

Romans 8. I have been so looking forward to this particular message or this particular passage that I want to preach on ever since I knew I was going to do Romans 8. It is without a doubt, probably to me anyhow, the most single passage in the Bible that just continually motivates me. I was so excited about getting it to the point, and then when I started to put it all out, I thought to myself, "How in the world do I ever preach this?" As I stand before you this morning, I have to confess to you, I still do not know how to preach it, but we are going to let the Lord do the best He can with me this morning on it.

I. The Spirit of Adoption and Avoiding Deception

Remember last week in Romans 8:15-16, we saw a great truth. I showed you one of the most practical layouts in the Word of God of how to keep from being deceived. It is no secret to anybody in this room, if you are saved, that you understand that the goal of the devil is to deceive you. He deceives unsaved people; he deceives saved people. His deception is not just limited to certain people. Anybody can be deceived.

We talked about last week how to keep from being deceived. We defined the concept, one of the greatest practical layouts that you will ever get in your life, of what it means when the Bible talks about having the witness of the Spirit of God. We talked about how to try the Spirit to see if they be of God or not.

If you are ever going to meaningfully do anything for God, and I think that many of you probably will, this is absolutely essential. Once the devil knows that he can never get your soul in hell, once he realizes that once you have gotten saved, you have passed from death into life, from darkness to life, when he realizes that, he knows he will never get your soul in hell again. But what he does realize is that he will be so glad to let you go to heaven, as long as you do not influence anybody else in your life, and you just stay saved but never influence and talk to anybody else or ever get on fire for God and do what God wants you to do. In other words, his main goal is going to be to deceive us.

In section two of Romans chapter 8, remember we broke Romans 8 down into four complete sections so we could break it down. This chapter, or this particular Romans 8 that we are looking at, this section is what I call a building block section. The Bible has a number of them. What I mean by that is this: each part stands alone and teaches a great truth. But also, these great truths will build itself into a central truth or the next truth to form a complete idea. In other words, they stand alone and teach us a great principle, but when you put them together, it crystallizes a complete idea or a concept that Romans chapter 8 is trying to get across.

We saw, remember last week in Romans 8:15, and I am just going to regroup here for a few moments for the new folks that maybe were not here last week or maybe you missed last week, but also we have to see this to move in where we are going today. We looked at Romans 8:15 that the Bible says we saw that we have not received the spirit of bondage, but we received the spirit of adoption that put us into God's family. We also learned that when we got saved, when

this spiritual adoption took place that was not by the spirit of the world or the spirit of bondage, it set us free from the bondage we were under as unsaved people of the world.

Romans 8:16 then says because of that, we now have the witness of the Spirit of God in our life. We explained that. This is how you keep from being deceived. It is very important that you understand the aspect of why you should not be deceived so you can understand what I am going to say to you today because the two really go together.

We now completely understand that when you got saved, you got the Holy Spirit of God living inside you. We also know that the Holy Spirit of God is the author of the Bible. He wrote the Bible to you and to me by the Spirit of God, and that same Spirit of God lives inside you today if you are saved.

The way that you keep from being deceived and the reason why you are not under bondage anymore is because the same Spirit that lives in you is the same Spirit that wrote the book. So what He does is He takes the principles in the book and then bears witness with your spirit and His Spirit that is inside you that something is real, something is not, something is right, something is wrong.

What He has simply done is this, folks: God has something that He wants you and I to accomplish in our lives. Obviously, the devil wants to stop us. There is only one way the devil can stop you if you are saved. He cannot get you to lose your salvation. He cannot take back from you what God has given you. The only way the devil can stop you and me from being and doing and accomplishing what God wants us to accomplish is by deceiving us. That is why God gave us a process once we got saved. He said, "We are not under bondage." The Spirit that saved us delivered us from the spirit of the world that put us in bondage, and now you and I, neither were saved, we have the witness of the Spirit of God that we never have to be deceived with anything in life because we have the Spirit of the Book, the Spirit of God in me, and the principles that balance it all out. There is no reason, absolutely no reason, for a child of God to be deceived and not accomplish what God wants to accomplish in our lives unless we allow that deception to take place that puts us back under bondage.

Now today we are going to look at Romans 8:17-18. I want to begin reading in Romans 8:15. So go to Romans chapter 8, pick it up in verse 15, and here is what we have here. Here is what you want to see.

Romans 8:15-18

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

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

We have looked at both of these verses, and we just explained them again so you get a context of where we are at today. Now here it comes, 17 and 18, wow.

Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus, and we love you so much. Thank you for all that you do for us. Thank you for all that you have given us. Thank you for each one here today. Thank you for the Bible that you provided for us, for this church that you have just worked through in your own timing, Lord, and brought to us where we are at today. Lord, I thank you for all that you have given us, for everything that you have accomplished here. I thank you for the men and the women that you made, Lord, really the backbone of this church, that we might today come and leave here today a little better in understanding of all that you have for us. Help us today, Lord, help me today. This is a difficult message for me to preach because I do not know how to preach this. I do not know how to convey. This is not something that I can just open up like another verse and just lay it out. This thing is so in my heart, and it just seems like it is impossible to convey what I see in here in my own heart that you have given in this verse to help these people better understand it. But Lord, I will do the best I can. Forgive me where I failed you, Lord, and by the Spirit of God, give me the power, the wisdom, and the discernment to say what needs to be said today in a way that is workable, Father, to your Spirit and permissive, Lord, to your will. We will thank you for all you do now. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

II. The Importance of Focus

Remember Thursday night when we did New Year's Eve, and we talked about the Song of Solomon? I told you that the Song of Solomon, without a doubt, was the most intimate book in the Bible for you and for me. The equivalent of that book in the New Testament would be the book of Ephesians. But I showed you how that the book of Song of Solomon does many things. Yes, it shows you and I how to have the right relationship with Christ. It is a unique book because it shows me how Christ looks at me. It is a unique book because it then shows me how I am to look back at Christ. It is an incredible book, absolutely incredible.

One of the other things that it does, and it does so many things, I told you that it is the book that no matter what you go through in life and what you struggle with—and we all go through things in life, and we all struggle with them—but whatever you go through in life, whatever you deal with in life, whatever you have to put up with in life, the book of Song of Solomon, I guess probably if one of the greatest things that it does, is that it always keeps you focused on what God has called you to do and what God wants you to do.

I think that probably in a child of God's life, the greatest single thing that is really relative to where that Christian really does what he needs to do or she needs to do in her life is that simple little word: focus.

To me, the job of a pastor is very simple. My job as a pastor, in my own mind anyhow, is simply this: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and everything that we do, trying to keep us focused as a church. There are so many things that get us off focus. There are so many things that will come

into our life, come into this church, come into your world, my world, that will absolutely keep us off focus.

I believe the job of a pastor, when he figures out what is going on, if he ever does, is that when he is in charge of a church and he is responsible for that body of believers, his job basically is one-fold. I believe that everything else will fall in line and take care of itself if he can do one thing and do it well, and that is to keep the church focused in the midst of the troubling times that we are in. Let us face it, there is so much today to get us off focus. We live in the most perilous times that we could ever want, and it is not going to get any better.

I mean, I am happy that Israel is going to take over the world here in the next couple of days. I am happy about that. But we also know that in our own lives, in our own worlds, in our own families, in our own work environments, or whatever we do, just the daily issues of life, we also know that there are a lot of things we have to struggle with and a lot of things that will try to knock us off focus.

I have found in my own life, and basically that is what this is going to be today, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot preach this. All I can do is try to convey to you what this verse means to me. Maybe through that, some way, some shape, some form, you will have a better understanding of how to apply it into your own life. Because grasping the context, grasping the concept of the area that the number one thing in our life, not only as a church but as individuals, is keeping our focus, is one of the most pressing issues that we have today.

I was talking to a young lady last week. In fact, I was talking to another young lady last night. The first young lady I was talking to, we were talking about the ministry. She and her husband worked with me and helped me. We were talking about some of the people that they are working with and some of the people that they have worked with. Many times, people that work with me in ministry with people, one of the greatest tools is as you work with them and things come up that you do not understand how to deal with, you bring it to me, I help you, and I teach you how you can teach them, and it is just a great learning process.

