a message that I preach that is going to change anybody's life, but rather the Word of God that lies within that message that is going to change their hearts. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

Well, I just read that through probably for the 5,432nd time, this time in front of you, and I just saw nine things that I never saw before that I am probably going to forget before the service is over. I had to preach that so I remember and get them on tape, but never mind. Wow, what a passage. Of course, the doctrinal ramifications of this are very clear, and the historical ramifications are very clear. But I want to show you this passage in a unique way.

It is stories like this in the Bible that make me love the Bible. When somebody says to me, "Bob, why do you love the Bible, and why would you spend all your life, more than anything else that you would rather do, would you rather spend with that book, reading that book?" My answer would be places just like this. This, without a doubt, is one of those places in the Word of God that is absolutely astounding to me. Because I understand that 1 Samuel chapter 3 takes place in the Old Testament. I understand it takes place under the Old Testament economy of the law. I understand that the church has not come into effect for a long time yet. I understand there are no Christians in 1 Samuel. Nobody is born again. I understand that we are dealing with the kingdom of heaven and not the kingdom of God. I understand all of that, and yet here is a place where the Holy Spirit of God has lifted out this passage and put it right into a New Testament context that you and I in the church can have a better understanding of how God wants to work in your life. This passage is one of the most incredible passages anywhere in the Word of God. Only God's Spirit... if I did not know the Word of God was the Word of God any other way, I know that it was because of places just like this. When God begins to tell a story, He sets the scenario that anybody who even understands that much about the Bible would be able to take this and inspirationally put it into the context of where you and I are living today: God calling you within this church. Let me show you what I mean.

VIII. Understanding the Context of Samuel's Call

There are some things we need to see here. Look at 1 Samuel 3:1. It says this: "And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision."

I do not know if you know this or not, but that is a pretty significant statement. In the Old Testament, God revealed things to people three ways. One of the ways He revealed them was through visions. Another way that He revealed things to them was through the prophets. The third way that He revealed things was through a little device called the Urim and the Thummim, which is talked about back in the Old Testament, and you find it all the way up through here. But in this particular place, God is not doing that anymore. I want you to see this strange word here. There is a little passage here: "And the word of the LORD was precious in those days."

Ladies and gentlemen, that is a pretty big statement. But you know what? All they had was the first five books of the Bible. They might have had Joshua. They did not have Judges because Samuel wrote Judges, and he probably had not written it yet; he is still just a little guy here. For the Bible to make a statement like that, when it says that the Word of the Lord was precious in those days, when he did not have the complete Bible, all they had was the first five or six books of the Bible, God is trying to show you that this is a picture of a time in your life and my life called the church age, where there is no open vision. Tongues, signs, healing, and all that stuff is gone. We are living in a day and age now where there is no open vision. God does not speak to you through dreams. God is not going to make an F-15 go out of control and spell His answer out in the sky with His contrails. God is going to answer you through one book, and that book is precious today because that is the only way you get the answer from God. You have a picture of your life and my life in the church age. There is no open vision. The Word of God is precious.

Now look at the next thing, 1 Samuel 3:3: "And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep."

Leviticus 24:2 tells you that that lamp in the tabernacle was never to go out. It was to burn continually. It was never, never to go out. Yet here is a period of time where there is no open vision, that the emphasis is on how precious the book is, and yet in the tabernacle of God, the lamp that was never to go out has now gone out. I only know one place in church history where there are seven angels or there are seven candlesticks, and one of those seven candlesticks in the last Laodicean church period goes out. Revelation chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 3. There is only one period in the whole history of the church when the church did not have the light of God shining on it because the candlestick was taken away, and that is the Laodicean church period. Revelation 3:16. You have a picture of something here. You have something going on here.

