

2 Corinthians 1

Sunday 11/27/2011

I. The Handbook for Ministry

This is a long-awaited time. I have wanted to teach this book, but I think after the introduction and the message this morning, you will understand how now is the right time for this. We have just finished the book of 1 Corinthians, and we had been coming through a study laying out how the Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in each book of the Bible. Now we have gotten to the point where, when we got to this book, we did such a thorough job of 1 Corinthians, I just hated to lose that. So we decided to hold up that study. We will finish it when we are done here, but I wanted to go into this book. I think from where we are at as a church, this is what we really need to do.

The book of 1 Corinthians forms for us the ideal handbook for ministry within any church. I have told you many, many times that one of the great ways to study the Bible is by what we call contrast: things that are opposite, things that are different. There is no greater contrast between the church of Corinth in 1 Corinthians than the second letter that he writes about a year later, 2 Corinthians. We have already talked about how in 1 Corinthians they are just about messed up on completely everything that they do, many times with multiple issues in each chapter. He talks about how they are spiritual babies, that they are not growing the way they should. Because of that, we see all of the problems that they have in this particular church. It is incredible.

Yet, when we get to the book of 2 Corinthians, and this is what forms the great contrast, something changed. Now they want to do what is right. They have really dedicated themselves to following what Paul wants them to do through the Word of God. Now they really begin to turn the corner, so to speak, and begin to do what God wants them to do. By doing that, then we have the great contrasting book of 2 Corinthians. As I have said many, many times, where 1 Corinthians tells you what not to do, 2 Corinthians chapter by chapter shows you every aspect of the ministry.

For those of us who have dedicated our hearts and our minds to ministry, these two books are really invaluable. First Corinthians shows you what not to do. Second Corinthians shows you what to do and how to do it. It is an incredible book. Every aspect of my ministry, from a personal standpoint, years ago, when I saw this, and I cannot even remember how many years ago that it was that I understood this great concept, but I understood that this book of 2 Corinthians is really the handbook of ministry. If you are going to have a successful ministry, a biblical ministry, one that God is going to bless and honor, then you have to make this your model. This has been my model or my pattern based on this ministry for as long as I can remember.

II. The Bible as a Safe

Most of you, we have talked about the importance of all the books in the New Testament. I cannot look at 2 Corinthians and 1 Corinthians without really seeing the importance of all of them and how they fit. Now this may not help all of you, but some of you in here at some point

in your life are really going to be invaluable when it comes to ministry. Many of you are very close to that at this point. You are grasping the idea and the concept. I have no doubt in my mind that if Jesus is coming at some point, some of you will be out in the ministry on your own, and you will have your own church, and you will be doing things, and God will be using you just like He has used you here.

I think it is important that one of the best things I ever did in my Bible, and I have worked very hard for many years to try to get my Bible in a very easy format for an understandable way of using it. Most people think the Bible is very hard. In reality, it is not. It is a very easy book. You just have to get the right key. The Bible is like a safe. A safe is what you put your valuables in. Bank robbers want to break, crack safes, get into safes because there is all kinds of money in there. We have all watched movies about great bank heists and all those kinds of great movies that are fun to watch. But the thing that keeps you from getting into that safe is the combination on the door. So you have to blow the door open. You have to do something to try to get it open. You try to drill it through and do all the things that safe crackers do.

Obviously, the easiest way to get into a safe that has all the money and all the valuables and all the resources that you could ever want in life is to simply get the combination. The Bible is a lot like that. The Bible is a safe. It is a safe place for you and me to be. It is a safe place to raise your family in. Within that Bible are all the incredible resources that you could ever want in life. But the way you get into that, to get to that, is to have the right combination. You have to understand that there is a combination to the Bible. You get the right combination, the door opens up, and you can have all that you want. Get the wrong combination, and you will never get in.

III. Indexing Your Bible for Ministry

I learned very early in life that the whole Bible for me, as far as ministry is concerned, is very important along that line. First and 2 Corinthians just kind of fit into it. Over the years, in an inspirational concept of teaching the Bible and using the Bible in ministry for me, I learned many years ago to index my Bible. I am not talking about putting little tabs on there to let you know where the books are. Those are neat, but that is not what I am talking about exactly. I am talking about each book in the Bible and how it is an invaluable resource to you.

For instance, you take Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To me, when I look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what I see there is the historical base for the rest of my Bible, certainly for the church. If you know how the church starts and you know how the church comes into being, you know that that church is called out in Matthew 10, even though it is yet far from what we know as the church to be. In God's mind, that is where He calls it out. So when I look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the way I index my Bible, if I am going to minister, having the books in the right format, I am going to look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as my historical platform. They are going to show me the basis of everything that is happening coming from the Old Testament moving into the New Testament.

When I come to the book of Acts, that book is going to define for me not only the church, but the true church. It is going to define for me the biblical aspect of church history. Everything that I am

going to need. The book of Acts is my handbook on church history. It is the foundation of the church. It shows you the right church in the right place and shows you everything you need to know, or in my case, I needed to know to keep myself straight coming down through church history.

