

I. The Reality of Ministry: Purpose, Perspective, and Passion

We began to read through these great passages, as we are coming through the section that really talks about dealing with people. What we are looking at here is for those of you who have a desire to minister for the Lord, to let God take you and develop you into what He wants you to be and use you in this church. These verses are the reality of ministry, the reality of serving God and really understanding what God looks at in your life and my life so many times.

We talked about it last week, how we all like to pretend that we are doing better with God than we really are. Most of our lives, I think, by human nature, are watched as we just do not want to deal with reality. As you know now from last Thursday night, if you were here for our New Year's Eve when we told you that we had to make some directional changes, you now understand that we do not have the same church this morning as we had last Sunday morning. In the course of a week, we have changed the whole direction and we now have a better understanding.

Every sermon that you hear, every special class like the church history, every Bible study on Thursday night will now have a complete, or it should have, a complete and total different effect on you because of what God did for us last Thursday night. God came down and certainly put His crown of approval on it by giving us this precious soul saved, and we are so thankful for all that God did.

We are talking about defining ourselves through ministry. Nothing will define you and me, male or female. Nothing will define who you are as a Christian better or more clearly than when you begin to get into ministry. Ministry requires you to have a purpose. Ministry requires you to have a certain perspective, and ministry requires that you have a certain passion. Those three things you are going to hear a lot in the next couple of years as we begin to focus on that because that is where the success of this church lies in keeping God's people, keeping the purpose before them.

To me, the purpose is clearly the fact that the job of this church, first and foremost, is not to get people saved. The job of this church is not necessarily to teach you the Bible or to help you through your problems. The job of this church, the purpose of this church—it should be the purpose of any church—is one thing, and that is to preach God's truth. If you get the truth, people will get saved. If you get the truth, your life will be changed. If you get the truth, it will fix every problem you have if you do what you need to do with it. That is purpose to me.

Then I look at perspective. Perspective is once you understand that you have the truth and you realize that the job of the church is to put out truth, your perspective becomes more understanding of what God is doing and you realize what a church is. A church is a place that should always give people a chance to get saved if they are lost by preaching the truth. A church is always a situation where people who are saved ought to have the opportunity to serve God. That is what our perspective should be. We are not a social club.

We do a lot of fun things, and it is easy to lose your perspective of why we are doing what we are doing when you do not come back and understand the purpose of why we are doing it. The job of this church is to put out truth. Some people will gravitate to that truth. Some people will not.

You have heard pastors, and I hear them all the time, that pastors get up and they browbeat their people by saying, "You will never find another church like this and you need to, there is no reason for you to leave our church and you need to stay here and you will never, you will get everything you need in this church." That simply is pretty foolish. That shows me that somebody does not either understand their purpose or their perspective because I will tell you very clearly, and you will never hear me say that here.

You may get all that you need here from the Bible. But the bottom line is that I have said this from day one, this church is not for everybody. I have never claimed that it would be. I have never wanted it to be. I have never orchestrated my teaching and my preaching to please anybody. That is what happens in a church when you do not understand your purpose.

When you lose sight of your purpose, then you lose sight of preaching truth. What you do then is because you want to please people sometimes, or maybe you want somebody to come into church so badly, or you want them to do right so badly that you will kind of take your foot off the gas, so to speak, on the preaching. I have told you many times that you will never find a time where Jesus ever altered His message so somebody would get saved. He preached the truth, let the chips fall where they may, and you either got saved or you did not. That is the only way a church can really operate is understanding that is its purpose.

When you understand your purpose, then our perspective becomes clear. Our perspective is, and I talked about it the other Thursday night, you take a church of 500 people, in reality, you probably only have maybe 150 people in that church. You may have 500 bodies. I remember old Mel Sabaka told me one time, and we were talking about some kid that had built a church of 6 or 7,000 people, and he built it based on just the good times and all of the things. I never forget, the wisdom of the old man just staggered me sometimes, and he looked at me and he said, "Just because you got a crowd does not mean you have a church." Because a church is never associated with a crowd. But we think it is.

The reality is, if you have a purpose and you have your perspective, you are going to understand in ministry that ministry is not for everybody. It should be, but it is not going to be. Then, of course, the third one is passion. Passion is simply that once you have a purpose, and once you get your perspective, then you take all of your energy and you put it into doing what God wants you to do. It is just that simple.

You give me somebody, a young man or a young lady who understands those three things, and I am going to teach you those three things. You are going to eat, sleep, and drink them as it builds into your life that it becomes automatic. When you leave here today and you are going home, you really do not have to think about which way you are going. Now, you may today, because the weather might be bad, but on normal days, you just get in your car and it is like it is on automatic pilot. You know where you are going. You do not even think about, "Should I turn left here, turn

right here?" You know how to get home. Because you have been home so many times, it is automatic to you.

If I asked you your telephone number, you could rattle it off just like that. If I asked you your address, you could give it to me just like that. Why? Because you live there. If I would ask you to describe to me, close your eyes and describe the color of your kitchen and what you have here and what you have there, or your bathroom, or your living room, you can lay it off just like that. Why? Because you live there. When you and I as a Christian, young man and young lady, through the process of spiritual growth, live within a purpose, live within a perspective, live within a passion, you will not need anybody to tell you how to get there. You will know exactly what you need to do.

II. Christian Qualities and Levels of Spiritual Growth

We have been talking about the Christian qualities that come from a relationship with God, God's qualities that are in our lives as Christians. I have said this many, many times. There is a great verse in the Bible. I think it is one of my favorite verses about my own personal relationship with God in 1 Corinthians 8:3.

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

You do not have to get a 45-pound King James Bible and get a jacket that says "Jesus man" on the back or whatever the case may be to let people know. If you love God, everybody around you knows it because the Bible says, "If any man love God, the same is known of him." You know why? Because it is the character qualities that come out of our lives because of our relationship with God.

Last Thursday night, whether you understand it or not, we grew into full flourishing as a church. Up to this point, I have looked at it as the beginning process to get us to a point. Now we are going to go to work on building Christian leadership in those three phases that we talked about. We are going to take those of you who want to, that are just basically what we would call the little children in Christianity. You just got saved a while back or you do not know a lot about the Bible, and we are going to get you to the next level. We are going to take the ones that have been around for a while and you need to understand these concepts better, and we are going to get you to the next level.

Now we are going to take that third level. That third level is what I am really focusing on. Everybody is going to get what they need. My goal, ladies and gentlemen, is to get all of you to the third level. Right now, we have got to take you where you are at. We have got to help you where you are at. We have got to give you what you need to help you get there. But the third level that I am looking for is building the leadership base of getting those who are in the father stage, so to speak, to that elder stage where you really put together in your life the purpose, the perspective, and the passion. I am really looking forward to that. I think it is going to be a great time.

III. Romans 12:9-21: The Practical Realities of Ministry

I want to read for you today. Go back to where we read last week in Romans 12. I want to pick it up in verses 9 and come down through 21. I do not know how far we will get here today, but we want to begin to come down through these. I am going to read what I talked about last week so we have a context.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now, Father, we come to You today and we thank You for those who have braved the elements to come through this snow to be here today. Lord, we look forward to what You have for us. I know, Lord, that You have some things for them. I know that in many hearts last week, last Thursday night, You touched so many people and You brought this church out of one phase into the other. Lord, let us begin now to look at everything that we say and everything that we do from a totally different standpoint. Let us put and listen and put the things in our lives that we need. Help me to help them, Father, and help me to bring them along and help me to lay out the vision in my heart and make it clear to them that these young men and young ladies may run with it. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name for a sake we ask it. Amen.

