

Jeremiah 6:16

Sunday 10/16/2016

I think that there is always a value in looking back, remembering, and thinking about the things that God has done. I think that is so vital, not only for us as a church, but as Christians in everything that we do.

I know this should be true of every pastor, and it should be true of every Christian. But I am going to speak in terms of pastoring and in a church situation, as we are today on our anniversary. Every pastor that starts a church should understand where he is in relationship to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that is for every Christian too, but especially when you start a church. There have to be some things behind what you do when you start a church. Starting a church blindly, just for the sake of starting a church, without understanding the perspective of where you are, is not a very good way to do things.

Churches have to form a personality. When you got saved, the Bible says you became a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things passed away, and all things became new. What does that mean? It means that your personality now changed. Where before you cared about these things, now you care about other things. Your whole dimension of your life changed. Everything about you now began to come into focus of what God wanted you to do. It is part of that becoming a new creature, and it forms for you the ability now to look at things in life from a different perspective. When a man starts a church, he has to understand what he is going to try to accomplish based on where he is.

I have given it to you before that in every area of church history, there has always been some issue that the church had to deal with. It is almost like every major doctrine that we believe today got thrashed out through the 2,000 years of church history. Everybody, wherever he was, had to understand what the issue was he was going to be up against.

I read a book thirty years ago by an old English divine—I cannot remember his name—but he said that the job of every Christian was to find out what was the prevailing spirit of the age that he lived in, and then with everything he had, to go against that spirit. That is what Christianity is. That is what building a church is. That is what the ministry is. The ministry is a lot of things, but the ministry, in its final analysis, is a church developing a personality, developing an attitude, developing a mindset, and a perspective to go against the prevailing forces that are around us today.

Thirteen years ago, a handful of us met in my kitchen, and this work became a reality. Many of you who were there remember Pastor Whalen; he is now home to be with the Lord. Keeping in touch with New Testament principles, I was not willing to start a church without being sent out by another New Testament local church. His church had been so kind to us, and he came and preached to us, dedicated our first service, and actually sent our church out. We called our church, as you all know, Old Path Baptist Church. That is a reference out of Jeremiah 6:16 about where Israel was in their spiritual condition at the time of the Old Testament. I think it says a lot. I think it forms for you and for me the attitude of where our church wants to be and where it wants to go.

It says in Jeremiah 6:16. In fact, I can always tell what a Christian knows about the Bible when they ask the name of our church. They will say, "What is the name of your church?" I am a Christian now, and I will say, "Old Path Baptist Church." They will respond, "Oh, what? Oh, what?" And I say, "It is in the Bible in Jeremiah 6:16." If you say to me, "Old Path Baptist Church," I know exactly where it goes in the Bible.

Jeremiah 6:16

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

That is a great verse that defines Israel's spiritual condition and the advice that God gave them to get back to the Old Path. That was the right way. If there has ever been a time in Christianity—and you are going to see this today as we walk through this—if there has ever been a time in Christianity when the church needed to get back on the Old Path, it is today. We have completely lost our way.

I hear guys say this all the time, and I see it a lot. Pastors and guys who go out to start churches complain of how hard it is to build a church today. I hear it all the time. They always say, "Boy, it is really tough. It is really hard today. It is a lot harder today than it was fifty or sixty years ago." I have often heard them say that, and honestly, I do not understand it. The devil was as active back then as he is today. The devil did not want churches any less one hundred years ago than he does today. It has always been the issue. The problem is they do not understand what issue they are up against in the time period they are living in, compared to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I must tell you this: I have never felt that way. When we started our church, it was so evident that the hand of God was upon us that we just never looked back every step of the way.

I remember reading a book years ago, if you ever get a chance to read it, it was written by Dallas Billington. It is a book called *God is Real*. Dallas Billington died in 1972. He was a pastor of the Akron Baptist Temple. He was an old guy that came up from Kentucky back in the 1920s and 1930s, came up here, got saved, and started a church in Akron, Ohio. I will tell you what, he was running sixteen thousand people in his day when he died and went home to be with the Lord. When he died that morning—he died on a Sunday morning—he would always go into his office and pray before he would go out to preach. He did not come out, and he did not come out, and they got worried. One of the deacons came and knocked on the door. He did not answer, and he opened the door. He was on his knees with his face in his Bible, and he went home to be with the Lord. Now, that is a good way to go home if you are going to go home, I guarantee you. A lot better than laying in a gutter, puking up your guts because of what you drank last night. But anyway, that is just me. It is an incredible book. God just kept bringing the right people that we needed.

In the last three or four years, when we began to hit crucial plateaus, God began to reach out and do a sweep, bringing back men and women that I had not seen for twenty or thirty years. These were the old mainstays back in the day that understood how I was and how I operated, and understood my ministry. God just reunited us. Men and women who knew their Bible, they knew me, they understood my vision, and it has just been a great, great day. I want to say this church

and all of you have certainly been the greatest blessing in my life in the ministry, and I would not trade what we have here today for anything in the world. We have a great mix and a great blend, and God is doing some great things. So many of you are that friend of Proverbs 17:17 that was born for adversity, and it is very evident and very obvious.

