

## I. Introduction and Church Philosophy

Thank you for being here today. We are glad to have you. I never want to forget anybody, because everybody is important. Next week, we are going to have a week that, to me, is more than I could ever hope for. I know officially we started our church four years ago, but in my own mind, knowing what I know about people, churches, circumstances, and how you have to build something like that, I really look at it like we really just became a church in the last year, year and a half. Next Sunday is an exciting time. I have been looking forward to this because of just watching what God has done in all of your lives. Some of us have been here since day one. Others of you have come in throughout that process of the last four years. But everybody, almost without exception, has really been a vital part of this church, and God has been so good to us in that element.

I told you many, many times, we did not even have a sign out there until about a year and a half ago. When we started this church, I wanted to make sure that if it ever went anywhere, it was not because of man being able to manipulate the circumstances. We did not have a website where you could get on and find where to come. We did not have a sign. We were not in the phone book. I took very much pride, in the right sense, of looking out every Sunday and saying to myself, "If you got here, God got you here." I just wanted God to give us the people that He wanted us to have, and my goodness, He exceeded my expectations. They still come in, and we thank God for what the Lord has given us and for the people that want in these last days to build a New Testament local church that is based solely on the Word of God and the Bible, without all the politics and everything else that goes on.

Every year, this month of June, before we have our anniversary Sunday, we always take and look back at where we have come from. It is a time of reflection. I take some of the sermons that I preached over the last three years. We just finished the first series that we did when we started our church. I was talking about the nine gates in the book of Nehemiah and how those nine gates are a picture of the nine ministries that you need to have in your church. We went through all of that, and you should better understand the concept behind building a church.

In reality, a church is only as strong as the people. That is why I am not in a hurry to build a church building. I do not really care if we ever have one or we do not. I am not interested in being prestigious or being like everybody else down the street, or everybody else that thinks that that is a necessity. I learned a long time ago, the real church has nothing to do with the building. The real church are the people that are in it. If you are saved this morning, you are the church of Jesus Christ. If pastors put as much time and effort and money into their people as they do the building, we would win this world to Christ. To me, it is a situation where I never want to forget where the church really is, and it is never in a building. But I also understand that a church is only as good, it is only as strong, and it is only as spiritual as the people that are in it.

## II. The Process of Spiritual Growth

Today, I want to take a couple of messages that I preached three or four years ago and blend them together so that we can remember and reflect on some great principles that I think will help you today. It is a very practical message. We are not going to talk about the great things of the Antichrist or the end times. We are not even going to talk about how to build a church. There will not be a lot of parallels between the Old Testament types and the New Testament principles, showing you how you put them together. It is simply going to be a message on some very clear, fundamental concepts that will help you.

The Bible is very clear that when a man or a woman gets saved, they begin a new life. The Bible says they become a new creature in Christ Jesus. All things are passed away, all things become new. Philippians 1:6, a great, powerful verse, says the moment you got saved that God begins a good work in you and performs it until the day of Jesus Christ. That would be the Rapture. So we know that when you got saved, a spiritual process should have begun in your life, and it is a spiritual process of spiritual growth.

This message is basically about me. This is not original material in any stretch of the imagination. Most of my material is not original. I am just a product of the biblical format that I told you about a number of weeks ago: that God has an unbroken chain of men who love the Bible, love the Word of God, and then they commit the great principles to other faithful men, and the chain goes on down through history. What I am giving you this morning, somebody gave me. I would love to say that I am smart enough and dynamic enough to be able to get in and put all this material together, but I would be lying to you if I told you that. I am just giving you today what somebody gave me.

I went to a camp when I was still in Ohio and had just gotten saved. It was thirty-some years ago. I was working at the Christian camp, and I know I had just gotten right with God, and I was trying to get my own life put together. The people that were in charge of the camp, and the man who became really my mentor and helped me put the Bible together and the ministry together, he had the insight to see that I was somebody that had all the right things; I just needed to get them in the right place. So he invited me out and he said, "Help me with this. Do this, do that. I am going to help you do this and have you do that." It was the greatest thing I ever had.

Every night from Monday to Friday, we had preaching. I will never forget that week was a life-changing week for me. It was something that I needed just as I was a young man who had just gotten saved, was contemplating what God wanted me to do with my life, certainly did not know anything about the Bible, certainly had not figured out where I was going in life. But I knew that God had begun a new work in me, and I knew that through that work, God was going to do something.

I will never forget the first night of the camp, the man talked about the fact that when you get saved, there are seven spiritual stages of growth that you go through. I had never heard that. I just thought that you got saved, and after you got up off your knees from being saved, you knew everything there was to know about the Bible. That is how naive I was. I thought that when you got saved, you just walked around for a while, and God had a big old clipboard up in Heaven. Your name was on it someplace down the line, and when He finally got to it, while you slept the

night, He backed a big old dump truck of spiritual knowledge and dumped it in your head when you were in your bed. I woke up the next morning and I thought that is how you got it. That is not true.

He began to show me that there is a process, and a process that has to begin the moment you get saved that you have to go through. I will never forget, he talked about:

- 1.) Babies
- 2.) Little Children
- 3.) Children
- 4.) Young Men
- 5.) Fathers
- 6.) Elders
- 7.) Aged

Every one of you, if you are saved, you are in one of these seven growth patterns. You may not recognize it, you may not know it, but you are. In the first three, in the babies and the little children and the children, if you are going to lose somebody, if somebody is going to quit growing, somebody is going to give up, if somebody is going to have a problem or somebody is going to go back to the world or somebody is going to have some nagging sin in their life or problem in their life or person in their life that they just will not give up, and you do not see them anymore and they just quit coming. I have never, never seen it once the person has gotten to the father stage. Once a person gets to the father stage, it changes. By that time you ought to be pretty much done with the things of this world and know the things that got you in trouble.

