

I. The Quality of God's People

You look at it from your little cubicle where you see what you see. I have to look at it from a totally different perspective of everything in that big picture you always hear me talking about. I have always marveled at one thing about our church, and that is the quality of the people that God brings to us. I believe when a man starts a church and God puts that in his heart to do a work for God, that God, through the process of time, gives him the people to help him do that. I think that is the process that it always goes through. I have been associated with churches for many, many years and seen all kinds of them, shapes and sizes, and I believe that to be true.

I believe that when a man starts a work, I know it is true in the New Testament because that is what God did with Paul. He gave him the people in his world that he needed to get the job done that God had called him to do, and I firmly believe that. So I do not look at people in churches like maybe most people look at them. I look at them as my gift from God to me to do the work that God wants me to do.

Now, I say that, and do not misunderstand me. This church is not by any way, shape, or form a perfect church. We have our flakes just like everybody else does. Everybody said it years and years ago, and it is a true statement: wherever you have light, the Word of God, you have bugs. That is true. The light draws people who are not maybe serious about it, and you have to work through all that. I tell people all the time, if you look for a perfect church, you are never going to find one. If you look for a perfect Christian, you are never going to find one. If you look for a perfect pastor, you are never going to find one. You do not look for a perfect church; you look for a biblical church, a real church, because they are always going to have issues.

But without that, you have a core people that I look at and think that that is exactly what God does. He brings the people. I look at the potential in this room. I see you on Thursday night, I see you on Sunday morning, I interact with you throughout the week. I think the potential in this room is incredible. I think the great attitude that most of you have about learning the Word of God is really overwhelming to me because that is what a pastor wants. That is what he puts his heart and soul into: to teach people the Bible. You always have people who do not care about the Bible. But when you find people who have a hunger for the Word of God, when you find people that really have a desire to learn what God's Word is, to me that is really what it is all about. That is what really excites me to see that here.

As I said, I look at this all around us. I look at the people that God has given us today and the ones that have come in, especially in the last couple of years. The quality year by year just keeps going up. But then the responsibilities that God gives us of what we do in ministry keep going up. Who would have thought when we started our church some ten, almost eleven years ago now, that we would have ever thought we would be in ministry around this city where we are at and doing the things that we do?

I look at it, to me, the real gifts that God has given me are the people: the men and women, the families, the singles, the young couples, the older couples, the people whom God really brings our way to help us. They see the need, and then God sends them to help us accomplish what God wants us to do. It really helped me once I understood it. I gave you a couple of simple, basic life concepts that I use in life and everything that I do. It was through that I developed those things.

II. Principles of Focus and Gratitude

I told you, you always focus on what you do have and not what you do not have. I tell myself that probably twenty times a week because what happens when you do not focus on what you do not have, then you start losing the blessings of what God has done for you. I never let that happen. I have a lot of people that come through the doors, but not everybody cares about the Word of God. I have two choices, and life is choices. I can get all threatened over those and spend all my energy chasing people who do not want to get caught, or you take the ones that God gives you.

What happens is, and this happens in many churches with many pastors, they get so busy chasing people who do not want to get caught, you neglect the ones that came because they want to learn the Word of God. That will never happen. You never focus on what you do not have. I would love to have everybody love the Bible, but that is simply not in the cards in the day and age that we live in. I would like to have everybody have a desire to know the Bible and love the Bible and do what God wants them to do and what He saved them for. But that is not going to happen. So you never focus on what you do not have. You focus on what God has given you. To me, those are the gifts that God has presented to this church, to me, to get the job done.

Along with that, I told you because of that, I never take people for granted. I never take the people that God gives me who labor with me side by side for granted. I always look at them as a special part of my life in this ministry. There are many of you, many of you, many of you, that this work would not go on and be as successful and as fruitful as it is if it was not for your labors. I know that. The older I get, when I was, I told somebody the other day, when I was in my twenties and my thirties, I would go through life in Mach 5 with my hair on fire, and you could get it all done. But you cannot do it anymore. So God, a smart pastor, a smart leader, builds people around Him that can do it, that takes the load off of Him, and it is a two-way street. He gets the help that He needs, but He gives out the experience, and everybody grows through it, and that is what makes people grow. So you never take for granted the people that God has given you.

Then the third thing I always talk about is you always take care of those who take care of you. You just make sure that everybody gets something that what their needs are.

III. The Unspeakable Gift of God's Word

It is Christmas time, and we are talking about gifts. Those little kids, they all came through here, and I am sure many of you adults, you have presents wrapped under the tree. We passed out a lot of presents this year to a lot of people, made a lot of people happy. I am sure that when we are

done today, not that it was a, I do not take this wrong, but after Friday night when we did the motel, I kind of breathed a great sigh of relief because up to that point, all I have been able to do is focus on doing everything for everybody else that needed to be done. Now everything is done. All the things have been covered. Now we can all as a church just relax and enjoy our families and enjoy each other. We do not have nearly anything that we have got to focus on before Christmas, so we can just kind of kick back and enjoy it.

