

2 Corinthians 1:14-24

Sunday 1/15/2012

SEC: The Handbook of Ministry

If you have your Bibles today, turn to the book of 2 Corinthians. You should be very well aware now of where we are and what we are trying to accomplish with the book of 2 Corinthians. You have heard me say it by this time many, many times, that the book of 2 Corinthians is really the handbook of ministry for you and for me.

Most of the Bible, whether you know it or not, is built that way. It is designed around the books themselves and how they teach certain patterns of ministry. We saw how the book of Romans, when we went through that, really taught us about the doctrine that the church is to believe. First Corinthians, that book showed us what a church is not supposed to do and got into all the areas that they were messed up in.

Then, someplace in the process of Paul dealing with them, they decided that they were going to do what is right and they were going to try to get on board for ministry. This is when Paul wrote the book of 2 Corinthians. If you do not have that little note in your Bible designating those two books, you probably ought to do that. It will just help you kind of put it into a context.

For you and for me, I learned many years ago, and I tell you this today, if you want to learn the lost art of ministry—and truly, true biblical ministry is a lost art today. It is like sword making. It is like many of the antiques. You look at some of the woodworking that people did back in the 17th and 1800s, and they had no modern tools like we have today. Their craftsmanship and their workmanship, and the way they found to do things with the materials that they had, it is a lost art.

Certainly today in the ministry, dealing with people in the Bible and dealing with the right way is a lost art too. For those of you who want to learn to deal with people in circumstances, the real key simply is to learn this book. In every aspect, everything I am giving you is what I have had to learn myself and some of the many experiences of 40-plus years in the ministry. A lot of them good, some of them bad, but nevertheless, we learned through them.

So far, we have found that the key element of ministry, and this is defined for us in chapter one, the key element is the ministry being defined as suffering. We go through things in life many times because of our own stupidity, but we learn the lessons of those things. Many times you are doing what is right, and you go through problems just because you are trying to do what is right. Things happen in life; bad circumstances do not just happen to bad people, they happen to God's people. God has a design by them, and we learn to grow through them.

As I have told you weeks gone by, through our weakness, God's strength is perfected, and God does things. Whether we like it or not, or whether we really know it or not, probably some of the greatest times when God uses us is really when we as individuals are at our weakest point in life. That is totally contrary today to what you see and what you get in most Christians.

When we go through and we learn those things that God gives us, and we see how God consoles us, how God takes the principles to help us, then we also can help others. I have had people come into our church all the time over the years. It has been in my ministry forever, and I just kind of smile and nod my head and roll my eyes when I cannot say it. But they tell me how valuable they are going to be because of the experiences they have been through in life. "I have been through this, I have done this, I have worked with this, I have worked with that."

Because you went through an experience, that is going to make you valuable. Of course, everybody goes through bad experiences in life; that is not what makes anybody valuable. What makes a person valuable is, have you learned a lesson that you went through? Do you know now the biblical principles that when you deal with other people, or you are a leader, or you are doing something else, or if somebody comes up with the same problem that you had, do you give them what you did, or do you give them what the Bible did? You see, that is the key. The key is not the bad things or what you went through in life; everybody goes through that. The key is, did you learn from them, and do you have the biblical principles now that you can lay out? Of course, that is the key. That is really the whole aspect of it.

SEC: The Testimony of Our Conscience

Last week we talked about a great concept, and that is the concept of the testimony of our conscience. I do not know of a greater thing that you need to grasp and latch on to if you are really going to seriously pursue ministry in this church or wherever, than that great concept. The example was Paul in the church at Corinth. He had written some pretty hard things to them, and many times when you deal with God's people, you have to really deal with the issue as it is, and you have to get hard lines sometimes in some things. He did with this church. Not everybody liked it, but the bottom line was, and I gave you this last week, we learned a great truth that even though not everybody was happy with Paul, and he makes reference to that, he says, "Some of you accepted us in part," yet he did not let that get him off track.

Whatever you do in life, nobody is going to like what you do. There are going to be people who do like it and people that do not like it. The best job you guys do in preaching, and you may just cross all your T's and dot all your I's and just be an exceptional sermon, and there will be people that come up and say, "Boy, I really learned a lot from that," and people that come up. I guarantee you, in every crowd, there will be somebody that says, "Well, I did not get anything out of that." That is just the way that it is. You never let those things affect you in ministry one way or the other because of the great lesson that you learned. As long as whatever circumstance you get yourself into, whatever decisions that you make as a Christian, the real key is not you standing up and justifying yourself. A lot of God's people like to do that. When they get into a bad situation, it is just completely outside the guidelines of the scriptures because they are prideful or whatever. They always want to justify themselves in every way, shape, or form.

Really, the only thing you have to be able to do in your life in any given situation you find yourself in is to be able to look back in your life and whatever given situation it is, and just ask yourself one question: Does it line up with what the Bible says I am to do? Quit justifying yourself. Quit blaming everybody else for your issues. When you look back in your life, open the

scriptures and just ask yourself, "Does it line up with what the Bible says?" When it does, it does not matter then because you have what Paul talked about, a good conscience toward God. A good testimony toward God in your own personal life simply means you look back in your life and whatever you have to deal with, whether everybody likes it or not. Many times people do not like the outcome. Do you have that testimony of a good conscience toward God that you did what the Bible says? When you are caught on the carpet, can you go to the scriptures and say, "This is what I did based on what the Bible says"? You cannot beat that. There is no greater feeling or reward or confirmation that you are doing what God wants you to do than you can look back and see a trail, a trail, a trail of biblical principles. That is why we put such an emphasis on biblical principles here. They always keep us between the white lines. At the same time, they always ferret out the phonies just like that. You can say whatever you want to say and justify what you want to justify. But at the end of the day, when we open up the book, it pretty much...