I was talking to her for quite a while. She was telling me and laying out for me where they were at, what they were doing with this couple and these people, and how they were laying it all out. She said to me, "Sometimes it gets overwhelming. Sometimes just really dealing with people and their problems and the things that they go through, it can be exasperating." That is a true statement.

I said to her this, "I know that is true, but let me tell you this. I have never told you this before, but I have watched you now for a couple of years. I want to tell you, there is something about you and your husband," and I told this to another gal last night, "there is something about that that you have that I think in ministry is probably the rarest quality that you can find." I think that it is, and I do not know how to teach it into anybody. I wish I could. I wish I could just, I wish I could have this formulated in a bottle someplace or synthesize it down to pills and just give it to people. But I do not know how to do it. I have never found an applicable way to teach it. Maybe it cannot be taught. Maybe it has to come through a person understanding what I am talking about today.

But I said, "I watch you guys. You have families like everybody else. You have kids. You are involved in ministry in this church, yet your kids have things at school. You both work. It is not like you sit around all day and do not have anything to do. Your life is as busy in an outward fashion with all that you do out there as anybody I know." I said, "You have family, and you do things with your family, and you have your own kids. You have your jobs. You have your own social things that you do. You have friends you do things with."

I said, "But in the midst of that, I have watched this: in the midst of this, with all that you have going on, and you work with people, and you do things in the ministry, with all this going on, the thing that I think that is, and you guys are really coming along well with the Bible, but I said, even better than that, the thing that I think stands out," and I said, "I have other people in the church that I wish I had more, but I have a couple of other people in the church that really fall into the same line. No matter what happens, no matter what you do, no matter how involved you get, no matter what goes on in the world, you never seem to lose your focus of what is really important in life and what you are trying to do."

Everybody has, you are no better off or worse than anybody else. You have kids, you have family, you have things you have to adjust, you have schedules you have to work around. But it is the greatest commodity that I can find in an individual that no matter what goes on in our world, no matter what happens, no matter what we have to balance out, that at the end of the day, you are focused on what the reality is of what your real purpose here is on life. That is a rare thing, folks. That is a rare thing. That is worth a hundred million dollars in gold bullion to the Judemacy to Christ. I do not find many people have that today.

The reason why is because the devil knows as well as I do, and as well as most of you do, that if he can knock you off your game... You want to make a good bet on the Super Bowl and really get the thing to the place where you can win a lot of money? Well, whenever you do, you raise your head. Yes. Okay. Okay. Then I am going to talk to you that nobody else cared, but you do. I want to talk to you. Here is what you do. Find out who is going to win. Okay. And when they are in a locker room coming out to the deal to play the game, find a quarterback, find a guy who handles the snaps for the field goals, and find a kicker, and just tell them—this is a dirty trick, but this is what you do—just tell them. Tell one, "Your wife just left you. She left you for somebody else." Tell the other one, "We just got news. Your mother just died." Tell the other one, "Well, he is a kicker. You can just both tell him anything and screw his day up."

If you give them bad news, there is tragic news in their life, even though it is not true, and then they go out to play the game, are they going to be at the top of their game? You think if you found out before it... Well, this is a stupid thing. Some of you would say, "Absolutely." If you would say, think somebody would tell you your wife just left you before the game started. Like I said, some of you would say, "Hey, praise the Lord. I am out of here." But in normal relationships, you think that when you have to focus on that game, that you have to focus on this, that you have to be thinking the plays ahead and focus, you think that is where your mind is going to be?

To me, the hardest job in a football game, I would think, you are talking about a pressure job, it is that guy that stands down there and catches a snap and has to get it down. I would have every finger broken on my hands if that was my job. I might get the ball and get it down, but I am so stupid, I would hold the ball, put my hand back here. He kicked me right in the back of my hand. Or I would get my finger down here. He would break my finger. I think the most pressure job in the world in a football game is to be that guy, especially if you are going to win the game with this, that you have to be exact, that you have to catch, you only have a second, and there are 10 other guys out there that want to kill you. You have to catch the ball, get it down, get it wrangled, get it right, get out of the way, and let that guy kick. To me, that is the toughest thing in the world.

Would you like to try to do that under the pressure that they are under? Well, just add to that by saying, right before he gets it, "Your mom just died." Bad news. I am going to wait until you are after the game, but that would not be fair. I guarantee you, drop the ball, throw the ball, he will get him off his game. That is what the devil does to you and me. He allows the circumstances in our world, and many times it is not true to the degree that those things are not true, but nevertheless, he knows how to get us off focus. When you are off focus, you are not focused. Those are the things that he does.

How do you get around that? I told this gal, "It is amazing to me. It is amazing to me with all that you have got to do, and all that you balance in your life, yet how focused you seem to always be, you and your husband, that whatever needs to be done, everything is balanced by the time you get there. I do not understand it. It is an incredible thing. It is a rare quality to find in people's lives today."

III. The Four P's of Focus

Now focus to me, and keeping your focus to me, I find in my life, and I have to break every day now very simple. I have given this to you one time before, maybe not everybody, maybe we talked about a selective group when we were dealing with leadership or something, but I talked about defining your focus is basically four real basic, simple concepts. They all start with P, which I love because it is easy for me to remember. I call them the four P's.

1. Perspective
2. Purpose
3. Passion
4. Patience

Very quickly, I want to define each of these, and this is going to build into where we are going here. Because if you want to keep your focus, these are the four basic, simple rudiments that you have to put into your world and put into your life.

The first one is perspective. You know what that is? Very simply and basic, and these are not complicated. It is God's standpoint. It is looking past the smoke and the mirrors of life and the games of life, and really just dealing and looking at from God's standpoint the reality of life.

The second one is purpose. You know what purpose is? Purpose comes from perspective. Once you understand that you see something and get a perspective, then purpose is the action of that perception. Purpose is what you do. It is why you are here today. It is what is the point of all this if there is no purpose to it.

The third one is passion. Passion to me is really an incredible key because passion is what really drives you and me. It is the difference between the average Christian and a Christian that stays focused. To me, passion defines a person. I have watched people now for almost 40 years. I have watched them in every scenario. I have seen really good Christians, really bad Christians. I have seen Christians in the middle. I have seen people in every shape and form. I have to tell you, after that much exposure with people, I can honestly say that passion is what defines you and me.

I heard a preacher say, and I wished I would have thought of this. It is so basic, but it is absolutely profound. I heard a preacher say this a number of years ago, "If you want to really know what a man or a woman is made of, if you really want to get an insight into their character of who they are, it is not hard. Just look at two things." It is the most simplest, but it is the most profound thing. He said, "Just look at one, what makes them really angry, and two, what makes them really happy." I thought to myself, that is one of the most profound things because that speaks to where our passion is.

As a child of God, we have to hate sin. But in many, many cases, Christians, they enjoy sin. In other words, it is just the reverse process of where they are at. Passion is what defines you. Passion is what really defines any person. If there was one phrase that when people saw you or your name came up, and it is true really, whether you know it or not, when people hear your name that know you, the way they identify, and it is just part of being a human, they identify with something about you that really speaks to your passion. They really do.

In your mind, in my mind, if people had to sum you and I up in one phrase that defines what you really are and what your passion really is, I wonder what it would be. I wonder if somebody heard the name Bob Alexander, would they think the word faithful, or would they think the word unfaithful? When they heard my name, Bob Alexander, would they think the word honest, or would they think the word dishonest? When they heard your name, would they think of the Bible? Would they think of people because you are a people person? Would they think unreliable? Would they think reliable? Would they think well-disciplined? Would they think dysfunctional? Would they think undisciplined? Would they think, "Well, that bad," when they say your name, would they say, "That is a man of his word," or would they say, "Boy, you asked him to do something, he puts it off for 25 years, procrastination"?

Whether we like it or not, whether we believe it or not, or whether we are aware of it or not, because we may have deceived ourselves, I will tell you something. When my name is heard and your name is heard, there is something associated with that. That most gently, ladies and gentlemen, will be your passion. What really drives you.

The fourth one is patience. Patience is the ability to see God's timing in everything. It is called long-suffering in the Bible. Of course, that is where we need to get those four things: perspective,

purpose, passion, and patience. Those are the four key ingredients to never losing your focus if you understand how to put those things into your life.

