

Romans 1:13-16

Sunday 3/9/2008

I told you last week that as a member of this church, and maybe even somebody that is looking at possibly making this your spiritual home, that last week and this Sunday are two messages you simply don't want to miss. I had no idea when I made that statement what God was doing, and God always is behind the scenes doing what He does best.

I told you that as we come down through the Book of Romans, Paul really lets us see some things and helps us understand some things. This is going to be a very good message for you today. It's one that I think every member of our church needs to hear, and it's something that I'm going to try to do the best I can with. It's where my heart is today, and I just want to open it up.

Romans chapter 1, reading verses 13, 14, 15, and 16. We'll come back and make the references to it.

Now, Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we ask You to quiet our hearts today that the Spirit of God would have the preeminence here, that we would be able to really understand the great weight of what needs to be said today. Lord, I certainly need Your help. I know that anything that I have to say really is of no value to anybody, only as the Holy Spirit of God leads and guides in it.

Lord, I just love You today, and I love this church, and I love these people. I pray that Your Spirit will pull it all together today, that when we leave here today, we'll be a little tighter, a little closer. When we leave here today, we'll have a little better understanding of what our calling is as a church. As we leave here today, we'll understand why we've got to always do the right thing and make the Word of God the effectiveness in our lives, whatever the situation is. Help us to grow as a church.

Lord, we know that I've said it from the very beginning that this was going to be the year of the Bible for our church, and already, even in a short month and a half, or two months we've been into this new year, my, my, some of the things that You've done and some of the things that You've accomplished. Lord, I want to give You all the honor and the glory and the praise for that. I want to take this time today to speak to Your people, Lord. Take the burden that's on my heart today and through Your Spirit convey it to their hearts that we might be able to stand for the things of God that He wants us to. We'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. Defining Moments and Ministry Impact

Last week, if you remember, we talked about as a church, and I made the reference of how that we need to have a defining moment as a church. There will always be defining moments as a church as we go through different levels and we accomplish more things. There will always be a defining point in our life. I told you that in your own personal relationship with God, you need to have those defining moments. I think they're absolutely crucial.

I guess I didn't have any idea the impact, and last week was a really hard message. I had no idea of the impact. I got home by two o'clock, and my phone started to ring, and I didn't have any idea of the impact. I had every intention of going down to help you guys move, but I bear to you, over 50 people came to see me this week. It was people coming in and out all week long, and it was probably, I talked about our church having a defining moment as a church, but in actuality, it was a defining moment in my ministry, probably the greatest moment in my life that I can ever remember, just because of what I saw God do in your life.

Last week, person after person after person came in and talked about the fact that they wanted to grasp the aspect that they wanted to be a debtor to God. They wanted to fulfill that in their lives. You remember last week we talked basically about verses 13 and 14, and I laid out how that there are some things that Paul didn't want you to be ignorant of. We kind of put it into a person, and I said I didn't want to be ignorant of that. I talked about the perspective where you could grasp it. We talked about dispensation, how he didn't want us to be ignorant of how dispensations work in the Bible. That's very important when you come to the Book of Romans.

Remember, we talked about the aspect of conscience versus law and how important that was. We talked about how getting God's righteousness, and then we talked about the great truth that you and I, in our relationship with God, in the way that we look at things, that we are to be a debtor. That's to be our attitude, and that is really the point that God broke so many of your hearts with last week. It was a time for me that I can't tell you, it just wore me slick all week long. I couldn't sleep at night. I was up at four o'clock in the morning, the excitement of seeing what God had done in many of your hearts. I know that's probably just the tip of the iceberg, but it was an incredible week.

I want to take that today, and I want to give you the second point. Now, when we're done today, you'll understand what I said: that if you're a member of this church, you don't want to miss last Sunday and this Sunday because of where we're at and what we're trying to accomplish. This is a defining moment for all of us.

II. The Ministry of Mercy and Truth

I believe as a minister and as a pastor, and in time, many of you right now help run parts of this ministry in this church for me, and you do things for me and help me in different areas. I think that a minister or a pastor, there's no greater advice for ministry than Paul gives in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I think that what's lacking today in most pastors, and certainly most churches and most ministers, is probably the single greatest statement that Paul ever made about the ministry and dealing with people.

He says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 1:

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

That is one of the single greatest passages anywhere in the Bible that if you're ever going to be in ministry, that is the greatest advice that you could ever have.

First of all, I want you to see the first thing there. He says that the ministry, verse 1, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." You know what the ministry is? The ministry is giving out mercy to people as God has shown His mercy back to you. When you start to deal with people, you're going to find that people come in with all kinds of problems and all kinds of situations in their life. Our job is to, our job in the ministry as ministers is to always expect to give out that mercy, like God gave us the mercy.

It doesn't mean that you don't hold people accountable. Many times that mercy can be displayed, and it should be displayed, in the fact that you hold people accountable because they have no accountability in their life. But that's the greatest single thing that he's talking about here: that when you approach ministry, when I approach ministry, I look at it that I now always view it through the mercy and the grace that God has given me. It keeps you from becoming self-righteous. It keeps you from becoming so hard that when you have to deal with a really hard situation, maybe it's a personal situation, it always allows you to do the right thing because you view it through the mercy that God gives you.

There are lots of people in life and time over the years that dealing with in ministry, that it would be easy to say in my own heart, "Boy, I wish God would really come down and whack that person." We all have people in our lives that, if we would really be honest, we would just like God to come down and wipe them off the face of the planet. But you know what? Even though that may be true, the truth of the matter is, God had to come down and wipe all of us off the planet. You've got to view those things through the grace of God and the mercy of God. That's really where the basis of forgiveness lies in the church and dealing with people. People are going to make mistakes. People are going to do dumb things. But it doesn't mean you don't hold them accountable, but it means that you never come to the point where you don't offer them the same mercy that God has offered you and me.

Then it says in verse 2, and here's the heart of it: "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

My generation talked about "tell it like it is." When I grew up, most of you don't even know what hippies are anymore. They're like Tyrannosaurus Rexes; they're extinct. When I grew up, I grew up in a flower child movement in the 70s, and everybody was walking around with long hair and bandanas and no shoes on and had flowers planted all over everything. It was "love and peace, love and peace," and they walked around, and their favorite expression was "tell it like it is." Brian used to talk down in the mission, you have to help me exactly what it was you talked that last time you preached down the mission when your dad preached, you said, "Was it keeping it real?" That's the new thing today, isn't it? "Keeping it real, keeping it real."

