

I. The Handbook of Ministry: 2 Corinthians

If you have your Bible today, I want to invite you to turn to the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 4. We've been there now for probably four or five weeks. We've been in the book of 2 Corinthians now for a while, and we were studying how to do the ministry. The Lord has been so good to us here, and we're looking at opening up a new endeavor out of our church to help people even more. Right now, we have a discipleship program, we have a counseling ministry that you can get things worked out in your life that you need, but we're looking to expand that. We've laid the challenge out to our whole church of people that would really just want to take that next step and move up to that next level of really taking the Word of God and being able to work in people's lives on a biblical level.

So we've been coming through chapter by chapter in the greatest book in the Bible on the handbook of ministry, and that's the book of 2 Corinthians. Just to refresh your memory and for the new people that are here so they get a kind of a context, you have two books in your Bible that are written to the church at Corinth: 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. They really form a great combining of two books. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to them, and this church has got a lot of spiritual problems. They're really dealing with a lot of issues that, almost chapter by chapter, he's dealing with them on problems.

And someplace along the line, this church says, "Hey, I want to do what's right." The people in the church say, "Hey, we want to do it the right way." And then Paul writes them the book of 2 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians, he chapter by chapter teaches them how to minister. Now, for them, it was a great thing because it took them from a church that didn't care about ministry, that was doing it all wrong, and now go to another book that is the book that teaches them how to do it. It's great for them, it's great for us because what it does for us is 1 Corinthians shows us what kind of church we don't need to be, and then 2 Corinthians shows us what kind of church we need to be. It's really what I call the handbook of ministry.

So we have been coming through that, and every chapter has a theme to it. We've been laying those out, and when we got into chapter 4, we found that chapter 4 really defines the ministry for us as far as the personal side, and how the ministry should be run from a, not just a biblical format, but from a personal accountability format. I showed you based on 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 that how the ministry, biblically done, has two vitally important aspects to it that we, if we're going to ever minister, have to see and completely understand.

One of them, and we've already talked about this, is the doctrinal side. The doctrinal side is how we handle the Word of God and give it to people. The Bible talked about that back in Paul's day, as it is today, that there were men in the pulpit who do not do the ministry correctly. The Bible talks about that they are to renounce, we are to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, walking in craftiness, and most importantly of all, handling the Word of God deceitfully. We talked about each of those, and last week I went through and I showed you basically why we use the Bible

that we use. Now everybody should be kind of up to speed on that, and I suggest that you get that in the back of your Bible. It'll be very important to build on, and I see most of you got those little books back there. That is an excellent little book to start with.

But that was the doctrinal side. That deals with us as a church, you as people who want to minister the Word of God, how we do it. We get rid of the hidden things of dishonesty, we get rid of the walking in craftiness, and we get rid of the handling the Word of God deceitfully.

Then the second aspect, and we've not talked about that, this is where we're going to go today, is the practical side of it. How that you give of yourself as a pastor, as a minister, as somebody who is a leader in a ministry or a church, how to give yourself and give of yourself to others.

I want to read again for you the opening two verses here so we get kind of an understanding of what we're talking about. Let's pick it up in 2 Corinthians 4. I'll read the first two verses again.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Now Father, we ask You today to give us the wisdom and insight into all that we need to talk about. Help us to grow, help this church, Lord, to produce some men and women that will really take the stand and begin to do the work. And Lord, we thank You and praise You for what You've given us already and for the men and women who have committed their hearts and their lives to this great work for You, and we just ask You, Father, to bless this time today. In Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

II. Don't Faint: The Purpose of Ministry

Now you remember the first thing I told you here in verse 1, it says, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." I told you, very important. What he's saying there is, "Look, you got a ministry and you got that ministry because God gave you the grace to get saved and saved you by His grace." So what he's saying is, "Don't faint, don't quit now." In other words, when you get saved, it's not all over, it's just beginning. God saved you for a purpose. So many of God's people get saved and then they faint, they quit, they don't go any farther. That is not what we're supposed to do. You're supposed to take the same mercy that God gave you and through ministry disperse that mercy to other people by showing them what God has done for you and then showing them what God will do for them.

III. The Doctrinal and Practical Sides of Ministry

But now when it comes to this practical side here and we begin to see how it all fits into the Bible. When I think about the doctrinal side of the Bible, what we talked about a couple of weeks ago, my favorite verse is found in 2 Timothy 2:13, a very familiar verse. But to me, when I think

of my responsibility as a pastor, as a leader, as a spiritual minister of the gospel, when I think of my doctrinal responsibility to you, this is the verse that always comes to my mind. One of my favorite verses in the Bible dealing with this aspect.

2 Timothy 2:13

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Now that's my verse for my responsibility from the doctrinal side of giving you the Bible. I have a passion for the Word of God more than anything else on this planet because nothing on this planet has done more for me than the Word of God. When you recognize that, then this is where you lose yourself in the things of God, and the world doesn't mean much to you anymore. You get to the point, as I hope that some of you will, that you believe that the Word of God is the absolute of your life. It has the answers to everything and every issue and every problem you're going to struggle with.

Maybe you're here this morning and you have issues. Maybe you have personal issues. Maybe you have things that you're struggling with. Maybe you're having problems within your marriage or you're having problems with your children. You know what? The Bible has all of the answers, but it isn't just about getting a Bible. Going out and buying a piano doesn't make you a piano player. Going out and buying a great set of tools doesn't make you a mechanic. You've got to take the Word of God and you've got to apply it to your life to get those things to work for you. When you're willing to do that, then that's when the Bible really works for you.

But for me, that's my verse. I have an urgency of the hour that we live in, and I have an intensity of the mission that God has given us. My passion, I make no apology for it, of the Word of God and what it'll do for you and what it's done for me. What it stands for, an absolute truth, I make no apology for, and it'll always be there by the grace of God in my life.

But when it comes to the practical side of the ministry, I have another verse that really guides me in that, and it's again, my favorite verse for that side of the ministry. I think it probably says everything that I want to say today, but I won't preach this verse, but I want to give you this verse and then you kind of let it drift through everything I'm going to talk about today. It's found in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, and it's a great, great, great verse. Again, Paul writing to the church at Thessalonica, and he says this:

1 Thessalonians 2:8

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

That's the practical side. Not just giving you the Word of God, but giving you, or giving people, who you are, your own self, because they're dear to you. We saw when we started that a pastor of any church, he should become one with his people through their suffering. We saw that in chapter 1, and it's a great aspect about your life and my life, and not just for me as the pastor, but for every man and every woman that wants to minister, ministry is nothing more than giving others of yourself. It's you making, understanding that God made the sacrifice for you. He gave

sacrificially for you, and now you have to sacrifice some things in your life to give to other people. That's simply what it is.

Most people are not willing to do that. Most people get saved who want to keep everything for themselves. Whatever they give God of our lives, it's usually what's left over that we didn't want anyhow. I'm asking God, and God's always been good to me all of my ministry and all of my life in this, and it's true in this church, because even though we've been together for a short time, about nine years, I've seen this thing go way faster than it probably could have, should have, or would have if we didn't take the approach that we have taken. That is simply to watch people rise up to that occasion that you actually understand that the ministry is giving of yourself, putting yourself last and putting other people first.