That was not enough. If that was not enough, look at this. Look at the time period of His calling. I do not know if you know this or not, and I have been asked this question many, many times, how Eli and his sons can be the priest and be so wicked. Here is what you have: Eli, in an inspirational sense, is a picture of New Testament Christianity within a time that you and I live, the Laodicean church period. It is totally corrupt. His sons are totally corrupt. He is in power, and he is the priest, but he is totally corrupt, and his family is corrupt. God, in the midst of corruption, is calling a little guy who will not be corrupt. You can miss it if you are blind. Eli represents the Laodicean church period. Samuel represents the guy, like some of you are, who are going to be a light in the darkness, who are going to build a Philadelphian church in a Laodicean church period, who are going to take the Word of God when Eli and his boys dump it and are going to make it the most precious thing in your life.

That was not enough. Look at 1 Samuel 3:21. God reveals... now it is not enough that there is no open vision. It is not enough that the Word of God is precious. It is not enough that it is a picture of the Laodicean church and the lamp of God in the tabernacle goes out. It is not enough that he is called in the middle of a period of corruption with Eli and his sons, and he is going to be the guy that God uses. 1 Samuel 3:21 says, when God does reveal Himself to him, He reveals Himself in Shiloh. You know what Shiloh means? It means peace giver. Shiloh is the type of Christ.

1 Samuel 3:21

And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

You have it all right there. Shiloh is the type of Christ. You know how He got revealed what God wanted Him to do? God revealed Him in Christ by the Word of God, just like He will do you. You cannot beat it. That thing is the most incredible thing that I have ever seen in my life, and it is the thing some thirty-five, forty years ago that God began in my life.

Now I want you to see something here. This is not our message, but you need to see this to get to the message. How God begins that work in your young life and how you have a decision. God is going to call you, folks. There is no question about it. If you are saved, the first decision you have to make in life is made as an unsaved person, and that is to accept Christ or reject Christ. After you accept Christ, you have another decision. At some point in your life, that spiritual phone is going to ring in your life, and God is going to be on the other end. You are going to have to decide to answer it or let it ring.

This is a great story. Moms and dads, you ought to see this because there are some good principles in here, and we never got into this part of it. But his mom is a unique woman. His mom, by the way, is one of the seven types of women in the Bible that are a type of the nation of Israel. They are barren, and then they have a child, a picture of Israel, but that is another whole study. But his mother says, "I want a child so bad I cannot stand it." So she makes a deal with the Lord. She says to the Lord, "If You give me a child, I will turn him over to You, and I will let You do with him whatever You want to do." God answers that prayer and gives her Samuel. When that little boy is born, she makes one of the greatest statements in 1 Samuel 1:28 that I think is one of the greatest passages anywhere for a parent or anywhere, any place in the Bible.

1 Samuel 1:28

Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

She gave him to God. She took him down to the tabernacle where Eli was, and she dropped him off, and she said, "You take him and You make him what God wants him to be." An incredible woman. So little Samuel finds himself down there in the tabernacle in 1 Samuel 2 and 3, and he begins to learn the work of the ministry under the priesthood of Eli. God begins to work in his life.

The thing that I want you to see here that goes along with this is found in 1 Samuel 3:7. Look at 1 Samuel 3:7. It says this: "Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him."

That is a verse that people get messed up. It does not mean that Samuel did not know anything about God. My goodness, he knew about God all of his life. It does not mean that he did not know who the Lord was when it says the Lord was not revealed to him. He knows he is down in the tabernacle. What it is saying is that he did not understand the things of God on the level that

he needed to understand it to be used of God. God had him there in the tabernacle with Eli, but God had not revealed Himself. God had not called him yet and said, "Samuel, I want you for the ministry."

Samuel is right where a lot of you are today, and you need to see this great lesson. Samuel is where a lot of you are. You are at a place in your life where you have gotten saved, and you are doing well, and you are learning the Bible, but there is going to be a phone call come your way, and God is going to be on the other end, and He is going to say to you, "Hey, how serious are you about this? What do you want to do? What are you willing to give Me in your life? What are you willing to let Me use because I want to use you in ministry. I have got a job for you to do, but what are you willing to do to get that job done?"