Now Romans 8:17 says this: "And if children, then heirs." "And if children" is through the first adoption we saw in Romans 8:15-16. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." That was your second adoption, you see.

As I said, I do not know how to preach this today. I have never had a problem preaching anything in my life, but I feel such an injustice of trying to preach something like this with all of what it has. I struggled with this thing all week. I tell you guys all the time, the best witness in the world, the best witness you can have when you want to get something across about God, it is not to sit down and tell somebody what God will do for them, but in reality, sit down and tell them what God has done for you. Anybody can sit down and say, "God will do this for you." Very few people can sit down and relate through the situation of the person then and say, "Let me show you what God has done for me." I think that is the approach I want to take today. I want to put a context to this, and I really do not know how else to explain it.

Zach was asking me about one of the books he was reading back here about a famous preacher's life and his journeys and all that God did with him. It is a great book, and it shows all the ins and outs of that, and he read it, and he came up to me and he said, "I cannot wait to read your book." Well, my book will be a lot more boring than his, I guarantee you. But that is basically what I want to talk to you about today. The only way I know how to convey to you these four things about perspective, about purpose, about passion, and about patience is to show you where I have come from and how these verses have been there in my life to keep me on focus. Not that I have always been on focus, not that I would even pretend to tell you that, but I am telling you, that is the only way to know how to do it.

IV. God's Purpose and the Problem of Depression

Early in my life, when I had just gotten saved, I asked the same question that probably most of you asked. There is really no difference between me and you. I know, I know, I am up here preaching, and I solve everybody's problems, and I teach the Bible on Thursday night, and any question when I ask about the Bible, yeah, I know. But get past that facade. At the end of the day, the bottom line is that I am no different than you are. Whatever I have, wherever I am at in my life, good or bad, it did not come easy to me. I am, many of you, if not most of you, are smarter than I am when it comes to just things in life. I mean, I was not very good in school. I do not want to tell you. Now, if you are here and you are a young teenager and you are an elbow on your mom right now because you just got five F's on your report card, that is not a role model for you to follow. Not a role model for you to follow, so do not come home with F's.

But anyway, I remember asking myself, "There must be more to life than this." There has to be more to life than being like a little rat in a cage that just, like those little hamsters that just run the wheel and go all day long, or you are in there and you are going through the maze, and there is

cheese at the end, and for us the cheese is going to heaven. There has got to be more than life. There has got to be more purpose to it.

I have found over the years that I have dealt with many people with many kinds of problems. I do not think I have dealt with a new problem for probably 10, 15 years. But I did find this out: people, whether they are saved or whether they are lost, they only have problems for two reasons. There is never a third. Whether they are saved or whether they are lost, they will have issues in their life because of one of two reasons. It is a basic counseling principle that you have in the back of your head that whenever you begin to work with somebody, you know that one or the other, this is what you are dealing with. It may take a week, a month, six months, a year to figure out which one it is, but I guarantee you it will never be a third one. It will be one thing or it will be this.

This is the type of year, depression I guess probably, and anxiety and all that stuff that comes with it. I see so many people caught up in that today. I see so many people that are just, they are depressed. When you get depressed, you are asking the question, and you do not have the answers, "What is life all about?" A depressed person is someone, no matter what age they are, and it is tragic when they are really young. But when you get into your 20s and your 30s and your 40s and the 50s, we used to call it in my day going up midlife crisis. We do not have midlife crisis anymore because the crisis has come way before you get to midlife today. In my day, it was midlife. You got to midlife, and then you had breakdown. But now today, the breakdown is coming in 12, 14, 20. Midlife crisis, you never hear it anymore.

But in my day, men and women came up, and they had midlife crisis. That is where a guy would leave his wife. They have been married 35 years, and he is 45 or 50. So now he goes out and finds a 20-year-old, and he goes back to his childhood. He gets a sports car, and he tries to look like he is 20 again, and he is not. He makes an absolute fool out of his problem.

Why is that? I will tell you why. Why do people get depressed? If you are a saved person and you are here this morning and you are depressed, you can leave your \$200 check in the thing out there. The doctor is now in. Let me tell you why you get depressed. You are depressed because of the fact that you are God's creation. You may not be saved. You are not even God's child, but you are God's creation, and God created you with a purpose in mind. You will never be happy. You will never be happy. You will never be happy as God's creation until you figure out what that is.

What you have done is you have been deceived. Very early on, the devil deceived you when you were in high school, when you took your first marijuana cigarette or you took your first beer or you went to your first party or you had your first sexual encounter. The world told you when the devil deceives you that that was going to fulfill you in life. That is what a real adult does. That is what a real man does. That is what a real woman does. You fell right into it. You fell right into it.

Then when you got in there and you started to dope and you started to booze and you started a cigarette and you started the language and everything that goes wrong with you, you come to the realization that that did not satisfy you either. So then you got a double deception because now the world and the devil told you, "Oh, well, you have to move from marijuana to crack cocaine.

You have to go from this to heroin. You have to go from beer." The bigger the party, the more buzz, the deception is, the more you will be satisfied.

You know why you are depressed right now? If you are an unsaved person and your life is a cesspool in a dead-end street, I will tell you what. Maybe you are 20, maybe you are 30. I do not know. But I will tell you this: the reason why depression has come into your life is because of the fact that you are looking for something that satisfies. The only thing that can satisfy you is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the only thing that will satisfy you.

Now you have been deceived because you have been deceived into believing that all the other stuff that you get into will deceive you. In reality, the deception is those things that will not fulfill you; they will only kill you. They will only take from you whatever joy life has for you. They will take from you everything and destroy everything in your life and leave you busted and broke that if you make it to 50, if you make it through 60, if you make it, you will be absolutely empty, absolutely busted, absolutely broken. When you cannot boogie anymore, nobody is going to even look at you a second time.

The problem is, you have been deceived. You have been looking all your life for something that will satisfy you because deep down inside, God created you to fulfill something for Him, and until you plug it in and they get the satisfaction that your sins are forgiven and you got something you can do with your life, you are not going anywhere. Your deception will carry on and carry on and carry on. By the time you get to the place, I have to tell you this, there comes a point in your life where that process becomes irreversible. You cannot turn it around. It has got you. You do not have it. You are completely out of control.

This is why many of you who work with me have worked with people that were on alcohol, they were on drugs, and they come for a while, and they hang out for a while, and they try to get it for a while, but they never get it. You know why? Because the deception has rooted down too deep. They have got complete control of where they are at, and they are not changing anything.

So an unsaved person gets depressed because of the fact the reality is beginning to set in. They are going to spend an eternity turning a lake of fire. What a party that will be. Everything you thought this world had to offer that would make you feel good, give you what you wanted. Some of you, it was a career to make more money. You thought if you bought more things, you would feel better about yourself. Some of you, it was a big house. You thought if you built a big house and laid it out the way you wanted it, "I got everything." And then you walked through that big house, you walked through that whole thing, and you just look at it and you say to yourself, "What is all this worth?"

I was over at a guy's place a couple of weeks ago, a friend of mine, an unsaved guy. He just built a house. This house had to cost \$2 million. It is 6,000 square feet. That is a big house. I do not know how big 6,000 square feet is, but I know my house is only 20 square feet, so it is a lot bigger than mine. This guy is lost. The hard, and I was going over because we are collectors. We collect mutual World War II memorabilia, and he has got a way over collection. He is a nice guy, but he is lost. He wants nothing to do with God.

I walked through there, and it is the first time I have been to his place, and he wants to show me the hardest thing for me to do. Honest to God, I can fake a lot of things. I have been faking being a preacher for 30 years, and I have got away with it. I can fake a lot. I cannot fake getting excited about stuff when I think this is the dumbest thing in the world. He has got to walk me through. I said to myself, "I wish Bubba was here." Bubba used to have saw this whole floor was tiled. It looked like the Taj Mahal. Walk in tiki wood stuff. Walk me through every room. There were more rooms in this place than I... I am glad he was with me. I would have never got out for two weeks trying to find my way out. He shows me every bathroom. They had 12 bathrooms in his house. Now, unless you got a real weak kidney problem and you got to always be near a bathroom, what in the world do you need 12 bathrooms for? I do not know about you. I only use one at a time.