Then we have the book of Romans. I taught you the book of Romans, did I not? The book of Romans is our handbook for what the church should believe. The book of Romans is the handbook of Christian doctrine. You see, it was not enough for God to give me a historical platform to look at the church and where it is going. It was not enough for God just to give me, then, the book of Acts that showed me the true church and church history. I needed to know what that church was supposed to believe and teach if I was going to build the right kind of church. So then God gave me the book of Romans. The book of Romans then forms my handbook for what the church should stand for and the doctrine it should teach.

Then we have the book of 1 Corinthians in our index, do we not? We have already studied that book. We know that the church of Corinth in the first book, 1 Corinthians, shows us what not to do. It shows us what happens if God's people do not continue to grow. It shows us what transpires in your life and my life when you do not keep getting the Word of God into your life and keep growing. It produces a bunch of spiritual babies, and that produces all kinds of problems. So 1 Corinthians is my handbook on what not to do.

Then we come to the book of 2 Corinthians, and that is where we are at today. Obviously, the book of 2 Corinthians is my handbook on ministry. It shows me what to do. It not only shows me what to do, but it shows me how to do it. I do not know of any aspect of ministry, from my attitude of heart to the very boots on the ground, so to speak, of doing the ministry, that is not covered in the book of 2 Corinthians. You see, indexing your Bible that way, whenever I have to deal with something, whenever I have to look at something or I have to teach something or I have to deal with something, having your Bible, the books of your Bible indexed, knowing where they go and what they cover, it is invaluable.

But see, it does not stop there because the next book we have is the book of Galatians. What Galatians does for us in indexing your Bible, it helps you get to the point where you fully understand the concept of faith. Where the book of Romans shows us that we were saved by faith, the book of Galatians then takes the next step and finishes the definition and shows us that we are kept by faith. It is an incredible book.

We have the book of Ephesians in our index, do we not? In the book of Ephesians, we have the church defined. We understand now the spiritual term of one body in Christ. We understand the spiritual body of Christ and how it all relates.

In Philippians, we have the importance of promises to the church or to the Christian. There are 10 promises in Philippians, and I want to say something to you. If you did not have a Bible, if you had no other book of the Bible but Philippians, and that is the only book you had, and the only promises that you had were the 10 promises found in Philippians, you could get through everything in life. It is an incredible book. It shows you how important the promises are to the church. There are 10 of them in there. I have given them to you before.

In Colossians, we have the warnings to the church. There I am told as a pastor, and you are told as a Christian, to watch out for certain things. One of them is philosophy. There is no such thing as Christian philosophy. I mean, there are, but they have nothing to do with the Bible. They are demonic. The next thing he talks about is, "Be aware of vain deceit, the traditions of men and the rudiments of the world."

Then I come to the book of 1 Thessalonians in my indexing of my Bible. There we have my setup for all the models in the Bible. For that book shows me the model church. It shows me the model servant. It shows me a model faith. It shows me a model walk. It shows me a model life. So when you come to me and you want a plan for your life to get it all together, where do you think I am going to go to formulate it? I am going to go to the books of the Bible the way that God has indexed them for me.

Then we have the book of 2 Thessalonians. That deals with the victory of the church. In that whole book, you deal with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, certainly our victory as God's people.

Then you have what is commonly called the pastoral epistles. There are four of these. They have also been called over the years the leadership epistles, because this is where if you want to teach young men and young ladies to be leaders, this is where you go. Hence, in our prayer groups, when we are meeting on the mornings every 12 weeks or so, I am teaching you the 12 charges that he gave to Timothy. Why? Because indexing your Bible, showing you how important the books are with where they are at. If you want to build leaders, that is the book you go to. It is just that simple.

Then you have 1 and 2 Timothy. That will talk about being a pastor or being a leader, the things you need to know. That book breaks down all around that. You have the book of Titus. That teaches you how to be a steward. Then you have the book of Philemon. The book of Philemon teaches you and I how to be a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ and lays out that incredible concept.

The next books that we have then in indexing our Bible will be what is commonly called the general epistles. There are eight of these. That will be Hebrews and James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and of course, the book of Jude. In these books, we go back and get our perspective on God's dealing with the nation of Israel and how He is going to restore them.

Then the last book in your Bible, in your little Bible index, will be the book of Revelation. You know that your teacher always, before he ever gave you a test, what do they do? What does your teacher do if you are a teacher and you have to tell your kids, "Okay, you have a test on Friday," what do you do somewhere in that week to get them ready for that test? You review. So God gave you the book of review, the book of Revelation. He gives you that book before the judgment seat of Christ shows up because, ladies and gentlemen, that is your test.

To me, that is what has worked for me. I learned many, many years ago how the Bible breaks itself down into a usable index. This is great spiritual material that you have to have to be an

effective minister. Maybe not now, but in time, hopefully, you will grasp it and you will get it, and you will start indexing your own Bible, using it along those lines.

IV. The Importance of Redefining Yourself

When it comes to ministry, most guys do this because they do not have any structure in their own life. When it comes to ministry, you just do not get on your horse and "yee haw" and ride off into the sunset someplace. You better have a format and a structure, and when it comes to helping people, teaching people, getting people where they need to be, you have to have your Bible indexed. You have to learn to study and use it within its own value system. That is vitally important.