This message today is centered, and appropriately so, around gifts because next Tuesday is Christmas, the day after tomorrow. Everybody is going to be opening up their presents, and everybody is going to get what they want or get what they did not want or whatever the case. I have been dealing with people a long time, and I have got to tell you, as happy as Christmas time is, and we all get excited about it, after Christmas and between Christmas and New Year's, and certainly after New Year's, when you deal with people and their problems, those are the two most depressing times of the whole year. It is like the big letdown. It is like we are all built up to Christmas, and then it is gone. We get all the presents that are unwrapped, and a week later they are broken, they are used, they are lost, whatever the case. Then you have got to face the drudgery of the next year, which this year is going to be a real drudgery, it looks like.

That is the reason why that happens. I put it together many, many years ago because people get the wrong gift. There is nothing wrong with getting gifts. Trust me, I like to get them like anybody else. But at the same time, I want to talk to you about one gift in particular today, but I also want to talk about the gifts in speaking in a general sermon also.

My verse today is found in 2 Corinthians 9:15. We have not gotten to 2 Corinthians yet. We are still in 2 Corinthians chapter 7. So we are going to jump ahead in this one verse, but there will be plenty to say about it when we get there and put it into the context of the chapter. This one little verse, a very simple little verse, and it just simply says this:

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Now Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You today. We thank You, Father, for all that You have given us, all that You have done for us. We thank You, Lord, for how Your hand has been in our life this last year and the great people that You brought in, the young Christians that have, young people that have gotten saved, and the moms and dads that have gotten saved, and how they have grown and how they love You and love Your Word. Lord, we just thank You for all of that. We look forward today to talking about some things here that, Lord, I think will help them all. Lord, we just trust You now to give us what we need, comfort our hearts, and Lord, let us know that through it all, Lord, never the doubt and the darkness, what God has given us in the light. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name for the sake we ask it. Amen.

You know that phrase, there is a phrase that you hear all the time about "the gift that keeps on giving." Most people do not know that that was originally, back in 1927, a marketing ploy for when the phonograph just came out. They said, "Give the gift that keeps on giving" because you

can listen to all the music you want back then. It was something that kept on going. It was not something that you wore and wore out and threw it away. Today, if you watch television much, you will find that Craftsman tools have picked it up. They give the gift, their tools, their hefty wrench or whatever it is, because you can use those tools forever.

Most people do not know that back in 2007, there was a song in a music video called "The Gift That Keeps On Giving." Anybody know the musical group that put that out? Well, I would not expect you to know. I thought Pat and Sonja might know it. It was right after Woodstock, and I thought maybe you could figure it out. It was called Super Furry Animals. How would you expect somebody to know that? I mean, that is a crazy name. It was really kind of an off-base, kind of a dark music video. But it was called "The Gift That Keeps On Giving," or there was a song in there about "the gift that keeps on giving."

The story was that a spoiled child who was very rich was opening all of his presents and very excited and very happy. He got a book. Because the book was not in his mindset as a toy of what he wanted and all the other stuff, he just looked at the book and discarded it and threw it over his shoulder. Obviously, the video was based on the fact that out of all the gifts that he got, the one gift that would have kept on giving was the book that he could have read through the rest of his life. Then it cut to a scene where it had a bunch of poor children that were crying because they had no presents to open. It was kind of a weird video at the end of it. It was let out at Christmas time, by the way. At the end of it, it showed this kid opening up his presents, the little kids crying over here. For whatever reason, I do not know, but Santa Claus was in front of the fireplace, crucified on a cross. It was kind of a goofy thing. But that is the world's rendition and their idea of the gift that keeps on giving. Back in the twenties, it was the phonograph, and today it is Craftsman Tools. Back in 2007, it was some dark video that said something that nobody probably ever figured out or understood.

But in truth, and this is what I want to talk about today, the gift that keeps on giving is the one that God gave us. That is the Word of God. It is a book. It is the Word of God. We make a lot to do about the Lord Jesus Christ and His birth at Christmas. But I tell you all the time that when you look at life, the Bible, you never look at it from the Christian standpoint. When you do, then you get a very slanted view and do not see the whole concept.

IV. Christ as the Word Incarnate

I was going by a church the other day; under their marquee, they had a little sign there. This church has always got the goofiest stuff on their marquee anyhow. I do not even know who thinks it up. But this one simply said, "A baby changed the world." Now when I saw that, I really went home and asked my wife if she was with child because I thought maybe God was telling me something, and I wanted to make sure that that was not the case. I then called Jamie on the phone because I thought maybe that was not the case either. They were obviously talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

I looked at that and I thought to myself, you know what? That is exactly the way the Christian world views Christmas. They think that because they look at it from a Christian standpoint, that

the greatest day for us and the whole world was the day that Jesus came and was born in a manger. We put all the emphasis on that. But you know that that is not a Bible, doctrinal, biblical, theological approach. That coming as a baby in Bethlehem in a manger was only one small phase of what God was doing all through the Bible.

You know that before that baby ever showed up, the Bible says that:

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Before Christ, the Bible says the Word was manifested in the flesh. Long before that baby was born, Christ existed in the Word of God. He was there as the Word. When He showed up as a baby, He was the Word incarnate. He was the Word manifested in the flesh. We get the idea that nothing ever happened and Christ was not around until He was born as a baby.