I. The Purpose And Personality Of A Church

Today I want to look back and remember some things. I want to remember when we started our church; I based it on some really great patterns and models in the Bible. For me, God does everything by patterns. Everything that He does, He has a model by which He operates; He has a pattern by which He does it. I think we make Christianity so hard sometimes. We make a lot of things that we do as Christians hard sometimes because we try to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, when we do not have to do that. I do not care what you are into, what you are dealing with, or what you want to try to do; there is a pattern in the Bible that will show you exactly the way you need to do it. It comes down to being very simple: when you follow the pattern, it works. When you do not follow the pattern, it does not work. We have followed the pattern. I was smart enough in my stupidity to realize that those patterns give you dimension and perspective. They will show you how to lay out the thing and how it goes.

You have heard me say many times that one of the things that I want to do is build a Philadelphia church in a Laodicean church age. That is a pattern in the Bible. You have heard me say a church that is built as close to the New Testament church in the book of Acts as is possible. That is a model in the Bible. A church that is free from politics. A church that is free from discrimination. A church that is free from fear, hurt, prejudice, or status. A church that is just based on the Bible and what the Bible says. That is a model in the Bible.

You have heard me many, many times talk about 1 Samuel 22, in the first couple of verses, the Cave of Adullam. How David goes down to that cave, and everybody knows that he is there. All the people the Bible says that are hurting, that are in distress, people that are in debt, people that are having all kinds of problems, they all make their way down to that cave, and there they find what they are looking for. That is a model in the Bible. I have said it many, many times: a church ought to be a place where people can be protected, where people can be ministered to, where people can grow. The church should be the safest place on earth for the Christian to be able to heal if they are hurting, or develop all of their potential if they are ready to go for God.

II. Nehemiah: The Blueprint For Church Building

I preached back then on the book that I believe personally is the blueprint for building a New Testament church: the book of Nehemiah. When you look at a blueprint—and I am not much of an architect, and I am sure not much of a builder—but I have seen blueprints. Blueprints come in a big tube, and you roll them up and open them up, and there are twenty pages to it. Page one shows you the basic fundamental layout of the foundational structure. Then, when you put the next overlay on it, it shows you what goes in next. When you set the next overlay on it, it shows you what even goes in more. By the time you put nineteen or twenty overlays on that original thing, you have the complete picture of where everything is, where everything goes, how

everything works, and where it all winds up heading. That is what the Bible does in building a church. That is what the Bible does in building your life. You start with a basic layer; in your case, discipleship. You start with a basic layer, and then you add layers to it. When you build a church, you start with a basic layer, the architect's model, and then you add to it as the Bible shows you other models to put into it. Pretty soon, you have the whole concept. The book of Nehemiah has always been a great book. I think that book inspirationally shows any man exactly the key ingredients that he needs to have in an attempt to build a church for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I remember back then giving you three things that we were to remember. We will come back and talk about these in a little more detail. We talked about Nehemiah, how he was the right man in the right place at the right time. We talked about how God's timing is important in everything. We will come back to that a little bit. The second thing I told you was a simple fact: when you start to do whatever you are going to do for God, opposition is going to come. We will talk about that a little later on. The history of Christianity in the world is simply about God trying to do what He wants to do, and the devil bringing up opposition to stop it. The third thing I remember I told you is that the church will simply—and this is so vital—a church will simply be made up of three kinds of people. Understanding a church body, its makeup, is the most vital thing that a pastor could ever understand. He goes into churches many times, starting a church, building a church, without understanding these three concepts. I will tell you, you have to understand them.

Within the book of Nehemiah, as far as I know, it has never been taught to anybody how to build a church. They always use this book or that book. When you go to Bible college, you go to a class on how to build a church by a guy who never built a church. Yet Nehemiah stands as a book—the blueprint, the pattern—a complete understanding of how easy it is: just follow the model, overlay by overlay, layer by layer.

You will remember that I built our early Sunday morning studies—they are still on the website; you can still listen to them—based on Nehemiah 2:13. What I did was, when I saw the book of Nehemiah, I saw immediately what was happening historically, but also the tremendous impact it had on where I was in my life and what I wanted to do. The parallels between them were absolutely incredible. Here is Nehemiah, and I remember, I read to you, Nehemiah 2:13, and it says:

Nehemiah 2:13

And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

This was the state of the nation of Israel in Nehemiah's time, you remember. They had been taken into captivity seventy years before by Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib from Assyria. They were completely destroyed; they were completely wiped out. The greatest nation on the face of the earth, which was the landmark in the Old Testament by which God was going to bring salvation to the world, ceased to exist. They were scattered everywhere. What did God do? God brought back a remnant. In the midst of the chaos and the destruction, God brought back a

remnant. Nehemiah was part of that remnant. When he goes down there at night, he is surveying, and he is looking at the greatest city the world had ever seen, in complete disarray. Burned with fire by Nebuchadnezzar, the gates ripped off by Nebuchadnezzar. Let me tell you something: in that last season, he comes down three times. That last time he comes down, he guts and burns, rapes, pillages, murders; everybody in that city is left desolate. Now Nehemiah comes back, and he walks down that night and looks out over all that destruction. He sees the greatest thing that God ever had in the Old Testament, in disarray. You know what God called him to do? God said, "Nehemiah, you rebuild it back to its former glory. You get it back to where it was."