IV. The Mind of God: Proverbs and Ministry

Now, when I look at the ministry, my ministry mentality had been formed by some great guys, and you've heard me tell the story many, many times. I came out of the last of the great Philadelphia preachers, and I've been blessed to have the ability to see what it was when it was real, and now to see what Christianity is when it's so phony and fake. My ministry was formed by men who understood the concepts of a no-nonsense ministry. They loved people and they loved the things about what they did, but they had a zero tolerance for aspects of people who didn't take the ministry seriously as far as getting involved in all of those things.

There were two verses, two verses that when I think of ministry and what I do, that these two things always come to my mind as far as doing the ministry. I read years ago a book, and it was a book by Tom Malone. Tom Malone is dead now. In fact, a couple of weeks ago I just met a man who was pastoring in Kansas that graduated from Tom Malone's college up there in Pontiac, Michigan. We had a good talk, and he was a very dear friend with him, and I told him what Tom Malone, his writings were very good. I read in one of his books, he wrote a, wasn't really a commentary, but he wrote a book on Psalms. I still have that book, and it was one of them, as a young man, it was one of the most impacting books that I ever read that really gave me a direction in Psalms. I'll never forget it.

He laid out, I remember him starting out, and he talked about the five wisdom books, and he said, "You know what," he says, "the book of Psalms has been called the heart of God." He says, "the book of Job has been called the sufferings of God." He says, "the book of Ecclesiastes represents for us the mind of the Spirit." And he says, "the Song of Solomon represents for us the mind of Christ." But he says, "the book of Proverbs represents for us the mind of God." Boy, I remember that, and that is so true. You see, that's what you would get from them guys that you don't get today. You get a bunch of froth today. You get a bunch of wilt milk, curdled milk that's been sitting out of the refrigerator for a week before you get it. Those guys gave you something in the Bible because the Bible meant something to them. I gleaned everything I could from those guys. I followed every pattern that I could see and understand, even though I was pretty stupid back then.

Basically, I recognized that the book of Proverbs was the mind of God. You've heard me say many, many times that the book of Proverbs is God's opinion on everything in life. I personally think the whole rest of the Bible is wrapped around the principles that you find in Solomon, in Proverbs that Solomon wrote. You know how I've broken that book down for you. I showed you how that it comes to the point where you get the first seven chapters is Solomon writing to his son. Every chapter starts, "My son, my son, my son," seven chapters, and he gives them personal instructions about things they need to watch out for. Some of the greatest material you'll ever get. I look at it as God, my Father, giving it to me, even though Solomon was given to his son, who didn't listen to it, by the way. I look at it as God telling me in those first seven chapters, "Bob, here's the things you need to look out for." And boy, He covers the whole spectrum of it.

Then you get into chapter 8 through chapter 30. In chapter 8 through chapter 30, this is where you find the Proverbs. The Bible says that there's over 3,000 that Solomon had. We didn't get them all, but I guarantee you we got the ones that God wanted us to have. Those Proverbs are incredible. They'll go through every detail of life, every issue in life. There isn't anything that you and I will struggle with that you will not find between chapter 8 and chapter 30.

Then you come to the great chapter 31. In chapter 31, we find a story that we all know about the virtuous woman. It's a great Mother's Day message. It's a great thing that you find when your grandma dies or your mom dies and your children get up and eulogize over you, and basically, say she was the virtuous woman, and they read out of that thing all the time. That's all wonderful and all great, and I'm all for that. But let it be known today that that story of the virtuous woman is a picture of the church. It's a picture of what you and I should be after we learn the warnings, chapter 1 through chapter 7, and then apply the principles, chapter 8 through chapter 30. That story is an incredible story. I wish I had time today to go down through that story, that virtuous woman, and every detail of her life matches up to what your life and my life should be in ministry because of what we've learned.

Proverbs has formed a great platform in my life, and two verses that I use in ministry all the time come out of that great book. One of them is in Proverbs 27:23. This is from my own personal instruction as a pastor; it ought to be yours too if you're going to be in ministry or you're going to be a leader or work with me in ministry. It simply says:

Proverbs 27:23

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

Now that's a great verse for a pastor. That's a great verse for a father. But it's a great verse for a pastor or somebody ministering the Word of God. Note it didn't say that you're supposed to know the number of your flock. Notice it didn't say that you're supposed to be concerned about their bank accounts. It says that you and I as ministers are to look nigh to the herds, and we're to look there in the oldest state of thy flocks.

A couple of Thursday nights ago, you remember, I forget who asked a question, and we talked about the two great concepts of the Christian life: standing and state. Your standing is in Christ Jesus as sinless perfection. That's the day you got saved. But your state is something else. Your

state is the condition your flesh is in today as you sit here. You see your soul sealed. If you're saved this morning, you're as good as in heaven. Your soul is sealed on another day of redemption. But you still have your flesh to deal with. When you don't do what's right with your flesh in the Word of God, then God knows what happens to it. When you do what's right, then God uses your flesh to do what He wants you to do. The Bible says that that concept is called the standing and state. Your state this morning is where you are at in your personal relationship with God based on your flesh.

The Bible says that a pastor is to know the state of their flocks. In other words, you're to care about people when they get in trouble spiritually. I wish I had the freedom and the right to come up to you and tell you, "Hey, look, I see something in your life you better look out for." I wish I had it. I would save you guys so many problems if I had that right. I know today that probably when I'm done today, some of you will come up and say you have that right. I also know that that right will last as long as till I come up and say something and then you'll be mad at me. I know it works.

I feel sometimes like the two ball players, and they were both saved, and they both were talking about, "Do they play baseball in heaven?" They argued back and forth. So they made a deal. This is how I feel. So they made a deal, you know, that the one who died first would go up there and find out and then they'd come back and tell the other one. Well, about a year and a half later, the one guy died, and about two weeks after his funeral, the other guy was out there in his living room one night, and the guy showed up, and he says, "Man," he says, "I couldn't believe this." And he says, "Did you ever find out, is there, do they play baseball in heaven?" And the other guy said, "Well, I got some good news and some bad news. The good news is yes, they do. The bad news is you're scheduled to pitch next Thursday." Sometimes you just can't win. I understand that. That's just the way it goes.

Sometimes I wish I had that right. I wish I could take that liberty, if I would say that. I guarantee you, I would save you so much heartache. I would save you so much distress in your life because a pastor is to look to the state of his life. When he does it biblically, I'm telling you, I see things coming in your life. I see you hooking up with the wrong relationships or doing the wrong deal. I see it wrong before you see it. That's my job. I just wish I had the right to do that. I wish if I were to say it, it just says, "I'm to know it." And that sometimes drives me crazy. I have watched God's people sink their ship and go down to the bottom of the sea. If I could have just said, but I know as well as I'm standing here, the moment I would have said, "You got to watch out for that guy," you'd go tell that guy, "Bob said, you need to watch out for you." And then I'd be in trouble. You see, so you just keep your mouth shut. But, oh, if I had that, I'd save you a lot of heartache. But the real truth of it is, you know what? I preach to you every week, preach to you every Thursday, and give you the principles involved with whatever you're going through anyhow. Why would I think you listen to me if you won't listen to the book and the Holy Spirit of God anyhow? So it's just one of those quirky things I have to deal with. It is where it is.