I found out, and I'm sure you know this is true too, my generation went around saying, "Tell it like it is." Remember that, Pat? You were a hippie, weren't you? You weren't a hippie? I thought maybe you guys made it to Woodstock. You were kind of, you know, how you were before that? Oh, you were the boogie-woogie bugle boy from Company C. Okay. But in my generation, everybody said, "Tell it like it is," but when you told it like it really was, nobody wanted to hear it. I guarantee in your generation, everybody says, "Keep it real," but when you open up the real book that keeps it real, they don't want to hear it. That's where we're at today, and that's what goes on in the world.

But my job, your job as a minister, is to manifest truth. It is to manifest truth by our lives, and it's not just talking about what is right, but it's having people look at your ministry and doing it by the book the way God wants it to be done. Every person who comes to the point where they get into the ministry, it's not just that you preach how to live, but the bottom line is you have to live what you preach. To men's conscience, you have to be a manifestation of that truth, and that's what the ministry really is.

I had a person, and I made it very clear from the very get-go that my style of ministry is not for everybody. I'm old school, I don't know what to tell you. When I look at you, I don't look at you as Christians, I look at you as recruits down at San Diego. That's how I look at you, and that's my mindset. I think the thing that's missing in Christianity is a militant spirit. The thing that is missing is steeling men and women's backbones, and that's why men don't want to go to church. That's why men don't want to be Christians. You go to most churches in the city, it's a bunch of old, bless their hearts, old ladies and kids. There's no man.

I'm telling you, I realize that my style of ministry is not for everybody, but that's fine, because I always, when you ever talk to me or you hear me preach, I don't ever want you leaving saying, "I wonder what he really thinks." I don't want that. I don't want you ever confused about where I'm at. If you come to this church and you're a young Christian, and maybe you're not in the Word of God yet, hey, I'll give you all the grace and mercy in the world. I always tell you what I'm, and I'm very careful about this, I'll say what I'm going to say today really isn't directly to you. If you can use it, if it helps you, that's fine, but don't go out of here thinking I'm talking to you and beating you up. The only ones I beat up here are the ones that need beat up, that are here all the time. Those are the ones. You young Christians that are trying to find your way, I'm not beating you up. I'm here to uplift you and help you.

But I always want you to know and understand exactly where I'm at. I'm the kind of guy that you're either going to love me or you're going to hate me. I have never in all my life found anybody that says, "Well, I kind of like him." They either say, "Man, that's exactly what I need," or "I hate him." So you either love me or you hate me, and some people love to hate me, but that's just the way it is. I like that. I think that's what a minister ought to be. I think that's what a pastor ought to be.

I had somebody come up to me after last week's sermon, and they put their arm around me, and it was kind of a joke. They said to me, "Don't you think preaching like that is going to scare visitors away?" I looked back and I put my arm around him and I said, "Welcome back. How do

you feel?" They said, "Well, I'm feeling fine." I said, "Well, welcome back." They said, "Well, wherever I've been?" I said, "Obviously in a coma for the last four years." When have I ever pretended? If you're a visitor and what I preach scares you off, you probably ought to go someplace else, not that I want you to. But this is a no-nonsense situation here. We've got a job we've got to do, and we're like the Marine Corps, we're looking for a few good men and women. That's what we're looking for. I am tired of the feminine Christianity that has just absolutely plagued and tore apart the things that used to be what men and women stood for.

III. The Church's Greatest Commodity

Today, I want to look at the next couple of verses, and this is where we're really going to look at this thing, and I want to talk to you about what I see as your pastor, and basically what I believe is the greatest aspect of this church. The greatest aspect of this church, listen when I say this so you don't misunderstand me, the greatest aspect of this church is not the Word of God, though it is in the sense, but the Word of God is perfect. I mean, you can have the Word of God every day, and you can have a thousand Bibles in your life, and you can have one for twenty-five thousand in every room, that's not going to change you by itself.

So we believe the Bible, and obviously I believe the Bible is the greatest book the world has ever seen, and there's no greater book in the world. But when it comes to this church, you can have Bibles all day long, you can have five million King James Bibles powered in every seat, and the Bible by itself will not change anybody. It's just a living Word of God that unless you apply it into your life, that's when it has the effect that it has. So when I'm talking about the greatest commodity in this church, and we'll get to it here in a second, the great thing about this church, and I understand, and I'm not pumping this church up, this church has problems like any other church.

An old preacher told me one time when I was with him in a Bible conference, and the church was right in the middle of the greatest preaching week that I could ever imagine in this church, squabbles broke out in the church. I remember looking at him and saying, "What is that?" I said, "I thought better of this church. I just didn't think the church had these kind of problems." He said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "All churches have problems." He said, "Let me give you a little piece of advice," and write this down, which I never forgot. He said, "This is a great church, and it preaches the Word of God, but you better understand that wherever you got light, you got bugs." I thought about that years later, and that's so true. There's no church without problems, for wherever you got light, you've got to have some bugs. That's just the way that it is.

But the bottom line is, the thing that is great about this church is the fact that there are men and women here that, well, we'll get to it here just in a second. Look at verse 15. He says this, and here are the two verses we're going to focus on today.

Romans 1:15-16

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Now, with these two great concepts, here lies the real secret of this church, and as far as I'm concerned, this is what is why I love this church. This is why I love you as people in this church.

Verse 15 says, and I love the way he simply says this, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome." He's saying basically, with every single word of God that is in me, everything that's in me, with everything I have, with everything I am, with every fiber of my being, my soul, my mind, my heart, my body, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome."

You know what? That's my main job as a pastor. My job is to take men and women and get them ready to preach. Now, I have a lot of limitations. There are a lot of things I don't do well. I think one of the problems that preachers have is they kid themselves into thinking they can do everything well. We all have our limitations, and I know where my limitations are. I know what I don't do well, and I know what my calling is. A couple of weeks back, we talked about the calling that God had for you, called to be an apostle, and I think that's what I'm saying. I talked about how God has a calling for each of you, and I understand what my calling is. But I understand there's no man or no woman on this planet saved that has all the strengths that they need and don't have any limitations or any weaknesses.

I'm just smart enough to know what my limitations are and smart enough to put people in my world who do better than I do, and let them do it for me, and you accomplish a lot of things that way. One, you spread yourself out where people who are not so egotistical or pious that you think you have to do everything and nobody can do it better than you. There are some things that you ladies do for me that I couldn't do it the way you do it if my life depended on it, and if I tried to do it, this thing would be upside down in the biggest mess you ever saw in your life. There are things that I don't do well that I have some of you guys do that if I had to do it, I'd screw it up so bad it wouldn't be funny.

I understand my limitations. I know what I do well and what I don't do very well, and I want to farm out the things that I don't do well when I find somebody who buys into what I'm trying to do and can do it for me, and we all work together and make it work and make it pull the way it needs to be. My calling is very clear to me. My strength, my greatest strength, is simply this: what God called me to do is to take young men and young ladies and prepare them to preach, to prepare them to know the Bible. I don't, that's the best thing I do. There's nothing else in my life that God has called me to do, and I do that through pastoring.