You know why people, worldly people, unsaved people, a lot of God's people, you know why their two favorite holidays are Christmas and Easter? Because they like the fact that you can control a baby. I think we ought to dump Christmas and have a Second Coming holiday. Now you could get some things done with that, but they will not do that. They like a baby. A baby is innocent. A baby is not threatening. Boy, when you see Him coming with the eyes of fire and coming down there in a streaming fire in Revelation chapter 19 with a sharp, two-edged sword going out of His mouth, that is a far cry from a little baby in a manger someplace. But a little baby is not threatening. Everybody likes babies. So we like to put the emphasis on the fact that Jesus is the baby. So we talk about a baby changed the world. No, I beg to differ. A baby did not change the world. The Word of God changed the world, and there was a time when the Word was made flesh and manifested and then made the price for you and I to be saved. But the Christ was here long before He was manifested as a baby. He is the eternal part of the Trinity.

People get hung up on things like that. It is a thing that John chapter 1, as I said:

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

1 John 1:1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

Everybody who wrote that knew that Jesus Christ was the Word of God. When all you put the focus on is the baby and the man Jesus, then what happens in time is you throw the Word of God out. That is what has happened in this country. They put more emphasis on the man Jesus or the baby than they do the Word of God. The truth of the matter is you cannot separate one from the other. The greatest gift God ever gave us, and a gift that certainly keeps on giving, is the book that you hold in your hand today.

There was a time in life in the Old Testament when that book manifested itself as the Angel of the Lord and came down and talked to Moses, talked to Abraham, and visited with them. That

was the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate form as the Angel of the Lord. It manifested itself there. But there was a time in history when, in God's plan and God's time, He says, "I am going to manifest My Word into a human man." That is what you got. You got the book. It is an incredible thing.

V. The Bible as God's Gift to the World

Once you understand that, there is a great example of this in the Bible in Genesis 46:26. To me, it is things like this that really make the Bible special to me. You know the story coming up to it. Joseph gets sold by his brethren into Egypt. The Midianites take him down, and he winds up in Egypt. God uses the events to bring about reuniting Joseph and his brethren, and he goes through some little shenanigans there before he finally reveals himself. But the big concept is, obviously, God wants to get Jacob and the twelve boys down into Egypt.

Now there are theologically some reasons for that because there was a prophecy that Israel had to come out of Egypt before he went to the Promised Land. So there are some theological things here, but more than that, God wanted Israel down there to forge them into a nation. God was going to take them down there as families, but He was going to bring them out as a nation because they are down there for over 430 years. But during that time, they go from a small bundle of family members into a two million-plus nation. When they come out, they have been through the iron furnace of Egypt, and now they are strong, they are a nation, and they are ready to go. That is the story.

But the picture is beautiful. When you go over there in Genesis 47:26, it says, and Jacob and his sons and his daughters and their kids, they go down into Egypt. In your Bible, Egypt is a picture of the world. When Jacob died, he says, "Do not leave my bones in Egypt." When Joseph died, he says, "Do not leave my bones in Egypt." They did not want to be left in Egypt because Egypt is the type of the world in the Bible. Egypt is never good in the Bible.

When you look here in Genesis chapter 46 and they go down here, you see one of the most beautiful pictures in an Old Testament story, in type, of what God did to me and you and the gift that God gave us. When you go over there in Genesis 46:26, you know what it says? It says then Jacob and his sons and his daughters all go down into Egypt, and the number that went down into Egypt was sixty-six. You know what that is a picture of? That is a picture of God giving sixty-six books to the world. John 4 says, "Salvation is of the Jews." That is a picture right there of God giving the world its greatest gift. It was the nation of Israel back then because from the nation of Israel was going to come in time the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Jew. From the nation of Israel in time was going to come the Word of God. From the nation of Israel in time was going to come your salvation and my salvation. So when you see that story and it says sixty-six people go down into Egypt, that is a picture of God sending His Word to the world, and we got a book, sixty-six, that God sent to the world. That is His gift. That is the gift. That is the gift.

VI. Gifts to the Church

In Ephesians chapter 4, another place you want to look at. Here he talks about, and it is a great study on the gifts that he gives to the church. He says in Ephesians 4:7-13:

Ephesians 4:7-13

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

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

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Now here are the gifts in particular that we got after Christ rose from the dead.

1. The first gift that God gave us was the Holy Spirit of God. That comes in Acts chapter 1 and Acts chapter 2, the Day of Pentecost. At that point, God's people are now empowered by an indwelling Holy Spirit of God. That was the first gift that He gave other than His Son. The first gift that He gave or comes out of His death of His Son is the Holy Spirit of God. You have got to have the Holy Spirit of God living inside you because that is the meeting in between you and God that God uses to give you and teach you and me the Bible.
2. The second gift that we got was the Word of God. By 90 AD, the Word of God is complete. The book of Acts takes place about 33 AD, so you have got about sixty years there for the Word of God to get totally completed and worked out. I tell people all the time and try to help them understand that when Jesus Christ went back to heaven, He was the eternal Word of God. He was God manifested in the flesh. He was the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. When He goes back to heaven in Acts 1, for it to continue on, He had to replace Himself with three things. These three things are very vital.
 - The first thing He replaced Himself with was the Holy Spirit of God, gift number one.
 - The second thing He replaced Himself with was the concept of the local New Testament church because Christ was here in a body, was He not? When He died and He resurrected, His body was no longer here, so He needed a body. So you and me are the body, body of Christ. He needed a spirit. When He went back to the Father, the spirit, His spirit went. So He needed a spirit, so He gave in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He put the spirit in you. He put you in His body, the church.

