

Romans 15:1

Sunday 6/6/2010

We have come a long way in Romans, and we are entering what I would call the premier chapter, not so much for the Book of Romans, but certainly for our life as Christians, in our ministry, and our relationship with each other. I do not know of another verse in the Bible, another passage in the Bible, that I probably use more in everything that I do in my life.

Last week, we looked at the end of chapter 14 and studied probably the single greatest aspect of our walk with God: our faith and the process that we go through in getting to the point where we can trust God. We talked about our ability to go through life trusting by faith what He tells us in His Word. We focused on the life of Abraham, and I showed you how Abraham's life is such an incredible picture, an incredible study of each of us. We all go through our trials and our tribulation. We all go through a process in life. I am going to show you that process before we are finished today, but we all go through the process of our trials and our issues.

When I showed you last week Abraham's life, I basically gave you an incredible outline for you to put in your own life that you could almost go back and study it in the format that I gave you. Yet, at the end of that study, you will not find the life of Abraham; you will find your own life, as I found my own life. We saw how he goes from Genesis 12, where he first shows up and cannot trust God for anything, and then we find in Genesis 22 where, at that point, he trusts God for everything. It is the incredible journey of his life that pictures our struggles as we go through this life.

Then we built that whole story and the whole sermon around the key verse, and it is the last verse in that great chapter. It simply says this:

Romans 14:23

For whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

We talked about how we as Christians, many times, have non-biblical concepts about things. We talk about it a lot on Thursday night as I have to redefine a lot of things for us from the Bible, from what Christianity has defined to be just not really true. When we think about sin, we always think about something that somebody does. We always think about adultery, murder, rape, stealing, lying, gossip, sowing discord. In reality, that is not, in the Bible sense, really sin. I know that it is sin, but that is where we usually define it as sin. In reality, sin never starts with what we do. I think that is the biggest mistake that most of us make.

I was coming through my files. I keep everything. I am always looking for sloppy people, who I myself am one. I just spilled water over my shirt. But anyway, I am always looking for things that I can use. I have a file probably that is 20 inches thick of material over the years that I have just amassed, and I hang on to it. It is things that I use from time to time. Obviously, after 20, 30 years, you forget a lot of it.

I came across this this week, and I thought, "Wow, what a great thing this is." I do not remember why I got this. Somebody wrote this a number of years ago, and it was titled simply, "What is

Sin?" I want to read this to you because I think that coming from Romans 14 to Romans 15, and we talked about the Bible says that whatsoever is not of faith is sin, we need to really begin to grasp and understand how this thing works.

Here is what it says:

Sin is to feel a secret pride in success, training, or appearance.

It is to feel bitterness over what someone has told you about the success of another.

Sin is a hard, sarcastic, or unyielding spirit.

It is a touchy, bitter, sensitive spirit, resigned to attract the attention of the opposite sex, to say and do things to attract attention to self by what we wear or how we act.

It is a constant complaining and a desire to quit trying to do what is right.

It is an abuse of acts to self or others.

It is a deceitful or an elusive spirit that seeks to create false impressions, to show and depict flaws, and to criticize others, all the while to make oneself look better.

Sin is a lustful wandering of eyes, a shirking of duty or responsibility, a tendency to retaliate when crossed, or permitting things in your life for yourself, but you simply do not permit in the life of others.

Sin is an uncleanness in thought and desire.

It is a joke that masks the hurt you intended toward others.

It is our unwillingness to put out for others unless personal advantage is involved.

It is to show partiality to certain people or classes or denominations in your dealing.

Sin is always thinking of what might have been if certain things had not happened.

It is the unthankful, unappreciative attitude toward your lot in life.

It is living in constant fear of failure.

It is taking an unmerciful attitude toward those who do fail.

Sin is putting on a false or exaggerated humility, or imagining how others are praising you or speaking well of you.

It is straining at the truth, showing an apathetic attitude toward being caught in sin, or shirking responsibility.

Sin is the feeling of nervousness or envy when you watch someone do something that you think you should be doing because you are better at it and can do it better than they do.

Honestly, if we would all apply that to our lives this morning and look at that and understand that, none of us would be left standing, all because of a lack of faith to trust God in what He says.

I want you to notice about what I just read: not one thing in that writing was anything that anybody did or committed. Did you see that? It was not a list of sins, but rather a description of what sin is, because sin starts with an attitude.

That is why the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart that there is no God." Before he got to the place where he did not believe in God, that sin started in his heart. The Bible says that whosoever lusts after a woman in his own heart has already committed adultery with her. Why? Because the sin starts in the heart. The Bible says that if you hate your brother in your heart, you are already a murderer. Why? Because sin starts in the heart.

These things that I listed, that is our old sin nature that is in each of us. When we do not deal with it biblically, it produces and provides the outward things that we call sin. Sin starts in our heart with an attitude long before it ever manifests itself in our lives.

Today, I want to try to make the bridge between chapter 14 and chapter 15. I want to show you how these two go together. Last week, we looked at the end of chapter 14 and studied probably the single greatest aspect of our walk with God and our faith and our process of its growth through the life of Abraham: "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." We talked about our ability to go through all of those things and trusting the Lord.

I. The Core Principle: Bearing the Infirmities of the Weak

Now today, let us look at Romans 15:1 and let us connect the two together as we move on.

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

We thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We ask You, Father, to help us today. Lord, there is so much that I want to say. There are so many things that I want these people to grasp in their heart, who are one with me in ministry, who believe in this church, who understand what we are trying to accomplish and what we are trying to do. Lord, there are so many things I, as a pastor, want to put into their hearts today that may help them even grow better. But Lord, You have to be the author of all of that.

Lord, if I said what I feel today, I would just be jibbled, jabbering and would not make any sense because it is so overwhelms me sometimes, the task that lies before us as a church. Most people today do not see the hour in which they live. They do not understand the urgency of the time that we have. Lord, we never want as a church to fall into that elusiveness and that lethargic attitude that we do not see and understand the times that we have and to live in what God has for us. So help us today. Father, we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

The first thing I want you to see here is the connection between the two chapters. It says here in Romans 15:1, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." He is talking about what he has already said, and now he is bringing it into where Chapter 15 is. Without a doubt, the number one verse that I keep before me and use more probably than any other verse in

ministry is verse one. It is a standalone verse. You can use it in every aspect of your ministry when you are working with people. It is the concept that you ought to have in the back of your mind that whatever you do with people, however you view ministry, however you view whatever you do, it ought to be viewed through this verse.

But in the context of Romans 14 and 15, as we have already seen, it deals with a weaker brother. We have already started, studied last time, when he is weak in the faith. But without a doubt, one of the greatest single concepts of the Christian life that you are ever going to find is, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." And then the last part of the verse, "and not to please ourselves."