My calling in life is not to be an administrator. Oh my, you don't want me doing that. My calling in life is to do one thing, and that is to take young men and young ladies who are willing to do what they've got to do in their life and then prepare them for the ministry, to not only preach the Word of God, not only to know the Word of God, but to hold them accountable in the process of living the Word of God. I don't want to turn out any more young men and young ladies that don't manifest truth because they preach one thing but they live another lifestyle. I'm not interested in that.

For a long time in my life, when Barb and I were having children, I always wanted a son, and God gave me two girls. I never fully looked at it until down the line when I really got into the ministry, and I understand now in a better way why God never gave me a son, because God knew that He had a thousand children. I had a thousand sons out there for me to be a spiritual father to. I couldn't imagine if I had a real son that would have had to grow up in the shadow of me spending time with all the other young men and being many times a father to them spiritually, many times spending time with them. God in His infinite wisdom, even though the desire of my heart was to have a son, knew that if He would have done that, it would have been a disaster because of my calling to have so many sons, and I include you young ladies in that in a spiritual sense, in my life that I had to invest that time, because my week from beginning to end is nothing more than taking the men and the women who really want to learn the Bible and facilitating a way for you to get that.

After I was satisfied with that, and I understood and I accepted it, because for a while, a long time in my life, I wasn't mad at God, but I didn't understand it all, because deep down inside I wanted a son. I wanted someone that I could, and once I understood my calling and how it was not going to work, then in time God did give me the desire of my heart. He brought Danny into my life, who is, I think Danny has parents somewhere in the world, Danny's my son. I love him as much as he was my own boy. I figured, when I mean, I appreciate the fact of who he is, God knew what I needed to handle Jamie. She was on her way to being a terrorist.

But it's one of those beautiful things where God allowed me, and still does, to have all the men and the women in my life that I need to be a spiritual father to and to do my calling, but at the same time He gave me the desire of my heart and the boy that He gave me. I'll tell you what, I stand before you this morning, and not many people, I don't believe in the world today, can say this, and maybe some of you can't, but I hope in time in your life you can. I stand before you as a contented man today. I stand before you with in my life fulfilling everything that I could have ever wanted in my life. I'm the happiest I've ever been in my life. I've got the greatest church in the whole wide world. My life is filled with the greatest people in the world, and there's just not much, if I would die and go home to be with the Lord tomorrow, there isn't much more that I could ever hope for to have other than spending more time with all of you and my family and all the things that we do together.

But I know how to build young men and young ladies. That's my calling. I do that better than anything else I do, and that's why when it comes to getting men and women ready to preach, I've got to say this. I don't know what this means. Jamie got pregnant again. We all have fingers crossed we're going to get a boy. We got another girl. Now I take that as a sign from God that I'm going to live another hundred years and continue on this thing with all these girls, but that's just the way it is.

My job is to take young men and young ladies and get them ready to preach. Like I said, my methods are old school. I still believe that the greatest power is not the power of media. I still believe the greatest power is not the power of music. I still believe the greatest power on earth in Christianity is not the power of some great presentation you can put on. I still believe the greatest

power is the power of the Holy Spirit of God working through a man to accomplish what He wants to accomplish. I believe that.

At the same time, I want to say this: we have some young men here that can really preach. They can preach the paint off the walls, and I love that. But I don't ever want you to get tunnel vision in your ministry that if you can't preach like that or you can't get up and expound the Word of God like that, I never want anybody to think that that's what really the only kind of preaching there is, because that's simply not true. We're a body. Your foot doesn't do what your hand does. Your ears don't do what your mouth does. Everybody, every part of your body, is a bunch of things together, and it all has to work together.

The thing that you've got to understand is you don't want to get locked into the tunnel vision of preaching. Let me tell you something, some of you ladies in here are the best preachers in this city. I put you up with what you know about God and the Bible with any preacher in this city. I believe that some of you ladies are the greatest preachers in this city. I believe that there are some of you young men who are the greatest preachers in this city, because we know that the Bible says in Acts chapter 8, where preaching is defined down there around verse 35, where Philip meets the Ethiopian eunuch, and he meets him on the backside of the chariot. Remember that story? He's sitting out there in the desert reading Isaiah 55, and Philip says, "Do you understand what you read in the book?" The guy says, "How can I, except some man should guide me?"

Now, here's what follows. He desires Philip to come up and sit with him, and the Bible says in that verse:

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Let me have your undivided attention for a minute. Do you really believe that there's that chariot sitting over there? Philip walks up and says, "Understand what thou readest?" And the guy says, "No, some man's got to guide me." You really think Philip said, "Okay, wait right there. I've got to have a pulpit. Okay, here's the pulpit. Okay, get the pulpit down. Okay, I got it. Okay, we're going to sing a couple of songs, and then okay, open up your Bible. We only got Isaiah 55:11." And you think he really got up there and slam-dunked this guy with Isaiah 55? No. The Bible says he sat down with him. He opened up the scriptures and he preached unto him Jesus.

Preaching isn't just getting up and doing what I do. Preaching is opening up that Bible and being able to talk to people, reason with people, show people, manifest to men's hearts what you've got in your own heart. Giving them the mercy and the grace, showing them what God has done for you. We've got some women that are great preachers in this church. We've got some men who will never stand behind a pulpit. Maybe you will, but maybe you won't. It doesn't matter to me. When you lock in your radar and God's Spirit says, "Go join yourself to that man's chariot," they're going to get preached to. That's the key. That's the key.

I heard a great illustration one time years ago. I've used it myself many, many times. I was in a Bible conference someplace, I don't even remember where it was, and the guy was preaching, and he was a great preacher, and it was a thing where the whole conference was built around

getting people to really pull together. Everything was going kind of like a motivation thing where we were trying to get the church together, get them on the same page, and get them going and get them to minister to people. This guy had a great illustration, and he laid it all out, and then he came up and he said this:

"You know what, folks? Let's pretend today that we're all going to be firemen, and we're going to have this church is not a church, this church is our firehouse. Now, let's see." And he used the choir because they were right there, they were behind. He said, "Now, let's see, you ma'am, are going to drive the truck. You, sir, are going to be in charge of the ladder. You, ma'am, are going to be in charge of the hoses. You are going to be in charge of driving the back of the truck. You're going to be in charge of hooking it all up the way it's supposed to be. You're going to be on the radio, and you're going to go in and find if there's anybody left in there before the building burns down. All right. We're a fire station. We're a bunch of firemen. Now, let's make sure everybody gets their job down. What's your job? Drive the truck. What's your job? Be in charge of the ladder. What's your job? Be in charge of this. What's your job? I'm going to fix the hoses. What's your job? I'm going to hook it all up. What's your job? We're going to go in and find the people."