I thought to myself when I left and I drove out of that big spiraling driveway to work this way down past this private lake, "That is as close to heaven as that guy will ever get." Because in that house, there is everything that he thinks is going to make them happy. Yet he is one of the most miserable guys that you ever met in your life. He is never happy about anything.

Now you take a saved person. You know why you get depressed? I will tell you why. You and I get depressed because once you got saved, God definitely has a plan for your life. The problem is when you lose your focus, you do the same thing the unsaved person does. You think things are going to fit your problem. You think relationships are going to fix this. You think doing all this is going to do this. You think getting all this and being here and going that. Many times that is why you get deceived and go back to the world. You try to have a foot in both worlds, you see. That does not work either.

The reason why a man or a woman gets depressed, whether they are saved or whether they are lost, is because they have never figured out that you are God's creation. If you are saved, you are God's child. You will never be fulfilled as God's child. Remember I told you a couple of weeks ago, the mark of a successful man or a woman as a saved person is simply somebody who finds what God wants them to do with their life and then does it.

That unsaved man over there, in his big million-dollar home with all he has got with his 6,000 square feet and his 48 bathrooms, he had an outside deck that was aerial up there, and on the outside deck, he had two fireplaces. Yet I can tell you right now, I know men and women that are saved, love God, that are on the mission field, that are living in bamboo huts that are happier than he is. You know why? Because then in the butt what we have, folks, that is why you get depressed. That is why I get depressed. The hardest thing in the world is keeping our focus.

I remember as a young man I asked myself, "There must be more to life than this." God began to work in my own life, and God began to deal with me. One of the first verses He gave me is found in Ephesians chapter 2. As a young man, I was much like many of you, and I wanted to do what God wanted me to do. I did not have any idea what that was, but I knew that God had something that He wanted me to accomplish, and I so desperately wanted to do it. I would walk around and I would see people who had a better handle on the Bible than I did, people who were involved in ministry and how happy they were, how God would use them. Here I am, somebody

that just got into it and just got saved and just got to the point in my life, and I am saying to myself, "I really want that. But how do you get that? There has got to be more to this. There has got to be more than just going to work every day and coming home. There has got to be more than just having kids and raising kids. There has got to be more than just fixing the house and getting what you want and this or that and the car breaks down or this or this. You have got to paint the house. My God, there has got to be more to life than just that."

God gave me this verse. When I began, this verse started it all for me. Because this verse, when God gave me, began to answer this question for me that led me to where I am at today in my own personal relationship with God. I say this message has to be about me because I cannot speak for you. I cannot. I can only testify to me.

Ephesians 2:5-7

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

That verse began to show me that God had a purpose. That verse began to open up the door that God not only had a purpose, that God had a plan. But when I began to read that and see what God had did, I began to see God's passion for what He wanted. I told God, "God, that is a great verse. That shows me you got a purpose. That shows me you got a plan. That shows me you got passion about it. But Lord, what I need is your perspective on it."

V. God's Three-Fold Plan

Even very long after that, I went to a Thursday night Bible study just like we have here. I have told you this before. I went there for five and a half, maybe six years. I do not think I ever asked a question in six years I was there. Now I did not say that so you will not ask any questions because if you do not ask the question, we go home early. But I wanted to learn. Here was my goal. I knew nothing, so I felt like I could learn from everybody else. My goal was this: I went there on Thursday night just like our night, and I sat down there, and every question somebody asked, I detailed out. We did not have tapes back then. This was right after George Washington crossed the Delaware. They did not have electronic stuff like we got today. Your little iPods and your E-Pods and your blueberries and all that stuff that go along. They did not have any of that stuff. But I had to do it by hand, and I sat down there, and I wrote this thing down, and I put this thing down. My goal was this: by next Thursday night when I went back to that Bible study, if somebody would have asked the same question, I could have raised my hand and stood up and taught it. I wanted to learn.

One night somebody asked a question, and it was exactly what I needed after God gave me Ephesians. I do not remember what the question was exactly, but I do remember what the answers were, and I can still see old Mel Shabbat up there with his shirt sleeves rolled up with

his big old ugly tattoos that he got in the Marine Corps on his thing up there, telling out, raving back and forth, talking about it. He taught that night. I came away with a great piece of the puzzle. God has a three-fold plan. I remember that night like it was last week.

The first thing that old boy said, he says, "God has three plans. If you are ever going to understand what God wants to do with you, you have to understand these three plans because these three plans are like God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit." Remember the other night at New Year's Eve when I showed you how that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, they were all the same. They were all one, but they had three different workings. That is what these plans are. He went through it very briefly, but it was enough to whet my appetite.

The first thing he says that, ladies and gentlemen, God has a plan for the universe, and he gave Isaiah 9:6-7. At that time of life, Isaiah 9:6-7 might as well be on the backside of the moon as far as me understanding it. But I wrote it down.

Then he says, "Now the second part of that plan, the second plan, is God has a plan for the earth," and he gave me Isaiah 45:18 that night.

Then the third plan that God has, or the third part of the plan, is that God has a plan for your life. Here is what he said, "Now you have to learn those three because God has a plan for your life. God has a plan for the earth. If you have not figured it out yet, you live on planet Earth. So you have to figure out God's plan for your life. You have to figure out what God created the earth."

If you have not figured it out one step further, this earth is in the universe. So they are all separate, but they are all connected. God has a plan for your life on Earth that is going to run right into the second heaven, into the universe. Boy, I got that thing. I went home. My mind. That one took me about three weeks to get down.

He gave me Isaiah 9:6-7. What a tremendous passage that opened up that door. I later connected it with Revelation 22 and Isaiah 66 and 20 other passages. I came away at a time in my life at some point that I began to grasp that God, there is more to all this. In my life, God had me, an infinite nobody, that the God of the universe had a plan for me in this universe.

Then I read Isaiah 45:18. I began to understand God's plan for the earth. In fact, it was not just Isaiah 45:18; it was all of Isaiah chapter 45. Then I fell into Ezekiel 42 and Ezekiel 48. Then I got into the book of Revelation, and I saw Revelation 21 and 22, and I realized that God now had a plan for the earth, and that earth is in the universe. Then someplace along the line, I grabbed that third concept, and I saw that God had a plan for my life. That plan is going to wind up someday in the universe on this earth with me being a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

Now I do not want to get ahead of myself because I am doing really good. But let me ask you a question. What on Earth? What do you have going right now? What do you have in your life right now? What are you in the process of doing right now that is better than that? Those are questions I had to ask myself. I am not preaching this to you. I am telling you where I came from.

God gave me John 14:12. He gave me Romans 12:1-2. He gave me John 16 that I gave to you that night at New Year's Eve about the seven Holy Spirit of God, seven things that He does, His work. I began to realize when I saw that God had a plan.

VI. The Nature of Ministry and Commitment

Now let me just come back forward here. Just let me fast forward just a second. To me personally, I am not speaking to you. I am not even preaching to you. I am telling you where I am coming from. To me personally, there is no greater, higher, noble calling than to be in the ministry. Now I am not talking about pastoring. Pastoring is an office. Though I believe that there is no higher office in this world or the universe or in my life or on planet Earth than the office of a pastor.

You say, "What do you mean by the president?" The president's office of the presidency cannot compare with the office of a pastor. The president can do a lot of things, but he does not have the ability to change somebody's eternal destiny. He may be able to stop war, start wars, feed people, give out reproducing checks, give out food and all kinds of things, but he cannot change the destiny spiritually in eternity with anything he touches. No, no, no, there is a higher office than that, and it is the office of being a pastor. But there is no nobler calling to me than the ministry. Nothing at all. Nothing of greater value. Nothing that can ever compare with it. That a man that gets God's perspective, then he gets God's purpose, then he gets God's passion. He understands he has to have patience. It does not come overnight, and off he goes.

My life as a person, I am really not very complicated to figure out. Sometimes I can fake being complicated when I need to in a situation to pull myself off to somebody trying to whack me. But in everyday life, you that know me, I am not a very complicated person. I am really just like you. The only thing different about me than maybe some of you, the only thing different about me than most Christians you will find, is just one little thing, and it is not a big thing. I got saved in 1972. 1972, I gave my life to Christ, and I never got over it. I never got over it.