I want to take this verse for a few moments, and I would like to develop it. I would like to show you the full range of motion of this verse, so to speak. But I want you to keep in mind from this day forth in your life, and I know that probably will not happen for most of you, but some of you it will, this great principle that "we then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves."

II. Application in the Home: Marriage and Children

Let me talk to you about where this thing starts. This thing starts long before you ever get to church. This principle starts in your own home. It starts in your own home. You say, "How does that work?" Well, it starts with husbands with their wives. The verse says, "You that are strong ought to bear the infirmity of the weak." Do you not understand that the Bible says in 1 Peter 3:7 that the wife is the weaker vessel?

You know what most husbands do? Most husbands in most married relationships, they exploit the weakness of their wife. They do not help them. They will use it as an alternative or divisive thing in their life. You see, it starts in your own home. Colossians 3:19, I think it is a great principle. It says, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

Why in the Bible is the verse that says husbands are to love their wives, but they are not to be bitter against them? You know why that is? Because the Bible takes the position that you as the strong one ought to lead your wife, who is the weak one. The truth of the matter is, wherever your wife is spiritually, it is where you have led her to be. Biblically, you have no complaint against your wife in most cases because she is simply a product of what you have led her to be.

I have said it many, many times, and I will continue to say it: everything rises and falls on leadership. I have been through the ministry for many, many years, and I have made some observations. Now, I want to tell you something: there are some bad women in life. There are some women that you had best stay away from. But compared to bad men, there are very few. I have found that there are bad women, and when you find bad women, let me tell you, based on the principle I am about to give you, if you find a bad woman, you had better stay 100,000 light years away from her because when a woman is bad, she is really bad.

I will tell you why that is. I do not know if you ever noticed it or not. Did you ever realize, and I have told you this before, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, when Jesus came the first time, you

know that there was not one woman that ever rejected Him? You will find scores of men who rejected Him, but you will never find one woman in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John who ever rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and said, "I want nothing to do with Him." You know why that is? Women were attracted to Him. Women were drawn to Him.

Do you know why that is? Because they saw in the Lord Jesus Christ exactly what every woman as the weaker vessel is looking for. They saw in His life, in His character, and the things that He did, and the way that He dealt with people, and the way that He dealt in all the circumstances, they saw exactly what God has put into a woman that she wants to have in a man. That is why many men dumped Him. Many men wanted nothing to do with Him. You will not find one woman in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John who ever rejected who He was because He stands as the model.

That is why I tell you, many, many times, if you are looking for a prospective mate and you are a young lady, do not marry the guy. Marry the Christ in the guy. If you do not see the Christ in the guy, then do not marry him. You are under an illusion that you can change him or once you get him in your control or whatever the circumstances, it does not work that way.

I have found this to be true: most people who go through their life and are not good leaders and do not learn how to lead, after 10 or 20 or 30 years, you do not turn them around to be a good leader. It is one of those things where everything rises and falls on leadership. When the Bible says, "We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," that verse does not end at the church. That verse goes all the way back to a husband leading his wife and being the right kind of example for her and leading her the way Christ wants her to be led.

It does not stop there, does it? The next place it goes is moms and dads with their children. You realize that your children are the weaker vessels in your family? They are totally dependent on you for everything. They are dependent on you for their food. They are dependent on you for their clothing. They are dependent on you for their safety, their comfort, their well-being. God gave them to you as parents. He lent them to you for you to raise them up and train them up that your progeny of your Christian family may go on and on and on.

Moms and dads need to provide the strong leadership together that they have. You remember when we came through child training classes a number of years ago, and it is in a book form back there now, and I know it is still on tape. I gave you a great verse and built the whole aspect around that. It is a verse that in most cases, when you first look at it or you have heard it preached, it is never preached in a real context. It is in Proverbs 29:18, and it simply says this:

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish:

We use that, and it is okay to do that. As a pastor, I need to give you a vision because if you have no vision, then we are going to perish. We are not going to get the job done. We are going to get all out of whack and messed up, the whole concept of things. The bottom line is that there has to be vision. But in the context, if you look at it, the vision is not the church. The vision is children.

Parents need to understand that their children are the weaker vessels, and "ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." If you will take that concept all the way down to your marriage and to your children, you will change your family and change your marriage. You have to, the Bible says, "and not to please ourselves." There lies the problem. We have too many things in our life that we do that we want to please ourselves, that we never get around to bearing the infirmities of those that are weak.

Let me ask you a question: what is your plan? What is your vision for your child? Do you have one? If I sat you down right now and gave you a piece of paper and said, "Write down your vision for your child," I do not care how old they are. If they are under your roof, write down the vision, the plan that you and your wife have. Is your plan to bring them to a youth group every other Thursday night? Is that your plan? What is your plan? Do you have a plan?

You know why you do not have a plan? Because you have no leadership. You know why you are going to lose your kids? You know why you are going to have tremendous problems with them when they get 17 or 18 or 19, that you cannot control them and you have to barter with them now to get them to do what is right? Because leadership has failed.

I know that we are talking about this in the light of ministry, and that is where we are going, but you had better understand something: if you are a husband here this morning, your first ministry is your wife. If you are a mom and dad here this morning, you have children, your first ministry is your kids. The reason why some of you will never make it in the ministry where you take this verse to other people is because you cannot learn to take it in your first ministry. It is just the way it is.

III. Application in the Church: Ministry and Maturity

I visited with a psychologist this week, not for myself. I never miss an opportunity to get involved in something that I can learn something from. I have an individual that I am working with at this particular point that has some severe problems, and they wanted me to go with them to an appointment with their psychologist. I was not going to miss that chance. I love sitting down and listening to how the unsaved world approaches things in life. It was the greatest experience of my week, really.

This psychologist was a woman. No offense, I mean, that is fine. But she is as far away from God and the Bible as you can get. Four, five, six, or seven times, when she said something, after she knew I was a pastor and I had come in with an individual, she looked at me and apologized for going against what the Bible teaches or what the Bible believes. It did not bother me; I was just there to learn.

I marveled that even though this woman is unsaved, she does not have any inkling of God. She does not believe the Bible has anything. In fact, I guarantee you, if we sat down and talked for a while, her big issue would be religion will be the problem that puts you over the edge. I could tell just by the time I talked with her that she thought that if you are too religious, then you are out of your mind. You mark that down because that is what they are going to use to lock us all up. Well, lock you up. They will not lock me up. Lock you up.

When I sat there and this person, this individual, started laying out their problem, I have to tell you, I was pretty impressed with this lady for one second. She is like me; she is, there is no middle ground. She put the bullet right between the eyes. This individual was whining about their wife and their family that they had lost, and all these things, and going on and on and on. She said something, and I had to catch myself because I almost said, "Amen." I thought for a minute she was just shamming me and she had been listening to my tapes.