When I read that, I thought to myself, "You know, for me, the real key is, the Bible says he went down by night." I am smart enough to know that nighttime in the Bible is a picture of the church age. We live in the nighttime, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The next thing is the Valley Gate. Israel was in the valley, the Dragon Well. They were drinking the wrong thing. I thought to myself, "What a great book this is for any man today trying to build a church." You know what? Christianity today is in the same mess that Israel was back in 606 BC. It is wrecked, it is ruined, it is a mess. It is in destruction. They do not believe the Bible anymore. They do not believe anything in the Bible anymore. Churches today, which ought to be the safest place, are sometimes the worst places you can be. The people in them have one goal in mind: to destroy anybody out there that they do not like. It is a mess today. It is an absolute total breakdown of Christianity, of understanding the Bible, certainly drinking out of the wrong well if you have an NIV or a New King James Bible, or whatever you have. Everything about it is a complete reversal of what God intended, just like in Nehemiah's time. Just like Nehemiah looked at that city and saw it the way that it used to be and the way it was now, and God put in his heart to make Jerusalem what it once was, I, as a young man, looked at Christianity in the church and knew what it once was. God had put in my heart, and the people that were with me, and the people here today, that we are going to rebuild it back as an honor-glorifying church with the Word of God to give everything honor and glory back to God. That is where it started. That is how it started.

I remember I began to walk you through chapter three, and I began to talk about the rebuilding of the walls of the city. I remember telling you how, in an inspirational picture, this church is a city. The Bible says that each one of you is a temple; you are a building, and you are going to let your light shine. When a church is lit up with a lot of people on fire for God, everybody can see it. I told you that that city back there was God's program; this church, you, you are God's program for the New Testament. Back then, they had a wall around the city. That wall protected them. It kept out the enemy. It kept anything from coming in that would hurt them. For you and for me, the wall around this church will be the Bible doctrines that we hold that will protect you and keep you from getting hurt. It will be the things in the Word of God that we build line upon line, precept upon precept, of the Bible teaching and the Bible doctrine that we believe, and it will form a wall around this church that nobody can ever hurt you because they have to get through the wall of Bible doctrine. That is going to be a rough job for you. Amen. Incredible picture.

III. The Gates Of The Church: Sacrifice, Soul Winning, Heritage, And Help

I took this chapter as they rebuilt the walls. I remember in this chapter, he talked about nine gates. You see, you can put a wall around the city, but if you do not have a way in and a way out, you cannot get in, and you cannot get out. So, around this wall, around this city in the Old Testament, the Bible talks about nine particular gates. Those gates were access to come in and come out of the city. When I looked at those things, I thought to myself, "Wow, we can have doctrine around this church that protects everybody here and gives you what you need. But how do people get into this church? How do people come in?" Now, I know they come in through the door; they park in the parking lot; I get it. But really, how do you pick a church? Most people pick a church one simple way: whatever the church is preaching, whether it is good or it is bad, if they like it, that is where they go. It is just that simple. So these gates, when I began to look at them, they formed the process by which people came into a church. I saw that as I built this church, we labored together, and we put a wall around this church—a Bible teaching, Bible principles, and Bible doctrine. We had to set these gates in the walls so people could come in. I walked you through those gates. I just want to reminisce with you for a little while this morning. We are not really going to preach to you. This is our time; this is our anniversary weekend. These nine gates, in my mind, will make up the attitude of a church. They will tell me exactly where a church's focus is and what it is trying to accomplish. Many churches are built on fun and games. Many churches are built on great aesthetics of how the building looks and all the things they can add to it. There are not too many churches today that are built with doctrine around them as a wall and nine gates by which people can come in. That is the model, that is the plan, that is the layout, that is the blueprint that God has for building a church.

The first thing I notice is the Bible says a remnant went back. I want to tell you today, going out to try to start a church on your own without a group going out to be your support and core people, you will fall on your face. It is absolutely impossible. If I would not have had the fifteen or twenty people when I went out, you just have to have—there always has to be—a remnant. There always has to be more than just one couple going out. There always has to be somebody that is willing to go to form that core. When it is done the biblical way and the right way, that is how it works. You have to have a core of people. My twenty people or so were my core. It is basically impossible because that is the pattern.

The next thing I saw was the fact that the first gate listed was the Sheep Gate. I immediately understood why that was the first gate: because the Sheep Gate is where they brought in the animals to be sacrificed. I began to realize and understand that the number one thing that any church and the people in it have to grasp is the sacrifice that was made for them. No church will go farther than the building you put up and whatever you are going to try to do. If you do not understand the sacrifice that was made on Calvary's cross for you, you will never do anything for God unless you understand what He first did for you. It is absolutely vital. It is absolutely essential. I am going to tell you why: because to build a church—any church—to build a church, people are going to have to make some sacrifices. Churches just do not happen. They do not happen because a lot of people just want to come. People in churches have to understand that it is going to take sacrifice. Churches themselves have to make sacrifices. The pastor is going to have to be willing to make sacrifices. When everybody is willing to make sacrifices to get the job done, those sacrifices cover everything.