If you are going to lose anybody in any church, and I tell you this for some of you boys down the line who may pastor or may run a ministry, if you are going to lose anybody in a church, you are going to lose them in that first three: the babies, the little children, or the children, because they do not have a good foundation. There are some children in a physical sense that, you know, we are going to study this when we get into child training and all the aspects of it so you can deal with it with your own kids and people you work with. You never look at two kids the same way. Some kids in the same family will grow up and they will just be as docile and nice and everything you could want. The other one is like the kin of the Antichrist someplace. Many times people have said, "Well, now how can that be?" It is that way because no two people are alike.

Just as you do not, and this is a danger parents do, just as you do not deal with your children the same way because they are two different individuals, you do not deal with people the same way. You are going to find that some people have more problems than others. They have more emotional baggage than others. You are going to find some that have some relationships that others do not have. Everybody is unique. But the answer in all the cases is the same: it is getting the Word of God into their lives.

### III. The Bible as a Survival Kit and Complete Diet

The mark of a strong, mature Christian is someone who understands how to have knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Those are the three big sticks back in the book of Proverbs and the book of Song of Solomon and the book of Psalms. We look at a guy and we hear a guy preach, and we think because he preaches a great message, you can get on the radio, you can get on television, you can go to churches, and you will hear somebody get up and preach a great sermon. He will cross all the T's and he will dot all the I's. You will be misled by that because you think that great preaching is the criteria of a mature Christian. You can go take a course on public speaking and dynamics and be a good preacher. Good preaching or being a good preacher is not the mark of a strong, mature Christian.

I will tell you something else. It is not how well you know the Bible. I have known people for years that have known the Bible, but they are not very strong Christians. The Bible, to a certain degree, can be academics. You can spend all of your life learning facts, figures, and all the things that you need to learn, and stand up in Bible study or stand up when you talk to somebody and you can lay the whole thing out. But that is not the mark of a strong Christian either. The mark of a mature, spiritual Christian that is in the process of growth, the real measure of a Christian, is how they apply what they know in the every day circumstances of life. That is the key.

It is not about how good you articulate when you speak. It is not about how good you know all the places and things in the Bible. It is about in any given situation, when push comes to shove with your children or your family or dealing in areas in relationship to church or people at work, how well you relate the principles of the Word of God to what the situation is. I have seen parents. I have seen individuals that were going to enter on a course of action, and before they ever got the door open where they were going, it was doomed to fail. Because if it is not built on the principles and you do not understand how to use the Bible in what you are doing, it is not going to work.

There are people that ask me in time, "Why do not you get involved in that? Why do not you help that? Why do not you do this? Why do not you do that?" My answer is simple: I have already been there. I know that does not work. I know it is going to fail. Maybe you did not learn the lesson from the last time, but I did. I am susceptible to making every mistake everybody makes in here. I am not sin-free. I am not mistake-free. I never claim to be the smartest man in the world, but I do claim to be the smartest one in the slow class. With that little claim to fame, I will tell you this: I very hardly ever make the same mistake twice. Everybody can make a mistake. For me to get up here and get on you for making a mistake. Obviously, some mistakes have worse consequences than others, but the bottom line is, everybody makes a mistake. Nobody is mistake-free. The question is, do you learn from your mistakes so you do not make them again?

The problem that messes people up most times in this spiritual process is that all their life is like a big circle. It is like my dog loves to do when there is nothing else to do: chase his tail around in a circle. He will do that and he will stop and rest and he will do it some more. What are the chances of him catching his tail? Nil. He is too short to be able to do that. He needs an extension

that is more elastic so he can get all the way around. He cannot. But he thinks he can. So what he does is what many of God's people do: they simply go around in a circle all of their life, and they never do anything or go anywhere or become anything for God.

That first night of that camp, he preached that message. I said to myself, I thought hard on growing for God. I said to myself, and it is almost like every night God was answering where I was going after that sermon. I will never forget. I walked out to the lake that night, and the sermon really moved me. I said, "I really want to be everything that God wants me to be." Back then, just like today, I only care about one thing, one thing only: when I get to the judgment seat of Christ, all I want to hear, I do not care about the rewards, I do not care about the crowns, I do not care about any of that. I just want to hear out of my Savior's mouth, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." That is all I want. I want to know that I did what He wanted me to do.

I struggled that night. I will never forget. I walked out on the dock, and the moon was up shining on the water. I got to thinking about it, and I said, "God, I want to do this. I really want to become what You want me to be. But I am all new to this. You have to give me some kind of yardstick, some kind of yardstick. You have to show me how to use the Bible. I mean, I look at the Bible and it is a jumbled thing. You have to break it down for me in some basic thing so from a practical standpoint, I can understand how to do this."

The next night, that was Monday night, Tuesday night, he began to preach a sermon on what the Bible really is to me. He started with a text in 1 Peter 2:1-2:

*1 Peter 2:1-2*

*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*

He said, "Now, I want to tell you tonight, last night I told you that there are seven stages of spiritual growth, and you are all in one of those stages. Those stages are not exact. It is not like on my 14th birthday, I stepped to the next stage. They are gradual in your life. But tonight, I want to talk to you about the Bible and how it relates to your spiritual growth." I said, "Whoo, that is right where I am at. That was the question I asked God last night."