That is why the Judgment Seat of Christ is going to be such a great deal. That is why the Great White Throne Judgment is going to be such a great deal. The Great White Throne Judgment is going to be a lot like the Judgment Seat of Christ in one aspect: people are going to try to justify what they do. You notice that God never argues with them in anything you find in the Bible. God never argues with an unsaved person at the Great White Throne Judgment. That person is going to justify himself, "Well, I did this and you did that and I did all these things." He never argues with them. The only thing He says about the Great White Throne Judgment is simply this: "And the books were opened." He is just going to take it right back to what the Bible said and see if you find something with what you did. I mean, it is so simple. Maybe it is too simple. Maybe we are simple. I do not know.

SEC: Four Concepts for Daily Living

As we enter into this last lesson in the opening chapter here, and this has been a great chapter, a great defining chapter, all through our study, what we want to start with, and I am going to keep this before you every week throughout the... You are going to get sick of hearing it, but the price of learning is repetition. I want you to focus on the four little concepts that I gave you about yourself and what you ought to be doing every day of your life.

1. Examining yourself. Not everybody else. Examine yourself.
2. Know yourself. Be honest with who you are.
3. Take heed to yourself. Correct those things in your life that are wrong. Most people do not want to correct what is right and wrong in their life. They just always want to focus on what is good in their life. You know what? I will be honest with you. You can have 90% good in your life and have 10% not good, and that 10% will cancel out the 90% as far as God is concerned. People do not get that.
4. Prove yourself.

Like I said, I am going to keep those before you throughout our study. The reason is, if you do not learn to be honest with yourself, and this is why it is so important when we get into the book of 2 Corinthians, and so many of you now are right at that edge of getting into ministry and already in, of course, but you are at the edge of really understanding it and letting it... Well, you

will see as we... When I am done today, it is going to be a lot clearer to you. But the truth of the matter is that these four things do not become automatic in your life and work them every day. You may be the greatest person in the world, but you will be of no value in ministry simply because these are the backbones of building yourself the way God wants you to be built. A whole concept has to be on honesty between you and God.

Not only are these things important to us, but I use them as a gauge in watching people grow. I see them negatively or positively in people's lives that I work with and watch them grow. This is why I drill them into you over and over again, especially now in the book of 2 Corinthians. It is a great tool in watching a young Christian grow and mature. I basically look for these things in people's lives because I know what it takes to build yourself for the Lord based on the biblical principles. These are the things that have to be there, or if they are not there... It is a simple formula.

The mark of immaturity, and there are many characteristics of immaturity, but the mark of immaturity will always be the inability to take responsibility for your actions and be accountable for them. You know that is right with your children. Well, it is also true of God's children. One of the main marks of immaturity that I look for in a person will always be their inability or their ability to take responsibility for their actions and be accountable for them. By the same standard, the mark of maturity is somebody who takes responsibility for their actions and is accountable to them.

My goal in all of this, and I told you this last week, my goal, I know everybody comes in and you have issues. There is nothing wrong with that. I mean, I am not looking for people to come in that do not have problems. I would be out of a job. That is my job, is solving problems. But my job is to get you to the point where you get these things in your life. That you get out of your own life the way you think it runs. You get back to the Bible. Because my goal is not forever to minister to you. I said it last week, my goal in time is to, though in a sense I will never stop ministering to you, but my real goal is to have you minister with me. That together we get something done for the Lord. That is the only reason God ever had a church. That is the way we have to work.

SEC: Patterns of Human Nature

A couple of weeks ago on a Thursday night, and like I said earlier, the Thursday night questions have been really great. Somebody asked a great question in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 16 where it talked about the cloak of maliciousness. That verse in particular talks about using your liberty in Christ to do what you want to do instead of doing what God wants you to do. Then through the cloak, and we talked about "take off that mask" last week, one of those old sermons, that you hide behind that fake spirituality. That is a basic problem whether you know it or not that everybody deals with either when they first get saved or shortly thereafter. This is part of the process. I have watched so many of you come to the point where you have had to learn how to grow through that basic stage of immaturity. It is a lot like little kids, you know. Little kids always want to blame their problems or what happens. Something gets broken, a room and there are three kids in there, you know, they will all point to the smallest guy, whether he did it or not.

Little children, brothers and sisters, are always blaming the problem on the other one. That is just the way that it is. That is why it is so important, and you have got to stay focused on that great concept where the Bible says examine yourself, know yourself, take heed to yourself, and prove yourself.

I was watching a thing the other day on police investigations. I always liked the techniques that they use because they are faced with many of the problems that you are faced with in ministry. I do not know if you have ever really thought about it or not, but you know, they are always faced with trying to figure out if somebody is telling the truth or not. I mean, if one of our police officers is running his patrol, and at about four o'clock in the morning, he sees some guy driving around a block time after time, and he pulls him over and he walks up and asks him, he was not speeding or anything, but he just, you know, four o'clock, and the guy says, "What are you doing?" He says, "Well, you know, I am looking for some bagels." You probably know that that is not exactly getting all the truth. Every time, when people do crimes, the police have to get to the bottom of it.

I have told people a lot of times, I used to teach young pastors, and I used to tell them that when you are in the ministry, it is a lot like being a police officer because at four o'clock in the morning when a police officer pulls over a car, and it is dark, and you are all by yourself, and you are walking up to that car that may have three or four guys in it, and it is all dark in there, you cannot just shoot holes in the car to give them a warning. In other words, you have got to play one thing right up to the point where you see everything is going south, and to be fast enough and quick enough to react without getting yourself killed. That is a lot like the ministry.

For years, police used lie detector tests, and lie detector tests are based on your blood pressure and your anxiety level and all that stuff. They have never been admissible in court, but the police always use that. Remember this ongoing case with a little baby Lisa that disappeared here in Kansas City a couple six, seven months ago or something like that. That is a classic example, and I am not putting guilt on anybody because I know nothing about it. I just know I did not do anything. But anyway, the bottom line is, the parent that starts saying one thing, and police immediately are a little suspect to it. It just does not all line up. Just like in the ministry, people will tell you things, and immediately you get a little suspect about it. The cops call it their gut feeling, because they have been on the street. You get the same kind of concept in the ministry. You have seen so many patterns of people, and the patterns never change, that when you hear that old familiar sound, "Well, I was just looking for bagels, officer, at four o'clock in the morning," you know that that is not what you are getting here. So they asked them to take a polygraph test. Of course they did. Police said the mother visibly failed a polygraph test. Immediately, we know now that whatever we have got, we did not have all of the truth. I am not saying they had anything to do with it at all. I am just saying the truth was not there. The police officer's job, investigators, interrogators, is to get the truth.