Yet when you come down through here, you will find in this little story in 1 Samuel 3 that God calls Samuel three times. He calls him the first time in 1 Samuel 3:4. He calls him the second time in 1 Samuel 3:6. He calls him the last time in 1 Samuel 3:8. I find it interesting, and I have had many, many people ask me questions because this story seems a little weird to the point of why this stuff is going on like this, and that is because you do not understand what the Bible is trying to show you here. You are a surface Christian. You do with the Bible what you do with your TV. You just surf through the channels to find something that fits you, what you want to see. You do not turn over to the National Geographic and learn something about spiders. You do not turn over to the science channel and learn something about outer space. No, no, no, no. You want to go back and watch Desperate Housewives.

He calls him three times. The first time he calls him, Samuel runs into the man of God, and he says, "Hey, you called me, Eli." Eli said, "I did not call you." You see what is happening is God is beginning to work in his life, but he is confused. He cannot decide whether it is Eli calling him or God calling him. It has brought a point of frustration in his life. He wants to be used of God, but the Word of God and the plan of God has not been revealed to him yet. So he goes to Eli and he says, "Here I am, what do you need?" Eli says, "What are you talking about? I did not call you." So little Samuel goes back to sleep.

Then the second time, down there in 1 Samuel 3:6, God says, "Samuel, I have a job for you to do." Samuel bolts up, runs over to Eli, and said, "Okay, what do you want now?" You see, that is so characteristic of when God in your life begins to bring you in and say to you in the most intimate, basic way, "I want to use you. I have My hand on you. You have young men in your life what I am looking for. I wonder if I have in your life what you are looking for." God begins to touch your life. God begins to change things in you. What used to be important is not important anymore. You found your love in the Word of God, but yet you do not understand it all. You want to serve God, and you are frustrated because I know every one of you tell me this: you think you ought to be farther along than you should be. Wow, who could not make that statement in life? You think because you think I know something about the Bible, that I should not be farther along than I am? I ought to be president. We all can make that statement. That is such a confused state of statement for a person to make as a Christian. "Well, I think I have wasted a lot of time." Who has not? Is there anybody here that has not wasted time for God? Thank God the Bible says, "redeem the time."

But you see, those are not stupidity statements. Those are confusing statements. That is a young man or a young lady that wants to serve God, wants to be used of God, and thinks they ought to be better, farther along, more in, more out, and they ought to have a better handle on things. It is part of that life when they get to that point that God says, "Hey," and Eli's wisdom is incredible. You know what he says? He says, "Go back to sleep."

In most Baptist churches, when you go to the pastor and you say to that pastor, "I think God is calling me for ministry," you know the first thing he is going to do? He is going to say, "Well, bless God, brother," and slap you on the back and throw you in the bus ministry, throw you someplace, or send you out to Bible college. He is never going to get personally involved with you to discern and perceive what God is doing. He is just going to hook you to the harness and put you out to work. I like what Eli said. He says, "Go back to sleep." Translation: "You just go back and keep on doing what you are already doing."

I do not have time this morning to take the word "sleep" and why he said "go back to sleep" and why God called him into sleep. I do not have time this morning. We talked about it a couple of Thursday nights ago for those of you that bother to come anymore. I took that thing back there in Job 33:15-16, and I showed you how that sleep is the time when God seals the instruction in your heart. So what does he say? "Go back to sleep." Keep getting the instruction. Keep listening to what God says. When you are confused in your life as a Christian, do not make major decisions, certainly about the ministry. A guy gets an emotional impulse, gets a "gucci-gucci" feeling there, and he comes down and says, "I think God is called me to the mission field." I think you need to go back to sleep. God will not call you and tell you before He tells me.

Look at 1 Samuel 3:8. He calls him a third time. The third time, "Oh, third time's a charm." The third time Eli perceives God had called him. Eli sees something in that boy. But Eli, with all of his problems, at least he is smart enough to know that he sends that kid back to sleep. Only this time he gives him instructions, and he says, "When God finally does speak to you, young man, you just simply ask what He wants you to do." The importance of my place in your life in the calling of God is absolutely astronomical. You may not like it. You may not want it. But there is never a man used of God that did not get through there because some other man did not invest his life in his life. It is just that simple. That is the structure of the New Testament local church. First and foremost, that is my job: to see in you what God sees, to help you see it if you want to see it, and then help you develop it and keep you from making some bad choices in your life.