Now, my second verse is also found in Proverbs, and it is in Proverbs chapter 31. Oh, I love this. When I think of me, I think of this verse. I think of my ministry, I think of this. It says down verse 15, 16 and 17. I don't have time to read it all this morning, but oh, I love it. And it's talking

about the virtuous woman now. It has listed everything that she's done. Boy, we could find the great parallels, but then it says this, and this is where my ministry is:

Proverbs 31:15

She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

If you know anything about the Bible, you know, the nighttime in the Bible is a picture of the church age. I mean, I don't have time to go into it this morning, but you probably already know that. "And giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens." Now, you see that thing, "giveth meat to her household and then a portion to her maidens." That means that your ministry starts at home. That means that the Bible that you have has to start at home. It starts with your household. Then it goes to the maidens. Ministry has to start where you live. It's no good to want to minister to everybody else on the planet if you're not ministering to your own family first. I mean, that's just the way it is.

I love this verse, verse 16. This is the one I love right here.

Proverbs 31:16-17

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

Now, we know that verse 17, "girdeth her loins with strength." We know the Bible says in the book of Ephesians chapter 6 and the whole armor of God that we're to have our loins girded with the truth, the Word of God. That strengthens your arm. We already know that. But verse 16 is the one. "She considereth a field, and buyeth it: and with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard."

Now, you know what, guys? If I could speak to every pastor in the world, not that they would listen to me, but if I could speak to every pastor in this city and tell them one verse that defines what their ministry should be, it's that verse, verse 16. It says, "She considereth a field, and buyeth it." You know, you know the depth of that statement. You realize in Matthew chapter 13, the Bible says the world is the field in that great parable, the parable of the sower. You realize the Bible teaches us that, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." You realize that when God came down on the cross, He died for the world. He bought the whole world. He considered the field and He bought the whole field. He bought the world with His death on Calvary's cross.

But you need this verse here. I love this. "She considereth a field." It didn't say she considereth *the* field. You see, God never asked me to buy the whole world. He just asked me to buy a piece of it, and my field's Kansas City. Yet I buy the field with all the intensity, even though it's my little piece right here, I buy it with all the intensity that He bought the whole world with. You know, if every pastor would grab that and realize that God hasn't called you to win the world to Christ, God's called you to build and buy and consider a field. Not the whole field, just a field. If

you'll consider to buy that field and then go after it with the same intensity for that field that God has called you to do that He went after and died for the whole world, you'd get something done.

Not only does it give you the motivation and the mindset, but the next part of that verse tells you how to do it. I love it. We've all been kids. When I was a kid growing up, I loved to play in fields. I mean, it was always three or four fields, two blocks from my house. We'd play army in them, we'd put forts in them, we'd put dog holes in them, we did everything that you could do in a field. I remember, I remember, you know, I remember sitting on the front porch and talking to Mr. Anthony, I told you that story a couple of minutes ago, and he used to tell me how that 50 years before we ever moved into that place, that it was all fields and farmland. Now you look around, there's houses, blocks, neighborhoods, churches, steel mills. But he said, 50, 60 years ago, it was just farmland. Somebody took that farmland and developed it into a residential thing.

You know, that's how you build a church. That's what he says. He says, "She considereth the field and buyeth it: and with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." Now that's how you build a church. You go into a field, and you know it the same way. And I do, if you're going to plant something, you just can't start planting in a field. There's rocks in that field that's got to get taken out. There's weeds in that field that have to be taken out. The grass has to be cut. I guarantee you, when you start to clear that field, you're going to find some creepy crawler things that are moving out from under them rocks, just like building the church. We bought our share of creepy crawler things, but I don't know what to tell you. But you build it by the fruit of your hands. She planted it one tree at a time. The ministry is one person at a time. The ministry is one couple at a time. The ministry is not mass evangelism. The ministry is not canvassing an area to try to get how many people we can get to come. The ministry is simply, "with the fruit of her hand, she planted the vineyard." You build a church one person at a time. You build a church one couple at a time, one family at a time. This church went from 12 people to around 300 people, only because we bought the field, we cleared it off, and then one couple at a time, one person at a time, one person at a time came in and got everything that they needed. And now we got a vineyard.

But it all goes back with your mindset of intensity of buying a field. That's what I look for in people to help me in ministry. I'll just be honest with you. I don't care about your skills. I don't care how good looking you are. I don't care how tall you are, how short you are. I don't care about any of that. My only concern is when you look at what we're trying to do here, will you buy this field with the same intensity that I'm buying it for? That's all I care about. That's what leadership is. That's what ministers are. It's somebody getting on board and realizing why God puts you here, why God caused this church to happen, why He gives us what He gives us. And then you, some of you, hopefully all of you, getting on board and saying, "You know what, that's my field and I'm going to buy it." And then you put everything else aside and you buy it. That's how it's done. One person at a time.

A couple of weeks ago on a Thursday night, somebody asked a question about David's mighty men of valor. I laid out the four concepts that they had: their courage, their determination, their loyalty, and their honor. Those are all the things that you find in somebody who's buying that

field. Boy, when you look at that thing and you look at that thing in Proverbs chapter 31, that virtuous woman, it mirrors everything that we should be.

V. The Practical Side: Manifestation of Truth

Now, our second part of this verse that we're going to get into today, the practical side, also breaks down into two different aspects. It breaks down two, very important. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:2:

2 Corinthians 4:2

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Now, that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Those two things. I want to talk to you about in ministry on the practical side, what it means when it says, "but by manifestation of truth." And then I want to talk to you about what it means when it says, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Now, these two will form the practical side of ministry for you and for me. It's real simple. We're going to look at the one first, manifestation of truth.

You know, that word manifestation is a great word. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:16, it says that God was manifested in the flesh. While I'm thinking about that, remember last week we talked about all the new translations, how that Origen back there about 180 AD didn't like the deity of Christ. So he took it all out. Well, if you got any other Bible than the King James Bible, it won't say "God manifested in the flesh." You know what it'll say? It'll say, "He who was manifested in the flesh." They take God out. You know why? Because Origen believed that God was manifested in the flesh. So he put in "He." That's why you stick with this book right here. But that being aside, God manifested in the flesh.

Now, the word manifest means to bring forth something. When Christ, He manifested God in two ways, and it's a model for us. The first way He manifested God was by His birth. He had to be born. And then the second way He manifested God was His walk. Simply put, our lives should be a manifestation of God's truth in all that we do. One, by our new birth, the day you got saved. And then after that, two, your walk with God, just like Christ. He's the model. When the Bible says God, Christ manifested God in the flesh, or God was manifested in the flesh through Christ, you and I should manifest what God is through your life and my life by your new birth and then by your walk.