And he turned around and he said, "No. Your job is to put out fires." It doesn't matter who does what in this church. It only matters that you do it well. It only matters that you understand that as a body, our job, our goal, I gave it to you last week: we are to bear fruit among the Gentiles. There are no stars, no quarterbacks. Everybody's in the same boat. Pick up an oar and row. That's what makes a church great. That's what makes a church be able to be used of God. No politics, no pecking order. Everybody stands or falls on their own merit. Everybody comes to the point where everybody pulls their own load.

When you look at that and you understand it, you realize that our church is just like that example of a firehouse. Our job is to bear fruit. It takes many different styles, different kinds of people, but they have to do it well. It doesn't matter who drives the fire trucks. It doesn't matter who hooks up the hoses. It only matters that we have a common goal: that as a church, our job is to bear fruit among the Gentiles, hence, put out fires. To me, the greatest commodity that this church has, the greatest strength, the greatest asset, the thing that I love about this church more than anything else in the whole wide world, is the men and women who have grasped that attitude and all of you younger ones who so desperately want to get there.

IV. The Calling to Preach and Prepare

Jeremiah chapter 1 is a great, great, great passage, and you might want to look at it. It's worth looking at. So many preachers have taken their calling from Jeremiah chapter 1. Boy, it is a great passage, and I want to show you something from it today that I think is very important.

He says in verse 6 of Jeremiah chapter 1, Jeremiah speaking now, and you've got to remember Jeremiah has been called to preach. He's going to be a prophet. He's going to go back. God's going to send him back with a calling to go to the most wicked nation on the face of this planet this time, one that has forsaken God, one that has dumped God, one that has turned her back on God. He's going to the nation of Israel. As a pastor, as a minister, God has called you and me to

go to the most wicked place on this earth. You know what it is? It's God's own church today. That's where it's all at.

Look what he says, and this is my job. What you see here is God's calling to you, but then you see what my job is: to get you ready to preach. I say again, I don't mean that you're going to stand behind a pulpit. Maybe you will, maybe you won't. But you'll understand the content that as a church, the greatest commodity we have is the men and women who understand that we are all in this together.

Jeremiah 1:6-9

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

What a great passage. What a great passage for every young man and young lady in this room this morning. What a great passage for every middle-aged, and no matter how old you are. What a great passage no matter where you're at in your spiritual life. If God has a calling for you, and you can mark that verse and write your own name along Jeremiah chapter 1, verse 6, He's talking to you. Oh, I know He's calling Jeremiah. Hey, He's calling you. He wants you not to be afraid of their faces. He wants you to put His words in your mouth. He wants you to carry it wherever He tells you to go. In other words, He wants you to be ready to preach.

Look at verse 10:

Jeremiah 1:10

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

Now, right there in verse 10, here's my job. I know He's talking about the nations here and what a man of God is supposed to do. There are four things there, ladies and gentlemen, four things:

1. To root out
2. To pull down
3. To destroy
4. To throw down

When I get a young man or a young lady that I'm going to prepare to preach, and I'm going to work with them, and maybe you're just starting discipleship, or maybe you're going to work in this or do this or do that, I don't care. When you come to the place in your life that you're going to say to God, "I'm going to turn it over to You and I'm going to do it," you'll either have one of

these four, a combination of these four, or all of these four that you've got to deal with in your life.

My job is, and we can go through the New Testament this morning, we don't have time, but I can take you in the New Testament and show you what "root out" means and what you've got to root out of your life. I could take you and show you to find in the New Testament what it means to "pull down." I could take you and show you what it means to "destroy," and I could take you and show you what it means for you. There are some things you've got to "throw down." The bottom line is this: before I can ever build and plant, before I can do my job, I have to get it. I have to root out of you, pull down some things, destroy some things, and throw down some things in your life. You can't plant and build until you do the first part first.

That is the greatest thing you'll learn today. There are some things in your life you need to root out. There are some things in your life you need to pull down. There are some things in your life you need to utterly destroy. And there are some things in your life you need to throw down. When you and me work together to get that done, then I can build. That's simple. That's simple. Ready with all that I am to preach. I'm telling you, some of God's people, they just never grasp that concept. They're not willing to focus on the thing. The good thing about this church is we have so many people who are. I was absolutely just blown away last week. I cannot even tell you.

So the first thing it talks about is being ready to preach. My job is to get you ready, and the way we get you ready is first of all for you to understand God has a calling for you. My job is to help you prepare that calling. I don't care where you're at, what you've done, what you've been into. That means absolutely nothing to me, nor it does to God. All I care about is where you're at right now. But in your life, as in my life, there are always things that need to be rooted out, pulled down, destroyed, and thrown out. When we get that cleaned out, then we can build. In essence, my whole week last week was filled with young men, young couples, young ladies coming in and saying, "That moved me so much last week. I want it. I want to be God's debtor. I want to do what God wants me to do. Help me get out of my life whatever I've got to change. We're willing to do whatever we've got to do." My job is to prepare you to be ready to preach the gospel, and now you understand the definition of that.

V. Not Ashamed of the Gospel

The second thing is this. He says in verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." There are a lot of God's people that are ashamed of the gospel of Christ today. You go around this place, and they try to water Christianity down. Pastors get in the pulpit, they don't preach anymore. They don't want to offend anybody, when the most offensive book this world has ever seen is that Bible to a man who doesn't want to do what's right. You should never leave this church totally feeling good about yourself. If you do, I didn't do my job. I never leave this place without critiquing myself and looking what I could have done better, examining my life. Did I live what I preached this morning? That's the job of every one of us. When a man and woman does that, you build into your life the ability to stand for God and not be ashamed.

I think I was 20 years old when I heard this message. I know I just surrendered my life to preach, and I certainly had no idea what all that meant. I was listening to a man preach, and he preached out of Ezekiel chapter 22, verse 30. To me, this is where I trace my roots. Some guys trace it back to Jeremiah chapter 1, like I already gave you. I trace my roots of where I'm at and what I am today, and maybe this will help you understand where I'm coming from today. Because if you're ever going to be part of this work, and I hope you are, you have to understand my heart.

When I looked at this, when I heard this when I was 20 years old, I didn't understand all the ramifications, but I had such a burden. I remember I went home that night and I got on my knees and I wept because it moved me so desperately, much like the message last week moved so many of you. To give you a little background, in Ezekiel chapter 22, the context there is that he's sending Ezekiel down to the priests of the nation of Israel. It's much like the church today; it was an apostasy, and the whole concept here is that God had a message that He wanted to be preached. God had a program that He wanted to instill. God had something He wanted the nation of Israel to do, and the real problem was God could not find a man or a woman to do it. I'm telling you today, in Bible Christianity, God has something that He wants us to accomplish, and the problem is God can't find a man or a woman that is willing to do it.