In my mind, with all the people I have worked with, you think I would have it all worked out, would not you? You think after all these years again with people and problems that I could answer every day. One thing I do not understand, and there is no reflection on anybody here, I am talking about me. But one thing I do not understand dealing with God's people all my life: I do not understand how a person gets saved and then gets over it. How do you have a transforming day in your life that alters your eternity? That is now a time when your focus is completely changed, and you get God's perspective. You get God's purpose. You get God's passion, and then you get God's patience. How in the world do you come to that point in your life and lose what you had?

For the life, I can want me to explain eternity to you. Want me to tell you what you are going to be doing out in eternity 16 million years from tonight? I can pretty much do it. Want me to know what galaxy you are going to be in? I can pretty much tell you. Want me to know? I am going to tell you where Lake of Fire is going to be. I can probably give you a good idea. Now, want me to talk to you about the 12 manners of life and a three-year life up there and why there are 12? I can

probably do that. Want me to line them up to the 12 nations of Israel? I can probably do that. I can do a lot of things, but I do not, and I have never found out how a man or a woman gets saved and then gets over it. That is what is wrong with me. See, I never could get over it.

Now I am far from perfect, and if you followed around me for a day, you would probably want another pastor next week, and if I followed you around next week, I would ask you to go somewhere else. I am just like you. You struggle. I struggle. You sin. I sin. You make boneheaded choices. I make a lot of boneheaded choices, but I have never gotten over the day I got saved. There has never been a day in my life that I ever regretted it. There has not been a day in my life that I ever lost my focus in all that is going on, and I just attribute it to not. I am not a great Christian. I am really not. I am really not a great Christian. I have met people who are much greater Christians than me. I know people right now that I envy to have the relationship with God that they have. I am telling you the truth. I am not some superhero up here that never has a problem. I struggle with the exact same pressures, the problems, the heartaches, the disappointments that you do. It is just a fact that when I got saved in 1972, you got over yours; I never got over mine.

When I am dead and gone, and you want to put a nice epitaph on my tombstone, you can just say, "Bob Alexander, born 1950, died whenever I died," and underneath that, put a thing, "Got saved in 1972, never got over it." I will be happy with that.

Have you ever liked going to a graveyard? Why do we have an attraction to graveyards? Because we are all going there someday, that is why. Now you can say, "I would like to go to Hawaii," but I will never get there. You can say, "I like to go to Paris, France," but I will never get there. Well, you are going to the graveyard, so you might as well enjoy it. I like the little things they say on them. There are some great testimonies. I like it now that they do a lot of times, they put pictures on the people so you can put a face with the person in the ground. Not me, sound morbid, but sometimes I have sat there, and it was a young person, and I wept. It was an older couple, and they had been together through life, and I was happy. I mean, I read them, and one did not say, "You know what, in heaven with the Lord in the arms of Jesus." I saw one one time, I did not care for it, it really bothered me. The husband had died, the wife was still alive, and she had wrote on there, "To follow you, I am not content because I am not sure which way you went." That is a true statement. I could take you there and show you that tombstone today. I have often hoped that guy was a saved man because he will have more rewards in heaven of me using that in my sermon and people getting right with God than he probably ever accomplished in life.

I am not very complicated, folks. I got saved in 1972, and through that process, God showed me there is more to life on planet Earth than what many of God's people think there is. I only have one perspective in life: it is ministry. I only have one purpose in life: that is for this church to enact God's plan. I only have one passion in my life, and it is people, but I understand to do all that you have to have patience because it does not take, it does not happen in time. But I am not very complicated. My ministry is even less complicated. I am not a very hard person. I try to be open. I try to be what you see is what you get.

You have heard me say this many, many times, and it is kind of a joke around here, but it is true: when people meet me, they either love me or they hate me. I have never met anybody in my life when they first heard me preach that they went away and they said, "Well, I kind of..." They either said, "That was the greatest thing I ever heard in my life," or, "I am not ever going back to that guy, he is nuts." That is just the way it is. I like that. To me, and that is just, I like a kind of ministry, or I want to have the kind of ministry that when a person hears me, they get one end or the other. I do not want to be somebody who when you are done hearing me, you say, "I wonder where he really stands." I want you to know where I am at when you leave because there is too much deception going on in this world. I do not have any middle ground.

I have met people that very frankly, that when I first met them, they first came to hear me preach or you invited them when they came to Bible study, they hated me, but through the process of time, they got saved, now they love me. At the same time, I have ones who started out loving me and now hate me. Life is a cycle, man. Boom, boom, right off, it is a cycle. That is the way it goes.

I have one goal in everything I do. See how I could not preach this? I cannot preach that to you. I have to put it through my eyes where I have been, and hopefully, some of you will maybe pick up on it. I am not here to try to make you do anything. I am just trying to here show you where I have come from and what when I had to struggle through, just like some of you right now are struggling through.

I have one goal in everything I do. It is the work in the ministry and taking the people that God gives me and perfecting the change for the work of the ministry on whatever level they are at. We do a lot of things around here. To me, when we play softball, when we play volleyball, when we have our great Memorial Day picnic, when we do thoughtful a little kid, whether it is an Easter egg hunt or maybe like our Halloween party. You look at that, and you see that, and then on Thursday night we have Bible study, we have Sunday morning, we had our New Year's Eve deal where we went through that, we have our Bible Institute. Some of you actually look at those two categories like they are two different things. To me, they are one and the same. I do not put any less intensity in the Halloween party or softball or this. To me, it is all a means to an end, and that is to reach people.

Because we do not have a pulpit, because we do not meet here, because it is not some kind of formalized program that we have fun and we do things. When you do not have the right focus and the perception, you see those things as, "Oh, we are just going to have a good time." Not in my world. I see those things as just as important as what we are doing this morning or what we are doing on Thursday night or what we do in Bible Institute because I see everything through the eyes of the perception that that is all a means to an end, to reach people.

All it is, and this was a process. I did not wake up one morning after I had been saved two years, three years, and God has got your name on a big chart up there in the sky on a big clipboard, and He looks up there, and it is nighttime in Canton, Ohio. God says, "Well, yeah, it looks like Bob Alexander is up for his dose of spirituality tonight. Been saved now two, three years. Done a pretty good job. A couple little glitches here, but he is an idiot. What are you going to do with

him? Got to love him. You are part of his charm." He looked at that thing, and he said, "Okay, tonight is his night. He has been saved now three years, working hard at it. All right, Gabriel, back up the big old spiritual dump truck that has got all the wisdom of God in it. Roll back angels, roll back the roof of his house. Here it comes, Bob. Here comes wisdom and knowledge and all the ability and your preaching ability and all of this and all that. And here it comes. Here it comes. Here it comes." Then you wake up the next morning, and here I come to save the day. That mighty mouth is on the way.

No, it did not work your way. It was a process for me. Like it is a process for you. You will not wake up and become spiritual anymore than I did. You never will. You never will. There is a process for you like there was a process for me. I realized that building a church is a process that you take the people that God gives you.

In my ministry, my ministry is as simple as my life. It is basically a two-fold ministry. Just as my life is very simple, so is my ministry. My ministry is looking at people in two stages. In the first stage, you may be at a number of little levels, but to me, it is real simple. I look at you here today, and you are either in stage one or stage two. My job as pastor is to get people to see and understand the great concept of Romans 8:17-18. Someday you are going to stand before the assembled universe, and God has a plan. That plan is going to be enacted in your life and my life that He is going to glorify us with Him as a joint heir of Jesus Christ. I do not know about you. I would not trade that for whatever you got or what I got in my world right now. There is nothing compared with that. Not a thing.

I take you young Christians, and my goal very honestly is to help you get to the place where you are profitable and free in the ministry. Do you think I am really spending time discipling you? I told somebody this week, "I am taking this year, I got a goal outside of everything else I am doing, and I am going to try to do it the best I can. I got a goal where I am going to take 12 people. Six the first six months, six the second six months, and I am going to meet with them, and I am going to give them everything. I know where they are at. I know they are right there on the edge. I want to get them, and I want to spend six months getting them to the place where they get where they are at with exactly what they need. Together, them and I are going to sit down and target what they need to get them into this thing where it is going." You know why? Because my goal for every one of you is to get you to the place where you become profitable in this ministry.