That night, he laid out one of the greatest things for me that I have never forgotten. This was thirty-some years ago, and to this day, these things are as fresh with me as if it happened last night. He said, "Do you know the Bible is your survival kit?" He said, "Do you know that God, when you got saved, He could have taken you out of here right now, but He left you here. He left you here to do a job. Part of that job depends on your spiritual growth. But He gave you a Christian survival kit, and that Christian survival kit is your Bible." He says, "You have to grow. You start with milk, and you wind up with meat. Milk in the Bible will be the very basics of the Word of God. Meat in the Bible will always be the great doctrines of the Bible."

Then I remember he pulled out of Hebrews 5:12-14, another great passage, where he said that the writer of Hebrews had the same problem that we have today. He wrote:

*Hebrews 5:12-14*

*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

He said there, the writer of Hebrews is saying that in any given church, there ought to be people who should be farther along than they are. There are people that have been saved for 10, 15, 20, 30, 40 years, and they still struggle with the very first principles of the oracles of God: eternal security, salvation, all this thing that we struggle with. He said, "As long as you are a baby, you are just going to exist with the milk of the Word of God." He says, "Strong meat, that is Bible doctrine, that is being able to know where you are at in the Bible, how to use the Bible. Strong meat belongs to them who are full of wisdom, by reason of use have exercised their senses." That is what the Bible does, it exercises.

Then he went down through there and he said, "You know that your Bible is your complete diet." He says, "Your body is the temple, and you are to grow and you are to build that body. But you have got to have a diet." You take a little baby, you start them out with milk, but sooner or later they are going to wind up at the Herford House eating a steak. You do not see any 42-year-olds or 52-year-olds going in down there at Herford House when they have got the greatest steak, or Ruth's Chris, or one of those great steakhouse places, and just say, "Give me a bowl of mush-stop Pablum and cereal." No, they eat meat. Why? They had the milk when they were a baby, now they are a man. We ought to be the same way with the Bible. When you open that Bible, there will be a big sign that comes up, says, "Welcome to the Herford House." Except you will not get some gay waiter trying to sell you steak.

That night he went through the things that the Bible is likened to as a diet:

- The Bible in 1 Peter 2:1 is likened to milk.
- In Hebrews 5:12, it is likened to meat.
- In Psalms 119:103, it is likened to honey.
- In Proverbs 7:2, it is likened to apples.
- In John 4, it is likened to water.
- In Luke 4, it is likened to bread.
- And in Psalms 78:24, it is likened to vegetables.

He says the Bible is your complete diet of everything that you need. It will give you your starch. It will give you your carbohydrates. It will give you your sugar. It will give you your protein. It is the diet of every child of God. We have to build his strong body twelve ways. The real Wonder Bread of the world, so to speak.

If that was not enough, he said then, the Bible is likened to:

- A hammer
- Nails
- Rocks

- A sword

He said, "If you have got milk, meat, honey, apples, water, bread, vegetables, and a hammer, and nails, and rocks, and a sword, you can survive anywhere." The Word of God is your diet. The hammer is what you build with. The nails is what you fasten it with. The sword is what you protect yourself with. And you have got the rocks to build for a foundation. I went away that night and I thought to myself, "Wow, I got the second answer. I know now that the way I am going to grow spiritually is to get in that book."

#### IV. Six Marks of Spiritual Growth

Same dock, same place next night. I said, "Lord, now, but you know what for me, I need to have a yardstick. How in the world, with all that I have got, all this new stuff, how in the world do I really begin to understand that I can see how I go?" I remembered in my home when I was growing up, we had a cellar kind of like this, in the kitchen, it went down the stairs, it was only a single door. Right over here on this door frame, my dad, as I was growing up, he had stood me up every two years and put a notch on that little framework. As I grew up from two to three to four to five to 16 to 18, and I used to be a lot taller than I am before I got sick, all the way up that door. In fact, if you would go back to that house today, some goodness years later, you would find, I am sure, because they have not done much to the house, those same notches. I am sure somebody is looking at those every day saying, "I would like to smack the kid that messed up my little door for anything there."

I could go there and I will never forget the day, the last notch my dad put on that door was the day I went for the army. I know the notch only went about 5'10", but I felt like I was 7'5". I walked off there, got on that bus, but Dad put me on a bus, took me to Cleveland, took me to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and the rest of its history. I can look back, and I remember looking back and seeing all those notches representing my physical growth. I remember that night I said, "God, You have got to give me something that I can measure my growth with." You might know, I was on Tuesday night, Wednesday night. God had that whole week set up for me.

Wednesday night, he preached a message, and I have preached it to you before, and this is kind of like a blending of all these messages. But that night he preached on the six spiritual marks of growth in every Christian's life. I remember what he said, because I have said it to you almost verbatim. He said, "You know what? You need to be able to check your growth." We all have one problem, and we all have this problem. It is the fact that we have freeze-frame when it comes to what we look like. I will see people I have not seen for a while, and when I see them, I am kind of shocked. You know why? Because in my freeze-frame brain, or freeze-fried brain, whatever you want to say, in my freeze-frame brain, I remember them the way they were the last time I saw them. I remember their kids when they were little. Now, it is, "Hi, how are you, see? How are you, see?" Because we all have the same problem. We think, I look at my picture, I look at myself in the mirror every morning. It is a tough job, but somebody has got to do it.