Modern science and police technology are always on the move. There is a thing now where, and I am not sure what they call it, but it deals with the pattern of the brain and your eyes. I was reading an article the other day that the body, our body, works off electro-optical impulses from the brain. Our brain is quadrant up in different sections. If you want a greater study on that, Bob

Greg has a pastor friend who actually taught on the left side and the right side of the brain. Is that all right, Bob? Yeah. You may want to give that tape out afterwards. A good friend of yours that talked about that men think with the left side. Men think with the right side. That was the most ridiculous sermon I have ever heard. Anybody knows that a woman does not think with either side. I am just kidding.

The way it works is that your brain is divided up into quadrants. I do not understand it all. I would love to know more about it because there is a real tie into the Bible here. But what they say is that part of your brain that runs your part of your face or your eyes is connected to part of that brain. It says, and I do not have this exactly right, but when you ask a person a question, if that person lies to you, they instinctively, that part of the brain sends the impulse that their eyes look up to the left or right. I am not sure which it is. But you can watch the eyes and you can see which way it goes. I think that is incredible. Like I said, I would love to know more about that. But I know this for a fact, that real men, like myself, real men, you always want to talk to a guy, you want to look him in the eye. How many times have you dealt with your children? You ask your kids, and they are looking all around. And you say, "Look me in the eye and tell me that is what you did or you did not do." Something about the eyes.

I will take it one step further and I will tell you that. I think two of the greatest studies in the Bible that need to be developed, and I have never developed them, but to a certain degree I have, but I think two of the greatest studies in the Bible are the study of blood and the study of eyes. Because the Bible says in Leviticus, "the life of the flesh is in the blood." That is why when you go to a doctor and they do not know what is wrong with you, the first thing they do is draw blood. Blood tells them everything. So one of the greatest studies in the Bible will be about blood. Man, you can take that thing, and there is no end to that. But on the other hand, in Matthew 6:22, the Bible says, "The light of the body is in the eye." That is why when they want to find out if you are really dead, they look at your eyes. So there is something to that. I do not understand it all, but I said all that to say this: The Bible follows a similar pattern. It really does. When the police officers and investigators and interrogators, they follow basically patterns of human nature that they have developed through their scientific techniques, but very frankly, most of them are based on the Bible. I mean, that is what they do. But the Bible follows similar patterns.

When you are dealing with people in ministry, which many of you are starting to do now, and some of you are well on your way. When you get to that point, you are going to find that in time, you are going to find that it is simply nothing complicated. It is simply learning and watching the patterns of human nature. Human nature leaves its own trail, just like you can go to a crime scene and find a fingerprint, or you can find a piece of hair, and you can go and get DNA or whatever you need, or the fingerprints and run it down. That person leaves a trail behind them. If you are paying attention, you will find that when you start to deal with people, and I do not expect you to understand all this today, but I am giving you 40 years plus of experience in dealing with people and problems. They always leave a pattern.

The funniest thing, my wife, I should not even say those things to you because we talk about it, she brings it up to me all the time, about the fact that I know when most of you are lying to me. I

will ask you questions. Now, from this point, no one is ever going to ever talk to me again. I can see this is where this is going right now. Not in all cases, but if I think there is something suspect, my job is to investigate. That is what a pastor does. He looks well to his herd and under his flocks, book of Proverbs. So I will ask some simple questions. I know by the answers that just like the police officer said, "Did you have anything to do with so-and-so's death?" "No." The answer falls into the patterns. I am just telling you. There are patterns connected with human nature, and they are built around, out of this four-point outline I gave you.

You know it is true in everything in life. Norbert is one of the classic deer hunters, fishermen, and turkey hunters that we have in our church. Steve Bracken is another one. I mean, there are a lot of them. You guys, you might make a science of it. But you know, you do not get a prize buck. Joe Christensen is another one. John Christensen is another one. I mean, we have got a bunch of them. But these guys all know what I am saying is true. You do not get a prize buck just because you decide to go hunting, go down and get you a hunting license, and go to the gun store and buy a rifle and a scope, and then head out to the woods. If you do get a prize buck, it is because if you did an autopsy on it, it was brain dead. It just walked out and said, "Target, here, shoot me, I am visible in life." Better check because he is probably a Christian deer. But anyway, that is just hard to find.

You know, you have got to go through the patterns. The guy who gets the big deer goes out long before deer staging starts. He looks at trees to see if they are rubbing on the trees. I am not sure why they rub on the trees, but they are rubbing on the trees. They do all, I do not care if you know, it is fine. You do not know. What are you talking about? The closest you ever got to deer hunting is eating one of Steve's deer steaks if he invited you over for dinner. So they go out long time before. They do not go out and say, "Oh, this is a tree I think if I build my tree stand in." They look for all of the patterns where the deer run. In other words, if you want to get a deer, you have got to get where the deer are. You do not just go out there, "Oh, there is a big one." You have got to learn the patterns of where they go. When do they eat? What time of day? Are they better in the morning and the evening? You do not see a lot of deer hunters out during the day. Well, I would think that would be the best. It is warmer then, you can see better. But the problem is the deer do not go out. You have got to learn a pattern.