Last week we started through these, and I told you that these concepts were the reality verses of the Christian life. We talked about how, and I said this earlier, how we all like to pretend. But we told you that these things are what makes the Christian life the Christian life. These are the

qualities of Christ that get built into our lives when we have a real working, viable relationship with Him.

We talked about, in verse 8, where it talked about ruling with diligence. Remember, I told you that that is the example of leadership role in a church. I told you that it is not dealing with lording over people and having a power base, whether you are a deacon or even a pastor or somebody that is in charge of something that you lord over people, but rather leading by example. The examples that you lead by are the various examples that we are talking about.

We talked about showing mercy with cheerfulness and how that applies into your life. We talked about love without dissimulation. I told you that there were two kinds of dissimulation when it comes to people and loving people. One is partiality, where you love this group, but you do not love that group. The other one is hypocrisy, by which you simply say, "Well, I really love you," but you really do not. We do it all the time. How many times has somebody said to us, "Would you pray for me?" And you said, "Oh, I will pray for you." We forgot to pray about them all week long. The next week we see them and we thought, "Oh, I never prayed for that person." That is just the way we are. We are going to change those things, but that is the way we are.

Verse 10 talked about being kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love. We talked about our church as a family concept, taking care of each other.

Then verse 11 talked about not slothful in business. We talked about that that deals with the fact that if you work for somebody and you work for them, then give them what they are paying for you to do. We talked about if those people who have their own businesses, then you will be honorable with what you do in dealing with people.

We talked about how these things affect every single thing we do in ministry. Our ministry is with people. You learned last Thursday night that reality is a hard thing to deal with. Reality is something that we all have to face. It is something that the Bible forces us back to.

The Bible says in the book of James that the Bible is like a looking glass. The Bible talks about a man who looks into that looking glass, which is the Word of God, and he sees his natural face. In other words, the Bible shows us who we really are. The Bible says in James 1:23-24 that one guy takes heed to it. He recognizes who he is and he does something about it. The other one walks away and he forgets what manner of man he was. That is exactly what we do. That is why, very frankly, the first thing that goes in your life and my life, when we start to get out of fellowship with God, is we quit reading the Bible. The second thing we do is quit going to church. Why? Because those two things force us back to reality. When we get in that mode, reality is not the number one thing on our hit parade.

Now let us move on through the rest of these and let us look at this. I told you last time I call these the reality texts of the Christian life. It is great for you and us.

IV. Fervent in Spirit: Controlled Passion

Look at Romans 12:11 now. It says, "Not slothful in business; but fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." I call "fervent in the spirit" passion. It is very important in ministry, but you have got to

have the experience to be able to keep it under control. This is why Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:6 that he was not to be a novice, that he had to get some experience. Experience is absolutely essential in ministry.

This is what I want to do as we come through these levels. I want to get you on all three levels, but specifically the third level. I want to get you all the experience I can, because experience is the key that really helps you keep your fervent spirit under control.

I remember years and years and years ago, I got a call from a guy that was a boss. One of the kids that was in my ministry, I had a college and career class at that time, worked for him. He called me up and he was the nicest guy in the world. He said, "Is this Pastor Alexander?" I said, "Yes, it is." He explained who he was. He asked me, "Well, you have so and so under your ministry?" I said, "Yes, I do."

He said, "You know what? You have got to help me with something." He said, "I like this kid. But you have got to help me. He says, because I am going to have to fire him and I do not want to fire him. But he is not leaving me any choice." I said, "Okay, what is he doing?" He says, "Well, he is a Christian and I am not. But he is. And that is fine. He carries his Bible. He reads his Bible. And I have no problem with that. But he has got to the point where he is so obnoxious with it that he is really turning people off."

Here is an unsaved guy that has given me a great perspective on what is wrong with most Christians. He is lost. He says, "Like last week, in lunch hour, the guys are sitting around. They put a cardboard flat cardboard box on something and they are playing cards. He walks over and tips up the table with the cards on it and lets them have it about how playing cards is going to send you all to hell."

I said, "Well, first of all, I want you to understand that I do not believe playing cards are going to send you to hell." I never missed my opportunity either. I said, "I believe that not trusting Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior will send you to hell, not playing cards." But the bottom line is, that is not what a Christian should do. I said, "I want to apologize for him." He said, "Well, what do I do?" I said, "Well, here is what you do. I am going to talk to him. I am going to try to work through it with him. I appreciate you calling me. But at the end of the day, this is it. If he does not stop it, fire him. Fire him. I mean, let us work with him. Let us try to salvage him. Let us put a big hook on him and try to pull him out of the snow. But the bottom line is this. If you cannot fix him, fire him."

Then he will walk around town, "Oh, I am persecuted for God because I am such a witness." That is just the way they think. The bottom line is simply this: fervent in spirit is a great thing. But you have got to be able to keep it under the control of the Holy Spirit of God.

My best example of fervent that I ever heard in my life, and everybody talks like this, and it is true to a sense, it really is. I talked to an old plumber one time, and this old plumber, he had been plumbing for all of his life. He had the big overall type thing, about 60 years old, real lean like a fence post, teeth all gone from the chew his whole life, and he probably could fix anything

anytime anywhere. He probably had more knowledge and wisdom and understanding about what he did in his trade than anybody coming out. So he is probably right in what he said.

But he said this. He said, "In the old days." And you ever notice how we always go back to the old days and things? You tell your kids because they do not want to stand out five minutes, wait for the bus, how you had to walk three miles in the snow to go to school. Many of us did. My walk when I went to high school was more than three miles. But the bottom line is, our kids complain because the car is not warmed up enough when you take them to school. Well, if you just throw them out there and let them walk one time, they would say we always do that.

It is true in whatever you do. Military is the same way. You talk to a Marine that was in the Marines in the 60s or the 70s, and he will talk about how they baby the Marines in boot camp today. I know when I was in the Army in '68, they do not do a lot of things today that they did back then. They do not cuss anymore. The D.I.s cannot cuss the people anymore. Boy, I will tell you what, you want to have a notebook to get down your general orders. You want to have a notebook to get down your rifle number, your serial number. But you also want to have a notebook to get down the cuss words you never heard before. I mean, they were incredible. But they are not on the cuss anymore.

We fought with what they called pugil sticks. Pugil sticks is where you put a football helmet with a big cage face on it, and you get a thing with two pads on the end, and you beat the fire out of each other until everyone cannot stand up. They do not do that anymore. They have sensitivity classes now and all that thing. Today when you get in battle, you have got to get on the phone to your commanding officer and ask if you can shoot back what they are shooting at you. The Marines in the old days, they look at it and they think, "Well, they do not train Marines back then like they do now." And they are probably right.

I think a lot of that has to do with the culture we come out of in our own society. I think that back then, society had a different set of priorities. I think they were closer to the Philadelphia church age. I think their Bible, even by unsaved people, was still reverent. You realize back in the 60s and the 50s and the 40s, when you went into court and you put your hand on a King James Bible and had to swear on that King James Bible, you were going to tell the truth. Now that it is asked you, like that is going to do a lot of good. You know why they had to put your hand on the Bible back then? Because they revered the Bible as the final authority of truth. Most people back then were afraid to lie putting their hand on the Bible because God killed them. People are afraid of that. Try that next time. In the old days, that is the way it was.