This book of 2 Corinthians, I think, is really important to where we are at right now as a church. Some of you remember, many of you were not here at this particular time, but many of you will remember that when we first started our church, one of the first studies that we took, and if I remember right, we did it a second time for all the new people that had come in, but I taught you the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. I thought that those books were vital for you understanding how to build a church because that is what we were trying to do: build a church. If you remember, I focused on the man Ezra. I talked about how Ezra was God's man. Then I talked about another aspect which we talk about quite often around here, and that is God's timing. God's timing in your life is absolutely crucial. You are going to find by studying the lives of Ezra and many other men in the Bible that in that particular case there, when God was ready to do something, He had the right man in the right place at the right time. You start coming through your Bible and looking at your Bible through those kind of eyes, and you start seeing it from that aspect, you are going to find that that is what God will do in your life. God's timing is everything.

May I say that many of you right now this morning sitting here, you are right there. You are in the right place at the right time. The Bible says that Ezra was a ready scribe. He was ready to do what God wanted him to do. Many of you right now are in that same position. You are ready to take a real leap in your life with God as far as, to put it in a context, breaking the sound barrier of ministry. The sound barrier for many, many years was an unapproachable thing. It was not even known until late after World War II. It was a mystical thing of flying faster than the speed of sound. How ridiculous it seems now when you can fire a bullet and a plane can outrun the bullet. We can travel through space at 25,000 miles an hour. The sound barrier seems like nothing anymore, but it was big back then. It made tremendous news around the world when Chuck Yeager, who was the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound, broke the sound barrier. It was such a thing that everybody was trying to do it, but once we did it, we realized that the sound barrier was just the beginning. There were other challenges out there that the sound barrier was just a gateway. Once you got through that, you went to the next one.

I have always looked at that analogy much like ministry. Many of you, for the first time, when you are really in your life, you are at a place now where God is really going to use you. You are like Chuck Yeager, going to go through the sound barrier. You are getting your first real taste of ministry. You are getting your first understanding. The book of 2 Corinthians is going to help us put that. This is why I am excited about doing it, because right now so many of you are in the

right place at the right time to be the right man or the right woman, and you are a ready scribe. You are ready to do something, and God is going to do it with you.

Here is how it is supposed to work from a Bible standpoint. God saved you for ministry. We make no apology for that around here. We make no apology that the only reason God saved you, if you are a saved person today, the only reason He saved you was to minister. That is simple from a Bible standpoint: to do what worked for Him. But to do that work, you have to grow. To grow, you have to learn how to redefine yourself. I talk about this term a lot: yourself on a consistent basis. The aspect, and we are going to define that today as we move into the book of 2 Corinthians, because I think it is very vital that you understand that before we, so you know what is going on around you, so you can better learn from what we are going to talk about.

Redefining yourself keeps you from becoming stagnant. It keeps you from becoming lazy, complacent. It keeps you from losing your focus or losing your perspective, which we all have a tendency to do. The thing that most churches do not do, and the thing that most Christians do not do, is they never get into a program where they constantly are redefining who they are in Christ. I think that when that fails, when a pastor fails to bring that to his people, when a pastor fails to do it himself, then it just moves right down the hill, and everything kind of falls apart. This is why churches have problems where people get lethargic, they get lazy, they get complacent, they get stagnant, they lose their perspective, they lose their focus, and everybody wonders what is wrong with Christianity. I will tell you what is wrong with Christianity. What has happened is God's people have never, or they quit, redefining themselves on a consistent daily basis to really stay focused on who they are.

Throughout the Bible, Paul tells us as a Christian, and this is certainly true for a church, of course, churches are made up of Christians, and the church will only be as strong as the people that are in it. But Paul, throughout his writings, throughout the Bible, tells us that a Christian should always do four things to stay fresh. In redefining yourself, you should do four things, and he mentions it throughout the Bible. The place that comes to mind is in 2 Corinthians 13. We will spend a lot of time when we get to that point. But he talks about many of these things throughout all of his writing.

- Examine Ourselves
- Take Heed to Ourselves
- Know Ourselves
- Prove Ourselves

V. Ministry Defines Us

Now that is really important when you consider the next part of this and you really think about it. How many times have you heard me say it, and it is true, nothing will define us as God's people or who we really are. Nothing really defines us as God's people as to who we really are in Christ more than ministry will. It just is the way it is. You see, real ministry, like real Christianity, has

some qualities that cannot be faked. When real ministry is present and a redefining process is underway in a church, the good side of it is that the people who are applying it are growing. The bad side of it is, or maybe it is the good side, it exposes the phonies. It is just the way it works.

Have you ever stopped and looked back at some things in your life and to see how time and how certain things that people do, God's people or anybody, how it defines them with the passing of time? If I have learned anything in my 61 years on planet earth and 40 plus years in the ministry, I have learned one great thing: that I never, never, never jump at what somebody says. There is always a tendency that when you hear something bad or good, that you, because you either want to hear it or you think that it needs to be what you need to hear, you jump on it. I am telling you something, that is just not a good way to do things. You are going to find if you look back in your life that there are things that you thought one way that were really somewhere on the way with the passing of time.

One of the great examples that comes to mind is the question a couple of nights ago about Adam and Eve when she had Cain and she says, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." But with the passing of time, what did we find out? That was not the man from the Lord. You see, time proves all things. The problem is God's people are not patient enough to wait it out, and they do not watch. They do not watch, but I am telling you, nothing will define who you are and who I am, who we really are in Christ, better than ministry, because real ministry, like Christianity, always has some qualities that cannot be faked.