Now, when I heard this message, it says this in verse 30:

Ezekiel 22:30

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.

I heard that man that night. I heard him so eloquently apply it to God's people, and as a young 20-year-old man who had just come out of the darkness and into the glorious light, as a young 20-year-old man who was tired of life, tired of the world, and God through His mercy had shown the light on him, I remember going home that night with tears streaming down my face because I so desperately wanted to be that man for God. I wanted to understand the reality of that context. To many people, it's just a verse. Oh, it's some obscure verse in Ezekiel, which is some obscure book in the Bible. But to me, it was the lifeblood of what I wanted to do for God, because I went home that night and I said, "Oh God, I want to be that man. I want to stand in the gap. I want to make up the hedge." All through my life, God has redefined and over-defined what that great verse means.

You know what it means when it says to stand in the gap? When you have a battle, the lines are drawn, and you're all in your positions, and you stand there, and everybody is holding their position. When you have a battle, there comes a break in the line, and in any battle, that becomes a weak point. If the enemy is doing their job, they know what that weak point is. Many times the night before the main battle, they will send out small units to probe the line to find where the weak spots are. When the forces come, they'll hit that weak spot. God's people need to come to the point in their life where they understand that that's our job. This church needs to stand in the gap. It needs to make it up in the hottest part of the battle. I told God that's what I want to do. I want to be the one that stands there. That's so easy to say.

I remember reading in military history, World War II. Most people today, most kids, don't even know what World War II was all about. But toward the end of the war, around 1944, Christmas time, we had what we called, and you hear it all the time, the Battle of the Bulge. I'm not talking about a weight loss program here. We had what was called the Battle of the Bulge. What happened was this: everybody thought on the American side the war was over. We thought it was finished. There was talk that everybody was going to be going home by New Year's. Well, the Germans had another idea. All the time that our forces on the lines were lulled into Christmas and thinking of going home, the German General Montrofo had put together a spearhead of 28 German divisions. They went down into Germany, and they gleaned the gasoline, the tanks from every place. They wanted to make one last desperate attempt because they knew if they could break the American lines and they could penetrate in, they could still win the war.

The Battle of the Bulge is nothing more by its own definition than when the Germans hit the weak point, and there were troops there that had been in battle since Normandy. They were tired. They didn't have all the weapons they needed. They were in a rest area. When Montrofo hit that bulge, what he did is he took the line and he exposed that line into a great bulge in the line, which became known as the Battle of the Bulge. I don't know how many American soldiers were taken prisoner. Many of them were executed by the Germans in the Malmedy massacre. But I do know this: there was a tremendous breach in the line, and America was close to losing World War II with that one break. They had caught us completely unaware, and they had broken the line at the weak point around a city town called Bastogne.

They had no troops to pull in. The 101st Airborne, which had fought from Normandy and just finished in Holland, was worn out. The 82nd Airborne had fought. The 517th had fought. They were all in rest areas with no equipment, no winter clothing. This was the coldest winter in France and in Belgium and in Europe. You know what they did? They carted those guys on trucks. Many of them didn't have any winter clothes. For the next 45 days, they lived outside in foxholes, and some of them actually froze to death. Many of them lost their feet. They had no ammo. They had no food. They had nothing. But they put them in around there, and every time the Germans tried to launch into it, it was repelled.

On Christmas, the day before Christmas, it shows the arrogance of these guys. On the day before Christmas, Montrofo had the complete American forces of the 82nd, the 101st, and the 517th, and many others, completely encircled. The weather was terrible. They couldn't get any supplies to them. The clouds, they couldn't drop any supplies. They had to stand in the gap and fight with what they had. Day before Christmas, completely surrounded, Montrofo sends in one of his aides with a surrender under a white flag. He comes to Private Saloonie from South Philly. Walks up to him and says, "My commander has offered you terms of surrender. You are completely surrounded. We will annihilate you. There's nothing wrong with an honorable surrender, because we are going to wipe this town off if you do not surrender. And I want you to know that you are completely and totally cut off and surrounded." The old sergeant took that thing and looked at it and he said, "Here, on your way, bub. And let me tell you something else you can tell your boss: We're paratroopers. We're supposed to be surrounded. Whoa! We're the 101st Airborne! We're

supposed to be surrounded!" And they held them. Onslaught after onslaught. Some of them were throwing rocks. But they held them.

You and I, we're supposed to go through the things we go through. We're supposed to be overwhelmed. We're supposed to be surrounded. That's what God's called us to do. We're supposed to stand in the gap when nobody else will. We're supposed to hold the line when everybody else runs. That's our job! Stand in the gap. Make up the hedge. You ever run through a hedge? If you did, you only did it once. I mean, those things, you go in, fold your clothes, come out naked on the other side. I mean, those things tear you up. I love what he says. He wants God's people to say, "I'll stand in the gap, and I'll be the hedge. You may get through, but you're going to be torn up when you come through the other side." Not being ashamed of your Lord. Not being ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power unto salvation.

I must be truthful with you, and I'm not speaking to you young Christians because I know you're in the process. But you give me Christians that have been around for a while, and they're ashamed of the gospel. There's more than just the people who are in the process. And just talking about how you witness. I have a hard time with God's people who won't stand for God. My whole life has been surrounded by God's people, and that's what I love about this church. My whole life has been surrounded by God's people who for the most part were effeminate when it came to Christianity.

I don't know who wrote The Wizard of Oz, but I do know that he used to be a pastor someplace, because he played in that great story. We grew up on it. My kids grew up on it. I know every line. I know every song. I also know that whoever wrote it had to be a pastor someday because he depicts what is exactly you have to put up with in the ministry. You know how it goes. You're on a yellow brick road. That's the life that you're walking on in your road in life. The goal of that yellow brick road was to get to an Emerald City so they could get home. That's my goal. I'm on a yellow brick road of life looking for my Emerald City so I can get home.

You know that there was opposition in getting them home. You had the wicked witch from the north, southeast, by southwest. You had the little munchkins, "Oh, ee-ooh," the little demons. And you had three types of God's people on that road. You had a Tin Man, a Scarecrow, and a Lion. On my journey through life on the yellow brick road, that's exactly the kind of Christians I've found in my life. Some of them have no heart. Some have no brains. And some have no courage.