You know, I follow in my life and my ministry a very simple but profound truth. I learned this many, many, many years ago. It is the, if anybody would ask me what is the single one basic structural foundation that my ministry is built on as far as the concept of my mind, it would be this one. Because I don't ever give or take on this. It's simply that I believe that everything rises and falls on leadership. I think everything on this planet rises and falls on leadership. When I'm dealing with people and I have people that come into my church, and I'm going to be looked at

the state of my flock, I look for people with any ounce of leadership skills or ability. I look for people, male or female, who I see any glimmer that you might have some hope of leadership. I'll do everything within my power to develop that and bring that along because I'm telling you, you want to have a strong ministry, you want to have a strong church, you want to have a ministry that reaches out and touches people. I'm telling you, you have to build leaders.

I was telling another pastor a couple of weeks ago, we had to go to a funeral, and I was telling your favorite pastor, Bob, I was telling him about, talking about you, Zach. Well, you were there, you were there. And he saw you and he asked who this guy was. I think you had that same shirt on. You didn't wash it since then, did you? That was three weeks ago. You didn't? I didn't think so. And he says, "Is that one of your guys?" And I say, and he said, "Was he in the airborne?" I said, "No, he just don't want to be. He never in the airborne." I said, "He's really a sissy at heart." He just said, I said, "No," I said, "He's one guy." I said, "I'll tell you what," I said, "and he's just like about, you know, nine or 10 or 20 other guys." I got, I said that kid, and I was telling him about your brothers and I was talking about some of the other guys. And I said, "That guy can really preach the Word of God." And he looks at me and he says, with seriousness, he looks at me and says, "How did he learn his preaching skills?" I really didn't know what to say. I didn't want to make him mad because he's got in charge of the cake, and I wanted a big piece of chocolate cake. I didn't want to screw up my chances for that. I looked at him. I didn't know what to say. I wanted to say, "You idiot," because I trained him how to preach, and he's in a church where everything is run to learn you how to preach. If you've got any ounce of spiritual leadership to preach, we'll ferret it out, sort it out, beat it out, and get you ready to. Couldn't tell him that. I just said, "Well, he went through some of our programs, you know, yeah, we have a Wanna. He went through a Wanna. He went through a Wanna. We made him a chum commander. He just took off with it, man." I mean, I couldn't believe it, but that's his mindset. He couldn't believe that any church could produce guys who could really preach. Do you know why? Take a guess why. Bob, tell us why. He couldn't preach men who could preach their way out of a wet paper bag, but he puts guys in the ministry to preach that can't preach because he's so intimidated by anybody better than him. He gets all upset about it. I couldn't believe he asked me that question. And one of those things I said, I said, "Why did you ask me that? I don't want to end this relationship yet, but why?"

Everything rises and falls on leadership. You know, the number one key thing I look for in leadership, and I think it's fundamentally, it's the backbone of what a leader is. The number one thing, and I know there's a number of other things, and I'm not still sure yet that leaders are born. I don't, I'm not got that all worked out yet in my mind, but I do know this. I know the single fundamental thing that I look for in a leader is, I think it's the telling character of that person, is that can they stand all alone by themselves when everybody else is going another direction? That's what I look for. I've seen a lot of people who had what I thought was good leadership skills, but the moment they get with some halfway Christian situation that it pulls, it always pulls them off focus. They're okay for a short time. "Oh, I'm committed. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that." But then somebody else or something else gets in their world who isn't doing it. And they just stray right off of that thing. That's not leadership. Leadership is you set your course. Leadership is you buy the field and come hell or high water. Nobody pulls you off focus. No

matter what happens, if the whole world leaves you, if everybody in your church gets up and walks out, if you're right and the book is right and you stay with that book, that's leadership. You don't find that very often. But to me, that's the number one mark of characteristic, but I'm telling you everything rises and falls on leadership. I look for it. Any sign of it in people and then try to develop it. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't work out, but that's what I believe.

I believe the spiritual leadership for a pastor or a deacon or a teacher or a leader anywhere, it should be someone who has gotten to the place in their life where they manifest God's truth by their lives and all that they do because of that new birth. Yet at the same time, I must tell you, none of us are perfect. I'm not looking for perfect people. I never judge a person based on their failures in life. A lot of people do. A lot of people, you'll make one mistake in life and you'll carry that in your back pocket for the rest of your life. Doesn't matter that God forgave them for all their stupid things, you see. But they come to the point where I never judge a person by their failures in life because we all fail. A person who will not forgive other people because their failures is somebody who thinks they never fail, even though they've probably failed miserably. I never judge a person by their failures in life. I think that's a bad thing to do. I mean, if you judge David by the failures in his life, you'd look pretty stupid right about now, wouldn't you? But you see, never judge a person based on their failures because we all fail, but rather judge their person on their consistency of growing through their failures. That's what I look for. Will you grow through your failures?

Now, some people won't. Some people won't learn any lessons in life, and they will just go on and on and on making more tragic mistakes in their life and be miserable. I have people all week long that call me, and they're so miserable in life. You know why they're miserable in life? Because they got one life or one bad decision after another bad decision, and they'll never stop and clear off a spot and fix it where they got to fix it. I don't judge them for that because I've learned that I have as many failures in my life as anybody else out there, and I am in no position to judge anybody because you failed in what you tried to do. But what I do look at is, did you learn through your failure? I've told you many, many times, I don't care if you make mistakes, just don't make the same one twice because not making the same one twice shows me you learned from your failure, and I can live with that. I can live with that. I know I'm not talking about perfection, being perfect, that would be very nice, but in reality we're all human, and I'm looking for a consistency in living God's truth that through your failures you continue to grow and get stronger, and in time you manifest everything that God has done in your life.

A leader, pastor, deacon, I don't care how you want to say it, alone must bear the responsibility of success or failure of whatever ministry God put them in. I've met a lot of pastors who want to blame their people because the church don't grow. I blame them because they, I've seen pastors blame their people because they don't get enough money in the offerings. I've seen people blame their people for every failure in ministry that bottom line is, was the pastor's failure because he failed to lead. It's just that simple, and that's what leadership is. That's what I look for in leaders, and that's what makes a strong leader invaluable.

You know, in ministry in a leadership role, the blame is never on the people, but it's on the leader as I said, failure to lead. This is why leaders have to be held to a higher accountability standard. It's just that simple. The Bible says in Luke 12:48:

Luke 12:48

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

When you buy the field, when you say, "I'm going to buy the field," when you make that commitment that I don't want to be just like everybody else, I want to go to the next level, and I want to have a part of an actual working God-ordained ministry. Well, to whom much is given, much is required. There's accountability factor, and I'm not the kind of a pastor who sits up here and says you need to be accountable to me. You do because the Bible says you do, but the Bible also says there's a dual accountability. I'm to be accountable to you. Too many pastors want to hold their people accountable. They don't want to be accountable to the people. You ask the wrong question at the wrong place at the wrong time, and you're dead.