I remember when we started our church, we only had fifteen people, certainly not enough to pay my salary. But we had saved up enough money, and we decided that we were going to go ahead and just start because I could not work a job and do it at the same time to get it done right. I remember, I did not tell anybody, I remember the first church service, I did not work anymore. I came back and I said, "You guys now have a full-time pastor." I never told anybody. We decided that we had enough that we could live on and get where we needed to go until the church could get to a point and pay. We never even used that money. We never had to. A guy came up, and I remember, we were over at the old place, and we did not have any money for chairs. A guy stepped up and said, "I am going to buy you a hundred chairs." We only had twenty people, but he was an optimist. We got a hundred chairs. When we came to this place, he bought us another one hundred fifty. Another guy came up and he said, "You know what? I am going to pay your health insurance for a whole year." He never said anything to anybody. These people drive me nuts that they get on Facebook and MySpace and they whine about what they do not have, and then somebody feels sorry for them or just wants to shut them up, and they go ahead and give it to them, and they brag about, "Look what God did." God did not do anything; you did it. You want to know when God does it? God does it when you do not open your mouth about it. You just take it to Him and say, "You know what, God? I am going to make that sacrifice for You," and then God has somebody else saying, "Well, I am going to make a sacrifice." Somebody else says, "Well, I am going to make a sacrifice." Somebody else says, "Well, man, I have to buy and believe in church. I am going to make a sacrifice." All the sacrifices cover everything. Amen. You have to understand that. You only understand that by coming into the Sheep Gate, understanding what He did for you.

The next gate was the Fish Gate. Proverbs 11:30 says:

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

A church exists for one purpose. Most people think that a church exists to win people to Christ. That is not true. A church does not exist to win anybody to Christ. The church exists to preach the truth, and the truth will win them to Christ. That is the problem with God's people: we win too many people for Christ; we do not preach the truth. This church, any church, exists for one reason: that is to put out the truth, and the truth will set you free. The truth will do the work for you. The truth will do the job. We have seen that. When you do that, it will bring men and women to Christ. Listen, man may not honor God's truth or the Word of God, but God always will. When you honor the Word of God, God honors you. So this is the Fish Gate, and they came through the Fish Gate.

Mark 1:17

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

You never notice how the first disciples He got were commercial fishermen. That is a great pattern in the Bible. I am not much of a fisherman. I do not have the patience for it. If I could fish legally, it would be with a hand grenade. I think that would be a great way to get it: throw

them in, blow them up, and catch them in the sky or let them come to the surface. Some of you guys out there, I get it. That is relaxing. I am sure you love to fish. If you are a good fisherman, it is great. But you know as well as I do, worms are pretty much out of style. The worms are happy about it. But when I grew up, that is all you fished with—with worms. Now you have spinners. Now you have fish that jiggle-jaggle. You even have somebody put a battery in their eyes, light up, and go through the tail there. You have small ones, big ones; you have them out there where they have flown a surface, and you jig them a little bit, and they come along and they make a little fluttering noise, and a bass comes up and goes crazy. Nobody uses worms anymore. What I am saying is this: you do not use the same bait to catch different fish. Every fish has to have different bait. A bass may like this, a trout may like this, a northern pike may like this. You do not go out and just put a worm on and throw it out there and say, "I am fishing for this." You have to understand what a fish is attracted to. I am going to tell you something: in soul winning, it is like fishing. You have to have in your tackle box, the Word of God, a bunch of different lures to be able to put out there to get somebody and get them saved. You do not use the same thing. You go to most churches, honestly. Most churches, the guy comes up and he just screams and preaches against sin for forty-five minutes, and that is all you ever hear. You never get any truth; you never get any Bible. He preaches and just does the same thing, shoddy, and wherever he goes, he winds up doing the same thing. It is about salvation, it is about salvation, it is about salvation. You know what I have learned wins more people to Christ than just preaching about salvation? Just giving you the truth. You guys, disciple people. You know what the first lesson is? "What happened today? You got saved." How many of you people called me on the phone after you started discipling somebody and said, "You know, we got through the first lesson, but I am not sure they are saved." You know what I tell you? Teach lesson two. You know why you just teach lesson two? Then you teach lesson three. Then you teach. Somewhere in the process, the Holy Spirit of God is going to take the truth, knock on their door, and they are going to come to you and say, "I do not think I am saved." The truth will always do it. It is you knowing how to use that truth, but this church has a Fish Gate. People come in and they get saved. It has a Sacrifice Gate. We understand what Christ did.