A country without a Bible will in time lose its passion and lose its perspective and lose its purpose. So things that used to mean something do not mean something anymore. It is true in everything. This old plumber said, "In the old days, we used to put on a piece of pipe and then we would turn the water on and we would keep up with the flow, put it on the next piece of pipe so the job was done." I thought to myself, "Now that is fervent. That is passion." But that is the way it is.

I am telling you something, when it comes to being fervent in the spirit, there is no place that laziness has no part than in the ministry. Most pastors are basically lazy when it comes to the

ministry. They look for snow days more excited about it than your kids are about not going to school next week. It snows on Wednesday. They are already canceling Sunday. It is a thing where they do not want to do any more than they have to. It is a tragedy that that way, but that is just the way it is.

My model for fervent in the Bible, the best one I have ever seen, is over there in Acts 8, where Philip is that great evangelist. God has that Ethiopian eunuch on the backside of the desert out there. The Bible says in Acts 8:29 that when the Holy Spirit of God told Philip to go join himself to that man, he ran. He ran. He was fervent in the Spirit, fervent in the Spirit. You have got to have the fire that drives you. That is just the way it has to be.

Most Christians or most pastors, most people when it comes to dealing with people or ministry, they are lazy when it comes about it. I have a standard rule. Do not let anybody work in ministry with me when you get to a certain point, but you better understand that when I give you somebody to work with and you take three weeks to hook up with them, you do not stay on top of it, or you let two or three weeks slide without touching base with them, you are out of a job, man. I can do that. Working with people requires you to be fervent about what you do.

He says fervent in the Spirit, serving the Lord. We get fervent about everything but serving the Lord. There are guys that when deer season comes in, they are so excited, they cannot sleep at night. They plan their whole year around going deer hunting. And you should if you like it. There are guys that think about going fishing in Canada, going fishing here. There are women who dream about going to Hawaii or going on a vacation or going here. We focus on that. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that, but there should not be more passion in that than there is in serving the Lord. That is where we get sometimes.

V. Rejoicing in Hope: The Return of Christ

Then he says in Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope." This hope here is the hope of Christ coming back. Every day you and I should get up with the joy that today might be the day that the Lord is coming back.

Now I say that and let me say this, because I do not want to put anybody on a false guilt trip here today. You probably have some young Christian out there, somebody that maybe just got saved a short while back and they will say, "Well, I do not feel that way." So you think there is something wrong with you. That is not true. I am not saying that you get saved that the next day you just understand everything about the Lord's coming and be excited about it. I am not.

But through the process, through the process of growing spiritually, through the process of letting somebody help you get you through that process, you learn to make priorities in your life. You begin to understand your purpose, as you begin to understand your perspective. As you begin to have that passion, you realize that the bottom line is this: there is really nothing in this world worth anything other than God. But it takes you a while to get there.

I never try to push people faster than they want to go. I try to gently nudge them and I try to help them and always keep the door open. But this idea of somebody getting on your case and just

beating you over the head all the time about you ought to be growing here and growing there, it does not work. Obviously if you have been around for a while, you ought to be farther than you should. But you take young Christians who are just trying to find their way through and trying to work through their issues. You have got to give them the space and give them the time to do it. They will get to it in time.

But every day, you and I that have been around for a while, every day, ought to get up with just one thought. And that is the thought that today might be the day that He might come back. We live in a defeated Christianity today. I have never seen God's people so defeated in everything that they do. I have never seen Christianity in such a denial of reality, of life, of where they are at. You know where the problem really lies? The problem really lies is because they do not have the hope in their life that they are rejoicing in that today might be the day that the Lord comes back.

Let me tell you something. Do you understand where the road starts for you and for me to getting out of fellowship with God? You want to know the bottom line where it starts in your life and maybe it is not apparent to anybody. Maybe it will not manifest itself for six months, a year, two years down the line. But I am telling you right now, you need to understand that where the road starts for you and for me to getting out of fellowship with God is the day we get up and forget to start our day just like that, like it is the last one you are going to be here. You know why? That is your perspective.

When you lose your perspective of why you are here, when you and I lose our perspective of why we are here, then we have got nothing to rejoice in. It says rejoice in hope. That does not mean that I am rejoicing in the fact that I hope I am saved. That is not what he is talking about. I know that I am saved. There is no doubt in my mind and if you are here this morning and you are saved, you know or you should know there is no doubt.

It is not that I am rejoicing in the fact that I hope I am saved. It is rejoicing in the fact that because I am saved, the only hope I have is Jesus Christ and Him coming back today. That is where it is at. Exactly where it is at. The day we get up and we forget to start our day just like that is the day we lose our perspective and we start down the road of losing everything else. It is all about perspective.

VI. Patient in Tribulation: Growth Through Adversity

Then he says in Romans 12:12, "patient in tribulation." Nobody likes trials and tribulations. Nobody does. But again it is all about your perspective. The reason he says to be patient in tribulation is because that is how you grow. Again, it is about your perspective, seeing things as they really are, the reality.

We do not grow just from the good things in life. We grow through the bad things in life. Look at Job, the greatest book in the Bible that talks about the fact that here is a man who loved God and eschewed evil and look what he went through. He goes through in seven days what you and I will never go through in a lifetime. Yet the Bible says that he is better on the other end of it when he comes out of it. Did he like going through it? Absolutely not.

Job has some of the clearest, most reality verses between a man and God that you ever find in your life. It was Job that got so bad that he cursed the day that he was born. It was Job who told God just to get away from it and let him drown in his own spit. It was Job that came to the point that looked around that everybody was trying to help him and he was so miserable in such an agony that he said, "Miserable comforters are you all."

He comes to the point where he went through the toughest time in his life. Did you ever study Job? I mean you stop and look at what he lost. He lost his kids. He lost his sheep and his cows and his oxen. He lost everything that was monetary to him. God reached down and allowed the devil to take everything that was anything in his life that was tangible, something that you could reach out and touch, something you could figure up on a calculator, something you could look out your window and say, "Wow, look what I got." God in one fell swoop let the devil take all that from him.

Somebody ran back and said, "Oh, your kids were killed, somebody just rode in here and a big wind came down and killed all your kids." Somebody else came in and said, "Mom, you were watching your cattle and somebody came down and took all your cattle." The only thing that he did not lose was his wife, and that is what he should have been putting on the deal.

He is in the agony of it all when he is going through all these things and his wife comes in and says instead of saying, "Honey, can I do something for you, honey, would you like a pillow, honey, would you like this, honey, would you like a new piece of pottery to scrape the pus off your sores, honey, would you like some orange juice, would you like this, would you," no her thing is, "Curse God and die." Not exactly what he needed to hear at that particular time in life.

After he loses all those monetary things he loses the number one thing we want to hold on to in our life, that is his health. He gets boils all over his body to the disgusting degree that he is sitting on an ash heap, scraping the pus off with a piece of broken pottery from this busted down house. It would be hard for us to find ourselves in that situation even in life. Some of you have lost children, some of you have lost parents, some of you have lost loved ones in your life but did you ever lose everybody in all of your family at one time? Some of you have lost your homes, burned down with fire, some of you have come through some tough times, lost your job but did you have it all gone from you where you had absolutely nothing?

