

I. Introduction to Abraham and Personal Impact

I don't know of any character in the Bible that probably impacted my life as a young guy more than the study of Abraham. It's an interesting story. Back in 1972, I was in Canton, Ohio, working under Mel Shabaka as his associate, in charge of all his music, and preaching for him when he was out of town. God had really been good to me.

Back then, in 1972, every year or twice a year, we had a Bible conference, and we would bring in preachers from around the country. It was one of the great things that church did that is not done anymore because there really isn't anybody any good anymore. But Dr. Harold Hanager, who was the pastor there, saw the need to bring in some of the great preachers around the country. In my young life, I heard some incredible men who are long dead and gone now that I look at as the last of the bridge of the old Philadelphia preachers—men who really understood what it meant not only to believe the Bible, but really knew how to preach the Bible. They formed the mindset for me that really shaped my whole scope of ministry.

It was in 1972 that they brought in a pastor who was a great young pastor, and he had really just kind of come into his own. His name was Truman Dollar. They brought him out there to preach at the Canton Baptist Temple. I was just a young guy back then, and he preached a series of messages one night on Abraham. I have to tell you, it was a situation where it probably was the single most series of messages that changed my life. I still have the original message that he preached at Canton Baptist Temple, a little cassette with their logo on it, dated '72 or '73. I would never play it again; I'm afraid it would break, it's so fragile now. But I have the whole series that he did.

I remember as a young man, I was working a secular job and working in the ministry with Mel. I remember listening and taking the notes that he preached about the life of Abraham. Now, his message was a little different from my own. He contrasted the two types of Christians. His question throughout that sermon, and it was a question that really impacted my life, was: "Are you a Lot or are you an Abraham?" What he did was go through and contrast the life of Abraham versus the life of Lot. We're going to look at some of that when we get into Abraham as the friend of God.

But it was from that message, a series of messages—he preached like three nights on it—that changed my whole perspective about myself and really my direction in life. I have preached variants of those sermons for the last 30-some years of my life. In my own personal mind, they absolutely changed the course of where I was going in life and how I looked at things. It was from that that I developed my own series of messages about Abraham.

You know, that's what you do. You hear somebody preach something really well and really good that really impacts you. If you're any kind of preacher at all, or any kind of Bible student at all, you take it and make it better. The standard line among preachers is when somebody preaches a good message, we say, "Yeah, I'm going to take that and clean it up and use it." You learn from

what other people do. That message was a great series of messages that he preached, but I took them and I broke them down and I applied them to my own life. I looked at Abraham in contrast to Lot.

But then I took Abraham and I focused on his life. From that, in my own studies and my own way of laying it out, I came up and saw the difference between Abram, Abraham, and then the friend of God. I'm a pretty simplistic guy; I don't deal very well with complex things. But God has given me the ability to look at something very complex and understand it in a very simple form. Of course, the Bible is a book like that, and so is the Christian life.

Last week we looked at his name as Abram. I told you, if you remember, that Abram means "high father." We saw how he was very successful in Ur of the Chaldees, which is where Babylon or Iraq is today, Baghdad. He was very successful, but God had another plan for him. God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees to go fulfill that plan. I told you then that Abraham's life is a picture of what God has for you and for me.

As a young preacher sitting back there under the great men that I heard preaching, God was forming up in my life. He was forging the things into my life that were going to give me direction. He was putting the men and the people and the sermons that I needed to hear. I was taking them and internalizing them and then studying them and then putting it back out. It was from that that God was molding me as He wants to mold you.

Because when we look at him as Abraham, we see his struggles as he goes through it. We see him struggling to believe God. We see him struggling to trust God. We see him as a picture of our own early years of our Christian lives, the formidable years that I told you about when we first started, that you're so vulnerable in as a Christian. He represents what we all go through, and that's why I think it's such a marvelous study. He represents the ups and the downs of your life when you first plug into God or maybe you first get saved. All through your life and my life, there are going to be struggles. I don't know of a day in your life that you'll be able to say that I don't have something I have to deal with today.

But the Bible, in a relationship with God, takes you above the physical circumstances, whatever they may be, and allows you to live in this world but walking on top of the world, not down through the middle of it. You live above the circumstances based on the principles of the Word of God. I told you last week about Philippians 1:6, a great verse in the Bible that says that God has begun a good work in you the day you got saved. God began a work in your life, and He wants to perform that work until the day of Jesus Christ. The day of Jesus Christ is the rapture of the church, if you know that in the Bible.

Now, since what we've come through, you should have a good grasp on the three aspects of God's will for your life. You should know what that is now. You have to have that in your Bible. God's plan for your life—you know it's not the same as God's will for your life. You ought to have that detailed out in your Bible. Then, of course, last week we talked about God's work—the difference between God's plan for your life, God's will for your life, and God's work for your life, and how it all kind of goes together. You should have a pretty good grasp on that right now.

You've heard me say this many, many times, and to me, this is basic Bible 101. You've heard me say many, many times that God moves in a direction to do something in your life, and then the devil moves. The devil's plan is to move in opposition to shut that down. There's no greater evidence of that in the Bible than in the life of Abraham. Almost at every turn of his life, once God calls him out, once God begins the process of a good work in his life, even though Abraham at this point doesn't have a clue what's going on, the devil is already at work trying to shortcut what God is going to do.

It's the same way in your life and my life. The moment you decide to do what's right with God, the moment you decide to be what God wants you to be, the moment you get to the place in Abraham's life where God calls you out, whatever you're doing, and has another plan for you, the moment in your heart you decide that's what you're going to do, you're in trouble. I mean, you're in trouble in a good way, but you're in trouble.

You're going to see from Genesis 11, where we first find Abram mentioned, up to Genesis 17 in the first five verses, his name is Abram. In those chapters, it shows us not only his struggle, but our struggle. It shows the process that God in action, every Christian's life, of a transformation of you and me from what we were to what God wants us to be. It's a process that we all go through. It's not without its hardships. It's not without its struggles. And it's not without its pitfalls. But if you stay with it and grow through it and learn to trust God as Abraham learned to trust God, the end result is you wind up becoming, as Abraham, God's friend.

II. God Changes a Man's Name

But in Genesis 17, and this is where we're going to focus today. We've already looked at his life as Abram. Today, we're going to look at Genesis 17 and we're going to look at an incredible study through an incredible example. Something that you need to put in your Bible, mark in your Bible, and lay out in your Bible. Something that you always want to look for in the Bible, and that simply is when God changes a man's name.

Now, I'm going to read a couple of passages here. I want you to go to Genesis 17:1. I'm going to come there in just a second. But I want to reread for you Romans 4:17 while you're turning to Genesis 17:1.

Romans 4:17

As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Now, that verse tells us right there that God's plan for Abraham. His name was Abram, which meant "high father." His life in Ur of the Chaldees showed us a success story in a man's life, much like yours and mine in this world. But God had another plan for him, and for him to fulfill that plan, God had to change his name.

I want to say this to you this morning on the authority of the Word of God: for God to fulfill the plan in your life that He wants to fulfill, for God to do in your life what He wants to do, you're going to have to go through a similar experience where God is going to change your name. Now,

when I say that, I don't mean that you're maybe David Geiser today and come back as Joe Smith next week. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about in a physical sense. In the Old Testament, yes, He changed Abraham's name. But in a spiritual sense, for you and for me, it means something else.

Let's look at Genesis 17:1. Let's pray for it. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. We thank You for all that You do for us. We ask You now, Father, to give us everything that we need today. Help these men and women to learn and to be part of the great things that You have for us. And Lord, we'll be careful to give You the honor and the praise and the glory. In Jesus' name and sake, we ask it. Amen.