Eli saw what God looks for in a man to use him. Eli's perception is right on the money. God was going to use Samuel mightily. I want to say something to some of you this morning. Some of you—and you better grasp this even if you cannot, and you better look deep inside you—some of you, God has His hand on you, and you better stop and look and realize the tremendous, absolutely tremendous responsibility that comes with God calling you.

Now that was my introduction. Thank God the message is much shorter than the introduction. But now I want to show you five things God saw in Samuel. They are the exact same five things that I see in some of you. It is what I look for in a young man, young lady. I do not mean to

exclude the young ladies, though I say again, you will never pastor. You can have as much ministry, and in many ways you will pastor individuals, but never a church.

IX. Five Things God Looks For in Ministry

I want you to turn now, and I want you to go to the key in all of this, and it is found in 1 Samuel 2:35. This is God speaking here. You always want to pay attention when God says something about a man. Let me just say this to you: you are not born with these things. These get developed in you after you make the first choice, which is to trust God as your own personal Savior, and then you make the second choice to make yourself available to God. Let me throw this in while I am at it: God is not interested in any of your abilities. Your abilities have absolutely nothing to do with God. God is not interested in your abilities. He is interested in your availability.

1 Samuel 2:35

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

What are the most absolutely powerful, telling, definitive verses in all the Bible on what God looks for in a man or a woman for ministry? Back in Ezekiel 22:30, the Bible says when Israel was in such desperate shape, when Israel was in such terrible shape—and it is much, much, much past this time, some eight hundred years past here, when they are in, or at least four hundred years past here, when they are in deep problems and they are in deep, deep apostasy—the Bible says that God sought for a man among them.

Ezekiel 22:30

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

God looked for a man that would make up the hedge and stand in the gap before Him for the land. There is no time in history, I do not care how black, how bleak, how bad it gets, God is always looking for that little guy and that little gal that will stand up and be called and stand for God and stand in the gap. But as in Israel's time, the end of that verse says, "but he could not find one." You do not find many of them today.

Five things God saw in Samuel, that are the same five things He looks for for you and I, and it is definitely the five things, though not the main thing, but five of the surefire things that I look for in any kid.

1. A faithful priest. Now I am going to tell you something that is wrong with a lot of you, and that is your faithfulness to this church. I am not saying you cannot go do things, I am not saying that at all, but I am telling you, there has to be an attitude in you that God's house is the most important thing in your world. It has to be the thing that you see this as the center point for everything you are for God. Here again, I am not saying that this is the only church in the world, I am saying you need to find one if this one does not fit your pistol. It is just that simple. I want to be honest with you, I struggled for a long time about going into this building

thing over here, and I know it was the right thing to do, but I always look at all my cards and play my options. I will tell you what, I had a real strong desire based on some of the "lackadaisical" attitude of some of you about how you come to church, how you come to Thursday night, how you do this, that it might just be better to take about a hundred of you and stay here and tell the rest of you to go find some place that you really do want to go to. Go find you another church that you do not want to go to either. I do not know if that is what I meant to say, but it sounded a lot better than what I originally was going to say. I know there are legitimate things that come up, I am not fighting that. It is about your attitude that when you get a better deal someplace else, that is where you go. Faithful priest. Building faithfulness in your life, it starts with the little things in your life. Being faithful over those little things. Matthew 25:21