It happened to him in seven days time what will not happen to the average individual in a lifetime. He had no Bible, no Bible written in Job. Job is back there time akin to Abraham, Moses has not written anything yet. He has no Bible, he has no church, he has no pastor he can call, he has no Christian friends, the three friends that show up do not do him any good. They misdiagnose the whole problem and just add more weight to it.

Job is in the Bible for one reason I believe for you and for me in a practical application. Job is in the Bible for one reason. Job goes through all that he goes through in seven days what you and I will never go through a lifetime without any Christian radio, without any Joel Osteen, without any Christian there with any of that, without any Bible, without any pastor, without any church, without any friends simply to show you and me that in our life God is simply enough.

I feel ashamed of myself sometimes, ladies and gentlemen. I do have a Bible, I do have Christian friends, I do have the Holy Spirit of God living inside me. He did not. He did not give me a church. I do have Christian radio and TV and Christian books. I do have all of those things and yet in all of those things in my life many times I am such a pansy baby about the trials and tribulations that come in my life.

The reality of the book of Job and the reality of what he is saying here is to be patient in tribulation is simply this: when you rejoice in the hope that you have and the hope of Jesus Christ in His coming is in your life, you have everything that you need to get through whatever you have got to go through. The problem is we do not really realize those things.

Patient in tribulation. Nobody likes it. We have got to learn the reality that many times, and you see this in the book of Job, many times in this particular case here, God had a message for Job. He had something he wanted Job to learn. He had something that he wanted Job to see and understand that there was no other way that Job would have got it so God did it this way.

He used the devil as the messenger boy to get the message to Job that God had for him. Many times in your life and my life, God has a message for you and me. He has something he wants us to learn, and yes, He will. He will use the devil as the messenger boy to deliver the message. Do not get so focused on the messenger boy that you will lose the message. That is what happens to us all the time. Again, it is about our perspective.

The reason he says be patient in tribulation is because that is how you grow. We do not grow just from the good things in life. We grow through the bad things also. You have any inkling how God will work in your life? You will come to Sunday morning and you will get some great truth. Or you will come to Thursday night Bible study and God will prick your heart about something in your life. And you will say to Him, "Yes, Lord, that is something I have got to deal with or that is something I have got to work on." Or "Lord, that great truth You showed me in the Bible is such a great truth. Absolutely wonderful."

Then He will put you into some trial or tribulation to show you how that great principle now works. He will give you the great truth and then so you can learn how the operational side of that truth is. He will put you in some adversity and show you how not only it worked, but show you how you grow through it. When you come out of it, you are stronger than you were before you went in it. That is how He does it.

Do you think they build great football teams by sitting around in training camp eating ice cream? Sitting around campfires and roasting marshmallows? No, they run till it hurts. They run till they puke. They work out till they cannot move anymore. You have got to go through whatever you are going to do, and in life that is going to be something that is meaningful. It is going to cost you something. There is going to be some pain involved. Most of us do not recognize that that is how He does it. You know why? Wrong perspective.

The first thing we do when something happens in our life is we do not stop and say, "I wonder what God is doing." The first thing we do is run to the ambulance, to the hospital. Pick up the

phone. "Oh Bob, what has happened in my life? What am I going to do?" I will tell you what you are going to do. You are going to grow through it. But that is what you should do.

Now I say all that and I realize that sometimes we bring tribulation in life because of stupid things that we do. But you grow through that. Life is a process of learning by the things that we do right and God brings tribulation in, and by the things we do wrong and God brings tribulation in. But it is still a growing process.

You have heard me say it many, many, many, many times. Everybody makes mistakes. Everybody on this planet, saved and lost, is going to make mistakes. The pastor that gets up and tries to pretend that he is without mistakes or without sin or without this and tries to hold you, is a sham. The bottom line is we are all going to make them.

I suggest to you that you get the Bible, apply the Bible and make as few of them as you can. That is a good piece of advice. I am not giving you your license to go out, "Oh man, I want to do whatever I want to do." Yeah, but there will be a price tag. I am not telling you that. You and I will have enough struggle without going out and looking for it. But I am telling you this, that when you do make a mistake, learn from it.

I have something that I hold in my heart so hard and fast. I do not always do it, but it is always there even when I do not do it, and that is simply this: do not make under any circumstances, in ministry, the same mistake twice. Because when you do, you are just holding up a flag. I have not learned a thing.

Patience is absolutely key in ministry. You learn patience through the things that you go through. Ministry requires patience because you have to wait on people. People are never going to be, and this is a failure of so many Christians, young Christians too. Young Christians, I talked about the zeal or the passion, but they do not have the experience or the practical application to realize that sometimes young Christians or people who are struggling, you cannot expect them to understand your zeal.

How many times have people started coming to this church, dropped out, came back, dropped out, came back, dropped out, came back? Almost without exception, there is never a time that anybody would ever say to them, "You cannot come back again." Now there are exceptions to that when you have somebody who is flat out trying to hurt, and you know what you are trying to do. That is like saying, "Here is the key to my house, I am going to be gone for the next four hours." So you have got to have some sense, but you also have got to have patience. You have got to realize that some people, it just takes a while.

I think that is one of the perspectives that I want you to begin to see going into this third level. That things are not always the way they appear. We are very judgmental toward people sometimes because they do not meet the standard we want them to have, but we fail to see and understand what is really going on in their life at that particular point that may cause them to do that. Obviously when it is your ministry, the first thing you want to do is take it personal, but you cannot do that. You just cannot. You have got to learn to discern what you are dealing with in

every given situation so you know how to respond to it. But patience is absolutely key in ministry, waiting on people.

You have had situations where the husband got saved and the wife was not ready, and you had to wait for that wife to come to the point where God got her ready. I have seen places where the wife got saved and the guy was not ready. And you had to wait for God to work in his heart. I have seen situations where God came down and did something with somebody and it just took a while for them to really get it all figured out.

My philosophy is simply this, and this is why I told you, on these levels of this next thing we are going to go to for this next eight-year period, they have no pressure from me on it. You can get in, get out whenever you want. I am just going to take the ones who want to do it and I am moving out with it. I am going to accomplish what God has. I do not care if it is two of you, one of you, a hundred of you, it does not matter to me. I will take what God gives me and I am patient enough to let the rest of you get there when you get there. I just hope that you get there before He comes back, but that is okay, it is up to you.

Romans 5:3-4

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

Who wants to glory in tribulations? "Oh, praise the Lord, I just got in a wreck. Praise the Lord, I just came from the doctor and my blood sugar is way over, I am a diabetic. Ha ha ha!" It says, "glory in tribulations," how, why? "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience." You see? Do you want to learn the ministry? The ministry requires patience. You want patience, then buckle your seatbelt because you are going to have to go through some tribulation.

In ministry, you get patience for others, learning to wait until the next day. And then you get patience for the next day. You get patience for others, learning to wait on them and their trials and troubles by learning to wait on God through your trials and troubles. It is just that simple. There is a value in going through trials. But when we do not have the right purpose and we do not have the right perspective, then we see it totally backwards. We do not understand that I am going through this because God wants to make me better.