Three years ago this January, we started our Iron Man teams. If you are a visitor here today, that may seem like a strange name to you, but that is another name for our prayer groups. You might be saying to yourself, "Well, that is still a strange name for prayer groups," but no, it is not when you understand that it was built on the concept of Proverbs 27:17 that talks about, "As iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." That is the concept that people praying together, talking together, working together, and helping each other through the tough times together, they sharpen each other's countenance based on that verse. So their prayer group will be called an Iron Man group. That is where they come from.

I told you, and this is a great example, I told you very clearly three years ago, coming up on New Year's Eve, that is when we put it out, about three years ago, and you can still get the tape back there, they still have it. I told you then that it would take this church and take you to the next level. It would redefine you and our church, and it was what we needed to do to get to the next level in ministry, and it was an open door that God gave us. We had spent five or six years building a good solid foundation, and now it was ready for us to go to that next level that would be a level of you and I defining ourselves with this.

I remember how many people were so excited about the fact that, "Oh, I want to be a leader, I want to do this, I want to get involved in this." Exactly, three years from now, you look back and you see those same groups today. It has produced some of the greatest leaders that I have ever had in all of my years of ministry, some of the best leaders that have come out of this. God has taken people to the next level, and our whole church has been redefined just like I told you it would.

I told you that there was a master plan behind what we try to do, and I am not interested in just having church on Sunday morning. I have a plan, just like a plan of indexing your Bible. You better have a plan of indexing ministry, of where you are going to get the people to go. Any church that starts up, you can hitchhike off for four or five years of good times, having fun, and all the things that go along. But after that time passes, now you have to settle in, and you better, you are going to take the people someplace, you have to have a plan. If you do not have a plan, your whole church just kind of degenerates into anarchy, and you turn into the church of 1 Corinthians, which we know what that is all about.

But we look back and we see those groups today, how it has produced some of the best leaders. It has taken people to the next level. Our whole church has now been defined around these prayer groups. But at the same time, it has defined who we are. It has exposed the ones who are strong. It has also exposed the ones who, you know, we were down at Restart last week. Catherine, who is in charge of all the volunteers, I was talking with her, and she is quite overwhelmed with us, and she really is kind of taken back. She has obviously never seen anything like this. We were talking, and she used that old phrase, and I have not heard it for many, many years. She looked at me and she said, and I told her, "You know, hey, we are just glad to be here, and we want to help any way we can." She says, "Well, I have learned one thing in the short period of time you guys have been here." I am thinking, "Well, what is that?" She says, "You guys really walk the walk. You just do not talk the talk, you walk the walk."

I thought, "Wow, for a short time we have been down here for God to do that in her heart and to show her how sincere we are about the whole thing, that was quite an incredible thing." But you know what? That is exactly what three years ago it brought our whole church to, because good or bad, indifferent, right or wrong, it exposed who was going to walk the walk and who was just going to talk the talk. That is the way it always does. That is what ministry does, because nothing will define who we are better than ministry.

With that in mind, look back and learn something here. In the last three years, we have fine-tuned those prayer groups as the people in them have redefined themselves on an ongoing basis, and we will continue to do so. At this point, prayer now is the central part of this ministry and this church, exactly what it should be from a Bible standpoint. But I am not talking about these goofy little Saturday morning prayer meetings with the guys when you worked all week long, and so you then you think because you get up early on your day off and trouble in and you all have a little prayer meeting and you have accomplished something. I am not talking about that. That is the goofy things of ministry. I am talking about a committed, on a daily basis, weekly basis, that a prayer group of men and women sharpen each other's countenance, and it ministry of other people brings the leadership up to the top and basically exposes where we are all at in ministry, because as Christians, you and I are, as a church, only going to be as strong as our prayer life. That is just what it has done, and you learn from things like that.

VI. The Purpose of Ministry and Spiritual Growth

My job, the job of this church, is laid out very clearly in Ephesians 4:12.

Ephesians 4:12

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

I want to say something to you: there is no work in the ministry and there is no edifying in the body of Christ until you first perfect the saints, and that is redefining yourself on a constant basis. It is just that simple. A child of God or a church consistently redefining itself of who it is, it keeps from happening what happened at the church of Corinth and what Paul struggled with through his whole ministry and what he was talking about in Hebrews 5. I know this is a familiar passage, but turn in your Bible over to Hebrews 5. I want to read this, and I know this grates some of you every time I go to this, but that is all right. Paul felt much of the same frustration that I am sure any pastor feels when he feels the burden of doing what God has called him to do, but many people do not want to do it.

He says in verse 12 of chapter 5, and I want you to follow this very carefully. Examine yourself now, and take heed to yourself and all those good things. But here is what he 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.

There he talks about in verse 14 that using the Word of God in ministry to exercise your senses. You hear me talk about it all the time, how that you need to develop discernment, you need to develop discretion, you need to develop godly wisdom, you need to develop an understanding of how to use all of that. But that has to happen only as you use the information and what you already have, using the Word of God you have, adding to it, letting God build that into an exercise program that gives you everything that you want.