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. One of the greatest single concepts in the Bible. You start out little, and you prove your faithfulness by God giving you something to do. There are some great qualities about you people that I love more than life itself. Even though I know there are always malingerers in every church and always people that just get one foot in, one foot out, I have to say to you, the core of this church, I love you so desperately, I am so proud of you, and I look at things in your life and I say to myself, "You know what? They are in it." This is not boasting or bragging. I am just telling you the truth. There is not another church in this city that would send two people, four people down to the Ozarks, three and a half, four hours away, to teach some family the Bible when they do not have a church down there that teaches them the truth. If there is, you show me that church. There are not many Christians that would go down and do that. Get up at six o'clock, five-thirty in the morning, do what you have to do, go down there, spend all day, and then come back and go to... and I guarantee you, those same four people that went this morning will be at the mission tonight. They will not say, "Oh, I just, I, I, I did my part for Jesus today. Oh, I feel better now that I... you know what? I am just so tired. I am just going to go home. I have a big day tomorrow." They do not even think about that. When you are faithful over the little things, in time God will build you to the place where He will make you ruler over the many because God sees in you that you are a faithful priest. God does not care what you know, what you do not know. God wants you to be faithful with just what you have right now. He did not require you to have a seminary education. You do not have to know everything about the Bible. When He called Moses over there to do one of the greatest jobs of ministry and the greatest examples everywhere, Moses was afraid he could not do it. Moses did not speak well. Moses did not have a good self-opinion of himself. Moses did not have a very good reputation in Egypt. He was a murderer, and he is worried about a number of things that, like a lot of you worry about. You know what God said? He says, "What am I going to do when I go before Pharaoh? How am I going to minister before Pharaoh?" You know what God said? He says, "Moses, what do you have in your hand?" He says, "Well, I have a rod." He says, "You know what? Then I will use the rod." Amen. God wants to see and start with what you have in your hand right now. He does not care about what you do not have. He wants to see if you will be faithful with what you do have. I know some of you want to preach. I know some of you want to teach. I know some of

you will be good at it. Some of you will be excellent at it. But you need to learn a great truth. You say, "Well, I have a message. I have it." God must make the man before He ever makes the message. God must make the man before your message is worth anything. God must make you what He wants you to be. You must, and you do that by submitting yourself to Him, to this church, to His Word, to nothing outside of you being sick or out of town or wherever. Nothing keeps you from being in God's house to get what God has for you. That you say, "Hey, look, this is my life." Tonight we will go down to the City Union Mission. Three-quarters of our church will show up at the City Union Mission. There is not another church in this city that has three-quarters of their people show up down to the mission. I have been in this business a long time. You know who goes down there? All the people that are just like the people that are down there. The high society folks, they would not even be caught dead at the City Union Mission. They might get something on their pants when they sit on those dirty chairs. Somebody may shake their hand, and there is no convenient place and no antibacterial to wash their hands. I hope this church never gets so sophisticated that those things like that are not the number one priorities in our lives. I hope we never get so big, so slick, so fast, so polished, so absolutely into everything that is going on that we forget the pit from which we all were dug. If it was not for the grace of God, we would all be down there tonight. This time coming up for Christmas, I have four or five families I want to take care of. This church will take care of them. You know why? Because this church understands that people struggle with things because you have all struggled at some point or the other.

2. A faithful priest that shall do according to that which is in My heart. Now I want to tell you something, and this is one of the things that I really look for. This is not the number one thing, but this is what I look for. Along with being faithful, when I give you something to do, when I give you somebody to work with, I do not want to find out three weeks later you never called them. When I give you, when you go down to that thing, do not not show up and try to blame it on the fact that my alarm clock did not go off. When you have God's heart, you are permeated with the things of God. The ministry will possess your heart, your thoughts. It will always be on your mind. It will be in your heart, in your head. It will rob you of time, your hobbies, and maybe in time even your life. But all you will think about is serving Him wherever you go. Yes, we must be faithful in ministry. Yes, we must be fearless in ministry, but we must be fervent in the ministry. The passion of ministry that overtakes everything in your life. Your job, your hobbies, everything you want to do comes after the most passionate thing in your life. Passion of God for people, lost people, saved people, your enemies, your friends, putting everything aside, your own personal hurt, your own personal wants, your own personal feelings, coming to the place that you just, God has a transparency in you. I think that is probably the biggest number one problem that most people have is they just never, never, never, never, never fall in love with the ministry. I will be very honest with you, there are some very unloving things about the ministry. There are some things in the ministry that are very hard to love. There are some people in the ministry that are very hard to love, but that is irrelevant. You did not look too hot the first time God cast His eyes on you or me.
3. A faithful priest that shall do according to all that is in My heart and in My mind. I do not know if you even caught this, but did you catch that you have to get God's heart before you