I have told you this before, but it is a great illustration. It is one of the greatest things I have probably ever heard in my life. Years and years ago, there was a man that I met whose name was Manly Beasley. Manly Beasley had five, when I knew him, he had five diseases that were killing him. He looked like something out of the night of the living dead when you saw him. Very frail, very pale. I do not know how he did what he did. He kept up an act of ministry where he preached. He could only preach one time and then he would have to take a break for like 12 hours before he could get back up and do it again. I looked at his suitcase one time when I was helping him into his hotel room and inside of his suitcase, it looked like a pharmacy. He had so many pills he was taking. This guy, he finally died. I do not have to say what he died of because there were five or six things. It could have been. I have no idea. But he was one of the greatest Christians that I ever met in my life. He was one of the kindest, gentlest men. Even though there

were times when I knew he was in tremendous pain, he always came to the place where he always got the job done. He was one of the greatest examples in my life.

He said something one time that I never, never forgot. For those of you who aspire to understand ministry, because I am going to begin in our time now in everything that we do. This is why I say there will never be a Sunday morning, or a Thursday night, or in any class that I do not take the time to point these things out. I suggest that you, along with everything else you do, get a little journal someplace that you can begin to catalog these principles of ministry that I am going to give you. Before, they were just neat things that Bob said, but I cannot remember what it was. These are things that are going to carry you down the road, 10 or 15, 20 years from now. These little things that will make the difference of where you are at now from where you are going to be then.

He said this. He always had a very unassuming way of saying things. He would always say things that, the way he would say them would make you think. He asked the question one time and I was in the crowd that he was preaching to. He was talking about going through things, and if anybody had a handle on going through problems in life and staying on task for the ministry, he did. He asked the question, he said this. "What do you get when you squeeze a lemon?" The average person says, "Well, you get lemon juice. That is how you make lemonade."

He had related the story that he was from Atlanta or Savannah or someplace, I forget where he was, down in Georgia. He had related the story that it was a period of time when they were putting the cyanide in the Tylenol capsules, remember that? People were dying all across the country. Some of you remember it. Somebody was going into the grocery store with a syringe, like a needle or more than one that had some kind of poison in it. They were injecting it in the lemons. So the people were buying the lemons, squeezing the lemons, making lemon juice, lemonade, and then ingesting the poison and dying.

His point was, "What do you get when you squeeze a lemon?" The answer was lemon juice. His answer was, "No, when you squeeze a lemon, you really get what is on the inside of the lemon." He says, "What do you get when you squeeze a Christian?" Then his answer was, "You get what is really on the inside." You see? Because what is really on the inside will really come out when we are squeezed. You walk around and praise the Lord all you want, but when you get squeezed, what comes out of your mouth? When you get squeezed, what is really on the inside is what comes out.

He says, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Watch this, Romans 5:4, "and patience, experience." You want experience in the ministry because this is what you have got to have. This is what you all, one level, two level, or three level, have got to get to.

I told you Thursday night, I am going to take what I have learned the last 35 years of my life in ministry, and I am going to pour it out and pour it in. But please do not think for a moment that just because I shoot it out of my mouth and you write it down on paper, you are going to understand how to use it. God is going to put you through some trials. He is going to put you through some tests. God is going to put you through some things, some tribulation that you are

going to go through, and God is going to grow you through it, and God is going to show you, and from that, you are going to get experience. You are going to get experience.

Then it says, "and patience, experience, and experience, hope." Hope is the ability to see God in every situation. The word "hopeless" should not be in the Christian vocabulary. I deal with all kinds of people with all kinds of problems. Many of you do also. My goal in time is to get you all up to that point where you can learn how to do these things.

The bottom line is this. I will sit down with a couple, or an individual, whoever, and they will have some serious problems in their life or their marriage or whatever, and they will lay them out. It pretty much goes the same way. Either the guy will start or the woman will start. She will lay out where her heart is at, and then he will lay out where his heart is at. Most of the time they are good people and they really want to do what is right. They are just caught in some things, and have to work some things out. But many times, I have had individuals, guys and gals, sit down and tell me about where they were coming from in their life. They want to get their life turned around, but they have got a lot of baggage they have got to deal with.

Almost always, they will ask me this question once they lay the thing out. They will lay it out, they will talk about it, we will dialogue back and forth, and then they will probably say something like this. "Well, Bob, now that I have laid this out, is there really anything we can do for this?" I always say back to them, "That is really not the question. The question is, no matter what your problems are today, the question is not, 'Is there anything to do?' The question is, 'Will you do what you need to do?'" Because with Jesus Christ, through the tribulation, there is hope. There is always hope for a Christian. I do not care how bad off you are.

If you are unsaved here this morning, I have got news for you. You are in a world that is upside down and you are trying to swim against the whole mainstream and it is going to swallow you up and drag you right down to hell. That is a pretty bleak future, but for you, I have got a hope. That hope is Christ's death on the cross.

If you are here this morning and you are a saved person and your life is upside down, you cannot get ahead of the game, and you did a lot of dumb things, you made bad choices, a lot of bad mistakes, and you are sitting here underneath the weight of all that today, and you look at me and you say, "Hey, I want to do what is right, I want to serve God. What is it? What can I do?" The bottom line is this, even in your situation, there is hope. The hope is taking your life and turning it around and beginning to do the right things, making the right decisions, and stop making the bad choices you have made. That is how it works. Exactly how it works.

When it comes to the ministry, you glory in tribulations because you know that the tribulation is the work of patience. Patience brings you to experience, and experience brings you to the last thing, and that is its hope. There is hope in the fact that when I am in, there is a way out. You do not have to look at anybody ever that you are dealing with when they say, "I do not know what to tell you. Man, that is a bad situation. Boy, I do not know. Thought about suicide because that looks like that is the only way out." No. There is always a way out when it is with God. It is always a way out the way it is with God.

I used to work at a factory years and years ago, and I was in charge of the warehouse. In this warehouse were all these parts up on tiers, or stacks of tiers. I always thought about what a fun time it would be. They will get rid of my frustration, they will just start going down at the beginning of that. They were like 200 yards long. Just parts for washing machines and dryers, because it was at the Hoover Company, and just parts for everything. Millions of little pieces, little rivets, little pulleys, little wires, little this, little that. I thought to myself, that would be a great thing. You want to get rid of your frustrations someday, just walk down there, you are mad at the company, you are mad at your boss, you are mad at this, you are mad at life. Just start ripping everything off and pulling it down and just throwing it up. Throwing all the little washers up that you have had to carry over there, and they yell at you because they are not there on time. And throwing this around and throwing that up.

When you finally get down to the end of that quarter, and you have just had a ball throwing everything everywhere, and you realize you have come to the end, you turn around, you are going to go out, and then you realize, you know what? You now have got to walk back through and pick up everything that you threw down to get out. Because you have blocked your path with all of the carnage or the stuff that you were having fun throwing up in the air, and now it is blocking your way out. You know what you have got to do? You have got to start picking up every piece, then create a path to get out of that mess that you made.

Many times, life is the same way, is it not? We go through life and we throw this in the air and that in the air and care about this and do not care about that, and we make the biggest messes, and finally, when we get down to the end of where it is at, we have got to turn around and the only way out is the back way you came in, but you have got to get over all of the junk that you carelessly threw in your path to get in.