Turkey hunting is the same way. Turkey hunting is one of the hardest things you are ever going to do. The smartest, I do not know why they call them turkeys, but, and we always use that word like you are a turkey. Turkey, that is a compliment. Turkey is one of the smartest animals you ever find. He will see you, hey, I have been sitting 400 yards up on a ridge watching a turkey 400 yards away walk along a bank and just stand up to get a better look, and he saw me and went up in that woods. Incredible eyesight. But they do the same thing. You do not bag a big turkey because you just go out and look like one. Buy you a turkey suit and walk around, you know. You have got to learn their patterns. You will go in the woods long before and you will look for what they call scratchings. Scratchings is because they are looking for acorns or whatever they eat, so they scratch out a little circular pattern. So you will walk through the woods looking for scratchings. You see about 40 or 50 scratchings? You have got something. But then another problem, squirrels do the same thing. So now you have got to be smart enough to determine

between a turkey scratching and a squirrel scratching. There is a pattern to it. I am trying to make a point here. Most of the times you want to hunt a gobbler. So you have got to know where its gobblers are hanging out and where there are hens hanging out. The way you do that, and I do not mean to be crude, is by turkey droppings. Am I not stating the truth, guys? Sure I am. Help me out here. Am I not true? That is right. You get down there and you are looking at, you find turkey droppings. And how do you tell a turkey dropping between the male and the female? Well, simple. You taste it. Yep. That is a male. Okay. Put this in your Bible. A male turkey dropping is shaped like a J. And a woman, a female turkey dropping is shaped straight. I mean, that is what I want to tell you. But these are the patterns. You can laugh all you want. It is obviously you are not turkey hunters. Why am I even wasting my time with you? You are not real men. I am just telling you. You see? You have got to learn to pattern it.

It is the same way with fishing. Fish, I have never been a good fisherman. I do not have the patience. If I fish, give me a hand grenade. That is how I want to fish. Let us get them now. I have caught a lot of them there. I was fishing today. It was wonderful. I got 48 fish and killed two fishermen that got through, instead of blast. But anyway. Certain fish are at certain levels at certain times of day. My point at all of this, patterns. There are patterns to everything in life. If you are going to be a good fisherman, then you have got to learn the patterns. If you are going to be a good turkey hunter, then you have got to learn the patterns. If you are going to be a deer hunter, you have got to learn the patterns. By the same token, if you are going to be a good minister and learn how to minister the word of God and deal with people, you have got to learn the patterns. It is just that simple. Patterns of human nature. I mean, it is just that simple.

You deal with somebody on a particular issue. Immediately, it happens all the time, immediately, they will say back to me, "Well, you know, so and so," and there are lots of people that like that. "You know, and so and so." I dealt with a lady one time on her kids. The first thing I had her, "My kids were some problems." And the first thing she said, "Well, you know, so and so's kids are," and there are a lot of kids in this church that are not very good. And a lot of, but I got, the first time somebody starts saying that to you, that is a pattern trait. Mark it down. The verdict is guilty. Guilty. That is what guilty people do. People will always try to shift because they do not want to examine themselves, because they do not want to do what they need to do, because they do not want to take responsibility and accountability. Mark it down. The first thing they will do when you confront them is bring up everybody else on the planet. They will have a list 20 pages long. What that does, it is supposed to make them okay. Because nobody else is okay in their own book. The process is, we are not talking, I told this lady, "We are not talking about those kids. I have appointments with their parents the rest of the month." Which I did not, but she did not know that. "I am talking about your kids." Accountability and responsibility is the key to examining yourself and then getting to the place where you prove yourself. I am telling you, when you start dealing with people, you are going to find people, the moment you try to deal with them on an issue, they are going to tell you, give you a laundry list of everybody else out there to try to get it off of them. Because they do not want to be accountable, responsible for their problems.

You see it in your kids. If you are paying attention, you see it in your kids. If you are parents, and you are good parents, you see it in your kids. I know that when my parents grew up, and I grew up with my parents, it was a different world today. I grew up in an era where the movies, where "Father Knows Best." You grew up in a world where father knows nothing today, pretty much. That is part of the problem. But you see it in your kids. You see the moment, I saw it in my own kids growing up. They do something wrong, and they know they are going to be in trouble for it. So what they do is they suddenly hurt their leg. Or they get sick. What they do, and it is a great trick, unless you have got smart parents, because your smart parents will see you walk around a house, and then when they are out of sight, it is, see? Now, the reason for that is because you want to shift what you did wrong so they are more concerned because you have loving parents and you have caring parents. They are going to say, "Oh, oh, oh, they did something wrong, but they are sick. How do I whip them when they are sick?" It is easy, the same way when they are well. But it seems so terrible to whip a sick kid, does it? Yeah. And your kid knows that too. That is why they are limping.

I told my kids one time, when my kids were growing up, there was a, it happened all the time, where parents will, I guess they call it corporal punishment, where you whip your children. I am a firm believer that that is how you raise children. Whale blubber is really important. You whale on them till they blubber. I think that is part of the discipline. That does not mean you will be out of control with it, but the Bible gives you the, remember the Bible, the book, it gives you the details of how to do that. But back when, you know, some parents disciplined their children and whipped their kids, and the kids called, told them next time they do it, they are going to call the police for child abuse. Now, that is some real leverage, you see. That is some real leverage. Now, if you ever find yourself in that situation, may I give you some advice, free, off the sermon this morning? Let them call the police. Amen. I tell my kid, "You know what? If, when they take you out of this home, put you down to DSF someplace, or put you in one of those homes, because you had it so bad here, and you want to come back, and you are crying and whining for me three weeks later, that you cannot stand it, then we will talk about it. Maybe that is what they need." Parents give in to kids too many times. Parents get held hostage by their kids too many times. That is because parents are not in charge.

Kids run the pattern of human nature, just like big people run the pattern of human nature. You are going to find it, you are going to find it, one of the great tricks that kids always pull is, if they do not get their way, and I have had this happen, I do not know how many times in my years of ministry. Father called me on the phone, "Oh, I am really nervous. Little Susie said, we have made her break up with her boyfriend, now she is threatened to go kill herself. What are we going to do?" Now, you know, these are tough situations, but cut to the chase. Let her kill herself. Now I am giving you a minute to process that. Work through it now, get your anger out, take out a terrible person I am, and then think of this, you give it to that kid one time, and she is going to pull that trick on you every time. Amen. Why do you not just give her the car keys, the house keys, and everything else, and then let her be in charge, because that is what you are doing. In other words, at some point in your life, you have got to be a parent. I am not saying those are easy circumstances, but I will say this, the reason why they said that to you, when they are going to try to pull that off, because the way you made them to be.

the woman you gave me." See? That is human nature. That is what your kids will do if you allow them to do it. That is what God's people will do if you allow them to do it. There is a thing of accountability and responsibility that it simply works that way.