The next gate I talked to you about was the Old Gate. That is understanding your heritage, where you have come from. That is understanding the history of why, where everybody else is departing and taking 'Baptist' off their name. We do not. This is why we understand who we are, what we believe, and why we believe it. We know our heritage. We know where we are. We know everything about why we stand where we stand. Last Thursday night, Amy up in Lincoln asked an incredible question about the canon of Scripture. We talked about the landmarks. We understand the landmarks. We know who we are. We realize that we do not have to change anything about us. We believe what we believe for the last 2,000 years, and we are not about to change anything. A lot of churches today, because society changes, they want to change. I do not care what society does. We stick with an unchanging Book. When you get a book that goes through an evolutionary process, then you kind of fall into an evolutionary process in your mindset. We do not have an evolutionary process here. That Book was written the way it is, and it stood for four hundred years, and a long time before that, before it got in its final form; we just stick with that. We know why we do. You do not; I am sorry, but that is your deal, not mine.

Then we looked at the Valley Gate. This will be our helping people with their personal issues down in the valleys—the valleys of life. This is where, a number of years ago, I pulled a bunch of you together and said, "Hey, look, for lack of better words, so you can understand it, I want to start a counseling ministry, but I do not want to call it a counseling ministry because it has a perception. We are going to call it the People Ministry." But I want to take you folks who really want to learn on an in-depth level how to get into people's lives and help them. I remember, I told you, whenever you deal with people with problems, you are basically dealing with three levels. I remember I told you this; I have said it to you several times.

1. Level one is somebody comes into our church, and they have relationship problems, or maybe they are just struggling in life; they are lonely; they are that. I classify them in my little medical formula as "band-aids and methyrate." They have an "ouchie," nothing major. Anybody can help an "ouchie." Who here cannot put a band-aid on? Who here cannot put your arm around and say, "Here, put this duct tape on your mouth, and you will feel better tomorrow morning." Who cannot do that? Everybody can. You see somebody come in, and they look lonely; somebody come in, and they look like they are lost. All you have to do is walk over and say, "Hey, my name is so-and-so, and I am glad you are here today. Do you need a place to sit? Sit over there; I will be over here." No, anybody can do that.
2. Then I told you that in dealing with people and issues, then you get to another level. It gets a little more complicated, but it is still workable. You get with people that maybe have addictions in their life, or they have struggles in their life and things that they really have to work with, or maybe they have gotten themselves in a bad marriage or things like that. I classify second level as "broken limbs and appendectomies." It takes a little more training; it takes a little more practice. The guy who can put band-aids on and put methyrate, you do not want him setting your leg or taking out your appendix. You need a little more training for that. But people come in that way.
3. Then the third level. The third level is where we really get into it. So many of you have risen to that third level. I am so comfortable with you. Out of the last couple of weeks, I have heard some of you just lay out things that have just amazed me; they just were incredible. You are definitely third level on it. You definitely have it where you need to get it. Third level is heart transplants or brain surgery. That is where you have to really get into it. You have to get into the heart. You have to get into the brain, into the mind, and be able to do what needs to be done.

But that is the Valley Gate. People come in; they are hurting. People come in; they are struggling. People come in, and they are dealing with issues in their life. Our compassion is for them that are hurting, not being judgmental or hurtful to those who have fallen, but to lift them up and get them back on their feet. The two great words for the church today are salvation and restoration: one, getting people saved; two, taking people who are already saved and getting them restored. Every week, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours are spent with you people doing that exact thing. That gate is up and running.

Then, the fifth gate, the Dung Gate. What can I say? This is the gate where nobody ever comes in, but a lot of them sure go out. The Dung Gate is where they took out the trash. When it comes

to the Bible, the word "self" is not usually looked at as a good word because it gives us, like we are talking about ourselves. But in some ways, it is a good word if you put it in the right context. It is like the word "independent." Somebody says, "Well, I am an independent Baptist." If you do not know what that means, it sounds like you are independent of God or something, but it really was not. The term "independent" was a term that meant we were independent from the Southern Baptist Convention way back when. We stand by ourselves, so it was a good thing.

Every church should be in a "self" mode in three areas.

- A church should be self-populating.

In other words, it all should happen internally. You should not have to look outside sources to get what your church needs. It ought to all be internal. I get people all the time that call me up and try to sell us curriculum for Sunday school classes. I get one probably two or three times a month, and they get a little frustrated when they say, "I am not interested." They get indignant when I say, "We write our own," like we are so stupid we cannot. But a church ought to be that way. There are enough people in this church who know the Bible and know the Word of God that you can just do about anything. That is what a church should be.

- A church should be self-motivating and self-maintaining.

We motivate each other; we maintain each other, and it all happens internally. We do not have to—we do not bring in—we bring in guys to preach a lot of times, and we do that for just the fun of enjoyment. But we do not have revivals on a regular basis to prop you up or pump you up. We teach you how to live in a state of revival. We teach you that revival starts in here, in your heart, not bringing somebody in to do a weekend.

- A church should be self-cleaning.

Like your oven, just turn up the heat, and it will burn off anything that is in there. This is the balance between guys who just teach and cannot preach. I have said it all my life: if you are going to be a pastor, if you are going to be in a ministry, you better be able to do things well. You need to be able to teach, but brother, there comes a time when you have to turn up the heat, and you better be able to do it. Because teaching will not motivate anybody. Teaching will pacify; teaching will make you feel good; teaching will edify. But when you have to motivate somebody, let me tell you something, any of you guys that have been in the military, went to boot camp, it was not teaching. It was getting in your face and turning up the heat and changing everything about your world that turned you into whatever they wanted you to be. That is the same way with preaching; the Word of God will keep a church clean. Teaching will not. Teaching will not necessarily convict you, but preaching will. That is why a church has to be self-cleaning; it has to maintain itself. People come to a church where they do not like it; they will come to the place very quickly where they are not going to stay around. That is the way it should be.