VI. The Heroes of the Church

When I look at the men and women in this church, it moves me beyond words. I look at the series of events of the people that God's put in here. The greatest commodity of this church is the men and women that God has put us together. It's the most incredible thing. We started an institute this year to take the people that I was working with. I've got to tell you this. Now, I'm going to say some things now that I don't mean to embarrass anybody, but I'm going to say it. Some of you asked for permission, and some of you I didn't. But I need to say these things

because, one, they're on my heart, and two, you need to understand where I'm coming from today.

We've got a couple that come to that institute that I've been working with for the lady for about a year now, maybe a little over a year. This woman was the most dysfunctional woman that I ever met in my life. When I first started to see her, she was taking 13 different medications. She had been diagnosed from everything from bipolar to in-polar to north-polar to south-polar to everything in between. She was absolutely, all of her life for 26 years, she was an absolute basket case. Finally, the psychiatrists in this town, after she'd been through all of them, said, "Don't come back. We can't help you." Through God's hand of providence, I met this lady, and I began to see emotively. No matter what her struggles were, I saw deep down inside her what it took. She had survived the unsurvivable. She had hung on with her teeth and sometimes her fingernails. The first pastor they took her to was sure she was demon-possessed and hung her upside down to cast out the demons. Everybody blamed her. Everybody blamed her problem. Everybody blamed it on her when all she really wanted deep down inside was to have a relationship with God.

I didn't do anything. I invested some time. But I put the Word of God into her heart. I put the Word of God into her life. I watched through the course how God changed her heart, changed her attitude. Now she sits in that class and got 100 percent on a test without no foundation in her life other than the desire to learn that book and have a relationship with God. She told me, "I got it. I got it. Nobody is ever going to take it from me again." They don't even go to our church. The pastor where she goes wishes she did. She gives him fits. She says to him, "That wasn't even a biblical message this morning." It moved me, folks.

John Christensen, I've been out of school for 120 years. I tell you, man, I watch you there. You've got more heart when it comes to that book of wanting to do what's right. I mean, you've been out of it forever, and I don't make it easy for you. It's people that move me beyond belief of what you do. David Ziser, you hear you in down there? He's down there. I mean, here's a guy that spent a tour in Iraq. Come back with some issues there, and what God has done in his life for him, where he's come from, to sit down there in that institute and take that test and pass that test with 100 percent.

I look at some of you young ones. I look at Angie, little Nicky. Look at Mikey, Brian. Oh, you really don't count, Brian. You've been around it for a long time. We'll get to you in a minute. You have nothing. You have no foundation in the Bible. You just want to know God, and you don't care what it costs. You don't care the expense. You don't care what you've got to change in your life. You just are going to get it done. That was little Shane and Tammy this week. Oh, I love you, kids. Sit there in my office and say, "I don't want to be a debtor anymore. I want to serve God." God, I love you. I love you.

I met with Dawoud this week. Man, what a day we had, didn't we, buddy? I'll tell you what. Muslim background, shouldn't even be here today. Been coming to our church, what, two months? Lovely wife. You know what I said last Sunday? I said some of you have been saved ten years or more and never want to show the Christ. When I said that, some of you walked out of

here and it didn't even move you. You know what he did? Two months in his church, he came over and he said, "I've only been in this church two months, but I'm not wanting anybody to cry. I want to win somebody to Christ."

The greatest part of this church is you, folks. It's you and it's you and it's you and it's you. It's all of you. It's the place that when I give a test and I said, "I need a chart. Brian, will you do the chart?" Brian's got his own test to do. He's got his own stuff to do, and he does a Class A chart. Then I give it to Mary, and I say, "Mary, will you do it up?" He stays up to two o'clock in the morning. I don't care if you don't like it. We need to understand if I was like him and him and the rest of you out there that make this church count. I'm not picking anybody out. But so you could have the chart.

I look at you guys that went down there yesterday, took your own time from your families to help bring Mark back up. What you did when you went down and how you, nobody complains. Everybody gets on the bandwagon. Everybody gets a part, and you go down there and you do what needs to be done. When you get back, the ladies have orchestrated that they're there and they help everybody move in. You can't train people to do that. You can hire people to do it, but you can't train people to do it. That comes because men and women have bought into it, and they want to be used of God. It doesn't matter who preaches. It doesn't matter who does what. We're a firehouse. We put out fires.

I listen to you guys up there, and Mary gets his little group, and you go up and you preach to each other. I really didn't know what was going on. He was giving me these, and I was listening to him, and I was thinking to myself, "This is great. Boy, if this isn't the concept of iron sharpening iron." I listen to some of you guys that had never taught before, who very frankly, you surprised me with the depth that you had. I think to myself, "Wow, that's what I'm talking about. There are those guys getting on the road." Then I hear the background, and I said, "Who's that?" I listened, ran it back, and I said, "That's Jimmy." One of the old guys in the back keeping the kids between the white lines. I didn't tell him to do that. I didn't tell them to do that. That's what makes this church what it is. It is me. It's you. It's you and your attitude that no matter what, you're going to do what you need to do.

I'll go to somebody and I'll say, "Well, can we meet tonight?" And you say, "No, I can't." And I say, "Why?" "Well, I'm over Steve Bracken's house tonight." "Oh, okay. You like him better than me. That's fine." "Well, can you do this tonight?" "No, I'm over John Busquette." "What's he got going?" "Well, can you come over tonight?" "No, I'm meeting with, we got a group over there at Ray's." "Well, Danny, can we do this tonight?" "No, I got a group. I got to do over here at my house." I said, "Kyle, can you help me with it?" "Well, I got to do a class over here." I start finding out, and those Bible classes that we do, a lot of people need to get caught up. A lot of people need to have help. The great thing about this church is you guys on your own. I didn't tell anybody. I didn't ask anybody. You find these people. These people find you, and you invest your time. That's what makes this church great. It didn't me. It didn't me at all. The real heroes of this church are you. You're what makes it what it is. Your attitude.

If you're a young child of God here this morning trying to figure this thing out, I want to tell you, you have a home here. We'll love you. We'll give you whatever it takes for you to get whatever you want. But this is what makes this church what it is. It has nothing to do with me. It has nothing to do with the Bible in the sense that the Bible is perfect, because we can have 10,000 Bibles. But if your attitude of heart wasn't such that you weren't going to do what needs to be done with it, it's of none effect. Absolutely none effect.

If you've never read the book, if you've never read the book or seen the series, you ought to read the book or watch the video series called Band of Brothers. Without a doubt, it is the most moving format that takes place in our greatest generation. Band of Brothers is a book, and they made it into a mini-series on Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division. Basically, their history from camp all the way up to the end of the war. They interview these veterans who are now in their seventies and eighties. I check the website almost every week, and almost every week another one dies. I'm going to get a chance to meet one of them this May. They called him One Lung McClung. He's going to be in town. I'm going to go over to his book signing, and I'm going to get a chance to talk with him and get a chance to meet him and buy his book. I already got Bill Guarnere's book and some of the other ones' books, but it's an incredible thing.