You all put up a lot of stupid stuff with normal garden variety Christians. I mean, I will. I realize that, like I'll put up with John not putting ice in my drink today. Jimmy would have been here. It had ice in it. But then where is Jimmy today? Do we not have any deacons, pastors that will develop an ice ministry for me? This is warm. It's all right. I'll put up a lot of stupid stuff with normal people in the ministry. You have to. Yeah, I told you. Well, this church is like a hospital. People come in sick. If everybody was well, we wouldn't even need to be here. And people come in and they got problems. No. Yes, I would like him to walk in, and the moment they walk through the threshold, John, you don't have to go to 7-Eleven. Get a bag of ice. I'm just kidding, buddy. It's all right. I would love that the moment you walked in there under the clock that whatever you had wrong, you were perfect. But it doesn't work that way. Some of you take months. Some of you take weeks. Some of you take a couple of years to get it all worked out. I got patience to deal with that. I really do. I know some of you don't have as much patience. You got to develop the patience. People don't jump through hoops like you want them to. I know we have truth, but the Bible says that Jesus came bringing grace and truth. We got a lot of churches that got truth and no grace. A lot of churches got grace and no truth. We need to be a balance of both. You're going to have people come in and don't fit my caliber, and I don't like what they do or I don't like what they are. But you know what? I don't get to pick and choose who comes here. God, if I look at it this way, if God sent you here, then I got to do something with you. It may be kill you, but I'll do whatever I ought to do. See, I mean, that's how I look at it. We're a ministry, but I won't tell you something. Oh, John, come here, John. Come here, John. Come on, John. No, my wife won't only let me drink Kirkland. Hy-Vee, Barb. She won't even let me bring Hy-Vee in the house. I don't know. I don't either. It tastes funny, John. I'm not sure whether they're all in there. No. Thank you, buddy.

But when you take on a role of leadership in this ministry, it all changes because of what we're talking about today. In my mind, when you say, "Bob, I want to be in charge of this. I want to be

a prayer group leader. I want to be a ball captain. I want to be this. I want to be that. I want to be working a counseling ministry. I want to disciple somebody. I want to do this. I want to do that." To me, you're signing on a dotted line that you're going to hold yourself accountable to the Word of God in ministry. You're basically telling me, "I'm buying the field." You see, I mean, I simply hold you to the same standards that I hold myself to. We ought to be able to, we ought to work together to solve problems, not cause problems. That's what leaders do. When you get into a leader position, you're telling me, "I want part of what you've spent 45 plus years of your life learning and developing." You're telling me, "I want now to have a part of your ministry that God has given you to help you buy this field." Brother, you can have it, but I'm telling you right now, you better rise to the occasion when you take it.

Now, I know we all struggle with things. I know that. I struggle with things. I know we all have our issues, but it's the stupid things that come about because of no self-discipline or no understanding of the tremendous responsibility of being a deacon or a pastor or a leader, whether you're male or female. No self-control over what you do. No self-sacrifice in your life. You can't do the ministry on your terms. Hey, there have been times that I've been so sick on Thursday night that I did, and you know what? You never knew it. You know why? Because sometimes you have to make the sacrifice to do what God's called you to do. It'd be times that I went places to preach that if I was sick as a dog, but you know what? You got to go do what God, you got to self-sacrifice. I learned the ministry of a man that his mother was dying, and his mother was dying, and she was ready to expire at any time. He was in the middle of a revival that he was driving 100 miles to, and every pastor said, "You need to cancel that revival. You need to stay home with your mother." You know what he said? He said, "It was my mother who taught me the Bible and taught me the Word of God, and though my mother's in a coma, I guarantee you if she could talk, she'd want me to go preach that revival tonight." And he went to preach that revival, and I went with him. When we come back, the front porch light was on, cars were all around, his mother went home to be with the Lord. But you know what? It takes self-sacrifice into ministry sometimes. No, I'm not saying that that works across the board and everything in your life. Understand what I'm saying. But what I am saying is this, kids, you just can't do ministry when it's convenient. That's why God gave your husband and wife. If the baby's sick, why don't you stay home? The other one go do ministry. Why do you hold the baby? You hold the woman or the man? What is the deal? You know what? There comes a time when you have to realize that to do real ministry. Now, I'm not talking to just common, ordinary people. Why don't you get sick, stay home, and bring them aspirin? I don't care. But ministry is self-sacrifice. You don't do ministry when you feel good. You don't do ministry when everybody's okay in the family. You do ministry when it's time to minister. And there's exceptions to that, I understand. It would be your death.

Giving yourself to people. Somebody said years ago, I never forgot this either. It's a simple thing and it's really almost a goofy thing, but it's so profound. It says, "God first, others second, and me last." There's a lot of weight to that. You know, over the years I've seen this. I mean, people don't follow you as a leader because you have a badge that says, "I'm a leader, follow me." I've seen this over the years. You see it a lot in the families of pastors. I've known some of the greatest pastors who were the greatest preachers that built some of the greatest churches, and they lost their whole kids and their family. Don't even go to church today. I've seen it all my life.

I've seen it with pastors, deacons, and spiritual leaders, and all this stuff. I've seen it, man. I've seen it. I mean, dad and mom go to church, but the kids live like hell, don't want to have anything to do with church.

I want to tell you something. You young couples here, and our church is probably 80% of you young couples that have young kids. I'm telling you, you better learn what I'm about to tell you. You better see and grasp some things about when you have kids or if you have young kids about what I'm going to talk about here and hear me out. Because as a leader, you have to have credibility. Credibility doesn't come because you get ordained as a deacon or become a pastor or get a church. That's not how you get credibility. Credibility becomes because you manifest truth in what you do. But I've seen it all the time. Nothing hurts your credibility of being a pastor, a deacon, or a leader more than having a child that could care less about God that was raised on your watch.

Now, at the same time, I'm telling you, I'm not, again, I'm not criticizing anybody because of the fact that everybody has problems with their kids. Everybody has problems with them when they hit teenage age. I had problems with mine. Everybody has them. I'm not talking about that. It's not the fact that they're not in church or ministry. It's not the fact that they're not spiritual in what they're doing. It's the fact that when you had a chance to deal with them on a spiritual basis and drop the hammer to keep them in line, you failed to do it.

Father Flanagan, Boys Town, one of the greatest movies with Spencer Tracy playing Father Flanagan. Father Flanagan was a real guy. He built Boys Town basically out of nothing. He took a bunch of homeless kids in a depression era. He had a favorite saying. He always would say and do everything he did. They thought he was not. They thought he couldn't do it. He built one of the largest, an unsaved man, built one of the largest organizations for kids that you could ever find in your life on one concept. You know what his concept was? He really believed there was no such thing as a bad boy. I agree with him on that point. I don't think there's bad kids. I don't think there's a bad kid out there. I think there's a lot of bad parents. Kids don't go bad on their own. Kids go bad because parents didn't do what they were supposed to do on their watch.

Just like I never judge a man for the failures, I never judge a person whether your kid did right or he did wrong or they struggle. All kids do. When I look at it, when it pushed come to shove, did you deal with it biblically? When the hammer needed to be dropped, did you drop the hammer? When they had to push come to shove, who got pushed and who got shoved? Someplace along the line. I know you can't make them do right, but you can take a biblical stand that will give you the best chance of reaching them. You got to stop enabling them. You got to stop babying them. You got to hold them accountable to their bad choices. You've got to come to the plate. It may mean that you have to, in some cases, God forbid, you have to separate from them and say, "Look, if you've chosen this lifestyle, that's not our lifestyle. I love you. I care for you. But you know what? You got to go your way and I got to go mine. But know the door is always open. If you ever want to do what's right." Parents putting up with their kids, drinking and doing drugs and smoking and doing all those things. I don't understand it.