- The third ingredient that He gave you, you needed to have Christ's mind. How are you going to do what God wants you to do? He does not know what He wanted him to do. Be like me saying, I was going to say Daggie, but he just steals everything out of my car. It is like I say, "Honey, I need you to do me a favor. Go out to my car and get what I need." Now you would go to my car and get whatever I need, but I know you. I would say, "Courtney, go out to my car and get what I need." You would say, "Bob, I would love to go out to your car to get what you need. What do you need?" And I said, "Get what I need. Here, here is the keys. Get what I need." She said, "Bob, I would love to go do whatever you want me to get out of your car. If you need it, I want to get it for you, but you need to tell me what you need." And I said, "Come on, Courtney, go, go get what I need." She will never figure out what I need for her to get out of my car until I tell her, give her what is in my mind, what I want her to do. "I want you to get, I want you to get my briefcase that is out of the car." "Oh, okay." Gone she is. That is why God had to give you the Bible as the third part, because the Bible is the mind of Christ.

Now when Christ went back to heaven, He replaced Himself with three particular things, because those three things left. The spirit left, so He had to give you the spirit. His body left, so He had to give you His body, and His mind was left, so He had to give you His mind. So He gave you the Holy Spirit of God. There was a spirit. He puts you in His body, the church, the body of Christ, and then He gave you the Word of God, which is the mind of Christ, Paul said. Now you know what He wants you to do. This is why you have no excuse at the judgment seat of Christ. You might like to feign stupidity or ignorance, but you will not be able to. I do not mean by that stretch of imagination, you are not stupid, but I am just saying, you will not be able to pretend that.

- Gift number one was the Holy Spirit.
- Gift number two was the Word of God, and now it is complete, we are complete.
- Gift number three was the apostles, and you find them in the early part of Acts as the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2:20 tells you they are the bedrock of the church.
- Gift number four was the prophets. You will find those in Acts 11:27.
- Gift number five was what they called evangelists. That would be Philip and Paul. He was an evangelist.
- Gift number six was pastors and teachers. Now you better be nice to me because I am your gift. You say, "Well, I do not like you." I know, but it is just like, you know what it is? It is like when you get a shirt that is way too big or too small. It kind of crawls up your back, does it not? But that is what it is, pastors and teachers. That would be Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

I want you to note the purpose in verse 12: perfecting the saints, working the ministry, edifying the body of Christ. In other words, once God gives you and me the gift of salvation, and He gives you and I the gift of the Word of God, then He gave some gifts to the church. Those gifts are to help you take the gift that God gave you and make sure it is the gift that keeps on giving by giving it to somebody else.

VII. The Christian Life: Giving the Gift

The Christian life is not complicated. We like to make it complicated simply because we do not want to do what is right. The biblical concept of the gift that keeps on giving is simple. God gave us the Word of God. When we accept it, it changes our lives forever. The rest of our lives, we as the vessels of God, the body of God, the spirit of God, with the mind of God in our hands and in our hearts, we give the gift that keeps on giving to other people. I am going to show you how that works in our church in just a little bit.

People are my life. I do not know what to tell you. Helping fix the issues in their lives that are broken. It is my only real passion in life, and many of you have that same passion, and many of you are very good at it, very good at it. My goal after January, we will get into this people ministry, getting your training session is to make you better at it. When I got saved, God, and you too, God gave me that gift.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He gave me that gift. Because of that gift that God gave me, I understand and look at you as the continuation of that gift of God to help me accomplish all that God has called me to do, and you are the gifts that God has given me to do it. You say, "Well, you have people who do not help you. You have people who do not do anything." Well, every gift you get is not going to be a nice one.

I love my sister. I love my sister more than any brother loves a sister. My sister is the most good-hearted woman you will ever meet on planet Earth. She would give you anything she had. She is the sweetest girl in the world, and I love her to death. But she buys the goofiest Christmas presents you are ever going to see on planet Earth. My sister still sends me British Sterling cologne. British Sterling cologne went out in 1976. She sends me watches that do not work. Doormats that I do not even have any doors. I love her. I do not know if it is a personal thing or not. She sends Barb great stuff. She sends the girls great stuff. She has notched it up a couple of times in the last couple of years, and she sends me these sausage sticks now, which I can live on forever. So I mean, and I can eat them. So it is a good deal. But I would look at the stuff she would give me and I would say, I mean, I was surprised when I, you know, this guy thing, the bigger the box wrapped up, the more anticipation we have. I look at that thing, and I am thinking all kinds of things go through my mind. She knows I love North Face. She knows I love this. She knows I love that. I am thinking, "Boy, I got a North Face winter jacket in here that I can climb Mount Everest on." No, no. I have dog pictures on them, and I do not even have those kinds of dogs.