I mean, you sit around for a while and do not do stuff for a while, but after a while, does not it bother you a little bit when people have been here less than you are passing you over and doing things that you ought to be doing? You see, you may want grass to grow into your feet. I do not want any grass to grow into my feet. You know why? I understand my perspective. I do not want to stand here with Him before the assembled universe and not have understood what His plan was for my life. I cannot speak for you. I am speaking for me.

I will show you another verse God gave me in 1 Corinthians 2:6-12. You see, I am building this thing. I am showing you how I got as messed up as I am today, and messed up is the right word. You think I am screwed up? I am going to show you one of the most screwed up guys the world has ever seen in just a few moments.

1 Corinthians 2:6-12

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

So that is my goal for you. That is my goal for me as a pastor. That should be the only goal a pastor has: taking people who want to learn and people who want to grasp it and people who want to get it and get it into their life.

It is a process. I remember when I first came to Kansas City. Some of you older people that have been around in churches for a while, John, I know you will remember this, and Steve Bracken Senior, I know you will remember it. I have been around in churches, and remember the, and Shankle, you remember, remember the Tuesday night, Wednesday night, or Thursday night visitation program? I grew up in that kind of ridiculous mindset that every Thursday night or every Tuesday night, whatever night that church picked, you all met for the church for supper, and then what you did after supper, you probably would have been in a tube after supper, they divided up all the cards of two classes: people who were visitors and people who just have not come for a long time. Then your job was to pair up two by two, have a little spiritual pep rally, and then go out and go to those people's homes.

Now this was back in the 70s and the 80s when you could kind of, it did not work back then, but the difference between then and now, you go to somebody's home at eight o'clock at night tonight and knock on the door, you are going to get shot probably. I have been in situations where I went into people's homes. It has been a process for me too, folks. I have made some of the biggest stupid mistakes of a young pastor you could ever make in your life, and they were fine. I tell you, I do not care what mistakes you make as long as you learn from them. Boy, I made them.

I would go in there to sit down with some guy that visited the church three, four months ago, or somebody, we used to have special days back then, friend day. Remember friend day? I could not

get anybody to come on friend day, but boy, I had busloads on enemy day. They just wanted to come. We had heaven Sunday. Remember that, heaven Sunday? I always thought, "Let us have a hell Sunday," but nobody wanted to come to that either. So we had guys that came to friend day, and having back for three or four months, and so our job is to go in and have a visitation with him, invite him back.

I have been in homes where I went in, and it was so obvious the guy did not want me there. I have been in places where the guy is watching TV, and I have interrupted his ball game, and I am talking to him, and he, I am saying, "Well, we sure had to come to come back." He is just watching TV. I am sitting over here, he is not even looking at me, or he looks here, and he is looking there, and he is looking here, looking at me. I remember one time I went into a place, and I said, and I was visiting for the kids, and the dad was there, and the kids were right there, and the dad was so indignant that I was there, and I said to him, "Sir, can I just talk to your kid for a minute?" He said, "Sure, go ahead." And I said, "Could we turn the TV down just for just for a few minutes?" And I talked with him. He says, "Yeah, sure." We still did not turn it off.

I came to the conclusion, one of the greatest lessons in my life God taught me the hard way. It was a Saturday morning. It was just like February or January, only a lot of snow on the ground, and it started to melt, and it was really slushy and really messy. On Saturday morning, we as pastors were required to go out and beat the bushes for them. I bought into that mindset, even though I did not like it, I bought into it. I was just like everybody else. I would go out and fill my quota. Nobody ever came. Nobody ever got saved. Nobody ever wanted to talk to you, and you would kid yourself, you deceive yourself. I would go back and I would say, "Well, I really did not do well today, and I did not get to talk to anybody, but God will bless my efforts."

I was down on 18th and Topping, visiting some bus kids. Went up to the house on a Saturday morning about 10 o'clock, real messy, slushy, just a mess. Went up to the house, went into the house, and I said, "Hey," I knocked on the door, I said, "I am Bob Alexander from the church down here," and I decided to come and be... Slam! Slam the door right in my face. So I turn around and walk down the steps, martyr-y means, and I was thinking to myself, "Well, God will bless my..." And right that time, I stepped off the curb, and I hit a piece of ice. Now I have to remember, I had a three, back then you had a three-piece suit on. I looked good. Three-piece suit, had a nice new overcoat on. I stepped on a piece of ice. I kid you not, my legs went right up almost even in the world, and I right down in that thing, I mean in a mud hole, I mean icy, slushy mud, and I am laying there soaking wet.

The guy must have been watching, he opens the door, and he says, "You all right?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, I am fine." I am laying there just as if it was an audible voice with God standing over my presence. I heard God say to me with a sarcastic shrill in His voice, "You think I am still going to bless your efforts now?" He says, "You know what, Bob, you are a good kid, but you are pretty stupid. You know what you are doing? You are wasting my time. You are running around here chasing people who really do not want to get caught. You know what, Bob, I have given you a Sunday school class of about four or five hundred people. Why do not you do this next Sunday or tomorrow? Why do not you get up and say this: 'Next Saturday morning, I am going to teach a class for anybody here that really wants to get a better relationship with God through a

systematic study of the Bible. I am going to start at nine o'clock. If you want to come, you will be here.' Try that."

I did. The next Sunday, Saturday morning at nine o'clock, there were 225 people in that room. You know what God said to me then? "Bob, let me ask you a question. In the ministry, which would you rather do? Would you rather chase your whole life of people who do not want to get caught? Do you want to talk to people that do not want to hear what you got to say? You got 225 people here that want to hear what you got to say. Why in the world are they suffering because of you are so stupid? Forget them. Go with what you..."

You know what the lesson God taught me out of that, one of the greatest lessons, and I use it with you guys all the time. In the ministry, you can get discouraged. In the ministry, people bail on it. In the ministry, people come and go. You know what I have learned, and if you do not keep your focus, you know what I have learned? Never focus in the ministry on what you do not have. Always focus on what you do have. God taught me out of that. I never went out on a Saturday again. That 225 people developed into a Bible Institute about six months down the line, and I came to the point in my life when I, when God taught me one of the greatest lessons, it is a process for me, and that lesson was, I had people here that wanted to learn and wanted to see it and wanted to learn. Why am I chasing everybody out here that does not want to hear? I have got people here that want to learn God's perspective. They want to get God's purpose. They want to get God's passion. They want to get God's patience. What in the world am I doing chasing people who could give a flip about what God has to say?

Now, how do you get to that point in your life? It is a process. I think the greatest example of it in the Bible very clearly is probably one of the greatest examples outside the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the apostle Paul. I do not know of a man in all of the Bible outside the Lord Jesus Christ who had the perspective, who had the passion, who had the purpose, and had the patience for the ministry and never, never, never, never one time. I find a couple times where he loses his perspective, but he never loses his, he never loses his focus.

You know why that is? I will tell you why that is. God had a tough job for him to do, bringing him out of the Old Testament, going into the New Testament. God had a tough job for him to accomplish. God did something with him that He never did with anybody else in the Bible. He took him up into heaven, pulled him right off the street, took him up into heaven. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, he showed him the things up there that no man had ever seen. I do not know how long he was there, but he got an eye full. God showed him His plan. God showed him His perspective. God showed him His purpose. God gave him the patience, and he put him back down on this earth after he had seen the taste of glory of God and understood it, and then set him loose on this planet. He never lived his life ever again once he had seen the Lord of glory, once he had seen what God had for him, once his perspective was clear, once his purpose was clear, once the passion was in him, he was never, never the same man again.

Every one of us ought to have that because we can have the same experience he had out of this book right here. There is no reason for me to be like everybody else. I cannot speak to you, but

there is no reason for you to be like anybody else. There is no reason at all. We have everything that we need.

My overall goal is to get you to the place biblically where you can handle a piece of this ministry before the Lord comes back. I told you my ministry is very simple, like me, very uncomplex. You either love me or hate me, and some people love to hate me, but it is one way or the other. But in my ministry, it is the same way. There are only two parts to this.