Nothing, nothing destroys credibility more than not dealing with the problem. My kids always know and still know to this day, and they're certainly not perfect by the stretch of the imagination, that in my position, if they screwed up, they got clobbered harder than some other kid. That just went along with their territory. If it meant they got kicked out of church, then they got kicked out of church. If it meant that whatever they did, admit on an equal why. Somebody says, "Well, that's awful hard on your kids. Is that fair?" Hey, let me tell you something. Your credibility as a leader on how you deal with your house, then how you deal with the house of God. I mean, you do got the verse, don't you? I mean, 1 Timothy 3:4-5 says one that in a qualification for a bishop or a deacon or an elder:

1 Timothy 3:4-5

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

I like that word gravity. Having your kids in gravity. You know what gravity does? What goes up must come down. Gravity is holding their feet to the fire, not letting them just go to and whatever they want to do. Then it says, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" I don't know, but I've seen it all my life, and it all comes back. Not the fact that kids are good or bad. All kids struggle with things in life. All kids get into problems, and sometimes they get into terrible problems. It isn't about the only chance you have to help your kid and to maintain your credibility is to deal with it biblically. Read the verse, the manifestation of truth, and that starts at home first. You cannot have a double standard in being in ministry. You can't have one standard for your family and another standard for the church. If they step out of line, you deal with it. If it comes to the point, whatever you got to do, you deal with it. Your credibility and ministry is absolutely important. It's vital.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy chapter 3, a pastor should be blameless. That verse always bothered me because I don't know how a pastor could get blameless when he's blamed for everything. But I finally figured it out a number of years ago. A pastor is blameless simply because he deals with issues biblically, whether they're popular or not. A leader deals with issues biblically. Therefore he's blameless. Somebody comes in, "Well, your kid did this or your child did that." "Yeah, they did, didn't they? But I dealt with it biblically." There it is. Here it is. End of story. Blameless.

The other side of that is pastors need to admit when they're wrong. Something most pastors can't do. You'll see me on Thursday night with somebody, I teach something wrong or get something screwed up. Somebody raise their hand and say, "You know what, that's not right." Or "You missed this verse" or "You gave this verse wrong here." Most pastors would have a heart attack. That'd be your last time. They'd cut your hands off so you couldn't even raise them anymore. Hey, we're all in the same boat, man. I am far from perfect. I make my mistakes. I forget things. I mean, I do. I mean, I do. I'm at the place where I'm almost 62 years old. I forget. The great thing about being 62 is now I can hide my own Easter eggs and have fun finding them because I can't remember where I put them. But I tell you, it's scary in the morning when your body makes the same noises as your coffee maker does. I'm telling you right now. My biggest problem is that I remember a lot of things. I don't remember a lot of things. I don't remember what I just said.

What did I just say? We're all here to help everybody. Everybody works together. Everybody, everybody, and pastors think that they got to live above the people as far as they don't make mistakes. Hey, stick around with me. You get me in the right mood and push the right buttons. I'll give you a cussing like you ain't ever heard in Jesus' name, of course. We're all frail. We're all fragile. We all make mistakes. And I didn't say that just so I could go around and cuss. But manifestation of truth, my friend, starts at home. You cannot have a double standard. The only way to get that credibility is to deal with those issues in your life. I've seen pastors all my life. I've seen deacon's kids were the worst kids on the planet. I know every kid has problems. Every kid has the potential to do some stupid things that probably will. It's how you deal with it. You don't pretend it's okay. You don't sweep it under the rug. You don't make excuses for them. You don't say, "Oh, well, you know what? No, they're just really good down in their heart." No, they're stupid. Just get out of here. You young couples need to learn from that. You need to train your kids up, hold them accountable. Don't let them just do whatever they want to do. Make sure that they understand that this house is God's house. You're going to be the leaders of this church. You already are. But someday, if Jesus doesn't come, you'll be even greater potential of leaders in this church. And you got to have credibility. You got to have credibility. This is why leadership always has to be held to a higher level of accountability. Because to whom much is given, much is required. Get the biblical process down right now. We as leaders have to manifest truth. We manifest that by our birth, new birth, and by our walk with God. God manifested in the flesh.

VI. The Practical Side: Commending Ourselves to Every Man's Conscience

Then the second one. Again, this all goes back to what we talked about in 2 Corinthians a while back, where it talked about that we have the epistle written in our heart, read of all men. This is really what it is. Now, the second one is also very important. It says, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Now, conscience is one of those big, spooky, mystery words. Let me explain to you from a Bible standpoint what your conscience is. Your conscience is man's spirit. You've got a body, soul, and spirit. Your body is what's sitting on that thing right now. Your soul is inside that. Your spirit is your conscience. He says, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In the ministry, we're to provide all things honest, not only to before God, but also before men. Romans 12:17 says:

Romans 12:17

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

If you're ever going to commend yourself to every man's conscience, then this is where the hidden things of dishonesty, walking in craftiness, handling the Word of God deceitfully, they got to go. If you're going to commend yourself to every man's conscience, this is where you've got to, you've got to, you've got to be honest.

In ministry, as a pastor, deacon, spiritual leader, there's a tremendous aspect of ministry. It's called the trust factor. The trust factor. In ministry, people will trust you. In ministry, people are supposed to trust you as a leader, as a pastor. I found in ministry, there's many mistakes that a pastor can make, and people will forgive him and just chalk it up until he's human and will let it go. But I'm going to tell you also, there's one area where you'll lose it and you'll probably never get it back. That's when you violate somebody's trust. It can never be violated. Never. Trust is the key to any relationship whatsoever. It's certainly to create a biblical Christianity and a certain key to your marriage and a certain key to your relationship with your kids and certainly our relationship in this church. If you have a pastor you have no confidence in and you have a pastor that you can't trust, I don't even know why you're still there. If you're going to say you're going to do something as a pastor, do it.

You see, we as leaders, we represent God in His word, the manifestation of truth. People will trust you in that. People come to church because they got needs. When they see somebody up there and they say what they want to hear, and they tell them, and they give them, or they help them, that trust automatically develops. But as a leader, as a minister, that you can never, never violate that trust. You have to be as best you can who you are and live the life that manifests the truth even though you're still a sinner. People will forgive you for a lot of things, but dishonesty in the ministry is not one of them. Violating that trust. A pastor, leader, deacon, whoever has a tremendous responsibility in keeping the trust of their people. People will tell you things in confession. They'll tell you things in confidence. They'll confess things to you. They'll lay out their deepest, darkest secrets, their fears, their sins, and they trust you to do right as a minister with what you have. That's just the way it is, folks.