You say, "What is your point in all that?" My point is simply this: some of you look really nice wrapped up, but when you open it up, the present is disappointing. Paul called them co-laborers. He says we are laborers together. He called them fellow soldiers. He called them ministers together. You and your family, or if you are single, or if you are a young couple without kids, you are the gift of God to this church. The greatest gift God ever gave me other than my family and

the Word of God and my salvation. But boy, you are right up there because you understand that the gift that God gives us, we have to keep on giving. That is why we go to Restart. That is why we go to the motel. That is why we go to Wichita. That is why we do what we do. Because we are simply taking the gift that God gave us, and we know it is the gift that keeps on giving, but we have to give it to somebody for it to continue on. That is just the way it works.

VIII. Learning and Loving the Bible

I am always looking for ways to help you get a better handle and a better understanding of the gift that God has given us, the Bible. I learned very early in life, and this is the difference between some of you, why you do not make it and some of you why you do, or why you are going to, or why some of you will not. I learned a long time ago when I was a young Christian. I was a lot like a lot of you. I thought the key to learning the Bible was reading the Bible. My father in the Lord read the Bible through every thirty-three days, so I thought that was the key. So I invoked into a program for two years of reading the Bible through every thirty-some days. That is sixty chapters a day. I must confess to you, by the end of that two years, I was pretty much messed up and screwed up. I learned a great truth out of that.

I thought that the more you went through the Bible, the more you know the Bible and the closer you would get to the Bible, and I found out the hard way, which I found out most things in my life the hard way. I found out that was not true. I found out a great truth. It is not how many times I go through the book, but rather how many times the book goes through me. That made the difference.

I thought early on that the key to learning the Bible was studying the Bible. Nobody spent more hours in the Word of God than me. I loved it. I just spent all the time in the world. But through the process of growing up, and people always hear, "You cannot fix stupid." Well, God can. In my case, He did, kind of. I do not claim to be the smartest guy in the world. My claim to fame is to be the fastest one in the slow class, but He fixed me a little bit. I learned this great truth. The key to learning the Bible, ladies and gentlemen, is not reading it. The key to learning the Bible is not studying it. Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons read it all the time, and they do not get anywhere with it. You see, the key is not reading it, and the key is not studying it to learn it. The key to learning the Bible is loving it. When you love it, everything else kind of takes care of itself.

I love people who love the Bible. God has given us an abundance of people in this church who love the Bible. It is the greatest gift, as I said, outside of my family. It is the greatest gift that God has ever given me, is the people who love the book and love God and want to know it. I am always looking for ways to make that better for you.

Now this unspeakable gift is not that we cannot talk about it. We talk about it all the time. Pete and I have some of the greatest Bible conversations you could ever have, Kevin and I too. We talk about it. When you come over to my house, we have some great times in the Bible. We talk about it. So it says the unspeakable gift does not mean we cannot speak about it. That is not what he is talking about. But rather the concept is it is unspeakable that the aspect of how in the world

and why would God give such a marvelous book to such a goofy person like me. Why would God take a book that is His mind, that is the most precious thing on this planet, that down through history kings and nations have risen and fallen because of, that runs the course of everything in history and life, that sets the stage for every historical event, every current event today, and every event in the future. And God put it all in a volume of a book that is the mind of His Son, the mind of Christ, which is the mind of God. And then God put it in a book form and gave it to a guy like me. To me that is unspeakable. I cannot speak to that. I do not even know what to tell you. I do not know. I do not know. I just do not get it. I just do not get it at all. It is unspeakable, the treasure map of life, like finding something that leads you to a million dollars in gold pirate booty someplace because it leads you to the treasure of this life.

IX. A New Year's Gift: Bible Overview

Christmas is here, and I have a gift for all of you, but I cannot give it to you Christmas, but I am going to give it to you in New Year's. This New Year's, up to this point, I have spent probably two hundred hours, and I have put together something that I think in one setting will give you the Bible in a conceptual way. You hear me talk about two things all the time in the Bible: context and perception, being able to perceive something in perspective and context. I have devised something that I want to do and put into your life and bring you through that in one setting will give you both of those things. It will do for many of you in one night what it would take you years to accomplish if you could ever go to accomplish it. There is value in getting alone and shutting out the world and just getting into a concentrated concept where you can just systematically come through the things.

I put together the complete storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I am going to start after I give you some preliminary things. I am going to start in Genesis, and I am going to follow that chart line, and I am going to walk you through and tell you and lay out for you every story in the Bible. I am going to give you every major character. I am going to give you every major event. I am going to give you every major timeline. I am going to show you every key point in history that you need to know. I am going to bring you through in such a fashion, probably going to take us three and a half hours. When we are done with it, you are going to have a layout of the Bible in a format that will simply give you the Bible, and it is my gift to you. I cannot think of a better gift to give you because it is the gift that keeps on giving, and the quicker you learn it and get a handle on it and begin to understand it, the more valuable you are going to be. It is just that simple. The greatest gift that God ever gave me was an understanding of the Bible. It is a very small percentage, probably ten percent if that much ever, maybe less than that. Boy, I am thankful for what He did give me.