Now, Genesis 17:1. Watch it very carefully.

Genesis 17:1

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

Now, I need to tell you this: remember the last time that I showed you that from the last time you find Abram in Genesis 16 to the time that God speaks with him in Genesis 17:1, there are 13 years. Abraham had been out of fellowship with God. The plan of God had been on hold. No transformation had taken place in his life. He made a couple of bad choices and had put him out of the game plan for 13 years.

Now, the Bible doesn't give us the inside details of what transpired in those particular years, but obviously something happened and Abraham and God began to get back into some direction. Here in Genesis 17:1, notice what God tells him. I think this is so instructive of what you don't get in Genesis 16 that shows you what must have gone on a little bit.

Genesis 17:1

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

Now, that's what Abraham had a problem doing up to this point. He had a problem walking before God. He had a problem believing that God was Almighty. You know what "Almighty" means in the Bible? It means Almighty. It means that God can do anything. Abraham was not convinced of that fact. Oh, he believed God in areas that he could, but when God was telling him about the promised seed and he was 86 years old and Sarah was way past childbearing, he had a tough time and he struggled with that.

But through these 13 years, and I guess the best way to say it, in Abram's life, 13 years without God was finally enough. I wonder how many years it will take in your life. Some of you here this morning, bless your heart, I love you, and you're saved and on your way to heaven. But you're no closer today to fulfilling God's purpose and plan in your life and the work in your life than you were the day you got saved. Abraham is a perfect picture of where you're at.

There was a time in my life, I was telling somebody this week, the point I got saved, the point I really plugged in was probably 14 or 15 years of my own life. I look back and I understand, you know, that time spent waiting on God is never time wasted. I know all of that, and I know that God has His purpose, but my point is this: Abraham missed out on what God had for him for 13 years. Finally, God says to him, "You know what? I am the Almighty, and I want you to walk before Me, and I want you to be perfect."

Then He says in Genesis 17:2-8:

Genesis 17:2-8

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Now this is a major place in your Bible. This is a place where you need to mark this in your Bible. If I were you, in the next little section here, I'm going to talk to you about when God changed a man's name. I would suggest that right here in Genesis 17, this is where you put all this material to kind of help you put it all together and grasp it, so it's in one spot. But this is a major place in your Bible.

III. Significance of Name Changes in the Bible

I don't know if you understand that or not, but when God changes a person's name in the Bible, it signifies that that person is moving from one spiritual level to another spiritual level. I don't know if you know it or not in the Bible, but there are a number of people that God changes their name. It's not always for the good. I need to throw that in.

I'll give you an example. In Jeremiah 22:28, you have one of the kings of Israel. You people in Institute, you should know this; we talked about him. He's one of the key figures that set up the kingdom of heaven and the times of the Gentiles and the destruction of Jerusalem. His name is Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin, his name means "Jehovah Will Establish." He was one of the last kings of Israel. But he became such a wicked king. He became such a king that was so against God. He became a king that everything he did was for his own self. He didn't help the problem in the

nation of Israel; he magnified the problem in the nation of Israel. Instead of leading the people right and getting them back to the Bible, he led them further into the darkness, further into the ungodliness of Israel.

Finally, God got so fed up with him that God gave one of the greatest prophecies in the Bible about him. You know what He said in Jeremiah 22? Here's what He said: God said, "I despise that man, Jeconiah, so much. I despise him so much that I'm going to give a prophecy that no man, no man coming from that kingly line and the line that goes all the way back to the kingly line to Abraham, no man from that line will ever sit on the throne of Israel as their king ever again." That's an incredible prophecy.

You know what else He did? He changed his name. He changed his name from Jeconiah, which means "Jehovah will establish," to Coniah. You know what Coniah means? "Despised, broken, idle." Here's a man that had a chance to do something for God. His name suggests that Jehovah will establish him. If there ever was a time that God needed to be established in the nation of Israel, it was at this time. God had His man on the throne, Jehoiachin, a man whose name means "Jehovah will establish," that God could have brought back the nation of Israel, but Jehoiachin wouldn't do it. He led the nation of Israel into deeper apostasy. Finally, God came down, not only pronounced the prophecy on his seed, but changed his name to "despised, broken, idol."

You go over into 2 Kings 12. You have another young man over there that's a king. His name is Jehoash. Jehoash, J-E-H-O-A-S-H, Jehoash, Jehovah in his name. It may mean "fire from Jehovah." How many times I've seen this work itself out. When you find these names in the Bible and these stories in the Bible, they represent things in our lives. I don't know how many times I've seen a man like Jehoash, who could have been something great for God, who God could have established a ministry through his life. But because of his not wanting to be what God wanted him to be and staying with the things of this world, he wound up being a despised, broken idol.

I don't know how many young men I've seen that I've looked at them and I thought, "Your name is Jehoash. Fire from Jehovah." When they start out, you're on fire for God. You're really doing what God wants you to do. But if you study his life in 2 Kings, you begin to find out that some things began to go down in his life. God began to go by the wayside. Where the things of God were once important to him, suddenly they weren't important anymore. Other things in his life began to come in and be more important, and the things of God began to go one by one out of his life. It came to the point so bad that by the end, he wants to justify himself so much that he's actually killing God's priests who are pointing their finger at him saying, "You need to be the right kind of king."

You see, that's the process that always goes. It always goes that way. When you start to get out of fellowship with God, it can't be you, it has to be something else. It has to be the people in this church, it has to be me, it has to be the church, it has to be what we teach. Finally, in Jehoash's name, had Jehovah in it, "fire from Jehovah," God finally said, "I'm taking My name off of your name, and your name now is Joash." You know what Joash means? "Fire." God says, "I don't even want My name associated with him." God took his name, Jehoash, off and just called him

Joash. The J-E-H being for Jehovah, which you see that a lot when God's names are always associated with many of these kings.

How many times I've seen a young man or even a young lady that have the ability to be something great for God, to be fire for Jehovah, to be established for God. And yet they throw it all away. They give it up because of a career or because they want to do this or their own personal things that they want to do, that they don't have time for God, that they don't have time to give God what's important in their life. They give God what's left over. You know what God says? He says, how many times I've seen a young man that had the fire for Jehovah just wound up being fire. The scary thing about it is why God just let the name fire, and I guarantee you that fire with Jehovah's name off is going to show up at the Judgment Seat of Christ. 1 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 5.

Then you have some good ones. You have a guy like Jacob. You know Jacob means "schemer"? When you study Jacob's life, you find a picture of all of us. You find a picture of us, you and me, who when we first come with God, we just pull every angle we can. We try to weave and deceive as much as we can. I don't know how many times I've seen kids want to snowball their parents, and they'll tell their parents exactly what they want to hear and then they'll underground will do exactly what they want to do. It's a thing where that was Jacob, that was you and me, that was me when I was a young man. It's all of us at some point in our life.

One of the greatest studies in the Bible is found in Genesis 32. If you would look in my Bible, not this one but the one I teach on Thursday night, if you would look in my study Bible, you would find in big red letters across Genesis 32 that you couldn't miss it. Right across the top, there's a little heading that says, "The day God gets you alone." You see, God had something for Jacob to do. But Jacob was a schemer. Jacob was in it for himself, not for God. He's like a lot of God's people. They're in the ministry, they're in to go to church for what you can get out of it, for the fun times. You do what you get out of it, what you want, not what God wants. Many things that God would have you to do would be an inconvenience for you. You're going to do what you want to do, play the game on the outside, walk around, be Mr. or Mrs. Spiritual, and everybody thinks you're spiritual, and you want to pretend you're spiritual, but in time, it's all about you, what you want. That was Jacob. That was me for a long time.