If you are here and you are a young Christian, you have all the grace you need. You do not ever have to be afraid of making a mistake with me in this in this time frame. You have all the time you need. We will handle every issue you got. You have my undivided attention. My tolerance and my patience are unending. We will work at it as long as it takes. I cannot think there is only in my whole life very few exceptions to that. If you are a young Christian in here, my goal is to get you ready to handle a part of this ministry before Christ comes back. But I do not put any timetable on that. I will never say to you, "If you do not have this thing down in two or three years, you are in trouble." Never say that to you. Everybody is different. We will work at your speed. It does not matter to me as long as you are honest with me and as long as you are trying to do what is right and as long as you are there and I can help you. I do not care how long it takes. I know that in time you will get there. That is the first part of the aspect of this ministry, real simple.

But now when you get to the second aspect of it, it all changes. The moment you come to me, which you will if the process happens the way it does, the moment you come to me and you say, "Bob, I want part of your ministry. God has spoken to my heart. I want to pick up the mantle with you. I want to help you. I want to do this for you. I want to do this with you. I want to learn this. I want to do that. I want this to do. I want that to do." Hey, I think that is the greatest thing in the world, and truthfully, that is what this ministry is geared for. But the difference between the first section and the second section is simply this: to whom much is given, much is required.

When you enter into that section, I am a different person. For the younger ones, I have zero tolerance in the ministry. Absolutely zero. You can make mistakes as long as they are honest mistakes. You can blow something and say something wrong to somebody. I understand that. I am not talking about that. But you ought to be in a situation now where you should stop causing problems and start helping solve them problems.

I, the older I get, the more I understand how Paul looked at John Mark. Remember John Mark? Remember in Acts 13 when they went on their first missionary journey, and John Mark went with him, and John Mark was a young guy, and evidently he got to go with Paul to be Paul's helper in this thing. The Bible says in Acts 15:37, or down through the process of that, that while they are out there and they are in the ministry and they are in the heat of it, John Mark bails out. He goes back to mama. Goes back home. Now the Bible does not say what the reason was. You know why? Because I do not care. I do not care what the reason was. Paul did not care what his reason was. Paul had a perspective. Paul had a purpose. Paul had a passion. Here is a young guy that says, "I mean, can you imagine the notoriety it must have went along with, 'Oh, you are going on Paul's missionary trip!'" Oh, you know how many young men, how many young men

would like to have your spot? "Yeah, I know, but I was, there is only five guys on the list, and it was a short list, and I was number one." You know how that brought along? You see, John Mark had the ability to go. He did not have the ability to stay when things got tough. He left Paul in a lurch. He bailed on him, and he left him there where he said, "I am going to do this," and then when they got come to the down of doing it, he said, "I have got to go home. I have got a party to go to. I have got friends coming over. My mommy says she got a special cake for my birthday." Bailed on him.

I understand the next time in Acts 15, we are going on their second missionary trip. John Mark said, "I would like to go again." Paul says, "No way. Uh-uh. You are not going with me." You get one shot in the ministry with Paul. You know why? He had zero tolerance. Paul gave him something to do. He bailed out on him because he probably thought, "Oh, this is not that important." In Paul's mind, everything was important. He looked at everything he did because he had a perspective. He had a purpose. He had a passion that John Mark did not have. John Mark got into the middle of it, and for whatever reason, he did not want to do it, and he left Paul hanging. The next time he comes around, Paul says, "He is not going with me." Barnabas says, "Come on." He said, "Barnabas, look, pal, I took that kid last time. He said he wanted part of my ministry. I gave him something to do. Well, I told him it had to be done on a Saturday. He calls me on Thursday and says, 'I cannot make it back to mama.'" You see, that is the difference between the first section and the second section. In the first section, you can do anything you want to do. Once you take part of my ministry, you better take it with the same determination, and I take it. It is just that simple. But that is just me.

But that was Paul. I am telling you, Paul had zero tolerance, no nonsense. He had the four P's down better than anybody ever met in my Bible. He has a unique perspective because he had been there. He had seen it. He understood it. In fact, I am sure many, many times I thought he shot of the verse in Proverbs 25:19 that I thought of:

Proverbs 25:19

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.

Yet when I shed a broken tooth or foot out of joint, remember in Song of Solomon, remember Thursday night, New Year's Eve, the teeth and the feet? Remember that?

Mel Shabbat was my apostle. Everybody needs an apostle Paul in their life. Everybody does. My apostle Paul was Mel Shabbat. He is the apostle Paul of my life. If I treated you and trained some of you, and I know what you say, "Oh, do every time I say that, somebody comes up and says, 'Yeah, you can do that to me.'" Yeah, right. Just like John Mark, I am sure said, "I will be with you till the end of the earth," or, "Till I get a better deal." If I trained some of you guys the way he trained his boys, you will be over at First Baptist or Raytown next week.

Let me tell you something. He was the apostle Paul of my life. I saw a man that no-nonsense ministry. I saw a man that everything in his life was one thing. He knew he was going to stand someday before the assembled universe and be a joint heir with Jesus Christ. He understood it, and there was nothing in his life, absolutely nothing in his life, that was going to shortcut that

system. If you got in him with him, you get it by the book, or you went someplace else. Incredible. He did not put up with anything.

I have told you the story. I was preaching one time in front of four or five hundred people, and he was sitting right down the front, and I was preaching up there, and I was going to town, and I misquoted a verse right in the middle of 500 people in the front, and his voice did not need any microphone. He stood up while I am preaching, and he says to me, "Book, chapter, verse!" Just like that. You talk about a turkey farm day after a Thanksgiving quiet. I said, "Okay, I quoted it wrong in front of 500 people." You know what he said? He said, "If you are going to be in my ministry, and you are going to preach in my pulpit, and you are going to preach the Word of God in my church, then brother, you quote it correctly." Sat down.

Now what do you do in that situation? I gave the invitation, and I came forward. That is what I did. That is what I, that is what I felt like doing. Tell you what, I learned my lesson. You know what he was telling me? "Look, son, you can have part of my ministry. My whole goal is to get you ready to have part of my ministry. But young man, if you are going to have part of my ministry, you better take it as seriously, whether it is a softball, volleyball, Halloween party, Sunday morning preaching, Thursday night Bible study, you better get your perspective on it right, or go someplace else." What he was saying, "Cannot do that today." John Reid would have so many lawsuits on it on a church that you would not be able to do anything. We have changed a lot. We have changed a lot.

See, I do not think there is any difference on preaching on Sunday and setting up the ball fields on Saturday afternoon for the softball league. A real leader is somebody, you will never get this, a real leader is the first one there and the last one to leave. A real leader is to realize that a lot happens before the main event and a lot happens after the main event. But, oh no, we like being a captain, do not we? Yes, we do. We like doing a devotion, and you do a good job. The only problem is it starts about an hour before and runs about three hours later when you are off with your friends and somebody else is doing the work of the ministry. I do not know what to tell you. It takes self-denial. It takes self-discipline. It takes self-control. It takes self-motivation. It takes balance, and it takes the point that you never, never, never, never lose your focus.

If God would just give me 20 people in this church, 20 that would have their focus so set that whatever they say they are going to do, they are going to do, I will tell you what, we could turn this town upside down. I am just telling you, it is not ever going to happen. You and I lived after salvation for one thing, and that is to become a living sacrifice to finish what God has called us to do.

VII. The Cost of Service: Suffering and Sacrifice

In time, as I grew and I understood these things, I understood another great truth, and I am closing now. I understood another great truth, and it is found in Romans 8:18. He says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

In time, I came to the conclusion that not only are you going to have to be self-disciplined, you are going to have to have the right perspective, you are going to have to have the right purpose, the right passion, and the right patience, but you are going to have to realize that if you are going to be in the ministry, there is a price you are going to pay.

Have you ever read the early part of Revelation chapter 2 and 3? Have you ever seen the churches that are listed there? You got a church by the name of Smyrna. You know what Smyrna means? It means bitterness and death. You got a church by the name Sardis. You know what Sardis means? It means red ones covered in blood. You know what Thyatira means? It means order of affliction.