She looked at this individual and she said, "You know what? I know you want to change your wife. I know you want to change your family, but you need to understand something: you cannot change your wife or your family until you change yourself." I said, "Amen." That was some good biblical advice given by a very unbiblical person.

I am telling you, what is your plan? Everything rises and falls on leadership. It is a situation where you have to understand that this is how it works in the body of Christ. It is the same concept. You and I who are strong, mature Christians—and I know maturity comes on different levels—but if you have been in the Bible, you have a handle on biblical principles. You and I ought to be helping the weaker Christians get to a place of maturity. We ought to be leading them, not stifling them.

This is why I push you 100% of the time, 24/7, 365 days of the year, for every person in this church who claims to be mature and claims to have a relationship with the Word of God, and you are not a newbie when it comes to Christianity, that gets you to the place of maturity where you can fulfill Romans 15:1. That is working with younger Christians to help them grow because our job is simply that the primary mission of any New Testament Christian is Romans 15:1. There are no exception clauses. There are no, "This does not mean you like it or not deal with it or not deal with it."

The bottom line is the only reason God saved you and put you into a process to grow you up spiritually is so that you could get to the point of spiritual maturity where you could take what you learn and help somebody else. That is it. If you do not at some point, or you stop, you will fall back into that lethargic attitude of Christianity where you just missed the whole point of what God is trying to do. You lose your purpose, you lose your perspective, and you lose your passion. Scores of people getting saved, lives and marriages being put back together, and all people can see is their own sorry, negative life without any purpose. That is where it goes.

Like it or not, you take the ministry of people one on one out of your life, or you never get there. Let me ask you a question: what is the point of all this? Why are we here? If we are here to make an impact on somebody else's life, to take what we have and give it to somebody else, you who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and you are mature and you are not doing that, what is the point of being here today?

I will give you a great example. It is all fresh in our memory. Now it is Memorial Day picnic. Did anybody notice anything last Monday? Maybe you never thought of it in these terms. I do look at things a little weird. That is why I went through a psychologist this week. But did anybody notice anything?

I remember a time when we had Memorial Day picnic, and its intended purpose was to have a good time for you. I can remember me standing up and saying, "You know what? I want to do this for you. You do so much for us." The church buys the meat, pays for just about everything. You bring a few little side dishes in. But the bottom line is something that I initially wanted to do because I wanted to give you a day where you did not have to do anything. You did not have to fix anything. You could come and we would feed you. The leaders would help me cook it. We would get it all done, and you could just go out and have fun and do whatever you want to do.

That is still there. But boy, has it changed. I do not know if you noticed it last Sunday, but last Sunday, Memorial Day weekend, when everybody is out of town and everybody is gone and churches are traditionally down, we had over 220 people in church. Memorial Day picnic, I counted 230 people that came through the food line, and then there were probably 30 people that came later after that.

I had four couples and five or six singles sit down with me and talk throughout the process of the day, where they are at with God and what they need to do, and talk about who really was key in their life that got them there and looked around. At eight o'clock on Tuesday morning, my phone started ringing with a couple that said, "We really need to get some help. We really need to get our marriage on track. We were there Sunday. We were there Monday. This is what we are looking for. Is there anybody that can help us put this thing together?" I got a phone call, I could not even go to the ball field at the time I was supposed to be there because I got another phone call from another couple. They are just gruddled. They are upset. They are disillusioned.

Now, why is that? I will tell you why it is. They see this place as a place of hope. They see this place as a place that they can get help in their struggles. Somebody cares. A sense of genuine love of God and of each other. I do not know how many times I have sat down with a couple. There are some of you I am working with, and they are still struggling with things. When you get into these problems in your life, you know what? The first thing that happens, you think you are the only one that is in those troubles. That is a normal thing. You get overwhelmed by everything.

I do not know how many times the thing that I have used in counseling with couples or the very people who are working with them, somebody will say, "Well, we are really at this point, this point, this point." You know what I will say? I say, "You probably do not know this, but the very couple you are working with came in about three years ago, and they were worse than you are." You know what? They cannot believe it. You know why they cannot believe it? Because they were not here three years ago and saw you in your goofiness. They now see you as a trophy of God's grace. That is exactly how I view it and exactly how I use it.

I use your own life and testimony of when you walked in those doors and you did not love your husband, you did not love your wife, your kids were a mess, everything was up and down in your life. You had no hope, you had no vision, you had no purpose, you had no perspective. Your life was a wreck. By the grace of God, God changed your life. Now, not only do I give them the principles of the book, I use the principles of your life. Time and time and time again, I will say, "You know that person that has worked with you, that couple, they went through some, they were

worse than you are." "Hey honey, you think he is a nut now? You ought to see the guy that has worked with him when he came in. He was a bigger bozo than he ever thought about being." I embellish it a little bit.

A guy told me Sunday morning when he called, or Tuesday, last night when he called. He said, "You know what? I have never been to your church for Sunday. We came out and we came Monday." He said, "You know what impressed me? When all those kids went out there and played ball, nobody knew me from Adam. The guys that were playing ball made me feel like I had been there all my life." I cannot teach that. I do not have any books in the Bible or any classes up my sleeve that teaches that. You know how that happens in your life? By you allowing God to transform you, that you that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.

You see those people out there? You see those people that are out there by themselves and nobody knows? Have you ever been somewhere where you did not know anybody? You automatically feel like you are out there in left field someplace. That is where he played. Pretty good on my part. But you already feel like you are timid. You do not know what is going on. What it feels like, not just to have one, but a group of guys come around and make you part of the camaraderie and put you in there and get to know your name and get to talk with you. By the end of the time, he said, "You know what? That was the greatest single event in all my life since I have been saved." He said, "I actually got to a place where I felt like somebody really cared." I cannot teach that. I cannot teach that. But what a blessing that is. What a blessing that is.

IV. The Christian's True Calling: Tent-Making Missionaries

You see, the reality of the Christian life, I know you all have jobs, and some of you are pursuing careers. That is a good thing. Even if you are going to be a doctor, some of you are nerds, some of you are nurses, some of you are great mechanics, some of you work for the railroad, some of you are police officers, some of you are lawyers, some of you are farmers, some of you are teachers, some of you are typesetters, some of you work in blue-collar industries. The instructions that you do nine to five or whatever it is, seven days a week or five days a week, you get the understanding and you kind of get the false idea that that is what God has called you to do, and that is not true.