I go to my mother's in Ohio, I walk in there and I look up there, and I see two pictures, one of a girl, one of a guy. I say to myself, "Who in the world is that?" It was my senior picture. She still

has them on the wall. Has not got a rat in the house. Of course, my sister's picture is there with her. I am shocked. I look at myself and I say, "Wow, is that me? I did not know my nose was that big. I had hair back then," I say it for you. I had hair back then. We get this thing in our mind, and it is true. The hardest thing to see in growth is a Christian's life. It is tough, because you are in the middle of it, and you do not see it. You do not see what happened. Now, I see it. I have had people that I watched you and you will grow, and you will say to me when you come over, sometime we talk, you will say, "Man, you know what? I just do not feel like I am getting anywhere." And I will say, "What? Getting anywhere? Well, you have done it better than anybody ever saw in my life. In six months, you got more than most people get in three years," but they do not see that. Then there are some people that when they come up, I am looking behind them, and they are saying, "What are you looking at?" I am saying, "What are you looking at? What, what, what?" I am looking for the ball and chain that is holding you up. You ought to be farther than you are.

That night, he gave me six marks of spiritual growth. Thirty-some years ago, and I use this probably two or three times a year in my own life. I gave you this sometime a while back. Maybe you all were not here, but some of you were. I just wondered this morning if you did anything with that message. I wondered back then when I gave it, do you have it in your Bible as a chart or on a card someplace that you check it regularly to see where you are at? They are simple things. They are basic things that you, questions you put into your Bible somewhere and you ask yourself on a regular basis. They are not theological. They are practical things that just as the notches on the door show me my growth, by asking yourself these questions and being honest with your answer, it shows you if you are getting anything or not. Because coming to church every week, though I am glad you are here, does not mean anything. It does not mean you are growing, just means you are here. You can preach the greatest message in the world. It does not mean anything if you cannot apply the Word of God into your life and you are not growing through that process.

The first one is simple. The first question I always ask myself, and I ask myself this probably twice a year:

1. Do I love God and the things of God more today than the day I got saved?

That is pretty simplistic in its question form, but it is profound in its impact on my life. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 talks about the judgment seat of Christ. It talks about the foundation that I laid the day I got saved. It says down there, "No other foundation can a man lay which is laid, which is Christ Jesus." In other words, the day you and I got saved, the foundation in our lives is the Lord Jesus Christ. Then it says that the rest of our lives, we are built upon that foundation, three things that are good. There are three things good, three things bad. The three things that are good are gold, silver, precious stones.

When you read that, I know that you just think gold, silver, precious stones, those are really nice, but what do they mean? Let me tell you what they mean.

- Gold in the Bible represents the deity of Christ. Gold in your Bible will always represent God Himself and Christ Himself. In the Old Testament, that is why all the furniture, the

tabernacle, and all the things were made out of wood like this, but they were overlaid with gold. You know why? Because the wood pictured Christ's humanity. He was a human man, but the gold pictured His deity. Gold in the Bible will always represent Christ and His deity as God. So the first thing you need to build on your foundation the moment you get saved is gold. You know what that means? Learn about God. Learn who He is. Learn and understand all about Him. Most people really do not understand God, and they have been saved for years.

Years ago, I marked in my Bible, in the last year, I had to go back and scratch that note or really put another note under it. It is in Acts 17:22-23. It says:

*Acts 17:22-23*

*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*

They walked by there and there was a bunch of people out there worshipping at an altar, doing devotions, and across their altar was "To the great unknown God" that used to, in my mind, be for pagans. In the last 20-30 years, it has become a great verse for most Christians. I have never met a group of people who had taken salvation from God, but in actuality today know nothing about God. If I was to ask you, and I give you four or five years, just without even asking you, it takes you that long maybe sometime to figure it out. It probably should not, but you know what, err on the side of whatever, and I will give you five years. You would say 10 years, 20 years. If I called on you right now, could you unequivocally stand up and give me five concepts of God, not by opening up your Bible, just lay it all out?

George Bush is our president, and you may like him or you may not like him. This is not a political deal. I do not care one way or the other. That is not my point. Some people hate him, some people love him, some people just love to hate him. That is not my deal, but I do know this, he is our president, and as our president, he is a household name, good or bad. We all know, when you say George Bush, you do not say, "Now I wonder who that was." You know who he is because you know his name. You see him on television, you hear him give speeches, you hear him give State of the Union addresses, but you know what, you know who he is, and you recognize him when you see him, but have you ever stopped and think, you really do not know anything about him? What is his favorite color? The only thing I know is that he had a picture wearing clogs last week, and he had black socks on with them. Now, come on George, who wears black socks with clogs? Who wears clogs? I do not know what he likes for breakfast, I do not know his favorite TV show. I do not know what he likes to do on his day off. I do not know what his favorite movie is. I really know nothing about the man, yet he is my president, and I listen to him, and I respect his office, but in actuality, I do not know anything about him.

That is the way most of us are with God. We know who He is, we respect His office, but we really do not know anything about Him. We do not know what He likes, we do not know what He does not like. We do not know when He is coming, we do not know when He has already

came. We do not know anything about Him, any details. We just know as George Bush, he is God, he is president, he is a Republican, God is holy, he is up in Heaven, he is in the White House, no similarity between the two, by the way. But we do not know any details about either one of them. Forget George Bush, God is the one you need to know the details about. How you do that, because when you get saved, you lay that foundation, the first thing you build on it is gold.