You know what God did? God got him alone. Boy, the day God gets you alone, He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh when he wrestled with God over the will of God in his life to do what God wanted to do. God finally came down. You know what? You can only run so far. I know it's a physical application. I know it's literal back there, but it stands for a great spiritual picture. Jacob was running from God literally. God doesn't have to send the hounds on you. He didn't have to send the dogs after you. He didn't have to call the police. He just reached down and touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and he couldn't walk anymore. Then God walked up and said, "This is not in the Bible, but I guarantee you it went on like this." God walked up and said, "You ain't running too fast now, are you, Jacob? Are you?"

When you study his life, it's a great study. You realize that Jacob got the blessings and the birthright by scheming to get them. He dressed up and pretended that he was somebody else to

get what he had, just like what we do sometimes. He pretended that he was Esau so he could get the blessing. People come to church, they put on their spiritual face on Sunday, and then they put on who they really are when they go home. It's a great study. It's a situation where, but God never misses those things. I don't know how this exactly works, but I guarantee you, I am convinced of this: there's an angel that hangs out right next to God. And what he does, he has one job. You say, "Where's this at in the Bible?" Well, I don't know where it's at in the Bible. It ain't even in the Bible, but he's got something going like this because I keep seeing it popping up in the Bible. You know what that angel does? That angel just writes down whatever we say. And then God brings it back around.

When he was deceiving Isaac, he was in the deception up to his eyeballs. He dressed up like Esau, he smelled like Esau, and he is up to his eyeballs in the deception. You know what Isaac asked? Isaac says, "Who are you, my son?" And he had to lie and tell him who he was. He deceived to get the blessing. You know, when he finally gets alone with God, he's in Genesis 32, and God touches the hollow of his thigh, and he's there screaming and squawking and kicking all around the place. He finally says to God, "Okay, I'm going to do it." You know the first question God asked him? The first question God asked him. He says, "What's your name?" He asked him the same question Isaac asked him, but he lied to Isaac. God wanted to see if he was going to tell Him who he was. And he knew what he had to say? He said, "My name is Jacob." Translation: "My name is schemer." At that point in his life, God says, "No longer. Now you're going to be Israel." From that point on, he moved right along with God.

I look in Acts 9, Saul, who we know as the Apostle Paul. There's a man in the Bible that as he goes through there, when you find him in Acts 9 where God met him on the road going to Damascus, you know what he's doing? He's going to kill Christians. Saul was the unsaved murderer. Saul was the unsaved man who persecuted Christians. Saul was the man that had been trained by the Sanhedrin, been trained by the great mind, was a doctor of the law, and was going to Damascus to persecute God's people when God met him on the road. When he got saved, you know what God did? The first thing God did, God said, "Oh, by the way, you're no longer Saul the persecutor, you're now Paul the apostle." From that point on, his life was different. Every time you find it in the Bible, every time you find it in the Bible.

Here in Genesis 17:1-8, you find Abram's name from "high father" being changed to Abraham, "the father of many nations." You come on down to Genesis 17:15, He changes Sarai's name. Sarai's name meant "princess." He changes her name to Sarah, which means "I will bless her with many nations or children." This represents the great turning point in Abraham's life. It shows you and I, there comes a point in your life and my life through the process of transformation, that when God begins to expose you to His will and you become more like Christ, you put the will of God in your life. God begins to unfold the plan in your life, and then in time God gives you the work that He wants you to do. It's a great turning point in Abraham's life, and it shows how you and I move up into the levels of spirituality in our relationship with God.

IV. The Spiritual Spiral and Overcoming Obstacles

You ever notice how your life and my life goes? It kind of goes like this. You get saved down here, and then it moves like this. It kind of moves like a spring in circles going upward. Now what you've got is this: you start down here, and then you move along this thing, and then you hit a snag. Then you get through that snag, you move up a little higher, and you get another snag. Those snags represent issues in your life you have to deal with. You see, the higher you go up in the spring, the closer you get to God, the more it magnifies what's wrong with you and me. See how it works? Not hard.

Of course, you come up that thing and you hit a snag; that snag's something in your life you have to deal with. Now at that point, you have a decision to make. You see it in Abraham's life, you see it in Jacob's life, you see it in everybody's life. When you get saved, you're going to start on a slow journey upward in a spiral. Kind of like a plane circling, moving up, moving up, moving up. At every point of that circle, you're going to find an obstacle. That obstacle may be somebody you have to deal with, it may be something you have to deal with, it may be something in your job, it may be some personal thing you're dealing with in your own personal life. Whatever it is, you go no farther up the line until you deal with that.

You know what? This church is no different, though I believe it is a cut above most churches, but human nature is the same. I guarantee you right now in this room, if we would chart your life out and my life out, we would find that, and we put everybody on that graph and that circle, and everybody knew the bottom line of where you're at, we'd find all kinds of people. Some of them are moving up, dealing with the obstacles, and you keep going higher and higher. Some of you have moved this thing, and that's where you're staying. You've got something in your life that's more important to you than serving God right now, and that's where you're at.

Now in your mind you think, "Well, I'm still moving up the ladder, I'm going to Bible study, I'm doing this and I'm doing that." But in reality, you're not going anywhere. You're like a soldier that is on his way to battle, but he never gets there, you know why? Because he just marks time and place. "Oh, we're marching, we're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion, we're marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God." Yeah, but you ain't going anywhere. You're marking time and place, you know why? Because there's something on that line you have to get over. I don't know what it is, but I know this: as you go through life, you're going to hit these little snags, and until you deal with those and climb over those and get to the next time, and at some point in your life, at some point in your life, through the process of dealing with them, through the process of not getting your nose bit out of joint and saying, "You know what, I've got some things in my life I have to work on. I've got some things in my life I've got to fix." Putting the pride aside and saying, "You know what, this is where I'm at, and this is what I've got to do." This is what we see in Abraham's life.

As his life goes through this thing, you find like so many of God's people as they move up those things or come to the point in your life where you break through, you break through. You come up through these things and you get up a little higher and a little higher and a little higher. I've watched almost every one of you that I work with. I've watched every one of you come up this thing. I may not say anything about it. I may say it to you in terms, not like I'm saying this morning, but I'm telling you, I'm telling you.

We have a bad idea today about churches, we really do. It's a bad mindset, and I understand why it's here. I understand why it is. But the bottom line is this: as you begin to go up that little spiral and you begin to overcome your struggles and you begin to break through, God's will in your life begins to take hold in your life. I've seen it to be true in so many of your lives.

V. The Church as a Structure for Growth

The building process. God's program is a local church. God's program, whether you like it or not, whether you agree with it or not, God's program, God decided to run everything, and then He's going to run it through a church. People don't like churches today. You know why? Because churches tell you what to do. Somebody better tell you what to do. When you read the Bible, you know what the Bible does? It tells you what to do. You ever notice the Ten Commandments? They're not the Ten Suggestions. You ever notice they weren't, "Well, if you like them, try them"? They're commandments. There's a structure that every child of God needs in their life, and you grow through that structure.

How many of you have ever used a caulk gun? You know, you do your sink. I only used it once; my wife, because I'll tell you guys, if you ever want to get out of doing it the rest of your life, just mess it up the first time. She looked at that job and she said, "I will do it myself. That is terrible, you got it over everything." And I said, "You know what, honey, you're right. You better do it."