The reality of the Christian life is the fact that none of those things, if you do that or whatever you do, that is not your job and that is not your career. If you understand the model in the Bible, after you get saved, you are a tent-making missionary. Read the account sometime in Acts 18:3. Two of the key couples that Paul had in his ministry were Priscilla and Aquila. They were a husband and wife team, and they started churches and they changed people's lives. It was Aquila and Priscilla, when Apollos in Acts 19 was screwed up with his doctrine, that pulled him aside and straightened him out. They had a church in their home. He is a pastor, but when you read over there in Acts 18:3, you find out, you know what they are doing? They are tent makers. When Paul came through there, he says, "Because we were of like occupation," Paul spent time with them making tents. That is how he did what he did. When he needed money, he went back to his trade as a tent maker. Aquila and Priscilla had a church in their house, but their occupation was tent makers.

Your job, your career, is not whatever you do. That is the tent-making process that God has put in your life, that you earn a living, support a church, and then use it for your ministry as you reach out. What a foreign concept that is today.

Let me tell you something, folks, and you had better listen to this. The devil will give you every dream you ever had. He will give you every desire of your heart that you ever wanted to be. He will give you every desire and every dream and every fantasy, and he will let you make millions of dollars, and he will let you do everything in life that you want to do, just so he can get you out of the mindset that you lose the aspect that whatever you are doing has nothing to do with eternity, but it has everything to do with your ministry that is your eternity.

Your job and my job is to grow to the place in our lives where we bear one another's burdens. Hear that: a strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves, but by investing our lives in other people's lives. The Bible says you get to that point by growing, as I gave you last week, Romans 4:12, in the steps of faith. I showed you those steps last week. You learn to walk by faith and not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7.

V. The Process of Spiritual Growth and Edification

Again, as last week, though I did not get into the detail of it, I draw your attention to Hebrews 5:12-14. A great passage where it says:

Hebrews 5:12-14

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Strong meat in the Bible is a picture of Bible doctrine, knowing your Bible, knowing how to use your Bible. Milk in the Bible is your inadequacy; it is the fact that you may be saved, but you just deal with a basic concept. He said there were people there, just like there are people here, just like there are Christians all over this world, for the time you ought to be teachers, but at a time you ought to be dealing in somebody else's life, what do we do? We have to go over the same basic problems that you had five years ago. He says, "Strong meat belongeth to them who are full of age," spiritual maturity, "who by reason of use," using the Bible, taking what I give you and doing something with it, "having your senses exercised to discern both good and evil." We become strong Christians through the exercising of our senses. That is the absolute key; you have got to have that. Most of God's people never get to the ability to discern good and evil.

Look at Romans 15:2:

Romans 15:2

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

I always get amused how people always are pointing out other people's problems like they do not have any of themselves. My dear mother used to say, and my mom, my mom, was not the greatest Christian that ever lived, but she had a lot of good, solid things in her life. She used to say something that I am sure your mama said too, and it was simply this: "If you cannot say something nice about somebody, do not say anything." Boy, do we ever need that in Christianity. Our job is to edify each other.

Now, that does not mean you do not deal with issues. It does not mean that when a problem comes up in a church, you do not deal with it. The problem is, you have got to be able to discern good and evil. You have got to be able to discern when some issue comes up in a church that you have got to deal with it. It may not be popular. You may not like it. I may not like it. We may be confrontational. But you know what? You have to, that is what you get through the Bible. You discern what is good and what is evil. You discern what is right and what is not. Some things you can let go and deal with; some things you simply cannot. But our job is to edify each other, and even dealing with issues comes out of edification because the younger Christians see it. They say, "Wow, we have a church that stands on principles."

I just cannot believe you want me as your pastor to be a wuss. Maybe you do, but I do not. I just cannot believe that you want me to be some spineless jellyfish crawfish. I just, I do not believe, I do not believe that you really want me to be some weakling up here that you can sway me with whatever you do not like. That I am going to take a stand, and somebody says, "Well, if you take that stand, I am leaving." "Okay, folks, we are going to change it now, and we are going to do this." And somebody comes up and says, "You do that, and I am leaving." "Oh my God, what am I going to do? I do not know how to handle this. If I do this, they are going to leave. If I do this, they are going to leave. What can I do? I know, I will call Bob Alexander. Bob, what would you do?" I tell them both to leave. I do not believe you want a wuss for a pastor.

My greatest compliment I have ever paid was paid by somebody who did not like me a number of years ago. He said to me, he says, he came in and he sat down, he said, "Bobby," he says, "I am leaving your class." And I said, "Okay." I said, "I am sorry to hear that." He said, "I want you to know," he said, "I do not like you." And I said, "Well, you know, sometimes we have character clashes." And he says, "Well," he says, "I do not know what it is, but I do not like you." And I said, "That is okay." And most people do not. I am learning to grow with it. And he said, "Well," he says, "I do not, he says, I am just going to know I have got to leave, but he said, I wanted to come in and tell you I am leaving, but I want to tell you this." He says, "Even though I do not like you and I am leaving the church, it is not, it is simply this: I have got to tell you this one thing I, even though I do not like you, I respect you for is the fact that when you have got to make the hard choice and it is not the popular choice and people are swaying on both sides," he says, "one thing I do respect of you is you do not move your ground. You stay with what you are at. Even though I do not like you, I respect that about you." I think that was the greatest compliment anybody ever paid me.

Just because you do not have the discernment to discern what is right and what is wrong does not mean that I do not. It is one of those things where your job and my job is to help other Christians. You see, when you come in and you have issues and you have problems, I know you are in the middle of them, and I know they can be overwhelming. My job, and also your job as a mature Christian, is to discern what you have.

What is discernment in its basic form? Let me explain it to you. Discernment in its basic form is a couple comes in, they have tremendous problems, and maybe they even at the point where they hate each other, and they have all kinds of issues, and they are caught up in all the emotion of it, and have been for some time. All they can see is what is wrong with them. Now, discernment is looking at that couple as they see themselves as the problems they have, and me looking at that same couple, are you seeing that same couple, and I do not see the problems, I see the opportunities. Because I have learned over the years that sometimes God has to break your marriage before He can fix it. Sometimes God has to break your back before you can walk with Him. That is a contradictive thing, is it not? Nobody gets their back broke and walks. Sometimes God has to break your neck before you look at Him. That is a contradictive thing. When you break a neck, you do not look at anybody; you are dead. But spiritually speaking, that is true.

Your discernment is the ability to see what God is doing in somebody's life even when they do not see it. That is the discernment. Then when you see that, then you do not hurt them, you help them. You look at the opportunities of growth. That is what He gave you last week when I laid out the life of Abraham: problem after problem after problem after problem as he saw it, as we looked at it, opportunity after opportunity after opportunity, and he became the friend of God.