Before you decide to commit suicide, pal, or sweetheart, or whoever you are out there, I suggest you go through the seven suicides in the Bible so you really understand where it comes from. You put all those seven together, the greatest mark of suicide in all of the Bible is one great characteristic flaw, and it is found in every case of suicide. It is selfishness. It is all about me. Do not think of the hurt and the pain you are going to cause somebody else. It is about me. Well, that is where usually all of our problems are. This is why when you get that four-point outline that you examine yourself, you know yourself, you take heed to yourself, and you prove yourself, you can see how it eliminates those things in your life. That is what I look for in spiritual growth. I look for people who are going to take responsibility for what is wrong in their life. I am not blaming you for what is wrong in your life. I have had as much wrong in my life as anybody that is here. I am not blaming you because you have got wrong in your life. I am blaming you because you will not take responsibility for it based on the Word of God and be accountable to it based on what the Word of God says. You keep playing these goofy little games. That is the problem. Now learn these lessons well because each week we are going to blend these four concepts into what we are going to study through 2 Corinthians. So you are going to get sick of hearing it. Now would be a time to become a Lutheran maybe.

SEC: Getting to the Heart of the Issue

Another aspect of ministry based on what we are going to study. In dealing with people in ministry, you always want to get to the heart of the issue as quickly as possible. We are Baptist. We do not dance. Let that soak in for a moment. Most people want to dance around their problems. Most people want you to treat their symptoms and not really solve their problems. Most people have no real urge to fix anything what is wrong with them. They just want to feel better so they can go out and do what they were doing before. When you are dealing in ministry with people based on the book of 2 Corinthians, they go, I have talked about and I have decided I am going to do this. We have talked about going through a ministry course that I have taught for many, many years of taking people and doing it. A lot of those things I am going to, we have talked about this year and how it all lays out and what God is doing. I am going to incorporate a lot of those principles into here. Then as we get through this year and we see where this church goes, like we talked about last week, then we are going to really take some of the key people who are involved in it, who are really using what I am giving you. I am going to take you and I am going to show you how to put the icing on the cake. We are going to go through some of those things.

I am going to give you, and this is a great principle in ministry right here. In ministry, you will always have to get to the heart of the issue as quickly as possible. You go to a secular psychiatrist or a psychologist, and a lot of people do. If you want a good case study on that, go back and study Hezekiah. You want to do some great places back there where the guys made the bad choices. But anyway, when you go through that thing and you go to those guys, they will, their job is to draw this thing out as long as you can or until your insurance runs out. You will be

amazed how quick you get healed when your insurance runs out. My job is to solve your problem as quickly as possible. You see, they do it because they make a living. I do it because it is my life. In the Bible, Bible principles, ministry in 2 Corinthians, you always try to solve the problem and get to the problem as quickly as you can. Diagnose it, first time in. Many of you come in to see me and you have issues that you want to deal with. Part of the plan that we put together, when you go out that you are going to work through and you are going to make it happen, you know, is basically, in many cases, it is simply getting to that point where you understand what your issue is and then you work on it from there or you do not work on it from there.

People will lie to you. Mark it down. They will look you right in the eye and lie straight to you. People will tell you their version of a story. That is why when somebody comes to me and says, "You know what so-and-so is saying?" I said, "No, what are they saying?" They lay it all out. Here is what I do. I say, "Well, go get so-and-so and bring him here." "Oh, no, I could not do that." "Well, then get out of here." I will have a husband and wife come in and it will see me separate. A guy will say, "She is this," and then she will come in and say, "He is this." In my mind, I know all that they are both this. But sometimes you have got to get it that way to get it down to deal with it where it is really at. But people are going to lie to you. You get the idea that because you are dealing with Christians and we are in a church, people will not lie to you. They will lie to you through both sides of their mouth. They will tell you their version of the story. They will tell you half the truth and be stupid enough to think maybe not in your case, but in my case, you do not know they are lying to you. You see, in ministry, you have to be smarter than the problem people. Sometimes you have to be smarter than the people that you deal with.

SEC: The Solomon Principle

This is why I have given you before in counseling the great Solomon principle. The great Solomon principle is based on the story of two harlots coming in to see Solomon. Solomon is the king. The Bible talks about how wise he is. I have told you this before. When I first read that story and I first read a basic commentary on Solomon and it talked about in the Bible how that after he made this decision, all the world marveled at Solomon and thought, "Why would it his wisdom?" I have to tell you, I looked at that story and I thought to myself, "I do not see much wisdom in that."

The story goes that he is on the throne and he is making judgments every day and he brings these two harlots in. These two harlots both had an illegitimate child. The illegitimate child of one died. So during the night, the one woman took the other woman's baby because you could not tell babies apart, I guess, back then, I do not know. But anyway, in the morning she says, "It is my baby," put the dead baby where the other baby was. So they are spatting over the thing. So finally they bring it to Solomon. Solomon is sitting up there and the two women come up and they lay out their story and they basically say, "Okay, here is the story, Your Honor. You know, we both had babies and we went to bed last night and she rolled over on hers and killed it. And while I was sleeping, she took her dead baby and put it in my baby's clothes and put it with me and took my baby, put her in her clothes, put it with her. And Your Honor, that is not my baby." The other woman says, "Oh, she is lying to you. That is a bold-faced lie. Let me tell you something. She

comes with a long line of liars. She goes to a church over here. It is full of liars. I am telling you, Your Honor, you need to die. This is my baby."

Solomon did not know. Solomon did not know at all. So Solomon did the only thing that he needed to do, and I think it was pretty stupid when I first read it. He says, "Anybody got a sword?" You see, rule one, Solomon was going to get to the heart of the problem as fast as he could. Well, the fastest way is to cut that baby in half and give her a half and her half. Solomon said, "Bring me a sword." So they bring in a big sword and they all said, "All right, I cannot figure this out. You know what? I am glad you are both in my kingdom, but let us be honest. You are both harlots. You both lie. You have bad character. I cannot decide who is telling you the truth because I do not even know who is telling the truth because I do not know you. I just know the facts. You are both harlots. You both got a little jib of children. You are both not going to be elected mother of the year next year. So I do not know what to tell you. So the only thing I do is cut that baby in half and you take the front half and you take the back half or you can have whatever half you want. I do not care. And let us call it quits."