All from within, everybody—and I do not mean to be crass about this—but everybody, the human body, has to have a process of eliminating its waste. So does the body of Christ. It is obvious that Jesus Christ is not for everybody. He should be; He wants to be, but you know in the real world that He is not. People just do not want Him. I have told you many, many times,

this church will not be for everybody. It does not make you a bad person. It really does not. My style will not appeal to everybody. I get that. But then again, I am looking for a very select kind of individual. I am not looking to reach the masses of just a blasé of everybody. I am looking for—I know after forty-some years in the ministry—I know the kind of person I am looking for. I know the character qualities in a man or a woman that I see that I know is going to fit. There always has to be a batch. If you have some wimpy preacher up there that is just like a big marshmallow, anybody can fit in there. Not everybody will fit in here. I have a very narrow corridor that is a very biblical corridor, and that is where I live. Now people can live outside that and be happy. That is good. But the bottom line is this: if we are going to get a job done, narrow is the way, and straight is the gate. It takes a dedication. It takes a certain kind of person. In the day and age that we live in, it takes a certain kind of man and a certain kind of woman to do the work that God has called us to do. I get that. It does not make the other people bad. It just means that not everybody is going to be happy here. This idea that pastors get out there and talk about the fact, "Well, you cannot ever leave a church, and if you do, you are going to be—you are crazy, man. You are absolutely crazy." Find a church that you can be in at what you want to be and give it to the Lord and do what God has called you to do. It is just that simple. There will be certain churches on different levels. I am not looking at just being in the National Guard Christianity. You know why? They are only soldiers on the weekends. I am looking for the 82nd Airborne. I am looking for the 101st. I am looking for the 10th Special Forces Group. I am looking for the Rangers that can be dropped in any place in the world in twenty-four hours or less and get the job done. As I told last week, England, here we come. You watch and see.

IV. The Gates Of The Church: Fellowship, The Word, And The Second Coming

The next gate was the Fountain Gate. That is our fellowship. 1 John 1:7 says:

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Our fellowship in this church is based on our love for each other through the Word of God. The bond of our fellowship will be what God has done for us and is doing for us. Most people, you see them when we go to Culver's, all the people coming from all the other churches after the Sunday night services. You can always spot them. They always have their suit and ties on; ladies have their dresses—nothing wrong with that. They are coming in, and they are sitting around there, and they are talking about this and talking about that. Did you ever notice when our people get around? Did you ever notice yesterday at the picnic? There are people over here talking about the Bible, people over here talking about the Bible. Every time I sit down and somebody is asking me a Bible question, there are people over here. The fellowship is around the Book. That is the basis of what we do, and that is the key to our fellowship.

Then you have the Water Gate. The Water Gate is really talked about in Nehemiah 8. It is a great chapter. You ought to read it sometime, verses 1 through 10. It will not take time to read it this

morning, but it is a great, great, great aspect of what they did. The Bible says that they all got together as one man in the street, and they opened up the Word of God, and it changed people's lives. In fact, when you read down through it, you find the key ingredients that when you preach the Word of God through the Water Gate, the Word of God, it changes people's lives. The Bible's end result of a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching New Testament church will be found right here in chapter eight.

- Unity

First of all, in verse 1, it says there is a unity. Everybody is one. They have the same purpose; they have the same goal; they have the same vision.

- Attentiveness to the Word

The second thing, in verses 2 and 3, it talks about the fact that they are paying attention to the Word of God. They are attentive. They come to listen. They are not on their iPhone looking at this; they are not looking at; they are not talking around or reading a magazine. They are there to learn. They have their notebooks; they are sitting there, and they are learning what God has for them.

- Respect for the Word

The third thing, verses 4 and 5, it talks about the fact that they made a pulpit—a pulpit of wood, just like this one. When he starts to open up the Word of God and he starts to read it, the Bible says that all the people stood up. All the people stood up. They were respectful to the Word of God. They knew what they had.

- Understanding the Word

Nehemiah 8:8

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

The Bible says in verse 8 that they understood the difference between the doctrinal, historical, and inspirational. It says they read it distinctly. They gave sense. In other words, they helped other people make sense of what was being read, just like you do. I look across this room this morning, and I see some of you sitting with young people—young guys or gals that just got saved—and you are standing by them, and you are always explaining things to them; you are always helping them. When they have questions, you are there. I watched yesterday with some of you out there. When somebody had questions, you were answering this and doing that; you were making it make sense. You were giving sense. Tell what the Word of God is.