Let me ask you a question. Let me tell you something first: God always has a supply before you and I have a need. You know that. That is a thing of faith. I heard a message a number of years ago. A guy asked the question, and I thought it was a strange message when he started out, and I thought to myself, "Oh boy, here we go." He asked this question. He started out and he prayed, and then he looked at the crowd and he said, "Folks, let me ask you a question: which came first, air or lungs?" And I am thinking, "Okay, what is next? The chicken or the egg? Where are we going with this?" You know what he did? He laid out the greatest exposé walking through the Bible on that little statement that was designed to get everybody's attention. You see, sometimes the best direction is misdirection. When you want to hit them from the left, throw the ball to the right, and that is what he was doing. His question was, "Which came first, air or lungs?" And the obvious answer is, "Well, air came before lungs." And his point was, "You see, God always had a supply before you had a need." See that thing?

Then he took that concept and he walked it through everything in our Christian life, and the end of the message, the end of the time, was simply this: "Folks, God already has a supply before you even have a need." The problem is, we do not have the faith to trust God that way because we see our circumstances totally backwards from where it is.

Most pastors stand at the top of the spiritual staircase, every step of the way being another level of spiritual growth. Most pastors stand at the top of that spiritual staircase, look down there 150 steps down below, see a bunch of people groveling in their problem, and just scream at them to

get up where he is at. That is what most churches are. Most churches are people with problems who cannot get out of it themselves, and the pastor all he does is stand at the top of those spiritual stairs and scream at them and yell at them to get up there where he is at. That is not ministry, and that is not a biblical pastor, nor is that biblical maturity.

You know what we have to do? If we are at the top of those spiritual stairs, we have to go down and help them up one step at a time. We have to help them up one step at a time, one step at a time. I tell couples in marital counseling, "You need to help each other off the mountain." Somebody says, "What does that mean?" I am going to give you an example. Courtney, William, come up here. Put your stuff down. Come on now. Courtney and William, do not ever cry out to the preacher what he is trying to make a point.

Courtney and William are on a hike way up in the mountains, and Courtney and William are up there having a time in their life. But then something happens. Courtney falls, and when Courtney falls off of a big hill and rolls down the hill, bangs into a tree, you know what she does? She breaks this leg right here. Now, William, being the man that he is and the champion of righteousness, sees her fall, runs over, but he is such a klutz that he falls and he breaks this leg and rips his pants when he did it. What do we do? They are at 9,000 feet. No cell phone works, no nothing. What do they do? They are going to die if something does not happen. They are both hurt. They both have broken a leg, which tells me that in marital situations, when people come in and they have problems, they both have issues. It usually is not just the one party has a broken leg; they both have broken legs. So how do they get off of this mountain, which is a representation of the problem that you are in?

Here is what I tell them: "You know what you do? You get smarter than the problem. The problem is you are up in a mountain, and you have got broken legs, and you have got to get off the mountain or you are going to die." The moral is, your marriage has problems, you both have problems, you have got to get off the mountain of your problems or you are going to die spiritually. So what would I have them to do? Here is what I do. I get to a place where I put them together, and I would, these two legs are broken, this one on her, this one on him. I immobilize them so they could not bend. You know what they do? I would have him put his arm around her and him, and you know what I do? Let him use this leg and her use this leg. Put these two together and get off that mountain. Thank you. You may sit down.

That is how you do it. That is exactly how you do it. You have got to help each other. If I could get two couples working at this concept where you get off the mountain by helping each other off the mountain by using the good leg that you have, that is how you solve problems in your life. But somebody has to have the discernment to understand that.

I have learned that solving people's problems and dealing with people and their issues, it is not hard, not hard at all. What happens is we do not have the discernment because we have not exercised our senses. Now, you go to a professional marital counselor, and he would spend an hour and for \$200, and he would give you every metaphor you wanted to hear, and you know what? You would go out of there, you say, "What did he say?" Everybody in this room just understood what I did with that illustration, and everybody here knows now what you have got to

do. It did not cost them nothing, and it took me what, 60 seconds? Well, it is going to cost you something because I expect you to, when you finally get married, and I hear he is going to propose this weekend, that I want payback. There is going to be a wedding in the air. I just came through my ears.

VI. Christ as the Ultimate Model of Servanthood

Look at Romans 15:3:

Romans 15:3

For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

That is a great song. That is Psalm 69:9. In the context of Psalm 69:9, it is Christ dying on the cross for you. But wow, what a great example. You see, I guess if anybody ever was the strong one that bore our infirmities as the weak, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, was it not? You know what He says? Christianity is so simple. It is. We want to make it so complicated because we just do not want to do what is right. We want to make it more complicated because we have got our own career. We have got some vision out there and some we want to do, and it does not line up with what God wants us to do. But Christianity is so simple. God just simply says by verse 3, "Just do for others what I did for you." That is all. That is all.

Do you ever notice how un-Christian Christians can be in their Christianity? We pretend we are Christ-like, but we are just very, we are not, are we? Simply doing with people what God has done with you and for me. God never hurt you. Everything in your life, good or bad, God did to help you and edify you. That is the way we ought to be.

Philippians 2:6-7 says:

Philippians 2:6-7

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Now, that does not mean you covet what somebody else has, but in the context of what we are looking at, it does mean that you do not work to please yourself; you work to please somebody else. Somebody else is struggling, then you help them.

Then he says a great verse which you have heard many, many times, Philippians 2:5:

Philippians 2:5

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

That is the Word of God, the principles that I lay out for you every week, every Thursday night, to give you everything that you need. Let it go. He said on in verse 6, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He was the Son of God. He was deity. He was very much as much as God as God was. But look at verse 7, just like you and I, Christ living in you, the hope of glory.

Philippians 2:7

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

That is our job. Our job right there is to take on a form of a servant. He made himself of no reputation, yet wow, what a reputation He had. You see, the reason He got a reputation is because getting a reputation was not His goal, and God gave Him His reputation. God gave Him His reputation because He took upon Him the form of a servant.

Philippians 2:8

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

You know what the model for you and me is? Christ. Let me give you a couple of things that are just stand out very quickly. You know what the first thing that stands out? Christ had no life of His own. What are you doing with your own life? The model for you and me in the Bible, He had no life of His own. His whole goal in everything that Jesus did, you find it in the book of John, John 8:29, John 5:30. His whole goal was to fulfill the will of His Father. How foreign that is to us. How un-Christian Christians become in their Christianity. That is such a foreign concept. Your life is not your own.

I will tell you what Romans 12:1 says:

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

I told you this before, we have come through Romans 12. What God calls reasonable, we classify unreasonable. You know why you will never get to the place in your life where God wants you to be, that you ever fulfill verse 1? It is real simple: you are going to be in charge of your life the whole time. It is going to be your will over His will. You are going to do what you want to do no matter what God wants you to do. Christ had no life of his own. His goal was to fulfill His Father's will. That is just too foreign for us today as Christians.