Immediately when he said that, the real mother said, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, let her have the baby." The mother who was not her baby said, "Hi, yeah, cut it in half." See, immediately Solomon knew who was telling the truth by how they reacted to the baby. But keep in mind, they are both harlots. They are both wrong. They are both not right. They are both coming to him with bad character backgrounds. He does not know any more than you will when you are dealing with people. Solomon did the only thing he knew to do. He called for a sword.

I have found over the years that when you have people try to tell you one thing and they are lying to you and they are not being upfront and they are saying one thing but they are doing something else throughout the week and all these things and they are portraying something, the best thing you can do is put them under a sword.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

When you put somebody under the principles of the word of God and they have to live under it, I am not going to give you any names, but a couple of years ago we had a couple come into our church and typical marital problems, both really nice people. I mean, I just, I mean they were. I mean they both had their issues but they were nice people. We are bad people. But they come in and they see me and he comes over and he tells me how rotten she is and she comes in and tells me how rotten he is and it is typical stuff. So I meet with them together, get a plan and here is the deal. I do not know. I like them both. It is not one of those things where I ever get into a situation where I look at one or the other and I say, "You know what, I do not like you." Now I have said that after I have got to know you for a while but I do not say that going in. I am just kidding. I sit there and say, "Well, I do not like the way she does her hair so she has got to be wrong." You know there are people who make their judgments like that. "I do not like the way she talks. I

think she is too bold. I think she is too, I think she talks too much." Well, I mean you do not judge character on that. Here I go again. Most women talk too much. You do not judge it on that. No, I am just kidding. You know, and I do not look at the guy and say, "Well, you know, he is fat or he is skinny or he is, you know, he is tall or he is too short or you know what, he is meeky." When he talks or you do not judge it on that. A lot of people do, but that will get you into problems every time. No, you have got to look and see what the substance is. The only way to know what the substance is, is to put them under that four-point outline without them even knowing it. Putting them under the sword, putting them into a program where they understand what they have got to do with the Bible to fix the problem they have got and then subject them to this abuse every Sunday morning and Thursday night.

You know what, it was not a year until that guy was out of here onto another conquest and the woman stayed in this church, kept growing in this church and today is one of the great assets to this ministry and to this church. You know what, I never had to make any decision at all. I never had to say to him, "You are a phony." I never had to say to her, "You are right and he is wrong." I never had to say, "You are right and she is wrong." I just did what Solomon did because the Word of God, the sword like it was Solomon, will always produce who is telling the truth and who is not. You know why? Because it is based on biblical principles. You tell me one thing and your life is an ash heap of violated biblical principles, I know what I am dealing with. It is just that simple. These are things you have to learn. These are things that you can lie all day and justify yourself but I will tell you what, when you get put under the sword, the Bible always fleshes out the wannabes and the Bible always takes the things and lets you see what you are really dealing with. That is why if you follow that, you are not going to change the people who try to deceive you. I am not telling you for that. You are going into an area and many of you in the next year are going to be working with people in circumstances and scenarios that is absolutely vital for you to know these things. You can do this so you can fix their problems. You are not going to probably be able to do that. I am telling you so you do not get caught up in it and you do not waste a lot of time with something that nobody really...

SEC: Learning from Experience

First years of my ministry. God had to teach me a lot of things the hard way. I remember when I was a young guy and I was just here in Kansas City and I know I was a youth pastor and in our church back then visitation was a big deal. You had a visitation night on Thursday night where everybody came to the church. Really nobody came to the church but you went to the church, you had dinner there, you got cards and then you went out and visited people. On Saturday morning the pastors were required to take the first four hours of the day and make calls. Go out and contact people. Go ahead and get as many people in church as we can. I went through that and I followed the rules for a while and it just was so stupid. I thought to myself... The answer was we would go out and we would knock on doors and no one would be home. They are home. They have learned your pattern. They would not even turn the TV. I have actually went in and talked to people and invited them. I said, "I really want you to..." The guy was absolutely disinterested and I am doing my little ritual and I am saying, "I just want to stop by and let you know we are really glad you came to church last week," and the television is on. I had one guy

when I was talking, he was not even looking at me and I am going through my routine and he drinks over and turned the TV up. We were always told the same thing. "Well, God will bless your efforts." The fact that nobody wants to hear it, nobody ever comes back to church, but God will bless your efforts.

I remember it was one cold... I remember the place. It was down off of Van Brunt. I went down there and it was like February or January and there was snow on the ground, but it was starting to... It was really slushy and mushy and there was a lot of puddles of icy water all over the place. I had been really struggling with all of this and I came to the point where I thought to myself, "You know what? I am just going to go ahead and do this anyhow." I said, "Because God will bless my efforts." So I got out of the car and I was going to... I have been to this house five times and this guy does not care about nothing. I had one guy one time. I will tell you this story before I finish this one. I had one guy one day, everybody tells you, "Oh, I will be back." They do not come back. I went to the door one time and I was so frustrated. My level of frustration was so bad. I knocked on the door and a guy come up and he says, "Here." I said, "I would like to have you..." "No, we would like to have you come back." He says, "Look, I do not want you coming back anymore. I do not want to come to your church. I do not want to go to any church. I just want you to leave me alone." And I instinctively pulled out... I had a \$5 bill and I said, "Here," I said, "have lunch on me." He said, "What is this for?" He said, "You are the most honest man I met today." I said, "Let us go have lunch on me."