If you ever saw the series, at the end of the series, when all these old guys, after you've just seen the incredible things that they've done, and they were in the Battle of the Bulge, Dick Winters, who was the commanding officer of Easy Company the whole time, just about, he's now, he's a saved man, by the way. Now he's in his eighties, and he's telling the story. He says to the moderator, "Do you remember when so and so wrote me this letter?" He said this, "The other day, my little grandboy came up to me, and he says, 'Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?'" Dick Winters, tears streaming down his face, because he knew that in any war there are no heroes. He knew what it meant to him. With tears streaming down his face, he says, "No, son. I wasn't a hero. But I served in a company of heroes."

I'm no hero today. This church doesn't need me as much as I need you in it. But I serve in a company of heroes today. Men and women who are the heroes. I'm not a hero today. Men and women who will never turn back. Men and women that whatever the fight I'm in, I look to my left, to my right, you're there. The gap used to be a real lonely place. It isn't so lonely anymore because of the men and women in this church that are willing to make up that gap, make the hedge. That's where it's really at. We don't need a website. We don't need a sign. We don't need a billboard. We have men and women that are willing to stand in the gap. I didn't mean to put anybody over anybody else. If I named all of you that are here, we would never get anything else done today. But I'm telling you, we have a band of brothers here that understand what our job is, and that's what makes this church great. That's why this church, I mean, we can talk about leadership all day long.

VII. The Essence of Leadership

When I talk about building leaders, and that's what I do, I talk about a leader has to be self-disciplined, which he does. A leader has to have self-control, which he does. A leader has to understand the attitude of being a debtor, and he does. A leader has to understand the biblical

principles and how to apply them, and a thousand other things, and you do. But the reality is of a leader, the greatest thing about a leader is something I can't teach. I can teach you all the components of leadership, but the single most important ingredient of being a leader is something I cannot teach you.

You know why? Because first of all, a real leader is never ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He's never ashamed of its power and all the different aspects. You know what a real leader is, and I can't teach this. This comes between your relationship with God. I don't see it in very many people, but it's the number one commodity I always look for. A real leader will always be looking to lead the way to righteousness in any given situation. A real leader doesn't have to be told to lead. A real leader will see the issue, understand the principles and the values of the people. He'll see the issue, understand the principles, and then he's always looking for an opportunity to lead the right way. He's not affected by peer pressure. He's not affected. Sometimes being a leader is a lonely job because you have to take a stand against everything else that wants to go this way. But as a leader, he understands the great truth: it's never right to do wrong. In any given situation, when the Bible is very clear in that situation, a leader leads. He leads or she leads. They lead.

That's what standing in a gap is. That's what making up the hedge is. It's standing alone. It's standing there being that hedge in that gap. A true leader will never miss the opportunity to lead people the right way, even when it's at great cost to himself or herself. A real leader will always be looking for an opportunity. I can't teach that. I can't teach that. I can give you the concepts. You build your relationship with God. You buy into this thing, and you understand what this church is, and you realize that there is nobody, nothing more important than being here and this church, because this is your ministry and your home. And you look to lead. You look to lead.

You start by leading your family. Real fathers, real mothers, real leaders will lead their family. They don't get into the problem after the fact. They, because they're constantly the leaders, they're always ahead of whatever situations come up. You know why I've got to solve so many goofy problems in your family? Because you are not the leader you need to be. That's why. When you fail, then it falls into my lap, and it's just one more thing I've got to do. Real leaders lead their families. Real leaders are out in front. They're sitting and seeing. They don't get caught unaware. They're always looking for an opportunity to lead, and you lead your family.

A real leader will be a leader within the realm of your friends or your peers. A real leader will, when you hear somebody gossiping, will step up and say, "You know what? That's not the right thing to do. You know better than that." That's leadership. You know why some of God's people don't do that? I'll tell you why. Let me tell you something. Don't ever be more loyal to your friends or your immediate family than you are to the Word of God and what it says. When the book says do it, you don't pray about it. You don't worry about what so-and-so is going to think. If you are a leader, you're a leader. In the face of opposition, you stand in the gap. You make up the hedge. If that's the weak part, stand there. That's your job.

A real leader will lead in the scope of tragedy in their families. Maybe it's their whole family. Dana, I'm going to say this to you, and I know you don't believe this. I buried your relative here a couple of weeks ago, and it was a very chaotic situation. But I want to say to you, you know

what you did in that thing? I don't care how much you got kicked around. You know what you did? You exercised leadership. They may not have liked it. They may not like what you did, but you stood up and you got me in the position to give them the gospel. We worked it together, the three of us. Jean, I think you're one of the finest men I've ever met in my life. You know what? You took control. It was a tragedy in your family, and it got goofy, didn't it? Very goofy. Excuse me, I should have put very, very goofy in. But you know what? You led. You led, and you learned from it.

There are going to be situations in your family. There are going to be times when tragedy comes up. There are going to be times when divorce happens or somebody's sick or somebody's this or somebody's that. There are going to be times when it just goes upside down, and the family is in chaos. You know what it needed? You know what the family needs in any given situation? It needs somebody who's a leader to stand up and lead the way. It doesn't mean they'll all follow. It means that you lead because that's what a leader does. A leader says, "You know what? I don't care if you get mad at me. This is the right thing to do. I love you. I love you with all my heart. But I'm not going to be more loyal to you than I am what the Word of God says. It's never right to do wrong."

I can't teach that. I can teach you the concepts of leadership, but that part of it you have to get from God. But that's what this church is all about. That's why what goes on out here is the way it goes on. I look at you young couples. I look at you guys that I love. You just started coming in. I'm telling you what, you have the greatest opportunity in your life. One, because I'll cut you all the slack in the world. When I say mean things like I say, I'm not talking to you. I'm talking these other bozos out here who know better. But we've got some good bozos. We've got some good ones. We've got some ones that at any time, day or night, I can call on the phone, and they'll be there whatever needs to be done. We've got ones that rule their families right. They do what's right in their marriages. They do what's right in their areas where they're responsible for. They're always looking for a place to lead. That's what I'm talking about. That's where it's going.

Joshua chapter 1 talked about how you have to have courage. We came through the Book of Judges. I showed you how the Bible said that God left some nations there that they had to go up against. When you get saved, God's not going to take all the problems in your life. In fact, God's going to put some more problems in. He's going to give you some obstacles that are going to test your ability to lead. He's going to put you in situations with your family that are going to get ahead of you and out of hand, and you're going to have to stop and say, "You know what? I better get a handle on this." He's going to put you in situations when a tragedy befalls your family that you may be the only one that can lead, that everybody's looking to you, and you have to lead the right way. I'm not saying everybody's going to be happy with you. Half of your life, half of your decisions, the other half don't. You know what? I don't care, because I love you. I'd die for you, but I'm not more loyal to you than I am what the book says. It's never right to do wrong. I don't care. This church is not for everybody.