get God's mind? A lot of you want to know the book. Oh yeah, you want to be able to stand up on Thursday night and answer any question, do not you? Sure you do, and you should. A lot of you want to be able to preach, get up and wax eloquently, show everybody what you know. A lot of you want to get with people one-on-one at work, and you talk to them about that, lay all those things out. You can lay all the eighteen types of Antichrist out. You see, the problem is you know the book, but the real problem is you have never loved the author of the book. You have the book down, but it is more about just the book. It is about loving the one who wrote the book as much as loving the book. You will never get God's mind until you first get God's heart. Oh, I love this. 1 Samuel 3:19, my God in heaven help us to see this. 1 Samuel 3:19

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. There is the issue right there. All you get here Thursday night, Sunday, all you get in everything that we do one-on-one, everything you get from the Word of God through the tapes and through the... everything that goes on. Yet, how many of us do not even remember what we talked about last Thursday night? If I asked you what I preached last Sunday, you would not even know. You know why? Because we take it, we get it, and then we allow those words to drop to the ground. Now, I have a lot of problems, and I have a lot of personal issues. When I get to the judgment seat of Christ, I do not expect to get anything. But I am going to tell you one thing I learned early in life, and I have never, never, never one time in my life ever committed this. Never one time. I have blown it in many ways. I have made many mistakes. But I will tell you one thing I learned early on in life that probably got me through and where I am at today, and that is never one time in my life, to my knowledge, have I ever dropped one word of that book that was given to me. One time years ago when I was in the Army, because I played the trumpet, I got saddled with all the funeral details. I was stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. For a long time, what I did almost every, two, three times a week, was a great job. I did not have to pull KP. I did not have to do guard duty. I had to be on call because whenever a boy was killed in Vietnam and they had a military funeral, I had to go play taps. I did over four hundred funerals in a year and a half. I mean, I did some... I did a general, I did the only general who was killed in Vietnam. They lined up twenty-one howitzers behind me and gave them a twenty-one cannon salute. Blew my hat off. I will never forget, as long as I lived, we went into it. We already were, they already were two sheets in the wind and three blown away. We go into this bar to eat, and there is this waitress in there. We are all sitting around, and they are drunk. She was, all the money she was making from her job, and she had them in one of those, you know how they wear those little aprons that have the pockets in them. She had all of her money that she was making off the tables down there. One of the guys said something very off-color to her, and she slapped him. Now there are fourteen of us sitting around a table, and I am sitting there thinking, "We are all going to go to jail." This guy that she slapped stood up, punched her right in the face, knocked her over the table, dress flew up, hat flew off, and she must have had three hundred dollars in change, nickels, dimes, dollar bills. It went all, everywhere over the floor. You know how you just take about a big thing of quarters money and throw it up in the air, and it just rolls everywhere? As soon as she hit the floor, fourteen guys were on their knees, grabbing every nickel, dime they could off that floor. Except me. I was catching the dollar

bills as they were coming down. I looked at that, and I thought to myself, "That is the sickest bunch of guys I have ever been with in my life." Hit that poor lady, knocked her out cold, flipped her over the table, money went everywhere, and there everybody else is down on the floor grabbing the tips and trying to stick them in their pocket. Years later I thought of that, and I thought to myself, "You know what? They made sure that no money fell to the ground." That is the exact... we look at them and say, "How terrible people," and it was, it was a bad scene, very terrible, terrible, horrendous. But you know what? That is exactly what you guys ought to be doing every Sunday morning when I take the Word of God and all this stuff and just throw it up in the air, and you ought to be on your knees grabbing every piece you can grab. You ought to be just like they were about your Bible as they were about the money out of some waitress's pockets. Never let the Word of God fall to the ground. Everything is said. Why some of you started our Bible studies going through the books of the Bible. You are so far... you will show up to my house with Judges this time, and you will pretend you have been staying with it, and you stayed up half the night the night before just to get caught up because you have been letting it fall to the ground. You are not kidding me. I am telling you, that is the way it works. It is the same way in leadership. Everybody wanted to be a leader, everybody this and that. Then when you finally get to be one, you know what you do? You just go right back to doing the old thing, and everything that is said, everything you heard, everything that you heard me say just fell flat to the ground. I do not know what to tell you. You know the book, but you do not know the author of the book. You are trying to get God's mind, but you better take some time off and get God's heart.