VII. The Scriptures: Our Survival Kit for Hope

Look at Romans 15:4:

Romans 15:4

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

You know, when you and I edify somebody, when you and I bear the infirmities of the weak, when you and I lift up someone who is fallen, here is how it works. You know, one of the things that I try to do when I work with people, when people come over and see me the first time, and I know some of you do this too because we have talked about it, I will have people come in and they will have some issues. Sometimes those issues are not their fault. Sometimes they are. It does not matter. They have issues, and sometimes those issues are pretty pressing.

Now, I am not such a fool as I think that I can sit down with somebody in an hour and I can fix their problem. I teach you this, and I believe this with all my heart: the longer you wait to fix your issues, the harder it is to fix them. I also have to tell you this: there comes a time in your life, if you wait too long, you simply cannot get them fixed. Not because God cannot fix them, it is because the longer you go without God in your life, the harder it is to get back to God, and God is the only one who can fix them. You give God, you take away from God 20 years of your life and do your own thing, and then try to get back to God and see how it works. You will have ingrained your flesh so much that you control it, that it will never get back to God, even though God is patiently waiting for you to come back. It will not be God. Somebody says, "Well, God ever quit on me?" Never quit on you. But here is the problem: you will quit on Him, and sometimes you quit on Him and you do not even know it.

So they come in and they lay out their problems and they lay out their heartaches. My only plan is, when they leave there, is to give them hope, give them a light at the end of the tunnel. I may not be able to fix their problem in one session. I may not fix their problem in six months. But I can tell them that if they do what God wants them to do and they put in the things in their life and do it, that is where their hope is. You remember many people that just got saved came out of a hopeless situation, did they not? You have got to help them. Many people were saved but they were in dead churches or grew nowhere spiritually. You know what? It is not about whose fault it is. When they come in and they come to this church and they want to get on fire for the Word of God and get in the Word of God, you know what our job is? Your job is in edifying them is to give them hope. Many times they come out of hopeless situations. The people that called me on the phone of the Memorial Day picnic, they are people that had no hope, and when they came to the picnic and they saw by God's design what you guys were doing and what you guys were all about, you know why they called me? Because they saw hope. I do not know what to tell you. Building hope in hopeless situations.

I do not know if you picked it up yet, some of you fast track people, but there are four things in this verse to show you how to build hope, and I want to talk about these things now. You are going to see in these things exactly the things that I do in my ministry.

1. The first thing he says here, that things written aforetime for our learning. Last Sunday, I gave you a great example of this. The examples of men and women in the Bible are some of the greatest material that you are ever going to have to fix what is wrong with you. My mother said to me something one time after I got into the ministry. She asked me, she said,

"You know, Bob," she says, "Let me ask you a question." She says, "I know, I know the Bible is the Word of God, but she said, 'Did it never bother you why in the Bible there is so many negative things listed?'" Did you ever notice in the Bible how that there is even dirty things in the Bible, like incest, that he talks about this and he talks about that and he lays it out in graphic detail? She said, "It always bothered me that I have heard people that I used to work with talk about the Bible being a dirty book and how that it is no different than any other book." And she said, "I do not, I believe it, but she said, 'I do not understand it. Could you explain that to me?'"

I said, "Well, Mom, you have to understand, first of all, the Bible was never written to be a positive book. Never was. God never intended the Bible to be a positive book. God intended the Bible to be a negative book because man is negative toward God. You only get the positive out of it once you see the negative in it and yourself." That is why in the Bible you have every issue, every, I do not know of a sin, no matter how filthy and vile, from incest or pedophilia to whatever you want to put. I do not know of any sin in that Bible that is not listed in there in graphic detail for the express purpose of:

- 1.) *Showing you how a man gets into it.*
- 2.) *Showing you how he has to deal with it.*
- 3.) *Showing you how to get out of it.*
- 4.) *Showing you what happens if he does not do what is right with it.*

That is the Bible. Adam, Eve, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Isaac, the prophets major and minor, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Peter, Paul, Titus, Timothy, Philemon, the book of Hebrews, James, the book of Revelation. We saw it Thursday night when somebody asked the question about 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, did we not? I showed you how 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John impact you as a Christian. Last Sunday, we talked about the life of Abraham, and I walked you through and showed you, "This is what he is talking about when he says here." He is talking about the things that were written aforetime, the things in the Old Testament, the people that are in the Bible are there for our examples. You are going to find yourself in there. I just gave you a quick model last week with Abraham, and in Abraham's life, you see everything that you could ever hopefully see about where you are at in life.

Then what happened? What happened? I laid it out for an hour and a half last week, and then we came back Thursday night, and somebody asked a question, and what did we do? We squeezed a lot more out of it, did we not? If you went out of here Thursday night anyplace but walking out on your knees, there is something wrong with you. So we squeezed it out last Sunday morning, we squeezed it out Thursday night, and that is why I like about Thursday night, it gives us a chance to tweak what we did not get to do on Sunday. It does not happen very often, but it happens. We squeezed it out Sunday morning, we squeezed it out again Thursday night. You know what? If we could take from one o'clock today to about five o'clock tonight, and we can squeeze a lot more out of it, it never ends. So he says, "The things that were written aforetime," every issue in life is in that Bible, and it is written there for your admonition, that you can get

through what you are going through, showing you that you are not the only people on this planet that struggled. Everybody on this planet in the Bible went through tough times. That is the teaching ministry of this church. That is my style of teaching the Bible, using them as examples in a practical way in life. Add to that the wisdom books: Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, and Ecclesiastes. What else could you ever want? What else could you ever need other than an attitude to grow and learn? It is all there.

2. The second thing they say in that passage is patience. If you ever become a pastor or ever have your own ministry, you need to understand it takes time to do all of this, helping somebody through the problems and the mistakes of life, picking you up when you fall. My job is to exercise you. I get criticized for it sometimes, but that is the other wuss guy you are talking about, not me. I know what an exercise program needs to be. I know how to exercise you. I know how to put stuff on the bar so you stretch those, exercise those senses. Sometimes I will create scenarios just to watch how you respond to them and then grade you on it. You will never know when I do or when I do not. I understand how to build people. I have been doing it all my life. One of the things I have learned is that you do not get in a hurry. Another thing I have learned is that my job is to exercise you, but I never put more weight on the bar than you can bear. I monitor you very closely and give you things to do and watch how you handle it, watch how you deal with it. Chance after chance after chance, people get to get it together, and I never hold anything against anybody as long as they want to do what is right because you learn that it takes patience.