If you do what I tell you to do and you prepare the way I tell you, I know. Somebody sitting there said, "Well, that is impossible." I understand it sounds impossible, but I am telling you right now, if you do what I say and you prepare a few basic things before you get here, the way I tell you, you will come away that night light years ahead of where you are at right now with the Word of God. You will almost in a glance because of, not because I am doing it, because of the systematic way that I am going to lay it out. You are looking at a guy who has pried and laid out and worked

through every scenario in the Bible to learn it because I wanted to learn it. Out of all of that failures, like Thomas Edison said one time, he said he tried a thousand times before he got a light bulb that worked. Somebody said, "You had a thousand failures?" He said, "No, I just learned a thousand different ways how not to make a light bulb." I learned a thousand different ways how not to learn that Bible, and then I found a way, this is the easiest way to learn it because I am a pretty stupid guy, and I had to make it real simple. You are as stupid as I am, and I will make it simple for you. There is nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with being simple. Nothing wrong with being, when you get educated beyond your intelligence, that is when you get into trouble. If you do what I tell you to do, the way I tell you to do it, you will come away that night light years ahead.

You have heard me say, I talk about it all the time, the big picture of things, the big picture of the Bible, the getting the overview of the Word of God, not looking at it from one spec but the whole concept. Well, that is what I am going to give you all as a gift this year. I have spent over two hundred hours laying this thing out, formatting this thing, getting this thing that everything is in the right place. I want to give you the gift that keeps on giving. You have heard talk about context and perspective. You are going to come away with it that night. It is very important. What a way to start the new year of 2013 next year. I mean, is there any party? Is there any get together that can top that?

Now I am sure for some of you there are. So let me just say this very carefully. You do not have to come to this. This is something that if you are just going to come and walk around out in the foyer out there then just stay home or go someplace else. If you want to come to learn the Bible then this is what you do. If you do not, nobody is going to get mad. I will not come up and say, "Where were you?" I have turned over a new leaf in my life, and I have got a new simple process that in there. I do not want you here anymore than you want to be here. Works for me, works for you. I am tired trying to chase people that do not want to get caught. I am trying to play a little game. You know what? I am going to focus on those who want to learn the Bible. I want to help those no matter how frail you think you are with it. Some of you in here, you are in the best shape you can because you think you cannot do it. That is exactly the state of mind you need to be in. I know some of you out here are already thinking, you already know it. So you do not need to be here. You are right. You are right. You are absolutely right. I couldn't agree with you more. You know it all. You do not need to be here. You know it all need not apply. I mean, that is the way it is. I am just trying to give everybody, I am being honest with everybody. I am just trying to give you, you are out. I do not want you to have to, I do not want to have to come up and say, "Where were you Thursday night?" "Oh, I was sick." "Yeah, you drank too much that night. You were." It is a half truth. "You went to a party, got drunk, and you were sick." Yeah, I understand. I do not want to have to put you in that position because I do not care anymore. You want to be here, be here. If you do not want to be here, hey, have a great time. Happy New Year's and enjoy yourself. I have no problem with it. I have no problem with it. But I know that many of you, some of you, you want to learn that book, and you want the gift that keeps on giving. That is where we are at. I do not want anybody to feel any pressure whatsoever about being here that night. Absolutely. Now you do not even have to tell me why. I do not care. I will come in, take what I have, and we will go to work on it, and I will give you my gift.

X. Preparing for the Bible Overview

Here is what I want you to do. Get him prepared for that night. Need to listen to this. I want everybody to get him a spiral notebook just like this. You cannot afford one, let me know. Bob Greg will buy you one. He would too. Get you a spiral notebook just like this. I want you to leave the first eight pages blank because I am going to give you some preliminary stuff that night that you have to have before we get into the thing. Then on the ninth page, for those of you who are physically impaired, that is one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Go twice on one hand and leave out the last finger. That is nine.

On the ninth page, I want you at each top of that page, I want you to put section one and then the other page section two. Now if you are real indicative and you really want to do something, you can also just put section one for two pages. I have got to have every page, section one and section two. If you want to make one, one, that is fine. If you want to make it all one big section one and section two and use both pages, I would suggest that because you have lots of room. But that is what you need to do. That is how you have got to handle this. Each page at the top of the margin, you will write a heading, section one, section two, section three, section four. You are going to go up all the way to twenty-seven sections, section twenty-seven. In other words, I have broken the Bible down into storyline into twenty-seven sections.

Here is how we are going to do it. In my telling the story of the Bible, once I give you the preliminary, I will tell you, "All right, section one," and I will give you the heading of section one, "Creation." Section two will be "The Reconstruction of the Creation." You will put that title and that heading after section one and section two. I will come back as I tell that, but as you do it as I do it. I will tell you what it is, you write it down. I will give you the heading for each section that is part of the Bible breakdown, and then you will write under the main heading of each one, everything that I tell you as the story unfolds. You will put the people, you will put the places.

Now obviously, this is going to be something that you are going to have to, I will tell you right now, I have got twenty-seven sections to do in less than four hours. So I have got to move. So you are not going to be able to write as fast as I am going to be able to speak, but that is okay. I just want you to get the section down, the points down, and get some concepts down. Once you go back and get the tape and you start coming through, then you can go back and put everything under those sections that I said and the way you get it laid out. What you are going to do is get the basics down. You are going to take the tape and go back and put all of your material under each section with the diagrams that I will give you, and I will have diagrams I am going to pass out for you that night.