Now the suffering that you are going to have to put up today, ladies and gentlemen, will not be in that nature. Somebody said one time, I heard a young guy get up there, well, this was another guy, it was not me, thankfully. I learned my lesson the first time. Another guy, another youth deal back in Ohio. He is getting up, and he is preaching, and he is doing a good job, but not in Mel Shabbat's mind. He got up there, and he made a statement. He was kind of bloviating a little bit, and putting it out there, and he got up there, and he made a statement, and he really impacted it. I mean, he pounded the pulpit, and he made the statement that he did not care what happened. He says, "I am willing to die for Christ." Everybody went, "Amen." Mel Shabbat stood right up in the front. He says, "Any idiot can die for Him. Why do not you tell these people how to live for Him? That is what is tough." He gave the invitation, and he came forward.

You do, if I did that to you down at the mission, somebody, I will be stopping you every 30 seconds. What would you do if you got in a situation like that, and I did that to you? You would run home to mama so fast, you would be out of here sucking your thumbs someplace. You know why? I will tell you why. Not all you would. Not all you would. I better shut up here. I am getting, this is about me, not you.

Suffer now, you are reigned in. For I reckon that the sufferings in this present time are not worthy, but you compare it with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Luke 14:28 says that we are to count the cost. You want to understand what it is going to take to serve God. God wants you to be a living sacrifice. You will never understand the sacrifice until you understand 2 Samuel 24:24. You know what he says there? You are going to sacrifice to God, it is going to cost you something. There is a price to pay for this.

You know what the problem with some of you is? You want the glory of the ministry. You want the aspect of the ministry. You want the notoriety. Oh, you like walking around here like you are in charge of something. But the problem is, the bottom line is, you are not willing to pay the price to really have that because it is going to cost you something. It is going to cost you some friends. It may cost you your marriage. It may cost you some family. It may cost you your job. It may cost you your social status.

You see, back then, it was pure persecution on things like the rack. To hear it is just ridicule. A lot of people can stand the rack a lot better than they can stand ridicule. But that is what it is going to take. You stand for a book. You change your life where you get it into balance, and you be and do what God wants you to do. There is a price that is going to come with that.

VIII. Bearing Reproach and the Eternal Perspective

One last verse that I am done. You have got to have this one. Cannot go home without this. This is like going out to eat someplace and then not getting dessert.

Hebrews 13:12-14

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

You see that thing? We are to bear the reproach of Christ every day of our life. Look at Hebrews 13:14. You do not want to miss this. Here is your reason. Here is your perspective. Here is your purpose. Here is your passion, and here is your patience. "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." There it is. This thing means nothing to me. It is over there.

Someday we are going to stand before all the assembled universe in our glorified bodies. Remember I showed it to you in Song of Solomon that night? Remember I showed you your private garden where you and God are to go right now? But I showed you that thing over there in chapter seven and eight where in eternity you and Him are walking down through your own personal Garden of Eden, and you are looking back, and you are talking about all the defeats, all the struggles, all the heaviness, all the tragedy, all the things that so easily got us off track. Then you just come into that golden morning sunrise, brother, and you finally realize what He meant when He says, "For I reckon the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Right perspective, right purpose, right passion, right patience, all comes down to right focus.

The ministry to me is people. I am like the Marine Corps, always looking for a few good men and women. I look at things totally different than most people. I know that when I look at a young man or a young lady, I see way beyond maybe when they come in what they are struggling with. I look at some of you that are here in this room today, and I know you are struggling with things as a young Christian, but yet I look beyond that. I see the deep down inside you that it is all to get you off your focus. It is all to keep you from becoming what God really wants you to be. I know if you can ever get the smoke and the mirrors out of the side, and you can ever break through that thing, and ever see this thing as it really is, like Paul did, when he came back, his whole thing was, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." I am always looking for people like that.

My ministry and what I am trying to do and what I am looking for can be summed up in one story, and I am done. Honest to goodness, I am done when I say this. A long time ago, during the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps had a buddy system that if you enlisted with your friend, you could go in and go through boot camp. You got to remember that, Jim. You go through boot camp together, and you would be signed together, and you, you could call the buddy system. Back about 1965, 66, in there someplace, two young guys, lifelong friends, went into the Marine

Corps together. They went through their basic at Parris Island together. They went through their AIT at Camp Lejeune together, and they both got put in the same rifle company and were sent to Vietnam, 211 Bravo with their MOS designation.

They went to Vietnam, and they were there for about four or five months. Of course, back then, a year's duty was standard tour in Vietnam. One night they were out on an ambush patrol, which you did every night. You would go out, you set up an ambush in a boonie someplace, and you would all hide down there on a trail, and you wait for the VC to come through, and then you would set off your Claymores and smoke them and kill them any time you can and grab their weapons, get a body count, and try to get back for breakfast.

Well, this night it did not go according to plan. There were like 15 men on this ambush patrol, and they got out there, and they got ambushed, and they got separated, and they got broke out, and they tried to get back, and they had an assembly point. That is what you always did whenever you went out at night, whenever you had an ambush or whatever you were doing, everybody knew that if it all hit the fan, you had a contact point that you made your way back to, and that is where you reassembled, and they either went back and tried to retake it or you headed home.

Well, they went to the got back to the back to the assembly place, and they all got there, and they were checking to see who was there, and it was still very hairy, very hairy. VC were around them, and they had to get back. There was no way, overwhelming force. This young kid found out his buddy was not there, and somebody said, "I saw Tom get shot in the leg," and I said, "I could not get back to get him." He says, "He is cut off." This young kid, without saying to anybody, left and ran back into that bush to find his friend. The sergeant could not lose any more men because, hey, standard operation procedure, I got one guy down, he is probably dead. I am not going to lose two or three more guys that got somebody who is already dead. It is terrible. That is the way it goes in those situations.

This young man found his buddy, and he was wounded in the leg, could not walk. Viet Cong had now cut them off, and the rest of the boys told the story, and they heard, they heard, they heard the gunfire. They could tell the difference between an M16, which the GIs carried, and the AK-47, which was the, or the Chi-Coms, which is the NVA carried. They knew that a firefight was going on. They knew there were lots of AK-47s and grenades going off, and they could only hear two M16s being fired. There is no way they could get to them. They held their position. They called for an airstrike. It was not going to happen. They did everything in the world to plead to send more men out to go get these guys. It is not going to happen. They were in the middle of an overrunning situation, and those two boys, nobody was going to help them. They heard the gunfire go off for two or three hours, and then as always in every battle, it grew very quiet. The guns were silent. Everybody in that little Marine Force Recon knew that those two boys were dead.

As always in everything, when the VC did it, they went in, they did their damage, and then they pulled back over the border by morning. In the morning, the Marines, they just were fitting to go, and they went out, and they wanted to find where these boys were, and they found where they

were, and the guy that told the story, it was one of the most moving stories I have ever heard in my life. These two boys who were together in life and together in death. The one boy that came back for his friend was not going to leave him. You know what they did? They knew they were outnumbered, and they knew they were overwhelmed, and they knew that there was no way that they were going to get back. But that young man who could walk and could have got back was not going to leave his friend who could not go back. To make sure that he did not check it out in the last moments, you know what they did? They found them tied back to back. They took their pistol belts, hooked them together, put them around both of them, and fastened them there. Around them was the last remaining of their ammunition. They had fought till they ran out of ammunition, and the VC came in, and they killed them, but they fought and went out together, back to back, right down the last round of ammunition.

I read that story, and I thought to myself, in 1967-68, a PFC in the Marine Corps made \$127 a month. There are two boys that did what they did for Uncle Sam for \$127 a month. When I heard that story, it formed my whole concept of ministry. What am I looking for in ministry? What I look for in young men and young ladies? What I look for in people that say to me, "Bob, I want to have part of this." I look for just that. I look for young men and young ladies that will say, "I do not want part of your ministry. I want to get tied back to back. We may get killed. We may get overrun. We may get wiped out, but we will go out with the same perspective, the same purpose, the same passion, and the same patience." The problem I find with most God's people, they are shooting blanks. You make a big noise when you go off, but you never hit nothing. That is what I look for. That is all the ministry means to me: is getting me young men and young ladies that will say, "I am not there yet, but I want to get there. Take me. Everything I can. Teach me everything." If I could just get, if I could just get 20 people in this church that would not lose their focus, we would get it done. We would get it done.

Every head bowed, every eye closed.