Now, I did not lay this out for you last week in Abraham, but you need to see this. This will help you. Did you ever look last week, and maybe you picked it up when you looked at Abraham's life last week, you saw his life in three stages if you were paying attention. Did you ever wonder why God took the time to put his age in there at the right places? Well, the first time you find Abraham is in Genesis 12:4. Remember what happened there? That is when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees. Why does the Bible take the time to tell you at that time in Genesis 12:4 that he is 75 years old? Then in Genesis 17, when God really begins to use him, God took time to tell you again that he was 99 years old. At the end of Genesis 16, he did it again, and he told you how old he was when he listened to Hagar. I told you the time between the two was 13 years where he is out of fellowship with God. Then he dies in Genesis 25 when he is 175 years old.

You see what you have, and everybody in this room has the same format.

1.) You have an unsaved stage. He was 75 years old. The first 75 years of his life, he was without God. There was a time in your life up to the point you got saved when you were without God.

2.) Then, you know what it took for when he was 75 years old till he was 99? That is 24 years of going to school to learn to walk with God. 24 years. His school was 24 years. Moses was 40 years. You are going to find that every man in the Bible, every woman in the Bible, goes through that same process, and you are going to find out that every person in this room goes through the same process.

3.) When he got to 99, God saw fit to use him. He dies at 175. That means he gives 76 years to God.

The thing you want to remember is this: he starts out 75, first 75 years without God, 24 years going to school to trust God, and then at 99 to 175, that is the most fruitful time in his life. Half his life he spent learning what God wanted him to learn. You see, it is not about when you get it together; it is about do you ever get it together? That is what it is about. How long it takes is up to you. You have an unsaved stage; we all were there. Then you have a learning stage; some of you are in that stage right now. Then you come to a place where you have a ministry stage. That is where you learn, and then you go on from there. How long it takes is completely up to you. There is no gauge for it. There is no fast track for it. It comes down to what you are going to do with the Bible in understanding and focus that you do not have a life that is your own, that your only function in life is not to be famous, not to be this, not to be rich, not to be successful in a world standard. Your only goal in life is to be faithful to the Father's will.

3. Then the third thing he says, comfort. Being there for you when you struggle and fall, edifying you. I can honestly say this: three-quarters of my ministry is spent encouraging people in their struggles. That is what you need. We need to do that. That is our job. I cannot wait until we get into the concept of 2 Corinthians, and we look at the handbook of ministry. I think it is probably the greatest single book in all of the Bible that is really going to bring where all we are at to the next level in ministry because it is the book where he teaches us how to minister. He simply says this in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. Just listen to it; you do not have to turn to it, but here it is. You want the ministry? You want to know what the ministry is? You want to walk out of here with a definitive verse on the ministry? Here it comes. See how you fit in this:

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

You know what he is saying? He is saying the only way you learn is by God comforting you. You learn by God doing what is right with you. You learn by God comforting you through your tough times how to comfort somebody else when they go through their tough times. I talked about Sean a little bit ago. He has been in our church now about what, four months? Some of you saw him sitting back there. Never went over and shook his hand. But I said, "Sean, today, you are probably saying, 'Who is he? Who is he? Who is he?'" Strong Christian. We go through our adversity so we can be in a better mind to help the weaker Christian go through his. What a foreign thought. What a mis-concept in Christianity today. "Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmity of the weak."

As a pastor, it is simply this: pastors never get this today. Never will. It is the day and age that we live in. But a real pastor today, a pastor pastors his people by going through the adversity and the struggles with them. That is what a pastor does. A pastor becomes, somebody says, "Well, how

do you become one with your people?" There is only one way: you become one with anybody, go through something tough with them.

Did you ever notice that in World War II, in Korea, and even Vietnam, and even to this day, you have guys who were in World War II together, they have not seen each other in 60 years, and the first time they meet at a reunion, it is like they never left? You know why? Because born brothers are born through adversity. That is what the Bible says, "A brother is born for adversity." They go through some of the most horrendous times in their lives, and they go through it sharing it with each other, getting through it with each other, helping each other, encouraging each other. And they did it. Most of them died and went to hell. We are God's people, the aristocracy of heaven. We got called by God, got saved by God. God has given us this mind, the Word of God, and we cannot even do it to each other. What a foreign concept. The pastors become one with their people by going through the suffering with them and then teaching them through that to go through it with somebody else.

4. Then the fourth thing, it says comfort, but then we have got to look at it in its entirety. It says, "comfort of the scriptures." I really love this. You see, my job and your job as a mature leader is to comfort younger people when they are struggling with things and help them. Young couples, individuals, your job and my job is to comfort them, but your job also is in time is to get them to understand that real comfort comes from their own relationship in the scriptures. You have got to get in the book. You have got to learn how to use it. You have got to learn how to use it. You comfort them, but you always point them to the source of comfort, which is the Word of God.

I do not know if you ever saw this in the Bible or not. 1969, either 68 or 69, I cannot remember, so long, might have been 70, I do not remember. I cannot remember exactly when I was in the Army. I attended a survival course. Our station at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. So my survival course was in the mountains, and what they did is they dropped you in a thousand miles from nowhere, and you had nothing to eat. You had a knife. Sometimes they dropped you in small groups of three or four. Everybody had one thing that you had to learn to share. Some guys had a compass, some guys did not. We had to, you had to navigate your way back, which took about a week, and with nothing to eat, no water to drink, nothing to stay warm on. I mean, you had the clothes you had on your back, you had no, it is all you had.

I looked at that, and you know, when they taught us all those things, they talked about the fact that the reason why they are doing this is because that as a soldier, there will be many times that you are in a hostile environment, and the only thing that will get you through and get you home and get you to survive is the training that we are going to give you right now: how to survive in a situation that is unsurvivable. I, and you know, I do not, you know, everybody does it. I mean, if you ever saw Air Force pilots or jet pilots, they wear that vest with all the pockets on it. That is their survival vest. They have everything in there to live, to get out of a hostile environment if they get shot down. Commercial airliners, they have them too. I mean, wherever you go, wherever you go, and the idea, you know, I mean, you get on a cruise ship someplace, they have lifeboats. Those lifeboats are stocked with everything. In fact, they look better now than most

hotel rooms. They have everything you need to survive the idea is to get you through some devastation or some travesty till help arrives.

I do not know if you know this or not, maybe you have not figured it out and thought about it, but as a child of God, you and I are in a hostile environment. You know why Christians do not make it? You know why some of you will not make it? Very simply and plainly, because God has given you a survival kit in the Bible, and you never learn how to use it. You will be like the guy, the eight ball, that was in the group that did not pay attention, and when the instructor was talking, and pretty soon you are going to come to the place where you are going to get out there and you are not going to learn because you goofed off and did not do it, and you know what? You are going to die out there because you did not learn how to survive. My job as pastor is to train you how to survive. That is my job. That is my job.