When you are finished, you will have a complete commentary of the complete Bible. You will have every event, every character, every storyline, its major storyline, everything broken out in the right order the way it goes with the right timeline. You will understand everything, how it breaks down and how it lays down, that is of major importance. You will have the major characters, the events, the places exactly in the right order from Genesis to Revelation. You will be able to go back at some point once you get it done and use it as a brief to overview your Bible. You will be able to go back and read through it in an hour and have everything stay fresh

and consistent in your mind about that book and how it lays itself out. That is really the key. You want to come to the place where the Bible becomes pretty much as far as the storyline, total recall. When I talk about something in 2 Samuel 1 Chronicles right now, you have no clue. At the end of New Year's Eve, you are going to have everything at your fingertips to know that thing, every concept, every major event, in one setting if you do what you are supposed to do. That is how it will work.

Once you get past that, if you need some older people to help you put it all together and show you how to do it, then we will do that. But then what you are going to have is the rest of your life, you develop you a commentary, you see. You continue to add to it on Sunday and Thursday night. You keep this thing. It is not a one-time thing. You are building into it, and pretty soon you have the whole Bible in a notebook, in a running commentary that is your basis for staying fresh with the Word of God. Mine is in my Bible. At some point in your life, you are going to have to put yours in your Bible. My Bible runs probably three hundred thousand notes and references with every major event laid out, detailed out on the blank ends on each end of it. It is everything I need to answer any question anybody asks me. At some point, you are going to have to do that too. But not now. Right now, you do this. You do what I am telling you to do the way I am telling you to do it, and you will walk out of here that night light years. I say light years ahead of where you are at. You have the potential in one setting to get everything you need to take it and to understand that Bible and break it down. If you need help afterwards, I will help you. We will get people to help you. There is no reason why you cannot get this thing at one setting, no matter if you just got saved yesterday, the way I have got it laid out. That is why we have to do it this way. When you are finished, you will have a complete deal. This is, and you do all, you do that in time as you learn how to start and put it all together, then you will transfer it over to your Bible.

XI. Leadership and Opportunity

The gift that keeps on giving. God gave me the Bible. My job is to find ways to give it to you. I know that I do not want it to take, it took me twenty years to figure it out. I do not want it to take you twenty years to figure it out. I do not think we have twenty years to take to figure it out. I want you to figure it out as fast as you can because we have got a job to do. The job requires you having that mind of God, mind of Christ. So it is my gift to you. We will take the time to lay it out that night.

Our church has come to the point where the opportunities are all around us. I told you, everything we do, we find God giving us people to help and fix. I do not think once we start our people ministry, we will have any shortage of people that need help and we can work with no matter on what level it is. I told you last week when we went down to Restart, before we went down, I pulled Zach's team off because Zach works with all the high school kids, and I pulled his team off the street and I said, "I want you to come down there and bring inside because there is going to be a lot of teenagers down there that are coming to help, and I want them to tie, you to tie in and get to know them and get our kids tied in with it." I told you that from the pulpit last week.

We got Eve not here today, but we got Jamie and Eve and Debbie, who Debbie just got saved a couple of months ago. Debbie, I want to tell you, I am so proud of you and your daughter over there and my buddy right there. I just love you guys to death, but you guys have really got a little mission field out there, and they had the whole salon. All of the ladies, the owner to all of the people that came down, they came down to help. They took on, Jamie, how many kids did they take? Twenty-six kids that they took and bought presents for the owner. None of these people are Christians to my knowledge, and they wanted to come down, and they wanted to be a part, and they were over there, and they said, "We are bringing our teenagers down because we want them to see that." What an opportunity. So I got our teenagers and our leadership in with those kids, and I told you what would happen. I told you what would happen. One of the women afterwards, she said, "Boy, I really like your teenagers. And that Zach guy, he is really a neat guy." She says, "I am having some problem with my kid. Do you think Zach would spend some time helping him?"

We all went to see the movie last night, Jack Reacher, great preacher, won the world of Christ in no time. Got a unique soul winning ministry, "Get saved or I will kill you." And I love it. We had what, five or six young men out that night, last night. A couple that came out the first time, Joe and Christina, where you are a year ago, almost the same time you lost your little baby. They lost their baby, and they came down there, and they are going to a church of no hope and new hope and went when the church to nowhere from no beginning. When he found out we had volleyball, they said, "Oh, we would love to play volleyball. That is just what we are looking for." We are all around us. God brings people in. You do not just look at them as, "Oh, we got people to play volleyball. Oh, we got people here to do this." You look at them that God puts people in our world that you guys can have an impact on. That you guys can just by being there and seeing the situation, reading the situation, lending yourself to God to do what needs to be done. The opportunities are all around us. They really are.

I know many of you are saved and moving through it, and everybody has the opportunity to step up to the next level here. I mean, if you have just been saved a short time, you have the opportunity now if you really want to, if that is really your desire, to blow through the sound barrier and boy, be up on the next level and get everything you need if that is what you want. If you want to be, if you want to recognize that God gave you a gift, and now you take that gift and you give to others. At the end of the day, it is what I have said over and over again. It is building people. It is building leaders. Leaders get things done. Leaders stand apart from people who do not want to get things done.