- Silver in your Bible is always redemption. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver, Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver. You will find that in the Book of Exodus that they redeemed the animals or whatever by shekels of silver. Silver in your Bible is redemption. Not only do God's people not know who He is, they do not know what He did for them. You cannot tell me that you, and again, I am giving you five years now, you cannot tell me you understand what He did for you and who He is and live your life the way you do. I mean, sell that Brooklyn Bridge to somebody else. I just do not buy that.
- He says on that foundation, gold, silver, and precious stones. Precious stones in the Bible are pictures of people. Malachi chapter 3. You are going to find a great process here. When you get saved, the first thing you need to do is find out who God is. The second thing you need to do is find out what He did for you. Somebody says, "Well, I want to be a witness for God." Okay, the formula is simple. Find out who He is (gold), find out what He did (silver), and you will have to tell everybody about it (precious stones). That is how it works. We have the unknown God today who infiltrates everything in our churches.

2. Do you believe and trust the promises of God more now than the day you got saved?

I give you three or four or five years. But in actuality, if you are saved six months, you ought to start having some principles in your life. You know what it is like? It is like this: if you were a lawyer or a doctor and somebody came into you and they had a case or they had a medical problem. You are a doctor and you are a lawyer, but just like a pastor, you cannot keep up on everything all the time. Here is what you would do. If you are a lawyer, you go down to the law office. If you are a doctor, you go to the medical library, and you have a case here, and you would walk down here as a lawyer and you pull out this book on case law, this book on case law, this book on case law, this book on case law. "I need this. This is the statute for this. This is the statute for that. I need this." You might come back to your desk with 20 books. Then you are going to sit down and you are going to take what each one of those books represent and you are going to formulate from what is written in those books a solution to your client's case.

The Bible is just like that. You have a problem in your life. You have 66 books in your biblical law library. You have the particular problem. You pull out this principle for this problem, this principle for this problem, this principle lines up, this principle lines up, this principle lines up. "I need this principle." You sit down with your given problem, nine or ten biblical principles that tell you how to solve this problem for your client, which is you. Only for a Christian, or for a lawyer and a doctor, they can go to the library. Your library needs to be in here and in here. In any given situation, you ought to be able to bring up the principles right out of your mind out of the Word of God in time that give you in any circumstances, any situation. That is what the Bible is talking about when it says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

Proverbs is a great book on the issues of life. Could you stand up and give me five principles, precepts out of the book of Proverbs verbatim? Song of Solomon is about your love and your intimacy with Christ. Could you stand up and give me five principles? Ecclesiastes is the worldly wisdom that will not work. Could you stand up and give me five out of there? Psalms is the whole key to the Bible, the heartbeat of God. Could you stand up and give me five out of there? Job is the great book that deals with understanding suffering. Could you stand up and give me five? Those are all things that we are all going to have to face, and when you start working with people, you are going to have to deal with them. You better build your law library in your heart now that you can call on those principles.

In your Bible, you are going to find seven legal terms. You are going to find laws, statutes, commandments, judgments, testimonies, ordinances, precepts. In the book of Psalms, they are throughout the book of Psalms. They are all through Psalms 119. Each one of them means something different. If you are going to be an effective lawyer, you need to understand all of the ins and outs, or a doctor, of all the ins and outs. If you are going to be an effective Christian, you have got to understand the ins and outs. You have got to know what a statute is, what an ordinance is, what a commandment is. You have got to know those things because that is how you bring them up. When you go to court, they will say, "Well, Judge, there is a statute on this." When you deal with a problem in your life or somebody else's life, there is a statute on that. There is a commandment. There is a decree on that.

When you come through there, you are going to find precepts. Precepts are principles. You know what a principle is defined in the Bible? A principle and a precept is a direction giving us a rule of action. In other words, when I have this problem, this principle tells me how to deal with it. Do you know them now better than when you got saved? Do you?

3. Can you take abuse and ridicule better now than when you got saved?

It is no secret to anybody that if you are going to stand for God, you are going to pay a price for it. I say that at the same time. I say that in many cases, the price that we pay is because of our own stupidity. But I am going to say if you ever take a stand for God and take a stand for the Book, you will pay a price for it. Not only from the world, but from God's people. 1 Corinthians 4:10. He made it very clear when he was writing to the church at Corinth that, "We are fools for Christ's sake." The church at Corinth was a church that had all kinds of, much like the church today, had all kinds of worldly wisdom, very little of God's wisdom. He says in verse 8, "You guys are rich and you are living and reigning like kings." See, they had it all physically. They had nothing spiritually. But you need to learn in time how to deal with abuse and ridicule after you get saved because the closer, the more you get into this thing, the more it is going to come. One of the greatest things the devil likes to do is intimidate us with fear.

When I talk a couple of weeks ago about scanning the crowd for any minute ability for leadership. When I look at people and I look at them in the form of character traits or what it really takes. I look for three things basically after they are saved. These three things, when they mold these together, they really show you the importance of being able to take criticism biblically.

- The first thing I look for is a teachable spirit.
- The second thing I look for is a humble spirit.
- The third thing I look for is a courageous spirit.

Now you take those three things and you mold them together. You take a teachable spirit. There are some people just cannot teach. They are unteachable. I have had them all my life. You go over it over and over. Some people in the Bible, I look at them in the Bible and I scratch my head. They will come down through the Bible and they will get the three most things in the Bible that did not mean anything and they will miss 570 things that were jumping out at them. Another guy on that night, and another guy will come in over there and he will come in, he has been saved six months and he will see stuff all over the place. I say to myself, "What is the difference?" Well, the difference is not God. It is not the Holy Spirit. Both guys got the same thing. It is the ability of one to do it and one to learn it and finding out what is wrong with them and what they have got to change about them to really help them become everything that God wants them to be.