God gave you a Christian survival kit. Did you ever see it? Eight things in your Bible that are going to help you glean the comfort of the scriptures, that in any horrible, terrible, tragic situation as you find yourself in, you ought to be able to survive. My job is to comfort you as a young Christian by my relationship with God, as some of you people comfort others by your relationship with God, but in time, we need to teach you how to get this survival kit of God and get you to survive. That is really what the Iron Man concept is all about in its infant form, basically giving you the foundation to which to teach you how to survive. How to survive.

I do not know if you have ever seen it in the Bible.

1.) *The first thing the Bible talks about it being like unto water.*

2.) *The second thing it is like unto milk.*

3.) *The third thing it is like unto meat.*

4.) *The fourth thing it is like unto a sword. (Hebrews 4:12)*

5.) *The fifth thing it is like unto a hammer. (Jeremiah 23:29)*

6.) *The next thing it is like unto nails. (Isaiah 9:6, "sure nail")*

7.) *The next thing it is like unto fire. (Jeremiah 23:29, Psalm 119:105)*

8.) *And the last thing it is like unto a compass.*

You know, if you have those things, you can survive just about any situation that you are in. Did you ever notice how that thing works out spiritually in a spiritual aspect? Water. They taught us in survival school that you can last, depending on the environment, two to six days without water. There are some exceptions to that, but the average is in the climate that you are in, that two to six days. Maybe a week and a half at the most without food. Meat, you can go a month, maybe a month and a half before you starve to death. The milk there is the pictures of vitamins that you need, the supplements that you need to have. The sword, that is the Word of God. That is how you defend yourself and you protect yourself. The hammer and the nails, that is what you build with. You can build shelter with that. You can fix things. You can build things. The fire, the fire is a type of the Word of God. You warm yourself. You keep the darkness away. You scare out

the wild animals. You light to guide you in a way that you go. You can light your way with. And the compass, you always know where you are at because you always know the way home, true north.

You know, in 1968 or 9, I was told, I went, I look back on it, and I thought it, you know, I always were told if you do not have a compass, you always know which direction north is, and you check your heading at night with the stars and the daytime with the sun. I thought to myself years later, you know, I was not even a Christian at the time, I thought to myself, "How about that? Even on planet Earth, if you get lost, you have got to go back to the things that God made to find your way out." Incredible. Incredible. I mean, if you have got a compass, the bottom line is simply this: that compass points toward north. You are told in Psalm 75 that God is north, heaven is north. I will tell you what, it put that thing right on the line, right on the line.

Now, you also know, and I talked to this with a couple of Thursday nights ago, if there are two Norths. I always take kids out, you know, when we have got out of church here, and there is a big bright star over in the east. It is really not a star, it is the planet Venus. It looks like a street light. I will ask kids, I will say, "What is that star?" And they will say, "That is the North Star." And I will say, "No, that is not the North Star." You see, they think because they think the North Star is the brightest star. The North Star is not a bright star. The North Star is not a bright star at all. You have got to know where to look to find it. But if you have a compass and you are going by that compass in your hand, you realize that that compass will put you on a magnetic heading, but it will not be true north. It will be magnetic north. That compass will not point to true north. It will get you in a general direction, but it will not point you in the right direction.

In a forced march at night, when you can, you check your heading not on the compass heading, but you check it on the true north that you see. Is it not like God that would give you something that man made to hold your hand that would get you to the wrong north, but God's true north up in heaven is when you have got to follow? Man will always get you off track. They taught us, "You face the coming sunrise, north will be to your left. You face the coming sundown, north will be to your right." You always use that, and then you use the stars at night to navigate, and you can get out of any situation you are in if you know how to survive.

If you know that that Word of God is like unto water, and it gives you your basic fundamental need, the water of life. When you understand that that Bible is like meat, and that is the doctrinal Word of God. You understand that that Bible is like milk, that is your supplement, the vitamin that you need. When you realize that you have got a sword, Hebrews 4:12, that you can defend yourself and protect yourself. That it is like a hammer and nails, back there in Jeremiah 23 and Isaiah 9, that you can build things with it. You can build structures, shelter with it. You can build your family with it. When you look at those nails back there, you know what that nail is? It is called a sure nail. You know what that sure nail is? It is Christ. And you have got fire. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." You can warm yourself. You can cook your food. You can keep the darkness away. Scare off the wild beasts that you get scared of in the dark. The light to guide you, to light your way. And then you have a compass. Hey, God has fixed it in that book that there is absolutely no reason why you sitting here this morning as a

saved person cannot figure out where you are at almost exactly in reference to the coming of Christ. He has given you everything you need to survive.

One of my favorite shows on television, I think it is a great show, is "Survivorman." Every man really likes "Survivorman." Women watch "American Idol." Real men watch "Survivorman." I love this guy. He can get out of any situation he is in. I saw him fall in ice water in the Arctic with it 40 degrees below zero and survive. I watch him do everything. I watch him eat everything, do everything. He will eat centipedes, eat snakes, eat lizards, all that stuff. You know, he, they eat everything you can find. You know, bark off of trees and leaves and all that stuff. He eats anything, and he survives. I thought that many, many times, you know what? He is a perfect example in the world what you and I ought to be as Christians. He survives in hostile territory in places that the average person will not. That is where you and I ought to be able to do. And why cannot we? Why cannot we?

VIII. Conclusion: Hope and the Purpose of the Christian Life

God gives you those things so you have hope, that you have hope. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand. When darkness veils His lovely face, and it will, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil."

You see, give people hope. Give people, no matter how dark it gets, how bleak it gets, how bad it gets, God wants you and I, and saved you and I for a purpose. It was not to wimp out, fall down, and die in the wilderness someplace. It was to survive. You notice when they were wandering for 40 years in a place that was called the wilderness of sin, that they had no water, they had no food? Do you realize, do you realize God supplied everything they needed for them to survive that wilderness journey? Well, we are in a wilderness journey, and God will supply everything that we need to survive. What we have got to do, "He that are strong ought to bear the infirmity of the weak, not to please ourselves."

In any church, certainly in this one, almost every week there are young Christians coming in, people getting saved, people coming in with heartache problems and needing help. It is up to us to take what God has given us and to help us. Otherwise, as I said earlier, what is the point of it all? What is the point of it all? What is the point of coming, even owning a Bible, claiming to be a Christian, and going to church if you are not going to follow the simplest fundamental thing that Jesus told you to do: "What I have done for you, do for somebody else"? Do not get to the point where you think your life is your own. You have one goal in life and one goal only.