So I am getting out of the car going up to this house and I am walking up the thing and I slipped on the ice. I got my... Back then you wore a three-piece suit. You know, I mean, you look part. I slipped on the ice. My feet came up and I landed right in about that much of icy cold muddy water. I am laying there and honest. I do not believe in visions and I do not believe in those things, but I looked up and the angel of the Lord was standing over there. He said, "Now, do you still think I am going to bless your efforts?" He said, "You know what, Bob?" He says, "You are a good guy and I love you a lot, but you are one of the stupidest individuals I have ever met in my life. You are out here trying to talk to people who do not want to talk to you. You are out here trying to catch people who do not want to get caught. You are out here wasting your time." I said, "You know what, I have given you a Sunday school class with 200 people back there. Why do you not just do this? Next Sunday, why do you not get up and say, 'I have got a sign up sheet in the back and next Saturday anybody that wants to come in from the same time period I am out here visiting and you want to learn some things about the Bible, I am going to outline the book of Genesis for you.' Put that out there and see what happens." I did. That Sunday after that, I had 75 people signed up that wanted to come. You see what I was doing? I was wasting time teaching, chasing the people who did not want to hear it when I had 75 people in my own Sunday school class that wanted to hear it. But I was measuring on the minors trying to chase the people who did not want to get caught and forsaking the people who wanted to learn. That is not the way you run a church. Of course I had to learn those things because you are going to realize that not everybody wants to do what is right and not everybody is going to do what is right.

SEC: Paul's Example in Ministry

Very quickly today, and we are not going to, I wanted to lay that out for you. There are those principles, but let us move into this thing here and I want to read this and we will not get through it all today, but that is fine because there is a lot in here. But today I want to begin to look at another great principle on ministry that goes along with what we have just said today. I want you to incorporate these. I want you to get these principles down in dealing with people in ministry. You are going to use them. You are going to see in this next year that many of you, like I said last week, are right on that edge where you are ready to step up and really develop some skills with people in your world and in your life. I want to look at another great lesson on ministry that he gives them. But we have got to keep it all together. We cannot get so far out in getting new principles that we do not tie it back into the foundational principles. I want you to learn these lessons on ministry and begin to apply them to what God has given us here as the object lesson of all the great opportunities we have to work with people.

I want to tell you this too, guys, I know there is a lot of hoopla about going to Bible college and seminaries and all of those things, but I am going to tell you right now the Bible's way of training men and women for the ministry is in a local church and on the job training is the best way to do that. I am not fighting anything. Somebody said, "You are anti-Bible." No, I am just really pro-local church. I cannot see going off to a Bible college someplace to learn how to build a church being taught by a guy who never built one. That is like learning Olympic running from a man with no legs. It does not make any sense to me. You have got to get where the action is and that is how God teaches you. That is the way it works.

So he says in chapter one, verses 14 through 24, he says:

2 Corinthians 1:14-24

As also ye have acknowledged in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit;

And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea.

When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God;

Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

*Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.
Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.*

We are going to get into this this week a little bit. We are going to really get into it next week but I want to draw your attention to verse 24. I think this really sums up everything we have looked at so far and I think this is a great, great, great principle. You know in ministry and in preaching I wish that you did not have to say hard things but in ministry you are dealing with hard people and you are going to find that the great example of that is the Old Testament and the prophets going to the nation of Israel. The religious leaders were very religious. They had on a mask. They had their cloak of maliciousness but in actuality they wanted nothing to do with God. They had many of God's people today and God sent the prophets to them and they hated the prophets. They absolutely deplored them. They hated them because nobody likes somebody telling them the truth when you are bent on believing a lie especially when it is about yourself. We do not want to hear it and Israel would not do the same things that most of God's people will not do today. They would not examine themselves. They would not know who they really were and get honest with themselves. They would not take heed to themselves and they certainly would not prove themselves not by the Bible standard anyhow and you find that same scenario all down through there.

You find in Paul's life and at some point in your world as you grow you are going to take a real good study of the life of Paul. I may teach it to you at some point. I have one of the greatest study outlines on the life of Paul that just took me many, many years to put together. He has always been a favorite of mine as far as a model of so many things. Not so much obviously by what he does but the thing about Paul that you really have got to scrutinize, the thing about Paul that makes it absolutely invaluable is the little one-liner verses that he puts in. That little verse will just speak volumes of everything else he said. You have one in verse 24. He said, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith." What he is saying here is in contact he says, "Now we have been pretty hard with you. We have been pretty tough on you and I have said some hard things. I have called you spiritual babies. I have nailed you on some things very heavily. I did not get, I kept you ready. You liked it or not. I kept you accountable and I kept you responsible." He said, "I know because of that," he says, "that many of you do not accept us now and it is not because you do not really believe we are of God. It is because that you have got your own problems and you are not going to change the way you are so certainly you cannot have the problem so it has to be me." That is where he is coming from and that is going to be true in ministry. When people do not want to change you may be the most perfect person on the planet and doing everything for God the way you should. But if you have got some of your life that does not want to change they are going to try to make you the problem. If you fall for that it is because you do not have to look back and have the testimony of a good conscience and that is what he is saying here. He is saying here comes this testimony of a good conscience. Oh, it is a tremendous verse and he says down here he says, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith." He says, "I do not have a right to control your life. I do not have a right to tell you what you can do and what you cannot do." I guess probably there were some people and you hear this all the time in ministry you have people, "Oh that church just brainwashing you." Well maybe

your brain needs a good washing. Do you ever stop and think about that? I mean some of the filth you have been putting in and a good washing might not do you any bad. Your mom used to wash your mouth out with soap and you said dirty words. Why cannot the word of God wash your brain out of the dirty things you have got in it? If you are going to throw the Bible away throw your mother away. See how simple life is if you just follow me. Let my people go.

Now he says we do not have dominion over you. We do not have a right to tell you you have got to do this. He says, "I am telling you what the Bible says. I am laying out. I know you do not like it and I know you reject it and I know you want to blame everybody else but at the end of the day I am telling you what the book says." Paul never takes it personal. That is one of the great attributes of Paul's life in studying in ministry. Never takes it personal. He is so focused on what he has got to do and he is so focused on what he is doing is by the book you cannot move him a quarter of an inch by putting him on a guilt trip. He says, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith. Here it comes. But are helpers of your joy." That is really what pastors do. You see a lot of times you do not like the negative things but you do not understand yet maybe the tragedies that is going to befall you in life if you do not do what is right with God. The Bible says that there is no joy in 1 John chapter 1. There is no joy without fellowship with God. So unless you get in fellowship with God by the book, by the biblical principles and get out of this little world you live in and take off that mask and get up behind that cloak and start really building the relationship there is never going to be any joy in your life. Or there may be happiness. You may be happy because you think you have in life what you really want but there is no joy. Joy comes from doing what God wants you to do and looking back in your life and realizing that you have done it. That is where joy comes from.