But you ever look at that tube of caulk? First of all, it goes in a gun. See? Then you've got a little thing in the back that turns it, and then you click the thing, and the thing gets closer and closer and closer. The first thing you do is cut the end of it off, by the way. But mine was a lot neater when I didn't cut the end off. Now that caulk will get on everything. It's the goofiest stuff you ever saw in your life. It gets on your fingers, it gets on your clothes, whatever it hardens on, you can't get it off. Caulk needs to be in a controlled environment. No, it does.

You know what makes a caulk gun work that is so ooky and gooky and so messy and everywhere? You know, when you take that tube and put it in a caulk gun, it's now in a structure. When you squeeze that thing, it forces the caulk, which is gooey and ugly and yucky and will mess up your house, out a little end of that tube that you can control it and you can use it and you can do wonderful things with it. Try to take the tube and cut it down the middle and split it open and put it on. No, it needs to be in a structure because it's very icky and yicky and gluey, and it needs to be within a confined structure that the force of that structure forces it and conforms it into a workable solution that you can fix things in your house.

Well, hello. You know what's wrong with you and me? We're yucky, we're icky, we're like water, we get all over everything. You know what you need? We need a structure that shapes us and forms us and puts the right pressure. Oh, did you notice that? I love this analogy. The pressure on a caulk gun is in the rear end of the gun tube. I don't know if that translates to where the church needs the pressure applied, but it'll work for me if it'll work for you. What you've got is through the pressure, it takes something that is totally unworkable by itself and puts it into a format that now you can do great work. Of course, for you and for me, the structure is that church, the way

God set it up, that allows you to have boundaries but make your own decisions within the structure of the Word of God.

I'm telling you, I'm telling you, we've had this church now for what, five, almost five and a half years. The thing that you don't see this, you can't see this in a year, two years, three years, you don't really see it in four years, but it's starting to emerge and it's so true. It brings home to what I'm talking about. It's simply this: the structure of this church and the way it is set up and the way the Bible is taught and what you have and what you can get works. You see, I see, maybe you don't.

When we started this church, I started a process that anybody who wanted to study the Bible, come in and spend an hour a week with me and work with me in the Bible. Many of you did that, many of you are still doing that. But I'm telling you this, there is a marked difference in your attitude toward ministry and the things of God and the way you approach things of God for those of you that do that, for those of you that don't do that. Now I'm not saying you're a bad person. I'm not saying that God won't use you. I'm saying we all are structureless people. The Bible, the church forms a structure.

You don't know how to study the Bible on your own. I was discipling David this week. Remember we asked that question and I explained that, and David said this to me. He looked right at me and said this, "Now how would I have known that reading the Bible myself?" Remember that, David? What did I say? "Yeah, that's right, what I'm doing." I said, "David, you're not supposed to know what it means. You're not supposed to know what it means." The Bible was never written. It was never given. It was never given to man that somebody would just sit down in a log cabin someplace or in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains or in the top of the penthouse in New York City or up in the Rocky Mountains or out on a boat off the West Coast and just open up the Bible and God would come down and show you everything. God never intended for the Bible to be learned that way.

The model's in the Bible. When God opened up the concept of the church, He gave the church gifts. We talked about it a couple of Thursday nights ago for those of you that bother to come anymore. We talked about it that night. He gave the church gifts. The church was a gift. Within that church, pastors, teachers, evangelists. That's your gift. You get those things. What happens is the model is Paul and Timothy. You took Paul, come to the place where, how did Timothy become Paul's replacement? Did he just get in the Bible and read over there and say, "Hey, there's my name. I'm going to be the replacement for Paul"? No, not at all. Paul took him and showed him and worked with him and brought him through the process. He was side by side with Paul. He saw the bad things that Paul had to deal with, the good things. As he built his relationship with Paul through the Word of God and God through the Bible and that team worked together within the structure of the church, read it the first time Timothy shows up in the Bible. Go back in the book of Acts and find the first time he shows up in the Bible and what it says. It says that he had a good reputation within that church. The structure's the church. In that church is everything you need. Young Timothy, then you take Titus, another pastor, Philemon, another one. God knows how many men Paul must have invested his life with that he showed them and molded them because God never, never, never intended for you just to shut out and open your

Bible and read it. The ones that take advantage of the gift that God has given you, of the pastors and the teachers and the ministry and the structure of this church are farther along than the ones who just try to figure it out on your own. I don't know what to tell you.

I'll tell you this, this is another important thing. You might as well learn this. When you grow spiritually, there's going to be people who don't grow spiritually who aren't going to like the fact that you're growing spiritually and they're not. You do understand that, don't you? People who don't, write this down someplace. I'd suggest you put it on your forehead backwards. So every time you look in the mirror, people who don't want to change, people who don't want to change, people who grow to a point and then want to stay where they're at. They look at the ministry working with people as an inconvenience. "Oh, I'm in church, I go to church, I got the right Bible, I got the old thing, but man, my life is really moving right now and I don't have time for all this pitter-patter stuff." Mark this down: people who don't want to change will always point fingers at those who are changing. Just take that to the bank with you. You better learn early in life that if you're going to grow for God and do something for God, you're going to pay the price for it, and that's part of the deal.

VI. The Breakthrough of Vision and Purpose

But boy, when God changes his name from Abram to Abraham, it represents the day in your life where you break through. The day in your life, brother, that you got it together in your mind and you understand now that you have began building through the ministry. We have built together God's will in your life. Through that, God has showed you the plan that He wants you to do. You understand now what God's doing, and through that, God has called you and given you a work. You do that, my friend, the picture of God's plan comes into sharp focus for you, and that's what's wrong. That's where it's at. That's the number one problem that we have as Christians.

If I could solve one problem immediately, and there's no way to do this, I understand it, but I've been in this business long enough now, had enough people under the bridge, so to speak, and I know now exactly if there's one thing that I could just change about everybody right now that would solve every problem we got. If there's one thing that I, if I could do, if there's one slap on my hands, flick of my fingers, one little magic potion I could give you that would just absolutely put it, it would be the fact that if I could bring God's will, God's plan, and God's work into total complete focus for you right now in this moment. That as you sat here this morning, you'd see and understand why God saved you, why you were born where you were born, why God gave you the wife or the husband, why God gave you the children, why God gave you the job, why God put you into this church, and look at yourself in a complete perspective of what God's doing. Get it off yourself. Quit looking at what you got, what you want. Get your eyes off yourself and focus on what God is doing.

I had to laugh, I had to laugh at, I don't ever hardly listen to him, I don't want you to think I listen to him all day long, but if I'm driving some way, I'll listen to whatever's on Fox News, and Rush Limbaugh just happened to be on. It was the night after Barack Obama had made his great speech there at the convention. You know, these guys must have a staff behind them, because they don't have time to do it. I guess if Rush isn't out playing golf, he's buying cigars someplace,

he doesn't have time to do all this. But it's Barack Obama's message. They take it and somebody had excerpted his message. In short, 138 times. In a 40-minute message, Barack Obama said 138 times the word "I." 138 times in a 45-minute message, he said the word "I," like "I did this, I'll do this, I'm here, I'm there, we're here, I'm here, I'm here." Then at the end, he had the audacity to get up and say, "This presidency and this election, it's about me, it's about you." And everybody went, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah."

You have to get your eyes off yourself. It isn't about you. It isn't about your curriculum, your this, your that, your timeframe. It's about the time you got left to serve God. It's about God's plan, God's work, God's will in your life. If I could do one thing, if I could just grab my magic wand and change one thing about everybody in this church, it would get you to see and understand in perfect focus God's plan, God's work, and God's will for your life. But it won't happen, you know why? Because it happens through a transformation. It happens just like it happened with Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Saul to Paul. It happens through a process.