This is why the problem in all churches today is found right there. Some of God's people have been sitting around for five, ten, fifteen years. They are never doing anything more now than they did the day they came in. Most churches, most pastors, are just okay with that. Well, I am not okay with that. I mean, you may stay here the rest of your life and do nothing at all for God, but I guarantee you, you will hardly ever leave here a Sunday that your rear end is not on fire, and it will not be a case of hemorrhoids, it will be a case of that book, because I know what a lethargic church turns into. I know what happens when God's people will not redefine themselves or do not redefine themselves, and this is the problem with every church. Every church is up against the same issue, and it is real simple and it is real easy.

Most of God's people from one aspect are just like the world in one area. You know what that area is? We all like to eat, but nobody likes to exercise. Want a little bit of advice on your New

Year's resolution of exercising? Wait until about two or three days after Thanksgiving before you go to the gym, or Christmas, or New Year's. The place is packed. You know why it is packed? Because people eat too much. They feel the burden that they are overweight. They have to do something about it, and they keep eating, and they like to eat. So the first thing they do is get this bug, "Well, I am going to," and it is always after the last meal, "I will go there Friday after, or after Thanksgiving." The place is packed, you cannot even get in. But a week from now, it will be right back to normal. That is the way it works.

God's people are the same way. Just as exercise is the key to health and stability in your mind and your self-discipline, ministry is the exercise you need to balance all you eat spiritually. You eat, you have to have an exercise program. It is more than just a physical thing for you. Years ago, who would think that running would be the key to Bible memorization? Who would think of that unless you investigate what you have? First of all, in the Bible, is not the Holy Spirit like in the air? There is your first clue. What makes your brain function at a high rate or 100% capacity as much as it? It is oxygen. Simple math: expand your lungs, get more oxygen in your lungs, that oxygen gets to your brain, your brain functions better. End of the day, you have a better thinking process in every aspect of your life. The two are so connected, they really are. But God's people today are just like everybody else. We love to eat. We love to come on Thursday night and get the Bible. I bet you some of you have as many notes in your Bible as I have in mine, and you love getting all that stuff down. But you see, ministry is the exercise you need to balance all that you get. But God's people, they want to eat, but they do not want to exercise.

That is what our prayer groups did. Going back, thinking back, I got many of you taking what you had eaten, learned, and put into an exercise program, and look at you now. But I will say it again, nothing will define who you really are like what you do with ministry.

VII. Qualities of Ministry

With ministry comes responsibility. You can come to church and be the most irresponsible person to ever walk this planet. The second thing you will find is you will find accountability. You can come to church and sit in the church for 40 years and be unaccountable to anybody. Reliability. You can come to church every Sunday, and it has nothing to do with how reliable you are. Dependability, flexibility, durability, all of those qualities. You can come to church, sit in church, and you can just go through your whole life and not have them. But I guarantee you, you get into ministry and do not redefine yourself and develop yourself and put those areas in, they will stick out like a sore thumb. You will look like a six-foot man at a midget convention.

This is what, going back, our prayer groups did. God has consistently given this church levels of opportunity, and then the leadership has risen to it. But think a minute, think about it, look back and remember, not everybody liked the idea of those prayer groups, did they? Some people thought it was stupid. Remember the person on the blackboard over there at some point, come in when we were putting the dates down for the second one, and somebody had written up there how stupid they thought this was. Some people, not everybody, liked it. Now you have a little understanding why they did not. You see, everybody wants to do it, but once you realize that it

takes responsibility, accountability, reliability, and all the things going with it, and you do not have those things in your life, people do not like that.

In 40 plus years of ministry and working with a hundred churches and building three or four of my own up from scratch, it has taught me anything, it is that God's people who are saved and probably love the Lord and carry their Bibles and read their Bibles, they love to hide in church when it comes to ministry. They like to eat, but they do not like to exercise. I will give you a little clue here as a pastor: you cannot ever let that happen. You just cannot. That will always come back to bite you someplace in time. It always will.

The success of any church, any ministry, will never be built on one man or one woman or one person. The success of any ministry or any church will never be given the credit to one guy. I do not care if it is the pastor, I do not care who it is, the credit will never fall into one man. It is a continual effort of everybody, and it is everybody getting in and seeing the burden and getting it done. No success of any church can ever be pinned on one man, but one person can sure pull it down, and you just keep that to a minimum. So you keep the heat on, you keep moving forward, you hit it hard every Sunday, you hit it hard every Thursday. You do not ever look or think about the stupid excuses that people give for not ministering, and I hear them all the time, heard them all my life.

"Well, my schedule is busy right now." What do you say to the fact that so and so over here has got the exact same schedule you have, or maybe more, and yet they minister? Do not let your inability to prioritize or your inability to make good decisions be confused with you are too busy. I have heard people say, "Well, my job, I cannot go do this because of my job." Hey, last week Thursday night, and I never said it to anybody, never would, I do not even tell you who it is, but I know at least two guys that were there that went down to Restart that worked Restart that night, and they did not get out of there at seven o'clock, and I know one of them had to go to work at two o'clock in the morning, and the other one had to leave an hour early because he went and worked all night long. I do not want to hear it.