A pastor, leader, life, and ministry should be an open book. No hidden chapters. No ulterior motives. Nothing that's not transparent. What you see is basically what you get. The guy, live what he says in the pulpit. In reality, most people don't want a perfect pastor. They really don't. They just want a real one. They want somebody that will tell them what the truth is and then to the best of their ability, live that truth. Nothing hidden. Nothing calculated. Nothing artificial. Nothing political. Nothing controlled. Let people think whatever they want to think, but at the end of the day, you'll be genuine and real.

You know, I've always followed in my ministry from day one what I call an open-door policy in ministry. I think it's the only way to do it. If you're a member of this church and you support it with your tithes and your offerings and you make an investment in ministry, you have every right to know what goes on in this church. Open policy. Everything that you want to know. This is why I give anybody an hour a week to come over and ask me whatever you want to know. An open door. Many times it's about the Bible. You want to know about me. You want to know about the church. You want to know what we believe, what we believe. You want to know why we do this or why we do it this way. You have every right to ask that. Our ministry has to be absolutely transparent in all that we do.

I told you before, many churches, you ask the wrong question and you get blackballed, brother, and you get clobbered. You put the preacher on the spot by asking him something he doesn't want to reveal to you. I'll tell you what, anytime you ask me something, and if it's other than

somebody's personal confidential material that I hedge on telling you or I try to hide from you, then you know there's something dishonest about it. It's got to be open and honest, man. I can't think of anything other than somebody else's personal information that you can't have in this church if you're a member of this church, tithing to this church, and involved in ministry in this church. It's your church, man.

You know, I've had people ask me to come here. "How do you join your church?" Most churches at the end, they give a thing and you walk down and you kneel down there and you come to join. And the guy gets up and takes 20 minutes. "We just so and so came by letter. Just so and so came by baptism. This person came by this. This person came by this." And everybody's happy about it. That means, do you really think of the church of Antioch? That's what they did. We do some of the stupidest stuff in churches today that mean absolutely nothing. What good does it mean if you come down here and fall on your knees and say, "I want to join your church," if you do nothing with it? I would much rather you just get involved, do what you're supposed to do, and then somewhere along the process wake up some morning and when you're open to blind, the sun hits you in the face, you say, "Oh, that's my church." Buy the field. Buy the field. You see that's something that you got to decide yourself and coming down and making some snotty confession there. This ruins the rug, man. Doesn't do much for anybody. You have to decide yourself.

You know, most churches, I ain't kidding you. This is true. I've been around these guys all my life, and both churches have two rules that they keep. They keep an active roll and an inactive roll. Their active roll will be how many people come to church every Sunday. Their inactive roll will all be the people who joined the church for the last 500 years. Depending on where you're at, you ask the pastor how many are running. Now he has the option. If he wants to really impress you, he'll give you his inactive roll because technically speaking they're on the roll. Okay. If you're going to get honest, he'll tell you what's on his active roll. He can say, "Well, yeah, we have, we're running about 300, 400 people." And somebody else could say, "How many are running?" And he'd go back to his inactive list. "Well, we've got on the rolls about 1500 people." See that sounds impressive, doesn't it? But that's what these guys do. Now, that's deceitfulness, walking in craftiness. And that's all that stuff is. I don't look at it that way. This church only has one roll, and it's an active roll. That active roll has people on it who are involved in ministry, who bought this field, and are every day out there serving the rest of it. I don't even count. I don't even count. Active roll to me is, are you involved in ministry? Are you doing what God saved you to do? Where do you get all this? "Well, we got two rolls. We got three rolls. We got this roll over here and the people that don't even come anymore." You got 19, you got 1900 people in your roll that died. The active roll is, are you buying the field? That's the roll.

Now, I'll tell you another issue that church has to be upfront is announced in their finances. You ever notice we don't have any business meetings? We don't have any financial meetings. I mean, open from time to time. I never saw the value of getting up and preparing the information that somebody wants you to have without giving you the real information that you want. And then everybody coming to the meeting and giving that information out to not only the church people, but people that aren't even members of the church. I never understood that. This church's

finances are overseen by a financial advisory committee of 14 guys. Most of them are all of them are deacons or pastors who in every major expense is run by them first before it's ever been done. And then it's brought to you. Remember we did this building when we moved over to the other place, we brought it to you. We had 100% vote on it. Everybody said let's do it. It wasn't just that we're going to do this and we'll find out about it all next week. We're meeting down here. Hey, if you're a member of this church and you support it with your tithes and your offering and your sacrificial giving, you have an open door to see the books anytime you want to. That's a lot better than just calling a meeting. You got a question? Go to one of the 14 guys. Now they can't answer it. Come to me. I won't be able to answer it, but I'll get you to Jenny or Danny. And Jenny's the secretary. Danny's the treasurer, and you can see whatever you want to see. There's nothing hidden here. You have a question about something? Anything. See one of those guys. I mean, barring somebody's personal information, we're not going to show you that, but you can see whatever you want. You want to see the books. It's your church. You pay for it. You get to see it. I don't know how much more open can get than that. You see, that's, that's good stewardship of what you got. It gives you the ability that you can, I mean, you could come up and ask me something. I'd lie to you. You say, "Well, I want to see this." I'd fudge the figures and give them to you. But if you get to open a book, so there it is, there it is. Doesn't get any better than that.

I'll tell you something else that eliminates the riff raff. Get a lot of riff raff in churches. I've seen it, been in churches all my life where men gave nothing. They didn't absolutely nothing, but yet they wanted to say in everything that went on. Hit the road, not even your church. What question you got anything that you don't give a dime to this church. What right do you have to ask what we do with anything? We will go into the boat and spend it all with none of your business. You know, most pastors treat their people like the federal government treats all of us. Most pastors and the federal government think we're too stupid to figure it out for ourselves. We don't know what's best for us. So they want to run your life. They want to make all the decisions for you because they know what's best for you. Not here. You're a member. You're part of this team. Top to bottom. If you're a member of this church, you get to see whatever you want to see. As long as it fits within the guidelines of what you need to see, you got it, man. As simple as that.

But that's what the government does. That's what churches do. This Mayor Bloomberg now over there in New York, he's going to make sure that nobody ever gets a soft drink over 16 ounces. Boy, now that is in communism. I don't know what is. If people are going to stand for it, you know why? Because people in this country are like a bunch of sheep. Federal government tells you what kind of light bulbs you got to buy. You got to buy one of them squirrely looking goofy alien light bulbs that when you put it into your house and your kid throws the ball bat and misses it and breaks the light bulb, you got to call a hazmat team. Evacuate the house. All because the federal government says you're too stupid to use a regular light bulb. I'm telling you, they even make it now. The big thing in America is obesity. America's obese. And maybe they are, but I'm telling you what, you think that you're going to tell people what they are going to eat. You're going to legislate it. Now you're going to tell McDonald's that they can't put toys in happy meals because it intrigues the kids to get happy meals. Where does it end? Where does it stop? You know why they do that? Because they think we're too stupid. Now let me ask you, tell you something. If you're going to get obese and you're dumb enough to do it, then do it. I don't know

what to tell you. I mean, you say, "Well, I'm sick." I saw a lady was 800 pounds. Couldn't get out of bed. She looked like a beached whale along the side of the river or ocean. And everybody's feeling sorry for her. I'll feel sorry for you. Give me nine Big Macs, put them in a row and stack them things down there, man. Give me a break. When does personal accountability ever come in anymore? That's a too big a drink you got back there, man. I'm telling you right now, whoa, out of line. Whoa, you would never get away without a New York.