You know what, you've heard me say this before, but it is so true. Everything in this world has some kind of effect on you. You go off to college someplace and learn something, what you learn in college will teach you and maybe inform you. A lot of things you'll learn in college will misinform you. Some things that you go and do, they'll try to conform you. And some places you go, they'll try to reform you. But the Bible doesn't do any of that. The Bible never tries to reform, inform, misinform, conform. The Bible, my friend, does something that everything else in the world can't do. It transforms! It transforms you where God wants you to be. That, my friend, is a process. It's a process of coming up that thing one little barb at a time. It's a process that when you get stuck, let somebody help you. Your family may be at stake. Your marriage may be at stake. The rest of your life or what you do for God. Maybe when you hit that little thing right there that you don't get what you need from the source that God has given you to get it from.

VII. Understanding God's Vision

Ever think about this expression in the Bible? We use it in life too. Somebody will say something to you and explain something and you'll say, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I see it now." They'll say, "Well, you say, 'Well, I don't understand.' Well, it's like this, this, this, and if you see this and I'm going to do this," and you say, "Oh, okay, I see it now." You don't see nothing. It's an expression that we use. One time when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, John 3:3, He says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he shall not see the kingdom of God." Well, I got news for you. Romans 14 says you can't see it anyhow because it's spiritual.

What's the concept when we use that phrase, "I see"? You know what that means? To see something is to understand it by a picture that forms in your mind. When I explain something to you and you say, "Oh, I see," you don't see anything, but you see it in here because your mind formed a picture of what I was explaining. You've been over my house, you've seen up there in the upper room where we all meet. You see up there along that wall, a big old chart of the Bible. That chart of the Bible is my visualization of the Word of God. When you ask me a question about that Bible, when you ask me something on Thursday night or when you come over one on one, in my mind, your question is formed around a picture that I have impregnated in my mind.

Why? Because visual, I want to be able to say I see. Because "I see" means I understand with a vision in my mind of what you're asking and what I'm explaining. That's what I want for you.

When it comes to God's will for your life, I want you to say, "I see that." And I want you to have a picture of what that means. When it comes to God's plan in your life, I want you to say, "I see." But I want you to visualize what that means in crystal clarity. When it talks about the work of God in your life, I want you to see and understand in perfect focus what that means.

You ever notice on television that they have this thing for learning a language and it's called the Rosetta Stone? The guy that designed that, as we speak, is down on a beach in Florida, living high on the hog for the rest of his life. I don't know if you know this or not. The government uses it, the military uses it, colleges use it, God knows how many individuals use it. It's one of the most incredible discoveries that anybody ever came up with to teach you a foreign language. But do you know how it works? Do you know how it does? You know what it performs for you? You know what makes it so workable in your life? I'll tell you why. It tells you if you're paying attention to the commercials, when you put that program in and it brings it up and they give you the word, they give you the picture of what that word means. You learn the language better when you see the picture of what the word says. They know what they tell you, they tell you right on the screen, "This program is wired the way your mind thinks." That is absolutely true. So when you want to learn a language, they give you the word and they give you the picture. By association, you learn the word quicker by identifying it with the picture you have in your mind. Every time you use that word, the first thing that will come through your mind is not the enunciation of the word, but the picture that goes along with it.

Now that's how I approach the Bible. How come he's rich and I'm not? That's how I approach the Bible. The Bible to me is a picture book. Because when God wrote the Bible, did you ever buy a Bible book for your kids? You know those big things and a big print about that big? They're on stories of the Bible. If you ever notice how they work, you'll open up and it'll talk about the story of Adam and Eve. You'll read about a page or a page and a half, maybe two pages, and then you'll turn the page and there'll be a big visual picture of Adam and Eve in the garden. Then you'll come to Noah in New York and you'll read about Noah and then you'll turn a couple of pages and there'll be a big picture of Noah in New York. You know why? Because kids need a visualization of what they're reading.

May I go one step further? Jesus said, "Except ye come to me as a little child, ye have no part of me." You see, we like to think the Bible is a scholarly book. We like to think you need to have a PhD or a doctor's degree. We like to talk about eschatology and theology and hermeneutics. We need to talk about all the great things that the great theologians talk about. God said this book was written to children. That's why when you read through a couple of pages, you know what He gives you? He gives you a type, a picture of Adam and Eve, a picture of Enoch, a picture of Noah, a picture of Abraham, what we're talking about today. Those pictures are laid out through your Bible, just like any child's book you buy on the Word of God. You know why? Because we're children, we're children, and that's the way He does it. I do the same with the Bible. That's how I learned the Bible. That's how I teach the Bible.

The significance is in your life, when God changes your name, typified by Abraham, is a point in your life where you say to yourself, "I'm not going back. There'll be nobody that pulls me off my task. There'll be no promotion at work. I won't get out of balance. I realize the vision, I realize the job, I realize the will, the plan. I realize now that there's something God has for me. I see it. I'm not going to get in 48 ball leagues all week, so I can't go to Bible study. I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to get in all these things going on out here that takes away my time from the Word of God. I'm going to realize that those things are fine, but everything has to be balanced. But you know what? I am not losing focus of what God's will, God's plan, and God's work is for me in my life." That's when God changes your name.

That's where Abraham came to. He came to the point where he looked at Ur of the Chaldees, and all that he had, all that he brought out, all that he did, all that he brought with him, and he said, "You know what, that stuff looks really good, but it just got me 13 years out of fellowship with God. I'm dumping it." From that point on, God said, "That's My man, that's My man. You're no longer Abram, you're Abraham. Now we're going to get some things done."

God's will takes hold in your life through the principles, through your discipleship, through your prayer in Psalms 119, through our Bible studies on Thursday night, through our Sunday morning, and certainly through our one-on-one. God now has provided the plan, the vision. You now see the whole concept of God. You realize and understand how the ministry works around here. This work here, it all passes. You see it, you understand it, and you realize that God will only enact a work in your life through the work that we're doing here. It's just that simple.

You see in my life, the will of God, the plan of God, and the vision of God and the work of God, and I lay out that vision as best I can. God gets a hold of your heart as you put God's will in your life, God's plan in your life, and you understand what's going on around here, the work. You say, "You know what, I want to be part of that work." Just like Timothy said to Paul, "I want to be part of your work." Just like Titus said to Paul, "I want to be part of your work." Just like Barnabas said, "I want to be part of your work." Just like John Mark said, "I want to be part of your work." They learn through the structure that God gave them.

You've got people out there today that will tell you you don't have to go to church. You can study your Bible at home. You know what, that's true. But if you want the work of God in your life and you want to be used of God, you have to get in the structure. But you know what a lot of people do? They don't want that structure. They want their own structure. I guarantee you, if you took their life and looked back, everything in their life was about them. Spoiled rotten, had everything they want, and just got everything they ever wanted and just did whatever they wanted to do and no accountability in their life. Well now they come into a church where there's accountability. "Oh, it can't be my problem. It has to be the church's problem." The way it works, it's always worked that way. It doesn't matter.

This church is a clearing house. It really is. I hate to say it that way. I like to make it more spiritual than that, but that's all it is. It's got two doors in, one in and one out. You ever notice that? We have to put another set of doors in, Steve. We only got one set over there, that won't work. Well, I guess they could use the same door. They could get out the same way. We can push

the accident about. Because that goes up to a big old closet, doesn't it? Yeah, they think they were right at home in there. Dark, damp, and dusty. You know what they say? It's a clearing house. It's for people to come in and God gives you a chance to look inside your life and say, "I'm tired of the games I'm playing. I'm tired of the way I am. I'm saved. I've been years and years without God using me. And I want to change." Here's the place to change. Or you come in and say, "Whoop, that's not for me." It's a clearing house. It's a strainer. It's something that filters out and you find out very quickly, "Hey, this is what I'm looking for. No, thank you." But that's what it is. What a church should be. Exactly what it is.