4. And I will build him a sure house. Building God's man. That does not happen anything to do necessarily with your home and your children, though I am sure we can make that application. But I am going to tell you this, the problem with a lot of God's people today is they simply do not know who they are in Christ Jesus. When I look at the ministry, I am telling you, I see so many of God's people all around this country. I see God's people all around this city and churches. I talk to the pastors, I talk to the people. I will tell you what, so many of God's people today are worrying about who gets to do what. When they do wind up getting to do something, it is all about a competitive thing, and they have the wrong motive. You have to be sure who you are in Christ. You have to understand that you do not just stand up and demand that people follow you. You do not come up in any organization and then wind up and say, "Well, I have been here for fifty years. I have been here for four years. I have been here for three years. You guys need to follow me because I have been around and I know the ropes." That is not what makes a leader. I have seen people like that all my life in their own personal lives, their own personal finances. I was so bad up, they were bouncing more checks than the Harlem Globetrotters. It is all that same thing. You want to be big, and you want to be shiny, and you want to be flashy, but deep down inside there is nothing there. It is flop. There is no stability. Leadership does not start by standing up and saying, "Follow me." It starts by inwardly having all the right things in the right place. Personally, not some dysfunctional, disactive problem child that cannot ever get your life straightened out, who feels threatened by everything and everybody, who has to feel that you have to go around sandbagging all the young Christians so that somebody will not get ahead of them. What is wrong with you? I want to tell you what the problem is today in ministry. I

am going to tell you what the problem is in some of you. In the ministry, yes, there is God taking a man for the ministry. Yes, in ministry, there is not only God taking a man, but there is God taking that man and then making that man. But I want to tell you something else. God cannot take the man, and God will not make the man until God breaks the man. You have to come to the end of self. You have to get to the places. You do not care who does what. You do not care who gets to do this, and you do not. You do not care if some younger Christian gets to try yourself out at this, even though you may think you could do it better. Hey, there is not any job in this church that I cannot do better than any one of you. Do not stop me from giving the young guys stuff to do. That is how God makes them. Get your head out of your stereocastere postremity. Boy, I almost said it. Boy, I got close. God will take a man. Yes, God will make a man, but only after God breaks that man. You have to come to the point in your life where you are at the end of self. It does not care. It is not about you anymore. It is not about who you are, what you know. It is not about how long you have been around. It is about understanding you are a sure house. You know who you are. People think because I will give them recognition or let them do this or let them do that, that they will, that the whole church... let me tell you something. When you look at this thing and God began to do the things in Samuel's life, look at 1 Samuel 3:20. It says, "And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD." I do not have to build your credibility. All you have to do is look around this church and see who is doing what with whom. It is not about who you pick your friends and your little group you always hang out with. It is simply about you understanding that there is a work to be done here. People need to be trained. People need to be worked with. You need to get God's heart. You need to get God's Word, and everybody needs to get on the same page. God will take you, and God will make you, but only after God breaks you.

5. And he shall walk before Mine Anointed forever. You see, when you get these four things down here, when you get to the place that you have been a faithful priest, boy, there is a lot to that. When you get to the place that you get God's heart, you get God's mind, you build a sure house. These are the things God saw in Samuel. Samuel did not have none of these things yet, but God saw them in him at a young age, much like I see it in many of you. Some of you, you hit all five of these things, one, two, three, four, five, male and female. Some of you I see in you the ability for God to use you in a great way. God is going to call you. You are going to have to be responsible for how you answer that call and who you let in your life to help you with that call. Psalms 1:1-3