In World War II, if you watch many World War II movies, sometimes you will notice on the back of the helmets of the officers, they will have a little white bar that goes up like this on the back of their helmets. The NCOs have one that goes this way. Most people see that and do not even know what it is. That bar was put on there that the men in the companies would always know where their leaders were. It came to be known as a "follow me bar." But the thing I always thought was interesting about it is they did not put it on the front. They did not put it on the side. They put it on the back because officers and leaders are always at the front of the battle, not at the back of the battle. They did not have to put it on the front so somebody could look and see,

"Oh, there is an officer." They put it on the back so they could see that the officer was out front. Hence the term "follow me bar." Leaders are out front. Leaders are out front. Leaders lead. Leaders lead from the front, not from the back, not from the middle. I will tell you what, you cannot ever have too many leaders because there is always something that needs leadership.

I wanted to say publicly, and I waited until this end here, to Jimmy and Pam. They have stepped up in this very difficult time as the leaders that they always were. They have been with me for thirty-some years, and they, in an incredible tough situation, not just Jimmy but Pam, stood their ground and did what needed to be done. That is what leadership is. I gave you a while back the four or five principle concepts of leadership. I use them as a criteria in people, in my ministry. We have a lot of military guys that are post-military guys. Some are still in the military, and I always like military-minded guys because they are usually very self-disciplined, and they are usually a cut above the rest just because of some of the things that they have been through. I always covet to get those kind of guys. Police officers too. Anybody, nurses too really because they all deal with it.

A leader does what needs to be done when nobody else is willing to do it. That is what a leader is. That is what you ought to aspire to get to. The only way you get that is to get the gift that God gave you, get it into your heart, and start giving it back out to others. A leader does what needs to be done when nobody else wants to. A leader goes into situations when everybody else is running from it. Nothing more terrible than this tragic thing with Jan and Cheryl and Damien. When everybody else falls apart, when everybody else cannot function, leaders function. Leaders take charge of situations and lead the way when nobody else will, or in some cases they cannot. But leaders do. Leaders are always known by that follow me bar in the back of their helmet no matter how bad it gets, no matter how scared you get, no matter how hopeless it works. In the military, you are taught to trust your officers. Now you can be as scared as you know how to be, but if you have got a good commanding officer and you have got trust and faith in him, there is a real sense of comfort when the whole world comes around you and starts crawling down, and you look in front and you see a guy with a follow me bar on the back.

In the Old Testament, no people on the planet of earth was more indicative of the good leadership or the bad leadership that they had than the nation of Israel. When you gave them a good leader like Moses, they were at the top of the pinnacle. When you gave them a bad leader like Saul, they were at the bottom of the pile. In the New Testament, the church is the same way. God's people have always been dependent on good leadership. Good leadership is what makes churches get the job done. A good pastor sees the vision, realizes he cannot do it on his own, and understands that the people God gives him are the gifts to him to get it done. They are not his to lord over. They are not for him to rail on or beat up. They are for him to get the job done, and they are a gift to him. But we all only take that ultimate gift that God gave us and the gift that keeps on giving, and we keep giving it out. We keep giving it out.

Leaders take a stand on right issues when nobody else will. They will stand alone. We kind of bumped into by God's grace. Friday night after the motel deal, we went over to Cracker Neck, and we had no idea that Jimmy Cracker Barrel. Do not call me a cracker. Cracker Neck, Cracker Barrel. I do not care what his name is. You know what I am talking about, the place where you

have got the big barrels and the rocking chairs out front. We ran into Jim and Pam there. Brandon and Katie were friends from St. Louis, and they stopped and got somebody had no idea where they were. We just overwhelmed the place. You guys saw it. The people are saying, "Well, we will get you some seats." We had like twenty-five people when we saw them there. We did not care who gave a seat. We just took the whole room over. We just all went in and sat down with them. She said to me, she pulled me aside and she said this: "I know you have got to say some things that are going to be some really hard things to say." And she said, "I want you to know you do right, and you say what needs to be said." That is leadership. That is leadership. Leaders take a stand on right issues when nobody else will. Sometimes as a leader, you stand alone. That is you stand.

The last thing is leaders say what needs to be said. When nobody else has the courage to say it, whether it is your family, whether it is your friends, that is leadership. The only way you get to the place in your life to do that is to build your life into that book. Recognize it as the gift that God gave you. That is my gift to you. You are my gift, and I want to give back to you what God gave me that you can take it and keep on giving. I want to take one night for those that want to come, and I want to get you broken down and get you laid out and give you everything that you need in one night that you can jump three levels no matter where you are at. Because learning the Bible is not about our time. Learning the Bible is about how much you love that book and then let God give it to you the way that He does. That is how it works. That is how it works.

So next week, starting after this, I am done here in a minute. Enjoy your family. Enjoy your time with them. Open up your presents, get your gifts. Enjoy your friends. Come Friday, we will do what we all do. We will band together, and we will bury our dead. We will do honorably what God has called us to do. We will pull together as a family and grieve our losses and go to the Word of God for the answers. Then you get prepared for my gift to you next year. Every year our church goes up a higher level. We are going up two levels this year, maybe three for some of you. Now we will get ready to come that night and to get everything that God wants you to have. I put sign up sheets out there on the information aspect of that table where you can sign up out there.