I work this work at Old Pass. You see and understand more clearly as you put God's plan through the times we spend together and you see the God work has for you. We do the work together just like Paul and Timothy. Then God brings you to the point at some point where you develop that and you get your own vision. Proverbs 29:18 is a great passage. When you get God's will in your life, that's the spiritual aspect of it. When you get God's plan in your life, that's the concept of it. Then you get God's job you're doing in your life, that's the physical thing you do. When you get those things going for you like Abraham did, then God takes those things and puts those things into crystal clarity and those three become one.

You know, years ago, up in Gloucester, Massachusetts, they had a kind of a tricky harbor to get in. They had reefs high and too many ships would bang up and bust up. So what they did was this. And I thought about this years and years later. What they did is they put three big red lights and they were angled in such a way that if you saw three lights, you're off course. You had to maneuver your ship around that those three lights became one light. You lined up the three lights into one solid light and then followed that light in, and that light got you safely in the harbor. If you saw two, you're going to wreck your ship. If you saw three, you're going to scuttle it. But when you maneuver your ship coming into that harbor, that was very narrow, and those three lights, by your angling that ship in, brings those three lights into one solid light, you know you're on safe ground, safe harbor. God's will, God's plan, and God's job for your life, when you get all three of them together, shows everything in crystal clarity and gives you the vision that God wants you to have.

You know, vision, vision, oh I hate that word. Vision, I mean I love that word, but I hate that word. Vision, vision, I'm not talking about you going out there and having a couple drinks before you read your Bible, wine cooler, and sitting out there and saying, "Oh God, yes, there he is." We were all at the place working in those pegboards. Got those little holes in it, where's Mark at? Bothered you, didn't it? He got vertigo, didn't you? I thought Mark was drunk, he's walking around like this. If you look at all those holes, and Steve came over and he says, "Well, I don't know what we're going to do about this," he says, "I told Mark just not to look at it." He says, "Because you know, you look at all those pegboards in the hole, you know, and they're white, and it kind of..." And I said, "Steve, I said, Steve, I said, Steve," he says, "What?" I said, "Don't take down the pegboard, why?" I said, "I see the face of Jesus in that." I'm not talking about that kind of vision. I'm talking about getting God's vision of what He's doing. Not your own. We've got enough of our own stuff in our lives. We need to get the vision that God has, get the same vision He's got, be a good steward of it.

Like I said, my job is to have God's will, God's work, God's plan, and God's vision in my life for this church, in my own life first. Then lay it out, that vision, and see who else will grasp that concept and say, "You know what? I want to work the work with you." And let God mold you through that process into His image, through a transformation.

You know what Paul said in Galatians? I love this. Now the church at Galatia had some problems. They were a young church. He had won them to Christ, he had started this church on one of his missionary journeys. Now they're having some issues. He says this in Galatians 4:19. I think it's great.

Galatians 4:19

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

You see, they were his. He took personal responsibility for them. "My little children." I know somebody spiritual out there saying, "Well, they were God's children." Yeah, I know that. Yeah, they were God's children. But Paul, he didn't have the benefit of your great knowledge, so he thought they were his. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth." You see, he gave them spiritual birth. He won them to Christ. This church was his church, his work. This is what he did. He birthed this church and he turned it over to these people and he says, "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

You see, there's a difference, my friend, in Christ in you as salvation than Christ formed in you. Most of you are saved here this morning and Christ is in you, but the question is, how many of you have Christ formed in you? You know what that means? That means you've transformed yourself into the image of Christ. That means that you think like He thinks. You understand His plan, His will, His work. The vision is understanding and a realization of not only who God is, but what God is in your life. Understanding why He called you, what He saw in you when He called you, the time period you were born into, why He has you now, defining God's program in your life, why you're here, why didn't God put you someplace else, why did God bring you here? Some of you people act like you got here because you just found your own way here. Is there actually anybody in your right mind today that if you even got an inkling of wanting to do what's right, you just think you just found your way here on your own? This church is a clearing house. God brought you here to find out if you really want to do the plan, the will, and the work or not. That's all it is, that's all it is. If you don't like this one, you can find a bunch of them out there where you'll be happy. But that's all it is, that's all it is.

I told you, Paul said in Romans 4:17 last week, he says, "Even God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." Understanding why He called you, when He called you, defining the program where He put you, understanding the urgency of the hour, realizing as Psalms 1 said, that you have a season. I know you think you're going to live forever. Most of you are young, and there's a real danger to being young. You know what it is? You think you're going to live forever. You don't feel the urgency. You don't realize that the Bible says that a man bringeth forth his fruit in his season. You don't get apples in January. You don't get peaches in February. You have a season to your fruit bearing, and the problem we all have is

there's no urgency in that. Get into that place in your life like Abraham did when God changes your name.

VIII. The Five Aspects of Supernatural Living

You know the ministry, and you boys will learn this as you grow and in time, you know, take part of this work. God's done a lot of things. God's done a lot of good things. In my own mind, as I look at it, and I think of it, I look at, you know, we're probably ahead of schedule in my own plan of what I wanted to do. I've got people that, I mean, you can always use more, people that I feel comfortable with working with people, discipling with people. I've got some young men that can really preach. I've got some solid ladies in here that will help younger ladies. I've got a lot of good things going. But in time, you know, you're going to learn that a church needs to form itself up as the individuals form themselves up.

I told you about this year being the year of the Bible. Obviously it has been because it's been a defining factor for a lot of people when push really came to shove. But that's the way it always is. This church is growing, it's maturing, I'm happy with it, but I understand that because we're a young church and there's not a lot of men and women that have been, that are really plugged into the Bible at a level that they will get to in time. I think the next thing this church needs to learn to do, and it ain't going to happen tomorrow, but it'll come in time. This church has a lot of good things, a lot of good people in it, but the thing this church needs to learn that it hasn't learned yet, and I'm not chiding you for it because I don't think you're where you need, you could learn it yet. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think so. But what this church hasn't learned to do yet, it hasn't learned to stand together as a church. It hasn't learned to stand together as a church. That comes with time. I don't know how you make that happen quicker. It happens that men and women grow up and they see and understand what they really have here. I don't mean because of me, I mean because of that book. But they don't realize what they have, so therefore they don't realize how the devil wants to attack it and how precious they have to protect it.

When we put our first deacons in, remember what I told you guys? I am almost embarrassed to tell you this. When we put our first deacons in, I had a little meeting with you and your wives, you know? The first thing I told you, that your number one job is protect the ministry and the doctrine of this church. You know what? It sounded good and I walked out of here that day, I thought to myself, "Wow, I wonder how many of them will get it." Not very many did. But that's where we're at. As God begins to bring men in and women in and the other ones begin to filter out, and pretty soon, in another five years, we have a solid core of not just 100 people that are 150 people, you know, that are really just half and a half, but we've got a base of 150 people, a man now that have been with me, what, 10, 15 years, and you fully understand what I'm doing here, where you fit in, and your wives understand it, and you realize that what we have here has to be protected. You know what? Sometimes I feel like I'm a one-man guard at a prison with 10,000 inmates in it. Nobody's watching the rear gates. Oh, you've got plenty of things going on in your life, and we're doing a lot of good things, but you haven't come to the place yet where you understand the urgency of what we have. That just comes in time.