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. There it is, bearing forth fruit in your season. That tree there that is talking about, found in Ezekiel chapter 40 through chapter 48. It is a tree of life that comes out of the holy oblation there around Ezekiel 44-45. Water runs down on each side, the trees planted by the river of waters that bear forth their fruit in their season. You know what, folks? When God saves you, you

start a season. You start a season. As a young Christian, you start to grow up in the springtime of your Christian life, and that is when you are a baby Christian, and you grow up into the adolescence of Christianity. Then as you mature up a little bit, you move into the summer and the fall, and that is when you get most of the work done. A lot of you right now are in the springtime. Some of you, most of you, are in the summer and the fall, and at some point in your life, you are going to go into the winter of it. You know what? It is a true story. Apple trees in Missouri do not bring apples in February. Orange trees in Missouri do not bring oranges in February. Out of season. You only have so long of your life to give to God till your season runs out. When God looks down and He looks for a faithful priest who gets God's heart, who gets God's mind, who builds a sure house, God knows that that man by that time, he is never going back to the world. Some of you, I have seen you make that decision in your life. I actually have. Maybe you do not even know you made it yet. Some of you do. I do not think all of you do. Show me, I see you approaching that decision. You are coming to that point where you know what? Now the old song says, "And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glorious world." Old things in this world get dimmer every day. You are never going back. You are onward and upward. You have one thing in your life, and that is to be a faithful priest, to get God's heart, get God's mind, come to the point where you build yourself a sure house. In that process, God is going to reach down, and He is going to say, "Samuel, Samuel," and it will be a confusing time for you, but I will be there. That is my job to walk you through it and help you get to that point.

X. Conclusion: The Sculptor Analogy

You know what the ministry really is? This is the greatest definition after years of watching the ministry. You know what the ministry is? If I was going to put it, and this is all to me now, this may mean nothing to you, but the ministry to me, when you want to say to yourself, "Okay, I am where God wants me to be, and I am where God can use me," I am going to tell you what that point in your life is. It encompasses all of these things, but the ministry to me is simply this: you and I being so close to God that God has the ability—now listen to me—you and I being so close to God that God has the ability to speak to you while He speaks through you, and you keeping it all straight.

You see this when guys are trying to preach. The reason why guys get nervous, why they have to be glued to their notes, why they have to basically read it like they are doing a Gettysburg address. Nothing wrong with that. That is how you start out. But when you get to the point in your life that God has the ability to speak to you while He is speaking through you, God just puts those notes over here, and you preach the message. It is a difference between laboring through a message and enjoying the preaching of the message. You are going to come to that point in your life. Some of you already have, but if you stay doing what God wants you, Samuel goes on to be one of Israel's greatest leaders, a light of God's truth in the world of apostasy. In his life, from his call to his ministry, we have an example of how it is to go. This is the exact same way it went for me, a lifelong process of spiritual growth.

I read a story one time, and I am done, of a king, a great king, that commissioned a man who was a great sculptor, that he wanted this sculptor to take a block of stone and create his image and his likeness in that stone that he could put it in the palace that all could see, a huge statue. The sculptor took the challenge, and about a year and a half, he worked on this image of this great king. After the period of time, there was a day that they were going to make it and unveil it. There was the great statue with the big old cover over it. That sculptor came out, and the king and all the court was there, and he pulled that thing off, and there was one of the most absolutely beautiful renditions of the image of the king out of stone that anybody had ever seen. The king was so taken back, the king was so overwhelmed that he came over to that sculptor and he said to him, "Please tell me, please tell me, how did you ever take that block of stone and create that likeness that is in that image?" The sculptor looked at him and he smiled and he said, "Well, Your Majesty, it was real simple. I just chipped away all of the pieces that did not look like you."

When you got saved, God took up residency inside your body, ladies and gentlemen. Throughout your life, you know what God does? He chips away at all of the pieces of your life that do not look like Him. What is left, when you allow Him to do it, what is left when you allow Him to have free course in your life out of this old cold block of stone, becomes the image of a living God that men and women can see. God wants to use you. God wants to call you. You need to understand. Now when He does, tremendous responsibility of being everything that God wants you to be. Every head bowed and every eye closed. Father, we thank You and