Teachable spirit, teachable spirit, and then a humble spirit. A humble spirit goes along with the teachable spirit. You have got to know your limitations. You have got to be able to say, "You know what? I do not know that." I have very little use for anybody who pretends they know what they are doing when they do not. That is the most dangerous situation you can be in. Years ago, I got burnt many, many times by somebody saying, "Oh yeah, I know how to do that. Oh yeah, I do that." And then when they were on the spot and the money was up in the cash register, they did not come through. I am not impressed by that. Many people do not know their own limitation. They do not know what they are not honest with themselves or what they can do and what they cannot, and they will not let anybody help them with what they cannot because they have this pride issue that if I show you, I do not know this, you are going to look at me as weak. No, in time, I am going to look at you as stupid. Because you cannot hide that stuff. You cannot pretend that stuff. Because when the rubber meets the road and you have to be on the line and you have to do it, you will not have the tools to get it done.

So I look at teachable spirit, humble spirit, and then a courageous spirit. That simply means you stay with it no matter what. I have watched some of you lose your family. Some of you lose your friends. Some of you lose jobs. Some of you lose this. Some of you lose that because you wanted to take a stand for God and you were given an ultimatum. You did not take the ultimatum. You had the courageous spirit to do what was right. You take those three things and blend them together and you have somebody who is able to learn the process and become what God wants them to learn.

You know why that is so important? I will tell you why. Because criticism is going to come and rebuke is going to come. You are going to pay a price for what you believe, especially if it is the truth. The greatest example that in the Bible is Job. If you do not have a good balance of humility, a good balance, I mean, the first thing happens when somebody attacks you. What is your first response? When somebody attacks you, when somebody says something about you, when somebody lashes out at you, what is your first response? Is your first response a defensive posture? Or is your first response, "Well, maybe I better look at what I said to see if that is any

truth to that." See, that is the difference between a humble spirit and not. That kind of attitude is the attitude that Job had. You know what happened with Job? The Bible says he was a righteous man, an upright man. He eschewed evil. He hated evil and he wanted to do what God wanted to do. He gave sacrifices long before sacrifices were called into play. He did everything. He is way ahead of the game than everybody else.

When he got attacked by the devil, he goes into a defensive posture. He defends himself. Then the three brothers show, three friends show up, Dr. Fine, Dr. Howard, Dr. Fine. And they attack him. He is so busy defending himself. You know what? The devil could not get him in sin. Could not get him to take a drink. Could not get him to smoke a cigarette. Could not get him to do this. Could not get him to do that. But what he did get him to do was defend himself so much, he became self-righteous. That was his sin. The devil will find your water level wherever it is at. You can buy the strongest doors, the biggest locks. You can put bars on the windows. You can put a steel door up. He will get into your world. The thing that will protect you is a teachable spirit, a humble spirit, and a courageous spirit. Brother, as you grow, you better learn to take abuse and ridicule better than when you first got saved.

I always tell people as they grow in the ministry, especially when you start working with people. Rule number one, never take it personal. Never take it personal. There are going to be people who hate you because you stand for the Book. There are going to be people that hate you because you stand for truth, stand for God. It just comes with the territory. The ministry is not a place for fledglings. It is not a place for junior G-men or junior birdmen. It is a place for men and women who have counted the cost, who have been a process of spiritual growth and recognized no matter who says what or what happens, where you are at, and you never give up, even when you fail. Even when you fail.

#### 4. Do you love your enemies more now than when you got saved?

If I have learned anything in 40 years of being saved, I have learned two things. The first thing I have learned is it never pays to have enemies. It never does. I will tell you why that is. Whoever angers you controls you. Whoever angers you controls you. In the Bible it says that nothing should control you more than the Word of God. Now, I understand anger is an emotion that God gave. Anger is not a bad thing. You are going to find a time when the Bible says that Jesus was angry, when He chased them out of the temple. Anger is a God-given emotion. But anger out of control is a problem.

Most people, if you use the biblical principles, you remember the Law Library? When somebody that is your enemy or wants to be your enemy, when they do something to hurt you or they do something against you, our first response in anger is to react. When you have a bad day in the morning and your wife says something to you or your husband says something to you as the wife and it turns in a wrong way. I know what my first reaction is, is to react. You get out of bed on the wrong side of the bed, you walk out into the kitchen, the living room and your spouse says something to you and because he hits it the wrong way, you lash out back. "Yeah, well, you are ugly." How many times we have all done that and the moment it left our mouth, we said that was the dumbest thing I ever said. See, it is the ability to process your anger. You process your anger

through the principles of the Word of God. "Yeah, I am ugly, but you are stuck with me. Make the best of it." Process your anger.

I will tell you something. If I have learned any two things, I have learned it never pays to have enemies. I do not have, there are people who look at me as their enemy. I do not have enemies. I cannot afford them because I cannot afford anything that controls me more than the Word of God because unprocessed anger takes the next step to bitterness and when bitterness sets in, it roots down deep and then it controls you and you will never do anything for God. Cannot afford it.

One of the reasons I cannot afford anything is because I found a great verse in Isaiah 54:17, and it really solved the problem for me, and this goes along with taking abuse and ridicule. It says this in Isaiah 54:17:

*Isaiah 54:17*

*No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.*

You get that? No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. I do not care if it is lies. I do not care if it is rumors. I do not care what it is. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. Every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord. You know what that verse says? That verse says you do not have to worry about them taking care of you. You have to take care of yourself because I will take care of you. If you are wrong, I will deal with it. You do not have to worry about somebody else out there.