You say, "Well, my health." I realize that some of you older folks, bless your heart, you have legitimate health issues, but I also want to tell you, hey, I had a couple of people down there that called me on the phone and said, "Look, my health is so bad, I cannot do this, I cannot do that, but if you will just bring me a chair and set me someplace, I want to pass out stuff." I do not have a lot of sympathy with your excuses. I know a lady that died 10 years ago that was a fervent Christian, and when she had a stroke and she could not go door to door, and she was paralyzed from her waist down, you know what she did the last five years of her life? She got a phone book and went through it every day and prayed for the people in the phone book. Do not talk to me about it. You are talking to the wrong guy. Go Google David Ring on your computer this afternoon. There is a guy who he thought he was going to die by the time he was five. He has got every medical problem you can think. He cannot talk, he cannot walk. He is absolutely almost as close to a paraplegic, and he cannot speak, and God has used him as an evangelist for God knows how many years. I do not even want to hear it. You have to keep the standard high. Ministry is number one. Whether you like it or not, that is the reason God saved you. That is how it has to be.

VIII. Learning from Ministry Opportunities

In spiritual growth and in redefining yourself, which we are going to really work on through the book of 2 Corinthians, let me say this: you learn from whatever you do. I want to encourage you from this point on to listen very carefully, because the tendency is, and you do not maybe understand that timing is everything with God, and here we are at the book of 2 Corinthians when God has laid in our lap the greatest object lesson that we could ever have of learning how to take what we learn here and apply it to what God has given us to do within the homeless ministry and Restart. The greatest single opportunity you have to take what you are learning, learn from it, and use it if you will pay attention and see what we have to see here.

Learn from everything you do. The tendency is, we go down to Restart, and some of you work at Restart where there are 150 people. Some of you over 16th and Sherry where there are 100 people. Some of you over here where there are 10 people. Some of you down along the river where there are three people. Some of you pass out 200 hot dogs. Some of you pass out 20 hot dogs. The tendency is to feel like, "Well, you know what, this is, I am not successful. I would rather be where you." Hey, it is not about how many hot dogs you pass out. It is not about who you are talking to. Have you learned anything from what you are doing? You do not judge your success by how many people you meet or deal with. You never judge your learning experience on how many people you talk to. That is immaturity at its best.

Let me ask you a question as far as the homeless ministry is concerned. We have been down there now about three or four, three months. What have you learned? Have you learned to use it just going down? I appreciate everything everybody does. Our church has pulled together. We need hot dog buns, and we need hot dogs, and we need lettuce, and I am guaranteed by Thursday night it will look like the produce department at Safeway out there. I guarantee you that is a good thing. We go down and we know what we are trying to accomplish, but let me ask you a question beyond that: have you learned anything? At this moment, with three months under my belt going down there, I have clearly identified three different cultures within this homeless scenario. Each are different, each require different strategy, and you need to learn them and see them and understand that how you are ever going to be effective. It is not just a hot dog ministry. You do not just go down with a "here we are doing a good thing" attitude.

It never ceased to me, I just kind of snickered when I saw it Thanksgiving. There was a thing in the paper, many of you saw it, down at the Kansas City Rescue Mission. There were people down there, had the kids down there, and they were passing out Thanksgiving dinner, and they had a picture in the paper with their names and everything, and they all had smiles on their faces. They are down there doing their thing, and I thought to myself, that is exactly what the majority of churches and people do. They go down there at a seasonal thing, they feel good, and then they go back and they never think about it again. That is not ministry. That is not ministry. You do not go down there with a "here we are doing a good thing." You learn from everything you can. You take 2 Corinthians and what you already know, and you watch even in this area how they continue to redefine themselves. I do not care if you are out there on the street, you learn the cultures, you learn what you are up against, you learn because all aspects of ministry are always

the same. The people may change, the scenarios may change, but the format and the structure and how you may go after it will always be the same.

Part of the success of this ministry will obviously be based on simply building relationships, trust relationships. Some of you are already down there, and the guys are getting to know who you are by name. That is invaluable, because if you are ever going to really win them to Christ, it is going to be you becoming one with them where they understand that you really care. They all know you love their soul, they just want to know if you really love them. That is the problem with most churches: they love those people's souls, but they do not love those people. That is not ministry.

When we go down here on December 18th, we are going to, it is a Christmas party out of your mind. It is our opportunity to get one more step in their world. We are going to break those groups down into basically three different parties. Some of you this afternoon after church, you are going to adopt the single, and we will talk about that later. That will be your group. Some of the others, we are going to do things for the single men that are overnight off the street. That will be your group. We are going to do it for the ladies. That will be your group. We are going to have there, we are going to do everything we can to build a relationship with them and put a program together, and that is how you do it. Then you learn from it. You do not just go down and say, "Hey, we are doing a Christmas." Learn from it. Learn the different cultures.

When you look at Restart in our homeless ministry with the people on the street, here is what we need to do right now. We are the right church in the right place at the right time. You are the right person at the right place in the right time if you want to be. Here is what we need to do: every chapter of 2 Corinthians, every concept, every lesson we do, we apply to the example of ministry with the object lesson that God has given us right in front of us, learning the ability to read the circumstances and the situations and the opportunities through the principles that you are going to read and understand in 2 Corinthians, the handbook on ministry. In other words, you are simply going to become something I say all the time: you are going to become smarter than the situation you are in.