Working with people, you have got to be patient with that. You have got to realize that people get into problems and it does not always get out just like that. There are some things you can get into in life and you can walk out of it just as fast as you got in, but the longer you are in it and the more messes you make, the more time it takes, and patience is the key, patient in tribulation.

VII. Continuing Instant in Prayer: Constant Communication with God

Then he says in Romans 12:12, "continuing instant in prayer." There are two aspects to your prayer life. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing."

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

That will deal with your walk with God every day. I used to read the stories in church history about these guys and I never figured it out. I used to read how Jonathan Edwards and Wesley would travel on horseback eight or nine hours a day to go to the next place to preach. Then they would get up and they would preach. Yet the books about them said that they prayed without ceasing and they prayed nine, 10 hours a day. I would think to myself, "Now that cannot be right.

I mean, a guy had to sleep, he is preaching, so he is traveling from one place to the other. It takes him eight to 10 hours to get there. He has got to sleep at least seven or eight hours sometime. How in the world do you figure eight hours, 10 hours praying a day?"

For the longest time, I could not figure it out till I realized that the prayer they were talking about is the prayer that we ought to be in our lives all the time. That is to pray without ceasing, continuing instant in prayer, pray without ceasing. In other words, pray all the time.

You ought to get up in the morning and your whole relationship and life, and here again, young Christians, you are not there yet. It is okay. I am talking about things that for people who have been saved for five or six years, three or four years, two or four years, who begin to get a base down in their life and begin to work towards some things, you will get there. You do not ever want to go out of here if you are a new Christian. I am always very careful of this because we always have a host of young Christians or people maybe that are not in the Bible where they need to be and they want to be, but they are not there yet. So I am always very careful of what I say, that I always make it completely understandable that there is a process to get here.

But if you have been saved three or four years or more, come on. You ought to come to the point where you get up in the morning and your perspective and your purpose is all focused around the fact that you are hoping Jesus Christ and you start a conversation with Him and you just go through the whole day talking with Him about the good things, about the bad things and just keep that conversation going. You ought to pray eight to 10 hours a day.

I do not mean, obviously, when you are driving to work, you do not want to close your head and bow your head and close your eyes and fold your hand. You are going to run into somebody else and kill them. But the bottom line is in your heart, prayer is not the position of your body. Prayer is your attitude of heart of where you are at with God. You ought to have a conversation with Him all day long.

If you went on an eight-hour trip with somebody, it was your friend and they are in the left, you are there in this side of the seat, right side, you are driving. You start out at eight o'clock in the morning. You have got a 10-hour trip. Would you think it was a little strange if you drove the whole 10 hours during the day when both of you are awake and nobody said anything to each other? Even if you turn on the radio, some song comes on or some news report comes on and someone says this, you have something to say about it, you dialogue back and forth.

Would you think it is strange that you got in a car with your best friend or a friend of yours and drove eight to 10 hours and you talk to them all the way on that trip? Well, every day of your life when you get in a car, you ought to realize that your best friend is sitting right next to you in that seat and you ought to talk with Him just like there is somebody there.

You know what they say about crazy people, do you not? They talk to themselves. Well, every Christian ought to be crazy when it comes to the world because you ought to talk to yourself. You know what Psalms is? Psalms is the book of somebody talking to himself. That is what it is. You ought to talk to yourself on a regular basis, but not to you, but to the One that is living inside you. Continuing in prayer, pray without ceasing.

Another aspect of it is you do not ever quit praying. Matthew 15, I think it starts around verse 21, tells you the five reasons that God does not always answer our prayers when we want Him answered. We have talked about it before on Thursday night. In your daily walk with God, sometimes God does not answer when you want Him to. That is why you continue in prayer. You continue in prayer. You stay with it. No matter what happens, you do not give up. You stay with it. You talk with God all through your walk all day long.

Then the second concept he says here, is to be instant in prayer. He says continuing instant in prayer. Two concepts, continuing in prayer and instant in prayer. I heard an old preacher years and years and years ago. He was a great preacher. He is dead now. His name was Tommy Leatherwood. Tommy Leatherwood was a pastor in the Mansfield, Ohio Baptist Church.

I went down there one night. They had me down to play my trumpet and do some things when I first got saved. I heard Tommy preach that night. He was a great preacher. He was probably in his sixties or the seventies when I heard him and he had pastored a church there and he had a great oratorical power. He could really speak well. I will never forget that night. He preached on being instant.

He talked about the three things that Christians ought to be instant in. To me, I call this God consciousness. I call it so aware of God in your life that these things are automatic. He said every child of God ought to be instant in three things.

- 1.) The first thing he said to be instant in is being able to preach. Because Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 that he should preach the word. Be instant, in season, out of season. That simply means when you do not want to and when you want to. He said every Christian ought to be instant in preaching.
- 2.) He then said that every Christian ought to be instant in praying. He went down through those things and laid them out and it was a great sermon.

He said every child of God should be ready in an instant to do three things for Christ.

- 1.) He should be ready in an instant to preach.
- 2.) He should be ready in an instant to pray.
- 3.) And he should be ready in an instant to die.

I thought to myself, "Wow, that is some wisdom. That is some wisdom." If you are saved this morning, you are already ready to die. You may not recognize it yet. You may not want to die. I am not saying you have got to go out with a sign, "Shoot me, I am ready to go home to heaven." But you obviously know, as I do, that death is a reality. It is going to come sooner or later. I do not preach a funeral that I do not tell the people. The greatest object lesson we have here today is the person in that casket. You know why? Because I stand here preaching, knowing full well, if Jesus Christ does not come back, someday somebody is going to preach my funeral and I am going to be in a casket. It is a reality.

He said every Christian ought to be ready. Ready to do three things instantaneously. You ought to be ready to preach. You ought to be ready to pray. You ought to be ready to die.

There is a great example of this in the Bible. I do not know if you ever saw it before. Something does not really jump out at you. But if you spend some time looking at it, it will be back in Nehemiah 2. This is an example of praying an instant. The difference between praying without ceasing is throughout your daily walk. But there are times in your life when you have got to get up an instant prayer. You are in a situation that you were not expecting and here it is. This is what we have here. This is why that old preacher said that every Christian should be ready in an instant to do three things for Christ: preach, pray, or die. We ought to be ready in an instant to be able to pray in this sense.

The story back here is in Nehemiah 2:4-5. Nehemiah is going before the king of Ahasuerus. The king is going to allow the Jews to go back. Some things have changed here now and he calls in Nehemiah before him.

Nehemiah 2:4-5

Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

Here is the king. Nehemiah was just out there, whatever he was doing, fixing himself a sandwich or whatever. Somebody said, "Hey, the king wants to see you." He said, "Oh, okay. I got all the mayonnaise off my mouth, okay." He walks in there and he walks up to the king and he says, "Yes, your majesty, I hear you wanted to see me." And the king says, "Yeah, what request can I make you?"

Instantly, he does not want to say something stupid. So he sends up a prayer. "So the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed unto the God of heaven. And said unto the king." See what he did? Right in the middle of that thing, while the conversation was going on, he was instant in prayer and he said, "Okay, God, here is the chance. Now what do You want me to do?" Then God gave him the answer all in the space of a microsecond.