He is saying there, "I do not have a right to tell you what to do or have dominion over your faith or over your life." He says, "All I am trying to do is be a helper with your joy," because Paul knows that there is no real joy without a relationship and fellowship with Jesus Christ. Real joy is what we have to have. Joy in the Lord will get you through everything in life. When somebody, when you lose a loved one and you miss that person and you have got the grief in your heart. I am not saying that you should not. I am saying that the thing that gets you through is to know that there is joy in your heart because you know that person was saved and you are going to see him again. That is why he says over there in 2 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, he says, "We have the comfort of the Word of God not as others who have no hope." I cannot imagine a funeral where the mom or the dad or the person that was lost and you have got to stand there and look into that casket and know that they are lost without crying. That has got to be one of the hardest things in the world. But that is what a Christian, that is why we do not have to have that. Your life and my life when we are dialed into the Word of God, it produces joy. But sometimes you have to go through some hard things in your life to fix those things before you get to that joy. A lot of times people want to blame the preacher. They want to blame the church. They want to blame everybody because of the fact that they do not want to do what is right. When the truth of the matter is if it is a biblical process and it is based on the Bible, we like Paul, all we want to do is be helpers of your joy because I know the dead end street that you go down when you get out of the Word of God. You may think you are happy for a moment but it is going to be one disaster, one bad relationship, one bad circumstance, one bad problem with your

kids, one bad problem with your husband or your wife one after the other. You know what? It said it last week back there in the book of Job. I think it was Job chapter 34 that God will not put any more burden on you than to do what is right. But that can be a heavy burden when you do not want to do what is right. So you are blaming on everybody else. This is basic Bible counseling dealing with people.

SEC: The Second Benefit and Spiritual Growth

That is a great passage. When I get into this next week, I want to really focus on the aspect of this thing called a second benefit. I think it is really, really important that you understand this because not only in your own personal life but dealing with people. It helps you understand the whole concept better when Paul, and like I said, most exciting things about Paul to me, he has got an exciting life but it is the little things that he says that when you take the time to dig them out, oh man, it is a goldmine.

I told you the last couple of weeks into our new year what God has done with many of you. That is the pattern also. You need to know how the pattern of God works in your life just like you need to know the pattern of human nature of people and yourself in your life. When you begin to see how that God begins to work in your life, here is what God does. Many times you will come to church, you will come to Bible study, and you will grow to the point where you get to a certain point in your life, you have got a pretty good handle on your life, the Bible making sense to you, you do not know it all but you are enjoying it and you are tied into some of the other things that is going on now and you are moving right along and you are coming right up the deal. That is all a process and we will talk about that process next week.

Then you will come to a point in your life and this is the way God does it. You need to learn this. This is what God does. You need to learn this for yourself and you need to learn this to be able to see this in other people's lives because this is what I see and I am telling you that today. We are in 2 Corinthians, we are dealing about ministry, we are getting that thing together, I am telling you how this thing works. You will come to a point in your life where God will give you an opportunity. At that point, you are going to either go through the door of opportunity and you are going to pick up that thing that God wants you to do and you are going to do it or you are going to stay right where you are at, not do it and then not make any more progress forward but just stay where you are at and then in time start to move backwards. That is the way it works.

Your life, if you could plot on a graph where a Christian is like a spiraled spring pulled out, spiraled up like this and you start down here where you got saved and up here at the top where you are going to go to heaven. That spiral moves up through here and the Christian life starts around here, you come around here for a little bit and then bang, God gives you an opportunity. You go through that opportunity and then he brings you around again more and bang, he gives you another opportunity. Then you move around that thing a little more and bang, he gives you another opportunity. Then you move through that one and you get bang. Every one of those opportunities represents a level of spiritual growth. Those levels of spiritual growth do not come because you go to bed at night and wake up in the morning. They come because you actually take what God is doing. That is the whole key. You amass what you have and now God says,

"Okay, at this point before we go any farther, you have got to ring out and use what I have just given you." Then you begin to do that. Your whole Christian life will simply be that spiral with you having opportunities or circumstances, not always good, but things that you have to work through to get you through the next level. You see the majority of your church going through that and you see the majority of your people doing those four-point outlines, examining yourself, taking heed to yourself, knowing yourself and proving yourself. You see that process working in people's lives that they are growing. They are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination.

God will never make you perfect. Do you know why he will not? God will never make you perfect. He will never make you and me perfect. You know why he will not? Why? Pardon me? You quit needing him. That is the Bible answer. But that is not the answer we are going to give you today. We are going to give you a Bob's answer. She is right. Because if you were perfect, you would not need him. But learn this ministry one on one. If you were perfect and did not have your bugs and things you had to work through, then who would the people that do not want to do what is right have anything to blame it on? No, no, you laugh all you want. That Bible is a two-edged sword, brother. It will cut you either way. You either use it to grow or God will use it to destroy you. Many times he will use the very people who are imperfect because of the fact that they cannot be perfect, who you like to throw up in everybody's face that they are not perfect so everybody thinks you are perfect to destroy you by. That is how it works. That is how it works. That is ministry. That is where I see so many of you at right now. That is where you are at, at the point where you have grown to the place that you have got the Bible and now God is going to do something with you. My advice to you is go through the door. You know what? You are all different. You all bring a different value to this church. Not everybody does the same things well, but you all do something well and let God define for you what that is. Draw out of you what that is. Add to you what you need to have to make it fully blossom for him and then let God have it all. We are going to talk about the second benefit next week. I am going to explain to you. We have talked about it many, many times. You have heard it all your life. I am going to give you the bottom line definition of New Testament spirituality, maturity and the relationship through a growth process that Paul talks about found in the concept of a second benefit.