- Weeping and Contrast

Verse 9 shows me that they had a great understanding and a great comparison because the Bible says that when they saw all that God was doing, they all wept. I have heard a lot of people talk about the fact that they wept because they were happy, and maybe some of them did, but I tend to believe that they were looking back and understanding the last time that the temple was

dedicated under Solomon. It was such a contrast. Solomon gave hundreds of thousands of sacrifices; these guys got two chickens and a duck. The contrast is unbelievable. The former glory of what God's program was to what they were trying to do made them weep. I want to tell you, some of you are not old enough to have been around it, but I have been. When I look back and know what Christianity used to be, what churches used to be, what preachers used to preach, and I see what they preach today, it will make you weep. The book of Nehemiah is an incredible book.

- Unlimited Access to the Word

Verse 10 says that they could have all that they want. There is nothing here in this church that will limit you from learning the Bible to your full potential. You can have everything you want. You can have all you want. I remember back there in Exodus 16, the great chapter on the manna from heaven coming down, like the Word of God. The Bible says that while the people slept at night, the manna came down all around the camp, and that manna is the type of the Word of God. When they got up in the morning, they opened up the tent flap, and everything was there, right there at their reach. I often thought, when God brought the manna from heaven—the Word of God, a picture of their sustaining food—to the nation of Israel in the wilderness, and they put that tent flap, and there it was all around them, it brought them to a decision. They either had to stop and pick it up or trample it under their feet. The Bible says they went out and gathered, and the Bible says they could have as much as they want. You can have here as much of the Bible as you want. Nobody is going to limit you here. Nobody is going to think you are going to get so much of the Bible you are going to become too threatening, and so we are going to put the lid on you. Nobody is going to worry about the fact that you get to the point where you maybe preach better than this person, or know the Bible better than me, or know the Bible better than this. That is what is expected of you. You can have everything that you have here. I understand totally. The older I get, the worse I get. The less energy I have, the less brain cells I have; somebody better be coming up here that can pick up the slack for when I cannot remember. I really appreciate on Thursday night—I do not even tell them who they are, but I know who they are—I really appreciate on Thursday night when I have a mind breakdown, and I can always say, and they will have it right there for me. You just need to follow me around the rest of my life and help me. "Where is my car key? Will you put it over here, Bob? Okay, where is my cell phone? Will you drop it over here?" You can have as much as you want here. Nobody will limit you here but yourself. That is what a church should be.

- Sharing the Word

Then the last thing, in verse 10 and verse 12, it says that they could take all that they want, have all that they want, but then they were supposed to take it to others that did not have anything. That is the real goal here. I give you all that you want. Do not hold anything back. There is no question you cannot ask me about the Bible that I will not answer for you. There is nothing in the Bible that I will not give you, but my bottom line goal is I expect you to take it to others who do not have anything. Now let me ask you, we have been here thirteen years now. Let me ask you a question. You do not have to raise your hand; I am just asking. How many of you are here today because somebody in this church came and got everything they needed, and then came and took

it to you who had nothing? That is the New Testament church. Old Mel used to say, "Christianity is not about buildings. It is not about programs. It is not about this. It is not about that. It is not about big screen TVs. Christianity is just one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread." That is what it is. It is all it is. It is all it has ever been. This church has grown from fifteen or twenty people to what it is today simply because you came here in a church that allowed you to have whatever you wanted, held nothing back from you, but required one thing of you: take all that you get, and then take it to somebody else that does not have anything. That is what you have done. That is how you build a church. You do not build a church with great preachers. You do not build a church with magnetic personalities, though I have one. You do not build a church with all those things. You build a church by following the patterns. It is not about the guy in charge. Never has, but it never will be. It is about the patterns. Too many preachers today want to make it about them. They want to lift themselves up, and so they get the God complex where you cannot talk to me, "I am the pastor; you have to go through my this person over here, or you have to go through this person here. I have a person that makes all my appointments, and do not touch me," because they did not touch Jesus. You know what? You need to get a grip on yourself, pal. You really do.

Gates eight and nine, the last two. The last two gates represent the theme of the Bible. It is a double emphasis because the theme of the Bible is the second coming of Christ. So we have the Horse Gate and the Eastern Gate. The horse will be found in Revelation 19:11. The Eastern Gate will be found in Ezekiel 44. That is where Christ is coming through when He steps off that horse on the Mount of Olives and goes into the city through the Eastern Gate. That gate is blocked up right now. It was blocked up back in around 1400 or 1200 somewhere back there by a guy named Suleiman; he is a Turk. He had a vision that he was going to go through that gate, mocking Christianity. The night before he was going to do it, he had a dream that he walked through the gate, and God came down and killed him on his spot. You know what he did? He walled up that gate with bricks back in 1100 AD or 1200 AD, or maybe it is 1400 AD, I cannot remember. He walled up that gate, and for all those years, nobody has been through that gate. You know why? That gate is reserved. Everything we do in the New Testament church should be put into a perspective of two days found in the Bible. The first day is the Day of Jesus Christ. That is the Judgment Seat of Christ for you and me. The second day is the Day of the Lord. That is when God comes back in His Son, the second coming of the Lord Jesus. The second coming will be the theme of the Bible all through history, all events, all history. Everything will be in direct relationship to that day. All time—BC, AD, in the year of our Lord—all built around Christ's coming. Every child of God, every pastor, every church, and every dispensation or period of church history should always be understanding of where they are in relationship to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where our church is. I never let you forget it. It is the most important, key, crucial doctrine in the Bible, and it is one that deserves a double emphasis on these gates. So this gate has a double emphasis. We have been in Proverbs, and we have been talking about wisdom and understanding.