*Psalms 119:97-98*

*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.*

There is going to be a time in your life if somebody does not hate you. There is not a time in your life that somebody is not going to say, "She is my enemy. He is my enemy." That is fine. Just make sure you are not the one pointing the finger saying, I will tell you the second reason why I do not have any enemies. I learned this truth: in most cases in my life, when something bad happened to me, I usually got what I deserved. I very few times in my life have I been mistreated because I was perfect. I mean it happens all the time in our home, in our marriage. I am never treated perfect because I am not. But in life, I have to think real hard about whatever somebody said, did, how it ever befalls us in life. Let us face it. Most cases we deserve what we got.

Even if it is a worst-case scenario where you did not do anything, the Bible says all things work together for good to them that love God. I have seen situations where people wanted to devise against somebody. You know what God says? God says, "You know what, do not worry about that Joseph. They meant it for your evil. I meant it for your good." In other words, there is no point to have any enemies. If you do not let those things control you and you let God control you, God is going to bring you out on the other side. But it is a process of your growth. It is a

process of spiritual growth that you will get to that point where you can actually see that those things are side events. They are side lights. They are side shows. They are not the main event. But oh how we like to make them the main event, and when we make them the main event, we lose that the real main event is because all we think about, "Oh what they said about me or what they did or what that person did all this or that." Hey, in eternity 40 million years from now, do you really think it is going to matter? I do not think so.

5. Is Heaven more real to you now than when you first got saved?

Do you really understand what it means to be Christ-like or like Christ? Have you ever stopped and considered, could you stop and give me five things about you in Heaven? I am not talking about, "Oh yeah, we are going to go to Heaven. It is going to be a great place." Most people's idea of Heaven is something akin to what they got in St. Louis or at all of these states now, something like Six Flags Over Paradise. It is just a nice big amusement park. That is most people's concept of Heaven. They do not know anything about it. Most Baptist preachers, when you ask them about Heaven, they will say, "Well, you do not need to worry about that right now." Well, yeah, you know why I need to worry about that right now? Because the Bible says in Romans 8:18:

*Romans 8:18*

*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

You know what he said by that? He said, "You get through the tough times today looking for what you are going to do tomorrow." Some preacher goes up and said, "Well, you do not need to worry about those deep things." No, let me translate that for you. You do not know what it means. So you want to pretend that you do not want them to know you do not know. So you say, "Do not worry about that."

Is anybody here going to sign up for a vacation that is going to cost you everything in your life and then not find out what it is going to be like when you get there? Anybody? I know how you women are over going down here, get online. Look it out. Check the hotel room. They got a pool. They got a sauna. They got this. They got that. Let us look at the mood bar. What kind of restaurant do they got? How goes into the airport? You find out everything. When it comes to Heaven, it is just, "Man, Heaven. There is a wonderful place. Filled with glory and..." Heaven is not real to us anymore.

Heaven, that will be the joy of your soul. What do you sing about? You drive down the road and just sing about Heaven. Do you know any songs about Heaven? You are going there. I mean, do you know, when you fall in love with somebody, do not you like to listen to love songs? You take this guy here who sings a song and he is singing a song. He does not even know the person you are in love with, but you know what you do? You, in your mind, he is singing that song and you close your eyes and it is about a nice moon night with a nice breeze coming off the ocean and there is your lover and your friend and you look and you look at each other's eyes and he kisses you on the mouth hard and it is a, it is a, oh, you are raptured.

"Soon my mansion will be ready. I will be going home. Never more to be a scurrying, never more to roam. And on that cloud this morning when the dead in Christ shall rise. I will meet my Savior up there yonder in the sky." I almost killed that guy here. Sorry. "God made a way for me beyond the crystal sea. He is coming back some day. Whoa, whoa." Get pulled over a cop. "I will live forever more. Get out of car. Okay, around that Golden Shore. Oh, I would have a happy day. God made a way." Get back in a car. "God made a way for me." Do not you laugh at me. What is wrong with you? I am telling you, "For I reckon that the suffering to this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Heaven. The place that was paid for you to get there, the agony of this life in perspective of an eternity with God. Oh, it is like the whole song, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of Earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

There is the problem. The things of this Earth will grow strangely dim. We worry about our 401k, 264 reasons. Our retirement, and I am not saying you should not. We worry about this and worry about that and down here. We want to check on our investments and we want to get all we get and you know, get all you can and can all you get and you want to master your treasures down here and you know, you got the guys on the radio, "Buy, you know, buy this, buy that. This is a great investment. Get silver coins, gold ingots, go all this stuff." We just, everybody wants the best investment, the best investment. Let me tell you something. God has a man down here. He fights for gold. He kills for gold. He dies for gold. He dreams of gold. He thinks about Fort Knox. He thinks about all the money he can have, and when you get the habit, you know what God does with gold? He paves the streets with it. Give me a break. But I do hope I get the job in the street department when I get up there.

6. Is Hell more real to you today than it was when you first got saved?

Theologically, we think there is a Hell, but in our everyday life, we do not. We really do not. The lack of compassion on God's people for souls is unparalleled. It is one of the most disturbing things to me I see in all the realm of Christianity. Preachers want to get them in so they can count them. They want them in so they can get their money so they can build their Taj Mahals. They want to do this. They have got the program, and the average person in the average Baptist Church who had a terrible, a tough time in their problems in their life, could not get in to see the pastor if their life depended on it. His forte is not dealing with people. His forte is building, building, raising money, running around the world preaching, showing everybody what he knows about God.

But I went back to my original thing about what you know, what you preach is about what you do with your people. People hurt. People need somebody to call. The average church, just like the average insurance company, the average bank, or the average anything. You cannot even get a live person anymore. You get somebody that says, "Well, if you know your party's extension..." Hey lady, if I knew my party's extension, I would not even be talking to you. I would just dial the extension. I do not know what it is, and I have never figured out when it says, "Use your phone and go through the alphabet." What does that mean? I cannot go through the alphabet. I hit A and I got somebody in Alaska. We cannot get anybody anymore. We are the most impersonal, want

nothing to do with people. We want your money. We want you here. We want to count you. We want to take your money to the bank, but we just do not want anything to do with you.