Instantly he said, "Okay, God, here is the chance." You are going to make it instant in prayer. That is not like when you just went around the corner and a guy with a radar gun caught you and then you throw up an instant prayer, "God, I hope the tinfoil of my hub cap works." This is doing something for God where God puts you in a scenario that you are not expecting in that moment while the conversation is going on in a millisecond, while it is transpiring and the words are coming out of your mouth and you are presented with something that instantly while you are talking to that guy, you say, "Okay, Lord, what do You want me to do?" And God says, "This is exactly what I want you to say to him." Instant in prayer.

VIII. Distributing to the Necessity of the Saints: Generosity and Discernment

Here is a great example. Romans 12:13, "Distributing to the necessity of the saints." Helping out those who have a need or are going through a tough time. I call them the secret Santas of Christianity.

I knew an old boy. Some of you do not even know him. He is dead now. I preached his funeral here a couple of months ago. But some of you were the recipient of his blessings. I knew him from the fitness center where I went and his name was Dennis. Dennis and I got to be good friends and I witnessed to Dennis many, many, many times.

I never forget, before I even really met Dennis, and this is about three or four years ago, I am walking around the track and he calls me over. Dennis was an older guy and he had very bad health. He could hardly walk. He called me over and he says, "Are you a preacher?" I said, "Yes, sir, I am." He said, "You have a church?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do." He said, "How many in your church?" I said, "About 150, I guess, at that particular point in time." He said, "You got some people that need some help?" I said, "Well, there is always people that need help." He said, it was Thanksgiving is when it was. He said, "Here." He took my hand and I felt something in my hand and he says, "You make sure that gets to where it needs to go." I looked down and it was four \$100 bills.

I went back to church that next Sunday and passed out those \$100 bills to people for Thanksgiving. He did it at Christmas. He did it every time that there was a holiday. He had that kind of heart. He just did not do it to me. There were several other guys there that had churches. But he would do it to them too. He is somebody who just always wanted to help.

There is a time in this church when Christmas comes around or Thanksgiving or some time that the people in this church come to me and say, "Hey, look, here is some money, give this to so-and-so or give this to somebody who you think needs it." Whatever the case may be. That is the job of a church, is distributing the necessity of the saints, helping out those who have a need.

Sometimes they can be spiritual needs. Sometimes they can be physical needs. It does not matter. A church and a Christian ought to be generous with what God has given them, but not gullible in how they use it. You have got to be careful with what you do.

I follow a very clear line here. I like to help anybody, and I am not against helping anybody. But I have been in this business for a while, and I know how people try to scam you. My rule of thumb is to take care of your own people and your own church first. That is my rule of thumb. But I am not against helping anybody.

I know this. When we used to meet down here in the little place of the pavilion, we were there, I do not know, three or four years before we put a sign up. We put the sign up one week, and what happened the next Sunday? We had a couple of them down. The sign was no more out. The paint was not even dry. Somebody driving by and said, "That is a church, let us hit them up." It was hardly once a month, probably, or twice a month. Two of them came in, they left their whiskey bottles out on the step. Everybody had a heart attack when he sat down with Eric, because he kind of stretched, and he had a big old handgun down his side of the table. "How much did you want again, sir?"

Let me tell you something. I want to help anybody. All I want is to be legit, but I know how the world is. One time years ago, and I have even seen them bring their kids into the equation. One time I watched, they called me on the intercom and said, "Hey, there is a couple out here, their car broke down, they say they need some help. Would you talk to them?" I always used to talk, I said, "Absolutely." I walked out and there was a man and a woman with two little kids. The little kids were with dirty clothes and all of this. I told the secretary, "Get the kids some candy bar, donut or whatever, see what is in there." I said, "Come on in." Oh, what a sad story it was.

"Well, pastor, we are coming up here to see, go to my sister's funeral, up in Nebraska, wherever it was, and our car broke down. Now we slept in the car last couple nights and kids have not had anything to eat and we just really need some help." I said, "Okay, that is fine. My first question is, do you go to church anywhere?" "Oh yeah, we are from Louisiana, Alabama, whatever the case was, we are down there, we go to a Baptist church down there. It is just really a great church and we are just traveling up here and we broke down and I hate to ask you and he says, we do not know what else to do." I said, "Hey, no problem, absolutely no problem. Would \$1,000 do it for you?" He said, "Yeah, \$1,000 would be great." I said, "You need more? I mean, you have got three little kids there, your car broke down, it is not going to be easy, probably have to get a tow. Is \$1,000 enough?" "Oh yeah, pastor, \$1,000 would be just great."

I said, "No problem. I will go back and tell the guy back here that takes our finances to get you a check for \$1,000 and you need to take somebody up the bank and help you cash it so you get the cash because it is probably hard to do that. I just need one thing. Give me your pastor's name and phone number so I can verify that you are a member of that church. Because I always like to help people out, especially when they were a sister Baptist church and I am going to call your pastor and I am going to tell them that you are here and you are down and out and they broke down and because they are good members in your church and they are hurting, you confirm for me that you are in your church and they are really good and they are involved and no problem. We will give you the, you do not have to pay it back, I am going to give you the \$1,000 because we are supposed to take care of each other. Now, what was your pastor's name and the name of your church?" "Well, what was his name?" I said, "That is okay. Just give me the name of the church." "Honey, what was the name?"

The bottom line was there was no church. Once I started to probe the thing and I started to find that out, I simply said, "You know what, you have got to be ashamed of yourself. You have got to be ashamed of yourself that you drag your little kids in here for some scam to rip off money from God's house. You do not go to church anywhere, do you?" "No, sir, I do not." "Now, let me ask you a question. Are you even a Christian?" "No, sir, I am not." "Are you even on a trip from someplace?" "No, sir, we live downtown." I said, "You know what? I do not have a problem helping you. I really do not. But here is what I have a problem with. You see all that we have here? God gave this to us. Everything we do here, God gave us. Now, I do not have a problem that you do not go to church. I do not have a problem that you do not want to have anything to do with God. I really do not. But my question to you is this. If the devil has taken such good care of you and you are living and doing for him, why would you live for the devil over here but when

he does not feed you, want to come to God to try to get the money to feed yourself? If he is such a good master to take care of you, why not let him take care of it?"

I gave him \$100 out of my own pocket because I have no problem giving somebody that needs the money \$100 to have them sit down and listen to me preach to them for an hour. Dollar a minute. But you cannot stay past 100 minutes. I have no problem. I used to go to places when I would be in a hotel someplace and did not have anything to do. I would go down there, take a whole bunch of \$1 bills with me and go down where all the bums were, and walk up to somebody out there on the street corner and I would give him a couple of bucks and I would say, "Hey, I will give you a couple of bucks but I want to talk to you." And I would witness to him for 20 minutes. I do not mind giving the money out but I am going to make sure that you understand where it is coming from.

You say, "Well, that guy just ripped you off and took your \$2." I do not care. He has got to deal with that with the Holy Spirit of God. The bottom line is I will pay you \$2 just to sit and listen to me, not you guys. You guys are going to pay me but I would do that. It is not about not helping people. This church needs to help and it does help people but your concept of it as far as coming in and thinking that the church and its finances are something that I can take advantage of are a little different than mine.