Nobody's figured it out. Everybody says, "Well, this country is going to hell in a handbag." Yeah, it is. Nobody's ever figured it out. Let me tell you something. I told you last week, in the history of the world and 6,000 years, there's never been a nation that survived 200 years after they dumped the Word of God. We're a hundred years into it. It ain't about how big your Coke is. Anybody ready to put toys in Happy Meals? How much sugar you give your kids? It's about once any country turns its back on God and the Word of God, that country goes into regression. You start through the greatest empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the Roman Empire. They all decay in the decades, and they all fall down and stumble and crumble simply because they dump their book and they take God at everything they do. Then they wonder why their nation collapses. This country has no self-discipline in it. The people coming up in it, the kids coming up in it, nobody, the moms and dads don't have any structure whatsoever. I don't want to tell you. Don't get me started on it. Don't get me started on the school in Kansas City. First thing you do is shoot the school board. Second thing you do is start to get parents involved that their kids are their responsibility. You got to train them. You got to teach them structure. You got to give them. But mom and dad got no structure in their own life. It's where it breaks down.

But most pastors treat their people in churches just like the government treats us. They think that we're so stupid we can't figure it out. So they want to ruin everything that we do. Just like the federal government, common hard-working men and women have built this country. I guarantee you, they know more about what their needs are than some bureaucrat in Washington. This church, like many churches across this country, is filled with good solid people that understand that concept. Government and churches and pastors have much in common. Both never figure out that you can't spend it if you don't have it. You can't just get, I mean, the government just prints more money. The pastors just take more offerings. You have to learn to live within the budget that you have and still make things work. There comes a physical and financial responsibility. It's absolutely vital that in any church the bulk of money you have goes back into ministry and people, not into some big building and some big deal or something out there that makes so grand just. It has to go back into the common bottom line that God saved us for, and that's ministry.

"Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Man's conscience will be the table of his heart that Romans 2:15 says that God tells us that He wrote His word on when the Holy Spirit of God begins to deal with you and me about salvation. It's the conscience within man's spirit where the Bible says that God first goes and touches to begin to deal with us for salvation. The Bible says in Proverbs 20:27, it's called the candle of the Lord. God first lights us right there with what He's written on our hearts. It's our right and wrong indicator even before we're saved. It's why you can go to deep Africa or deep India or deep into Australia or any deep

primitive place where they have no Bible, they have no this, they have no society, they have nothing that we have, and yet everybody knows it's right and wrong. It's wrong to steal. It's wrong to kill. They have a sort of code that follows the code of Moses because God wrote those on their hearts. When you have that in your life and you have the Word of God then you commend yourself to every man's conscience. Man's spirit sees and reads the epistle that's written on your heart. You live the life based on biblical principles at all times that are best of your ability, open and honest before all men. You be open, you be real, you be transparent, but you be biblical.

VII. Leaving a Legacy

Now five areas we've looked at in this chapter that really define the New Testament ministry.

1. Renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty
2. Walking in craftiness
3. Handling the word of God deceitfully

That was the doctrinal side.

Now today we've looked at the practical side:

4. The manifestation of truth
5. Commending ourselves to every man's conscience

These form what the New Testament Bible-based ministry should be.

You know, bad Christians leave a life of carnage behind them. It would be good and nice if your sin and my sin just stayed with us, but like a man transposing a great piece of music. We as parents, Christians, people who don't live our life right with God, we transpose all of our bad things into our children. Many times those things go on for generation after generation and after generation. I've seen in our own church how that some of you young men or young ladies have risen up and your family going back for, I don't know how long, but so messed up and screwed up and just an absolute zero when it comes to anything. But yet God used you to stand up and break that chain. Now you started a new chapter, a new era in your own family. From this point on, you know, you're going to raise your kids and train your family. But bad Christians leave a life of carnage behind them. Bad marriages, their children pick up their sins, they get into bad marriages, they just keep going on and on and on and on.

Good Christians leave a life of good things behind them. People look at somebody who lived their life for God and loved the Bible and went to church. They always think fondly of them. We'll always look back and think of things that we watched them do that we learned. We look at their kids and we look at, you know, some of the things that they did in the churches that they were in and all of those things. But leaders, men and women who are not satisfied with the status quo, men and women who want to live totally above the circumstances and be used of God to the degree that they pastor, minister within a church, become a deacon, an elder or whatever, and do all of those things. They leave legacies. They leave something that carries on long after they're gone. They'll leave a trail of thousands of people that their lives touched.

I remember reading the biography of Billy Sunday so many years ago. When Billy Sunday died, the crowd was so big that they had to put his body for people to view in Madison Square Garden. Over two million people filed by his casket. A man from the New York Times, a reporter, was covering that. He said, as I stood there by the casket, just reflecting and watching the people go by for hour upon hour, he says, almost everybody said to the person next to them or said to themselves, "I'd be in hell if it wasn't for that man. I was saved through that man's preaching. That man's ministry put my family back together." He said one after another after another. My dear friend, that is a legacy. The thousands of lives that God wants to take one life, your life, and touch.

Years ago, I was in a big church. It was on a New Year's Eve. This is kind of goofy, but it always impressed me. I've never forgot it. I didn't think it was anything for what they did, but the impact of it in every many other areas of my life. But they had, must have had 2,500 people there. They had preached on the gospel and winning people to Christ and all those things. It was, it was a, and they use a stupid little thing as an example. They turned all of the lights out in the church, pitch black. Before people came in, they gave everybody a candle. And 2,500 people had a candle. When it turned the lights out, 20 people in that church out of 2,500 lit their candles. They held those candles up and you could barely see the lights. Then at the command of the pastor, they gave light of the candles on the left and the right. And that person on the left and the right. And right on down the line. In a space of about two or three minutes, that whole church was illuminated with 2,500 candles that started out with just five or six.

I thought to myself, that's exactly what our lives ought to be. You start out as just one candle. But by the end of your life, there ought to be thousands of people who were lighted by that one little candle that you had. Your kids sing it all the time, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." That's exactly what ministry is. It's exactly what this personal aspect of it, the commending yourself, every man's conscience, manifestation of truth. That's what it is. It's taking the candle of the Lord that's inside you, lighting somebody else and leaving a legacy to your kids, to the grandkids, to their kids, and then right out to the ends of the earth. "She considereth a field, and buyeth it: and with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." This church only is where it is because it started with these hands. And then somebody came in and said, "I want to help you, Bob." Then I had two pairs of hands. Somebody else came in and said, "I want to help you too." Now I had three pairs of hands. Somebody else came, pretty soon, I had 20 pairs of hands. Then I had 40 pairs of hands. When that happens, things get done. But it all starts with somebody in their heart, considering this field and buying it, and manifestation of truth and commending yourself to every man's conscience is what you see, what you get.

Let's pray. Father, we do thank You and praise.