VIII. The Sergeant Webb Story and Spiritual Strength

I want to tell you a story, and then I'm done. It's a story that is such a personal thing to me. I said everything I said today because of the fact that I love you and I love this church. But I want you to understand where my heart is at.

In 1968, I went in the Army. Many of you were in the Army. You know what the Army is like in basic training. We had a sergeant that everybody hated. His name was Sergeant Webb. Sergeant Webb had three tours in Vietnam. By the time I got to basic training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, he had three tours in Vietnam. He was the absolute toughest guy I have ever met in my life, and we hated him. Everybody else would cut us slack. Everybody else was hard but fair. Sergeant Webb wasn't even fair. Sergeant Webb, as we thought, enjoyed our pain and our suffering. We hated him. We plotted at night how to kill him. On the rifle range, we prayed that he would stray down range. He never did.

He had what we called the "Webb walk," where he would line our company up, 200 men, and he would make every man grab and put his hands through the front man's pack suspenders. We were all like a big train. Then he would lead us in a march, march my foot. He'd walk like this. We had to keep up. You know what it did? It had the reverberation down through the line that after the first three guys, you were running to keep up. You couldn't run to use your hands because you're tied to the next one. When a guy fell down, five people fell down. I'll tell you what, it was the most miserable time in my life, and we hated him. Absolutely hated him with a passion. We cursed him. We hated everything that he did. We felt like he hated us with a passion, that he had some axe to grind, and we just absolutely abhorred him.

Graduation day. We're all in our Class A uniform. One of the things that he did that we hated is behind our barracks, there was a great, it was sand. We all, he gave us all mop buckets, you know, the five-gallon or whatever they are, metal buckets. We'd have to go back there and fill them with sand. Every day we stood holding those buckets out. First day was 20 minutes. Next day was 40 minutes. Finally it was an hour. I don't know if you know how hard those buckets, but by the time you're in at 10 minutes, they're weighing 10,000 pounds apiece. You better not drop them buckets down. He would constantly walk up and down those lines. God help the man to dip the buckets lower than he could. We hated him. Every day we did that.

Graduation day, we're all in our Class A's. We finally think we're going to get away from Sergeant Webb. He called our company out behind the building, told us to get our buckets. Now we're in our Class A uniforms. We're on our way to graduation. He takes us around the back of that barracks, and we are just livid. He puts everybody at ease. Then he said something to us that changed my whole perspective in my life. I've looked back on it. There has not been a day in my life that I have not thought about this day.

He started walking up and down, and he said, "You men think that I hate you. You men think that I've been hard on you. You men think that I don't care about you, that I enjoy all the pain of these buckets. And you men came back here today thinking that I would have one more time that I could put you through the agony and the pain, don't you?" He says, "Well, you're wrong." He says, "I want you to understand why I did what I did." He unbuttoned his shirt, took it off. There, as he stood before us to that day, he had a scar that went from his neck all the way down through

here. He looked at us and he says, "On my third tour in Vietnam, in a firefight in the middle of the night that we were being overrun," he says, "I was firing out the front, and I was in a front forward position, and the enemy had broken through on both flanks." He says, "Out of the corner of my eye," he said, "I'm firing in front of me, and out of the corner of my eye, I catch something over here. As I looked around, I saw a Viet Cong officer come up with a sword, and he was going to slice me in half." He said instinctively, he said, "I took my M16 and I swung around, and I caught that blade about that far." And the downward force was so much, he says, "I held it down as I actually dropped it. That sword cut me from my neck all the way down almost to my groin." He said, "My combat days are over. I'll never do another tour. They relegated me to training." He says, "You think that I hated you. You think that I didn't like you. You think that I didn't care about you?" He says, "No, that's not true." He says, "I'm going to make sure when some of you have to go out there in the middle of the night, and somebody comes over you and tries to take your life, that your arms will be stronger than mine."

We wept. We felt so ashamed. Because here's a man that held us to the line longer than anybody, and we hated him. Now we understood that the only reason he did what he did was because he knew better than we were what we were going into. He knew that some men would not come back. He knew that some men would be put into a scenario where maybe what he did was the only thing that would save him. Over the door in his office, he had this sign. It didn't make any sense until then. He said, "No man will ever claim at Heaven's gate, 'I'm here because Sergeant Webb failed to do his job.'"

Ladies and gentlemen, I love you. I love you with all of my heart. But you will not stand at the judgment seat of Christ because Bob Alexander failed to do his job. Put the whole thing in a spiritual realm. I put the whole thing like David said in Psalm 18:34 when he says:

Psalms 18:34

34 He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.

I want to train you. I want to mold you. I basically want to take you, break you, and make you. I want to give you the strength spiritually in your arms that when you're standing in that gap, when you're all by yourself as a leader in that hedge, coming at you left and right, left flank, right flank, in your rear, up the front, and you've got nothing to do and you have to stand there, I want to make sure your arms are strong enough to break the bow of steel. That's my job.

God has given this church an abundance of men and women who are here today because you love God and that book. You're there on Thursday night because the most important thing to you is that book and learning it. You do what you do over and above and help everybody else because that's what we're all about. You understand we have to bear fruit among the Gentiles. You understand that we're a firehouse, but there's no truck driver. There's no hoseman. There's no ladderman. We're here to put out fires. It takes everybody to do it.

You young Christians, you have the greatest opportunity in your life. You have an opportunity to get everything that you need to be everything God wants you to be. As we grow together and God gives us the ability to greater aspects of ministry, we need to continue to understand that the

greatest thing in this church is not me. The greatest thing in this church is you. You. We band of brothers. You are the heroes. You are the ones. You are the heart and soul. You are the ones that have sacrificed your time, your family. You are the ones who have made your children do what's right. You are the ones who are there. You are the ones who no matter what needs to be done, you are the ones who are the leaders that are always looking for a place to lead.

That frees me up to take all of these wonderful young men and young ladies. They want to do what's right and have me the freedom. I would have done anything in the world to be down there with you yesterday. Anything in the world. But I had three couples that I got to spend the time with to work through. See, I can't do it all. But I don't have to do it all anymore. Look what God gave me. Look what I got. I got the greatest people in the world. We band of brothers. Stand in the gap with me. Get everything else organized and put in the right place. Let's make up that hedge. All they may get through is, but they'll be naked as a jaybird on the other side. But it's going to take men and women who are willing to do what you've got to do to root out, throw down, pull down. Then we can build and we can plant.

Every head bowed and every eye closed.