In ministry, things are never as simple as they seem. That is another mistake that many people make. They look at things at face value. Somebody comes and tells you something, you just believe it, take it as face value. I am not saying that it may not be real to them. I am not saying it may not be true, but I am just saying you do not buy the whole enchilada the first time you go into the Mexican restaurant. You find out that in ministry, things are not as simple as they appear. I will give you an example. You have not picked up on it yet, probably, I am not maybe that you probably could, but there is a vast difference in the philosophies between the homeless people on the street and the homeless people in Restart. You realize there are two different worlds there. You realize it is both the same homeless ministry. It is both much the same people with the same needs, but Restart looks at what they are doing a completely different way than the people on the street, and it is almost, it is so glaring you cannot miss it.

My point is this: you try to run one like you run the other, you are going to fall flat on your face. You just go in weaving hot dogs around and saying, "Hey, here we are," you are going to fall on

your face. There is a different world between those two. There is a different culture. There is a different mindset, and you have to learn what they are to effectively minister in it. I am just talking about that because that is the object lesson God gave it. It is that way in everything you do in ministry. It is that way when you work with a husband and wife. It is that way when you work with parents and children. It is that way when you work with whatever scenario in ministry. The scenarios are always the same, it is just the people change. That is all it is.

Some of you saw with that little group that is over there along the fence that they have their own leader. Some of you saw it with people who are down along the river, and that is where they stayed. Have you never asked yourself why they are not up where they can get a warm bed up here? Why does this group stand to be away from everybody else? There are four or five different cultures down there with a mindset that each one is different, and we are just going to walk down with two hot dogs in a truck. I do not think so. Ministry is being able to understand what the differences are, being able to realize a strategy for each one, and be able to understand and realize that everyone, even though it looks absolutely the same, it is totally different. Figuring out why, figuring out why.

My plan is simple. We are going to take one step at a time is what God has given us, because this is the object lesson God has put right in front of us to use while we are going to do the book of 2 Corinthians. Out of this will come the same leaders, will elevate new people, will come out like so many of you already told me, "You know what, this finally got me out of my comfort zone." This is what you needed. Right place, right person, right time always makes the difference. But I am just going to take one project a month. We are going to take it one month at a time. We are not making any long-range plans that we are going to go do. We are going to take it one month at a time, find out what their needs are, find out how we can best do it, and we are going to let God take the folks that want to get involved in it, that God is going to take what you already know with the Word of God, what we add to in 2 Corinthians into our study, and then God is going to exercise you and use the book of 2 Corinthians as our learning textbook with the object lesson that God put right in front of us. Sounds simple to me.

A church, as any Christian, has to be in a continual state of redefining itself. I used to hear it all the time, at New Year's Eve, pastors used to say, and I am saying to myself many, many times, it is a true statement, come down the New Year's Eve, you always ask the people, "What is different about you this year than last year?" Well, in reality, that is way too much time between redefining yourself. One of the real value lessons that it does, it keeps of redefining on a continual basis that it keeps God's people accountable to the reason God saved them, and that is to minister.

My dear friend, I love you to death, and you can say it all you want, you can pretend all you want, you can argue all you want, you can tell yourself, you can tell others, you can tell all your friends what a great relationship you have with God, but at the end of the day, it is the byproduct of that relationship that is so easy to spot and so simple to see. God saved you for one reason, and that one reason only is to bear fruit and reproduce yourself in the life of somebody else, your kids first and then others second. I have told you many, many times, there are only two things worth investing your life in this whole world, because they are the only two things going to last

for all of eternity. One of them is the Word of God, that is what you eat. The other one is the souls of men, that is your exercise program, and through that procedure, you get discernment, discretion, wisdom, and understanding.

IX. Listening and Learning in Ministry

Let me tell you another great principle of ministry. We will see this in 2 Corinthians also. The real key to ministry is not talking, but listening and watching. In any ministry, it is really important that when you sit down and you talk with somebody or you are in a ministry and you are doing something, that the most important thing you do is listen, because many times we talk and start to say things because we know what the Bible says, but we are not understanding what the real problem is. Real ministry is listening first, speaking second. Many times we are so busy telling everybody what we are going to do for them, we do not really hear what their needs are.

When it comes to the Restart program down here, this is where we need to listen. It is easy to get so involved in telling them what we want to do, we do not hear what they really need. So you will wind up giving them what we want, the way we want to do it, and they never really get what they really need, but really want. I will tell you something right now, they are not going to stop you and say, "That is not what we need." They are so fragile and so thankful that anybody has showed up, they are not going to take the chance of offending us. It just simply comes down, ladies and gentlemen, being smarter than the situation you are in, realizing that, you know what, it is not about what we want to do down there, it is about what they need down there. This is not about us going down with all our great ideas when we have no idea what their situation really is. We listen, we learn, and then we form a plan together to get them what they need the way they want it done. It is the same key to solving a marital problem. It is the same key to solving any relationship. You both have to listen to each other, and you have to help solve each other's needs.

God in His infinite wisdom has blessed this church with a rare opportunity, and I am not talking about the opportunity to start a church or reach people. That is certainly there. In the last three months alone, just by the figures that I have kept, we have fed over 800 people and passed over a thousand tracts. That in itself is a great thing, but that is not the main thing. I am talking about an opportunity for us as a church to move up two or three levels and learn from what is right in front of us, the different aspects of ministry of 2 Corinthians, all built around the object lesson that God has put right in our lap. Ezra, a ready scribe, right church, right place, and the right timing.