You're going to learn that the ministry's a bittersweet thing. There are a lot of things you have to put up with, a lot to deal with, a lot of things that go on that you never see, you never hear about, you never understand. It's just the way that it is. But you know, the thing that's going to keep you from getting discouraged at some point in your life if you ever pastor a church. This is where most pastors fail. Most pastors fail because all they do is focus on the problems. In most cases, they don't have anything good going for them. I never focus on the issues that are on the downside. You know what, they're always going to be there. I mean, I'm no novice to this. I've been in this almost 36 years. I know that there isn't a day or a week somebody isn't going to get their nose bit out of joint. Somebody isn't going to have a problem with something that you do or I do or the church does. That's just where it is. If you spend your life focusing on those kind of things when God has got what, 30 or 40 or 50 people that are dedicated to learning the Bible and you sacrifice them because you're focusing on this, I'm telling you.

You know why the Bible says that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose? You know why in your life and my life, there's never really anything bad that happens? Even though there appears to be things out there that will scare the fire out of you? Because you don't have the concept and the vision of what God is doing. I mean, when you read through the Bible and I teach some of you young people the Bible, and I think, you know, you get the idea that throughout the early part of the Bible, God's running behind the devil trying to catch up because the devil just threw a monkey wrench in his plan so God's got to fix the hole in the dike, you know? No.

You know why God just, somebody asked me the other day, "Why does God just let the devil go on and on and on and go on and on and on?" The answer to that is because the devil doesn't mean anything to God. I mean, you ever look at this thing? Genesis 1:1, Genesis 1:2, the devil meant to put a dent in the side of it. Down there, Adam and Eve put a dent in the side of it. God starts out His plan, the devil's moving every opposition to do. Finally, we get over there and we've got Noah in Genesis 6, and now the Bible says the devil, his plan has just succeeded. His plan is just incredible. His plan has just thwarted the plan of God. Here it is, God's only got eight people left on the whole planet to love Him. We're not even sure about one of those. All the world, 4.5 billion people now, is against God and wickedness runs the whole world. Boy, the devil got up on it. "God, why did You let that happen?" God said, "What happened?" Watch this, rain 40 days and 15 minutes, everybody was dead.

When you and I learn not to worry about the things in life, just like God doesn't worry about what the devil does, you understand the great concept that all things work together for good. If you're saved and you're right with God and you're where God wants you to be, the devil couldn't do nothing to you if his life depended on it. When he got God's plan, look, it was all messed up. God just said, "You want to see something, watch this." Rain! Look at those sons of God. Yeah, look at them dog paddling down there trying to stay afloat. 15 minutes after the rain started, everybody was dead except the people in Noah's ark. You know why? They didn't mean nothing to God. God just looked at that and said, "Watch this." And it's over. It's over. Don't ever lose your focus off the people who want to do what's right when you get focused on the people who don't want to do what's right. That's a big thing for many young preachers.

Now we're talking about Abraham here, and Abraham finally gets the vision. I showed you how back there that he talks about it. Abraham was the guy that he finally figured it out and God changed his name. He told you over there in Romans 4 that Abraham, even God, he got to the place with God that even God. The Bible says, "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Abraham got to the place like God where he says over there that God who calls the things that be not as though they are. Now at some point you're going to get to that point in your life. I think some of you will. I think some of you are getting there now.

I'm going to leave you with this and then we're going to go. This is going to be kind of a quick synopsis of this thing. When you get God's plan working in your life, God's will in your life, the spiritual part, and you understand God's plan in your life. And you get to the point where you get God's work in your life. And you understand God's vision of what He wants you to do. I'm going to tell you something. This is where God changes your name. God's changing your name signifies you and me stepping out of the natural and starting to live in the supernatural. It's putting aside the old things that tie you down and you've got a whole fresh look at life and now you've got a whole new purpose.

The spiritual walk with God of understanding God's plan, God's will, and God's work and God's vision come down in five things, and Abraham's got them in his life. You know what the first thing is? When you step out of the natural, move into the supernatural, you know what you do?

1. You hear what nobody else can hear. I call it hearing the inaudible. You ever notice in the Bible, the Bible says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." You realize the greatest example that is the disciples at the Last Supper where they're sitting around there and Jesus is saying, "One of you is going to betray Me," and it's the one I give the sop to. The Bible says they gave the sop and dipped it and gave it to Judas, and every one of the disciples says, "Oh, by the way, who was it?" They had the same problem you and I have. They're listening but we're not hearing. You ever hear in the Bible when the Bible talks about ears that are dull of hearing? You ever hear me say it, "The price of learning is repetition"? Acts 8, the greatest example of an action I know. Here's where Philip is out having a revival in Samaria. God calls him and sends him to the backside of the desert, and if you watch the conversation, it goes back between Philip and the Spirit of God. Philip gets the right message, gets the right time to go to the right place and do the right work because he's got the right concept and he's got God's will in his life.

Let me ask you a question. Do you hear what the Spirit of God says in your life? Do you even know, and I love this. I always love when somebody starts to say, "Well, God told me this," or "God showed me this," or "The Spirit spoke to me." I'll tell you what, I guarantee you. When somebody starts talking like that, you've got somebody that's going to make a big mess in their life because I guarantee you, people today don't understand how to hear the inaudible. What do you hear when God speaks to you? Do you even know how God speaks to you? I mean, if God is going to talk to you, do you know how He does it? Do you know how the Spirit talked to Philip? Hearing the inaudible.

2. The next one is what we already talked about, and that's seeing the invisible. For that we want to go to Hebrews 11:27. You don't have to turn to it, life of Moses.

Hebrews 11:27

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

You know how you endure in life as a Christian? By seeing things that nobody else can see. By seeing people the way God sees them, not the way you see them. By seeing circumstances the way they really are, not how people want you to think they are. By seeing what nobody else can see. How do you see the world? How do you see your job? How do you see your kids? How do you see yourself? How do you see your life and the plan of God in your life? Have you forsaken Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king? Do you endure through this day in life, every day of your life by enduring or seeing Him who is invisible?

3. The third one is touching the intangible, laying hold on the things of God. You know, you've heard me say it many, many times that your life and my life is about investment. I've learned over the years that the bottom line is this, there's only two things worth investing your life into because they're the only two things that are going to last for all of eternity. One of them is the Word of God and the other one, the souls of men. You see, to touch one's life is to change his direction, but to touch one's soul, that changes eternity. You mold people by touching their souls, not by touching their body. You mold people by giving to them what God has given to you. You mold people by not being sterile and not having people around you, but by letting them come into your life and being open and honest and giving them what they need. The investment of your life in the life of somebody else and teaching them how to lay hold on the things of God.
4. The fourth thing, believing the infallible. Believing the infallible. I see this one as such, I see this on a national scale and on an individual scale. History bears this out. The success or failure of any nation or country depends on its attitude toward the Word of God. You know, back in about 1960, 1970, they took the Bible and prayer out of the school. Most of you don't remember that, some of the older ones do, but it came down to national legislation that you could not read the Bible, you're not going to pray. Hey, when I went to school, they prayed every morning over the loudspeaker. When I went to school, the teachers got up and read out of the Bible every morning, had devotion before you started. Public school. When I went to, we had assemblies at Christmas time and Easter. They invited some preacher in who gave a gospel message based out of those things when I grew up.

Right after the Civil War was over, you know, it all went to pieces. About 1970, end of the 60s, they took, the Congress led you, and that's a study in itself, why they did that, but they took the Bible and the prayer out of the schools. When they took the Bible and the prayer out of the schools, they replaced it with sex, condoms, drugs, total collapse of discipline, mass murder, police in the hallways, and the weapons checked at all the doors. Good job, good job, good job. Hey, you know what, that's our country today. Hey, you know what, you can take that on a grand scale and put it right down into an individual scale, that's what happens in your life and my life when the Word of God goes out the door. Same thing. It just happens on a national scale.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth,

the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

It doesn't work in you if you don't believe it.