When you need me, you come up to me and you are going to say, "Pastor, my husband just shot myself in the leg and he is, my kids got this and that and the dog just bit everybody in the neighborhood. I need some help." You know what he is going to say? He is going to say, "Well, Brother So-and-so here. Would you take care of this?" You go to a place where you give your time, your money, your tithe, your offering, you give everything to God, and you want to go there to serve God, and then when you need something back, you get subcontracted out. The only thing dumber than the pastors in the churches are people who put up with it, and they do by hundreds of thousands.

I am telling you, there is no compassion. It starts in the pulpit. It comes down to the people. Pastors do not care about their people. People are not going to care about people. Compassion is not something you go to the library and get a book on. "Oh yeah, how to have compassion." Well, that will work. It does not work that way. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul talks about the fact when he talked about ministry, we are going to come through the whole book of 2 Corinthians sometime. He talks about the fact that the way you are a good minister is when you go through things and you suffer, you recognize that you go through those things and suffer so you can help somebody else when they go through their suffering. That is what the church is all about. It is about compassion, compassion for those who are saved and have fallen, and compassion for those who are lost without Christ, without hope.

You are going to work around them every day and you make absolutely no indentation in their life. You make absolutely no inroad to do anything to change anything. They look at you and they think you are just like everybody else. A lady said to me one time, she said, "You know what?" I said, "You need to be a witness for Christ." She says, "Well, you do not know my situation where I work. You cannot even mention Christ." I said, "Yeah, but you need to be a great witness for Christ." She said, "You did not hear what I said. They will fire me at my job. You cannot, I cannot be, you cannot say anything about God there." I said, "You need to be a great witness for Christ and sometimes even use words." You think your company policy, your boss, your supervisor is going to stop Almighty God from getting somebody to you that needs to get there? He can do whatever He wants to do. What He needs is someone that has the compassion. It is not the fact that God cannot, it is the fact that you do not care.

Lost without hope for eternity in Hell. I think the greatest cry at the Great White Throne Judgment will come down on the ears of every saved man and woman, myself included, and oh what a terrible place this is found in Psalms 142, one of the most terrible Psalms in all of the Bible, one when I read it just disturbed me for the rest of the day. Psalms 142:4 says this, speaking about a man standing before Almighty God at that Great White Throne Judgment, and he looks up and he says:

*Psalms 142:4*

*I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.*

No man cared for my soul. We have our thing, the things that we do. We have our careers. We have our jobs. We have our families. We have everything we do, and around us, in a mixture all around us, are men and women who just need somebody to care for their soul.

## V. Conclusion and Call to Growth

Spiritual growth, the process the day you got saved, you started that journey. You have been saved what now? Two years? Three years? Five years? 10 years? 15 years? 20 years? 30 years? 40 years? Where are you at on that journey? Do you do these things better now? Where are you at in the seven stages of spiritual growth? Where are you at? Where are your priorities when you check yourself spiritually? How do you answer these questions in your life?

I told you at the beginning this message was about me. What about you? If it got on you, I am glad it did, but it got on me more than it got on you because I was a young man and I wanted to serve God. I wanted to do what God wanted to do, and I had questions just like some of you did, and God took me to a camp and He sat the whole week. Every night He answered the question that night and then gave me the next question the next night, and I walked out of here saying, "Okay, I got me a Christian survival kit right here. I can survive with it. I can cook with it. I can eat with it. I can build with it. I can protect myself with it, and it has got everything in it I need as a spiritual diet to build my body strong for God." Then He gave me the yardstick. "Okay, a couple times a year, Bob, stop. How do you deal with that better now than you did? What do you know more about God now than you did? How do you handle circumstances?"

"Oh hey Bob, I know you are not responsible for everything that comes into your life, but you are responsible how you handle it. How do you handle it? Do you handle it better now than you did then, or is it the same old same old? Is everything in life controlling you or you controlling everything in your life?" That is the question. That is what a leader has to come through to go from that infant stage to the elder and the aged where there is somebody who just simply uses the Bible in the issues of life. I do not care if it is their family. I do not care if it is their people they are working with. I do not care what people they are ministering with. It is the same standards for everybody, and everybody just uses the principles out of the Word of God to dictate what you do in life. That is the mark of spiritual growth.

Next week, I am going to talk about not only where we are going in the next year, but I want you to understand the concept of what we are doing or why we are doing it. I want to define for you biblically. I promise you if you have been in a Baptist Church most of your life, and many of you have not, I promise you you do not know the biblical definition of being a deacon. We are going to go back to the Bible. We are going to show you what a deacon is. We are going to show you how they get picked. We are going to show you how the process goes about. It is going to be something that you need to understand that within a church the offices that are available and how you get to those places because it ought to be the goal of every man and woman in this church and someday to become the leader that God wants you to be to enter into that process, and I do not care where you are at. We can start with today and get you going or you can get in anywhere along the line. It does not matter. God takes you where you are at and begins to go from there.

If you have got family coming next week because you are going to be instituted as a deacon, make sure you get them signed up back there. Take care of all the other things you need to get signed up for the 4th of July. Get all that done. Please do not leave this morning before you get those two things done because I have got to call and give them a count on the food. Let us bow our heads and pray. Next week, we will meet here right at 10.