Just like learning the Bible or following biblical principles in whatever, finding a wife or a husband or taking the Bible and training up your children, some will and some will not. I think the verse or the passage that comes to mind, and almost, you know, you get into the Bible and you study something and you read something, and it will be one little thing that just sticks in your mind for the next 40 years. One of my great studies in the Bible that I took, and I have a series of sermons on them, I may have preached them here, and I have preached them many times, it is found in Exodus 16. In Exodus 16, you have the great story of God bringing down the manna from heaven to the children of Israel, and when you make the parallels back and forth, it is an incredible study.

First of all, the children of Israel had just left Egypt. That is a picture of a man getting saved. He is the type of the world. When they left Egypt, they go on a journey, and that journey is a picture of our spiritual growth, because God has got a land of promise for them, and the land of promise is the place where you get into ministry and you really do something for God. They had to stay in that land by believing the promises that God gave them, just like you have to stay serving God by the principles and the promises God gave you. So they go into the wilderness of Sin. There is nothing there that can sustain them. The water is bitter, the temperature is horrendous, snakes and scorpions and spiders, nothing grows, absolutely totally adverse to them, much like once you get saved, the world should be to the child of God.

But God knows they need to be sustained, does He not? God knows that they need something to get them through this wilderness of Sin. So God takes Moses, and with his staff, he goes to a rock. That rock is a type of Christ in the Bible. He smites that rock, and out of that rock comes water, a picture of the Word of God, and they can have all the water they want, pure, clean water from God out of the rock, a picture of God giving you and me what we need to sustain us. But then that was not enough, so God brought the Bible says manna from heaven. Manna is bread, a type of the Word of God. The Bible says, and that great passage, the parallels are incredible. I think back on it, and it is something that I really, I have never forgotten. I have taught it many times, but it sticks with me as fresh as anything every day.

They had to gather that in the morning while they slept. God brought it down to them, and it was supernatural food. God gave them supernaturally the bread that they needed to sustain them in the wilderness of Sin, and they could have all that they want. He gives them some restrictions. He says, "You cannot take the bread today and keep it for tomorrow. You have to go out and get it fresh every day," showing you that the child of God has to live one day at a time. The promises that God gives you today may not be the promises you need for tomorrow. That is incredible stuff, supernatural food that God rained down from heaven while they slept at night. It all came down when they put back the tent flap in the morning.

Here is the part I really like, this is where it fits into where we are at today. When they pulled back that tent flap and flapped it back there, and that manna was all around, a picture of the Word of God, and that is another great thing I thought of, as I come through that, all this stuff about searching for the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, on a quest to find the Word of God. You realized that when they needed the supernatural Word of God, the bread from heaven, that God brought it right to where they were. All they had to do was throw back the tent flap, and there it was. You realize that God gave you the Word of God, the bread that is going to sustain you. You have a Bible, hold it up today, that is your banner right there. He gave that to you. It came to you. You did not go looking for it. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to you.

But them being in the tent, it coming to them, brought on a decision. They put back that tent flap in the morning, that brought a decision upon them. They either gathered it up the way God told them to do, or they went on their way and they trampled it under their feet. But the whole thing is Exodus 16:17, because this is so true of God's people, and it is true exactly after what I have told you this morning. We now stand at the greatest opportunity this church has ever had. We now not

have just the study of 2 Corinthians, we now have the object lesson that we can take it to the next level, that God on an ongoing basis is going to give us a place that we can use, exercise everything that we do, learning the different cultures and everything about it to see how it works.

But just back as Exodus 16:17, that great verse, I thought about this a thousand times when I looked at God's people in my own church, God's people in general, after God did everything that He did, brought it down to them. The Bible simply says in verse 17, "Some gathered more, and some gathered less." That is the way it always is with God's people. Some of you will go after it because you know that ministry is the thing, and you are going to gather all that you can. Some of you, you will gather less. You will just do as you have always done, and that is the way God's people are. It just really is.

Our commitment here at this mission field that God has given us, and I will be very honest with you, I read about Stanley Livingston going to Africa, Adoniram Judson going to Burma, in my life, Robert Moffat 51 years in Cape Town, South Africa, William Carey, father of modern mission, went to India. But I will tell you something, this mission field, this object lesson that God has put in our lap, we need to look at it just like Stanley, Adoniram, and Robert and William looked at the mission field they went to, because it is our mission field right now. What you do with the opportunity that God has given you today will probably most likely set the stage for how God will use you or not use you the rest of your life.

At some point in your life, you have to clean off a spot. You have to take a stand with the Word of God, and you clearly have to say, "God, You saved me for a purpose. You saved me for a reason. I have got a lot of junk out there in my life that has been keeping me from getting it done, but right now I am going to clear off a spot, and I am going to give You what You saved me for, and I am going to minister for You." I am not saying it has to be at Restart. I am not saying it has to be in the homeless ministry. There are plenty of things for people to do that without ever touching that. I am just saying that is the object lesson at God that is going to take some of you who are already right there and put you through the sound barrier and send you up to the stratosphere, the ionosphere, in an outer space where everything is supernatural.

So we are going to take 2 Corinthians, and chapter by chapter, lesson by lesson, we are going to show how the minister, based on the handbook of ministry with the object lesson that God has given us, and we will watch God grow and take young men and young ladies, and this is what I do. We are going to get to eat, but we are also going to start an exercise program. That exercise program is ministry.

Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We do love You. We thank You, Father.