5. Then the last thing, you know what that all leads to? Doing the impossible. Let me ask you a question. This is a great question. What have you done for God this week that an unsaved man couldn't have done? What did you do for God this week that an unsaved atheist couldn't have accomplished? What did God use you to do this week that was absolutely impossible other than God doing it for you? Supernatural lifestyle. These things will automatically separate you from the natural to the supernatural.

IX. Personal Reflection and Call to Action

You know, when I was 14 years old, I just started junior high. I'll never forget. The coach put a thing up on all those things for basketball tryouts. I was 14 years old. All the guys were signing up for basketball. Well, I put my name on the list. Tryouts started Monday morning. I had me, we got my mind to buy me a new pair of trunks and a basketball looking shirt, and have my own basketball. I was out there, you're going to love this, Josh. I'm out there, you know. So we get to the thing and all the guys are down there shooting. I'm dribbling around. I'm hot dogging everything, you know. This coach was a typical back in the 60s coach, 50s. He used to stand over there, I mean, just shortcut haircut, and just looked like he'd just come out of Paris Island. He's sitting over there, working out of his mouth. He's just watching the whole thing. I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, he's seeing me. He's seeing my moves, man." I'm hot dogging around over here, you know, and around over here. I never shot the ball because I couldn't hit anything. I just thought I'd show him my dribble dazzle, you know.

Finally, he would stand around there and he said, blows the whistle, he blew the whistle, he says, "Line 'em up." And we lined up. He says, "Alexander, come here." I'm thinking, "Oh, he saw my move, man." Must've been 60 guys there. Called me up front, everybody, stand in front. You know, they did this back in them days. Now they'd have to take you to a therapist, you know. He took the whistle out of his mouth and he says, "Alexander, let me ask you a question." I said, "Yeah, coach." I thought he wanted me to pick out some guys on the team, you know. In front of everybody. He said, "Don't you ever get tired of just being a jerk?" And I thought to myself, I looked at him and I said, "Yeah, I do, coach." That was the end of my basketball career.

I don't remember that coach's name. But that was one of the greatest reality checks that anybody ever gave me in my life. To this day, I still ask myself that question in one form or another. That coach, who's probably long dead by now, has no idea how he helped me that day because he forced me to deal with who I really was. In front of everybody. I had to come to the reality, "Yeah, I am a jerk." And I didn't like being a jerk. From that point on, in my young life, I never forgot what he told me.

Let me ask you a question. An honest question, let me ask you a question. Every saved man and woman in this room this morning, hearing my voice, let me ask you a question. You're crying about it, it was okay. I didn't, you called me a jerk. It's all right, I know you're feeling sorry for me. Let me tell you what so and so called me back here. You want to really cry? Let me ask you a question. Don't you ever get tired of God not using you? I mean, come on, you're saved, the

Holy Spirit of God's inside you. Don't you ever get tired of God not using you? Don't you ever just want God to put you in some position where you could be used? Don't you get tired of the confusion in your life? The years roll on, the games continue, the problems compound, your kids get older, 14, 15, and 16, and you can't hide it anymore?

I mean, you do remember what I said when we were doing child training classes, a parent came to me one time and said, "My kids are really causing problems in my home, preacher. I don't know what to do." I said, "Well, the first thing we have to do is get it straight. Kids don't cause problems in the home. Kids just reveal the problems that are already there." They just get to the point now you can't hide it no more. You can sit on it for a while.

Some of God's people remind me of a story I read a while back about a man who died in poverty in his home. Nobody had seen him for three or four weeks. He lived in an old ramshackle place. When they finally kicked down the door, the sheriff went in and they found that he had actually died and they think he starved to death. Nothing to eat in the house. House was a shambles. When they started to tear down the house, you know what they found? They found that he had a rat hole \$2 million in the walls of the house. He had \$2 million around in his house and yet he died in poverty in a wrecked down place and he starved to death. Translation: so many are God's people today. You're sitting on a million dollars. And yet you refuse to let it change your life and you're going to die in the shallow and the poverty of this old world spiritually bankrupt.

At 14 years of age, my reality check, I think about it every day. You know what? That grade school, or was that grade school elementary, they tore it down last year. It was built in 1904. Every time I used to go home and stay with my mom, or visit my mom, she lives right across the street from it. I used to walk around and go where I used to play, and I never forgot a day in my life. In fact, when they tore it down, my sister went there and all the people that went to school there, thousands. We all, and she bought me a brick, you know, sent it to me in the mail. I never want to forget that day when that coach had the courage and the guts to ask me probably one of the single greatest questions that anybody ever asked me if I was tired of being a jerk. You see, my reality, everybody knew I was a jerk, except me. The reality is everybody sees the problems. You can't hide problems in your life. You just can't. You can't hide your indifference. You're bubbly for a long time and you love God, and then, you know, you come to the place where you miss a Sunday and somebody says, "We missed you," "Yeah, I wasn't there." You can't hide from it. The reality is we are what we are.

Almost a week doesn't go by that I don't sit down with some family, and not in our church, I'm getting them from all over the place. Let me say this while I'm thinking about it. Tuesday night at six o'clock, I have probably the most sensitive counseling scenario that I could ever find myself in. God has given us an opportunity to really make an impact in a family's life. They lost their daughter in a tragic car wreck. They're not getting any help from anywhere, and now all the doubts and the fears, and their boy who comes to our church has said, "Mom, you need to come and talk to my pastor. He'll help you. He helped me." I got a chance with a whole family coming over Tuesday night to sit down and let me walk them through the Bible, help them deal with it. I can't do that by myself. This is what I'm talking about. I need your help. I don't need you there, but I need you on your knees at six o'clock Tuesday night remembering me in prayer because this

is an incredible opportunity and it's something that I take very seriously and it's a situation that's going to, the outcome is going to be eternal.

But you know what, there almost isn't a week goes by that I don't sit down with somebody from some other church or somebody sends them over to me, that their daughter's pregnant, the boy got somebody pregnant, the wife and the husband are splitting up. Some kind of issue that I look at it when I hear the scenario and I hear the situation and I hear it going on. I think to myself, you know what, this situation never had to get to where it's at today. It never did. You had a pastor, you had a church, you had a structure. If you didn't have a pastor in a church that would do it then you get out and find somewhere you can. Get the help that you need before the problem gets so climatic and so out of control that you cannot regain control of it. That's the situation we find ourselves in today.

I'm telling you, this whole thing is about you getting to the next level in your life. This whole thing is you, if you're saved, understanding what God wants to do in your life, submitting yourself to it and then systematically moving up that little circle, getting over every little obstacle, moving up till you come to the point where God's will in your life, God's plan in your life and God's work in your life. Through this work here, through our one-on-one together in the Bible, through the things that we do, God shows you through this work, my work, our work, a work that you do for me and together God molds that thing into focus that you say, "You know what, I understand now. I see what the ministry is. I see how to deal with people. I see what God wants me to do." And you know what, Bob? "I ain't ever going back. There ain't nothing in this world that could entice me. There is nothing that's going to take the precedent in my life over learning my Bible and being the man or the woman God wants me to be." That's what it takes. When you get to that point in your life, just like Abraham, who was Abram, high father, had everything in the world, came to the point where he's Abraham, the father of many nations. God changed his name because Abraham had put the process of life for God to change your life. That's where we're at. That's where we're at.

Every head bowed and every eye closed. Father.