This church will take care of its own needs first. I simply say to somebody when they come in, "Where do you go to church?" "Well, I go down here." Chris has been with me when we have done this. I said, "Where do we go to church?" "Well, I go down here." "Well, why is not your own church helping you?" "Well, they do not do that." "Well, why would you go to church that does not do that?"

I had a pastor friend one time, he is still my friend and I would never do this. He had a deal in his church. I do not even think it is right but this is what he did. He comes to the place where somebody came into his church and said, "I need some money, I need some help." He would say, "Okay, that is fine, no problem. Let us see how much you have given over the last four years and we will give you back everything you gave. Is that what worked for you?" I could not do that. He did it.

But then he is the same guy that he had Sunday school on Sunday morning. A lot of churches have Sunday school then they have church. We do not have it. I am lucky to get you here for one, let alone two. But they have Sunday school in the mornings and they come in and then you stay for church. A lot of his people were, he was noticing a lot of his people were coming to Sunday school and then leaving and not staying for church. Which would make any pastor mad.

You know what he did? This guy is nuts. I would never do this but you know what he did? He had one of his deacons dressed up in a devil costume and walk up and down the parking lot. When the people were leaving after Sunday school and not staying for church, he would have him in a costume and say, "Hi, I am glad you did not stay for church this morning. I love it." I could not do it. I could not do it at all. But if I ever do, I have got three or four of you in mind to wear the suit. I am going to put six of you out there.

There has to be a balance in the thing. The bottom line is you help people. The Bible says, "distributing to the necessity of the saints." My big gripe is giving people money and helping them physically and then not helping them spiritually and letting them die and go to hell. I have no problem with it at all. But I am going to make sure that it is done right and I am going to make sure that it is not a scam. First and foremost, you take care of the people in your own church.

I will tell you right now, you are in this church and you know it is true. Nobody else knows who it is. But this church helps people every Christmas, every Thanksgiving. This church helps people throughout the year. There have been people that have lost their jobs and needed this or needed that. This church helps, but nobody knows about it, never bragging about it because that is the job of the church. The job of the church is to take care of those who take care of the house of God first.

If that guy would have been legitimate and I had a call down into Georgia or whatever it was and the pastor would have said, "Oh yeah, that is so-and-so. He is a deacon in our church. Would you help him? Would you take care of him?" I would say, "Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely I will take care of him. If he is a member of your church and he is in good standing in your church and he is saved and he is a child of God and he is in a jam, whatever he needs, we will get to him." Necessity of the saints.

IX. Given to Hospitality: Evangelism Through Fellowship

The last one we are going to talk about here today is Romans 12:13, "given to hospitality." That is a good one. Hospitality is not a sign of culture or manmade rules of etiquette, but rather a New Testament biblical principle.

Some of the greatest evangelism work I have ever seen done was done around somebody's home in their kitchen or their living room or their dining room around dinner. I do not know how many times I have seen it. I have seen people that got saved in this church and came to know the Lord in this church because somebody long before they ever got saved just invited them over to have time of fellowship together. I have seen people that got saved in this church that came out to play volleyball and came out to Jason's Deli or came out to Funhouse Pizza when we used to go there and sat around and people talked to them.

I have seen new people come to the deal where I have said, went up to them and I said, "Hey, are you coming over to eat tonight with us afterwards?" And they say, "No, I do not think we are going to come there." I said, "Oh, come on, we will buy your dinner. Come on over tonight. We will take care of it. We will buy your dinner." They come out and have the time of their life. They show up the next week, they come back and it is not long before God gets a hold of their heart and they realize that this is the place they want to be because this is not somebody who is looking around to see where they can get their hand in your pocket. This is a church that is looking to see what we can do for you. I am not interested in what you can do for me. I am interested in what I can do for you and only interested in what you can do for others. Hospitality is the key.

I do not know how many times I have seen it over the years where some of you people will take people in, invite them over for dinner, have a fun time, do some fun things and it winds up going farther than all the Sunday morning preachings and sermons that I could ever put together in a six-month period. Taking people in and working with them.

Titus 1:8 is one of the requirements of being a bishop is to be a lover of hospitality. 1 Timothy 3:2 talks about elders are given to hospitality. You see, there are so many dimensions of the ministry. There are so many dimensions of learning of this thing about your purpose and understanding your perspective and your passion. There are so many levels of dealing with people.

X. Conclusion: Accountability and the Future of Ministry

That is why as I talked about last Thursday night, this is what we have got to begin to do. We have got an eight-year program now. In that eight years, the last six and a half, almost seven years, we brought this church up to a point. Now we have got to get it to the next level. The next level is going to be harder, going to take longer, but it will pay off at the end because by that time, this thing has to be well on its way to take care of itself and stand on its own two feet, spiritually speaking.

Let me say this to you and then I am going to close. Whatever level you are on here today, and we talked about this the other night, but I want to reemphasize it again. Here is what you have to do at some point in your life. You have to. You come in, you get saved, or maybe you are already saved and you come in, but you have got some problems.

What I do is I put people in your world. I put myself in your world. The fact that you are working with somebody else or several other people never negates the fact that you cannot spend time with me. I will spend whatever time it takes. I will do whatever I have got to do. I will put whatever in your life. I will get you whatever you need to get it done. I will help you however I can. That is what a church does.

The church takes young Christians, young people who are struggling, young people who are trying to figure out where life is and get their life back on track. We build around them everything that they need to help them stay accountable to the Word of God. They come to the point where they respond to it. Many of you disciple them. Some of you are bringing them through the seven stages that changed the day they got saved. Some of you are working on other areas in their life. You are doing exactly what we talked about today. You bring in the hospitality factor. You have them over. You do things with them. You understand the whole concept. So for many of you, it is already in play. We just have got to get it up a couple more levels and get some more experience into the aspect of it.

But at the end of the day, it is about this. You are only going to be valuable in this church. You are only going to be valuable to God and to this church when you come to the place in your life that you learn to keep yourself accountable by the principles of the Word of God, which you are taught on Sunday morning and Thursday night and everything else that you get.

People cannot keep us accountable forever. When I first got right with God and saved and all those things in my life, for the first three years of my life, I had two or three men who absolutely kept me accountable. Four, now that I think of it, who actually kept me accountable in various different areas. I do not think I would have made it without them. Each one was in a different aspect of my life. Each one fulfilled a different need in my life. Each one gave me exactly what I needed and held me accountable in different areas of my life. Those men brought me up through to the place.

But there came a time in my life when I had to say to myself, "Bob, you have to stand on your own." I had to learn to listen on Sunday morning. I had to learn to listen on Thursday night. I had to learn to take the stuff that I was getting and apply it into my life that I could hold myself now accountable. That is the only way, ladies and gentlemen, you are ever going to get to the place where you can help hold somebody else accountable.

I say that fully knowing that most of you are right on track with that. I am not saying that like you all better get it together. Most of you have it together. But I do not want you to lose sight of that fact because that has to be your goal. My job on whatever level you are, the first level, the second level, or the third level, is to help you with that. You third level guys, I do not have to keep you accountable. You learn exactly what this church should be as far as its purpose, its perspective, and its passion, and you hold that line and you do not deviate from that. That gives us the ability to bring the other ones up to those levels and give them what they need to help them because that is the way this church is going to function from this day forward. It is the only way that it is ever going to get to where God wants it to be. It is the only way I am ever going to get the leadership to where it needs to be for the purposes that we talked about last Thursday night.