Nehemiah, in its historical perspective—you do not want to miss this; if you do not get anything else I said today, get what I am about to say—Nehemiah, in its historical perspective, is simply understanding and seeing that God's hand was in the rebuilding of God's city, Jerusalem, which

was God's program with His people, Israel, getting the people ready for the first coming of Christ. Then, understanding that inspirationally, God's hand is in the life of this church and you, His people, to rebuild it back to the Word of God-honoring church that it once was, to prepare God's people for the second coming of Christ. It is just that simple. That is the model. God sent him back because He wanted His people back in the land, in a city that God had to have for the first coming of Christ. God wants this church to get back where it needs to be to be the kind of church to prepare people for the second coming of Christ. For thirteen years, we have stayed the course to keep our church on track with the Word of God, teaching the great doctrines that once were the framework of God's church, which are no longer even believed. Terrible situation. Just like old Nehemiah walking down there in that nighttime and looking at the destruction of everything burned in that city, you look across Christianity, and that is where it is today.

V. Three Kinds Of People In The Church

I want to go back for just a moment for the three vital concepts that will be the success of any church. The first thing will be the right man in the right place at the right time. That is for all of us. God's timing is the most important thing in your Christian life. It is very obvious that in Matthew 4, when the devil showed up to tempt Christ, he did not tempt Him with alcohol; he did not tempt Him with drugs; he did not tempt Him with anything other than one simple little thing: trying to get Christ to do three things that were right things but at the wrong time. Every one of those things he tried to get Him to do is a prophecy that is going to be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ, not the first coming. It sets the great teaching and the great precedent that timing with God is everything. The simple way to be the right man in the right place at the right time is to never deviate from the right patterns, the right models, and let God do everything He does through the standard. God's right timing will always be played out through the pattern that He has set up for us: the times, the seasons, and the years set up and run by God's timing based on the patterns.

The second thing I talked to you about that I want to just touch on for a moment is the fact—and we have all experienced this—that when you start a church, opposition will come. When those Jews went back, the two books Ezra and Nehemiah go hand in hand. In Ezra, they go back, but in Nehemiah, they rebuild. Both are tremendous books. When they go back in Ezra 4, the first thing it shows up as the adversaries. They want to say, "Hey, we want to build with you. We believe God too." But the Bible says their real purpose was to weaken their hands in building. The Bible says when that did not work, they hired counselors against them. They wrote letters against them, made false accusations against them, and simply it came down to the leaders looked at them and said, "You know what? No part for us. Out the Dung Gate." In Nehemiah 2, it says:

Nehemiah 2:18-20

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this

thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.

The opposition is going to come. The skeptics are going to come. The people are going to come and say, "You will never do it. You should never do it." But when you do it God's way and you do it by the Book, you just simply look at them and you say this: "The hand of my good God is on me. Out the Dung Gate, pal. Out the Dung Gate." Nehemiah is an incredible book. The answer is simply, "So they strengthened their hands for this good work," and that is what you do. You take the people that God gives you, and you strengthen their hands. You make them strong; you give them what they need. You help them become everything that God wants them to be. You bring into their life and to their world the principles. You give them as much as they need, as much as they want. You take them; you develop them; you help them; you protect them; you give them everything that they need. You look and see where they are, you see where they want to go, and then your job is to help them get there, not keep them from getting there. That is your job. That is my job. My job is not to be the obstacle in your life. God knows you have enough obstacles in your life. Most of them you put there yourself. My job is to remove the obstacles and give you a free path to your full potential for God. But thank God for the Dung Gate.

Lastly, three kinds of people that will make up the body of believers in any church. This is incredible, I think. Look at Nehemiah 3:1:

Nehemiah 3:1

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.

The first kind of people that will be in any church are those who understand completely sacrifice. Our salvation would never have been possible without Christ's sacrifice for me and you. Any church will never be successful without God's people understanding that and making the sacrifices for Him that they have to make. It will always cost you something to be understanding what God wants you to do. It will always cost you something to understand that sacrifice for God has to be more than just what is easy for us to give. Sacrifice will always cost us something. We know that from the Bible. Sometimes it will cost you your friends. Sometimes it will cost you your time. Sometimes it will cost you your family. And yes, sometimes it will cost you your marriage. It will cost you something. But to whom much is given, much is required. Years ago, there was a little girl back in our youth group way back in Canton. She was a sweetheart of a gal. She was very pretty, just a doll baby. She had a great future. She was a great singer. People were after her to make a record and get onto this and do all these things and follow that lifestyle. She really loved the Lord, and she just turned down everything and just sang for the Lord. Never cut a record as far as I know. She had never done anything; she never made a lot of money, but she was a sweetheart of a little gal. I remember one time that she just decided that God gave her all the talent that she had, and she was going to use it for Him. She gave her testimony at camp one night, at Senior High Week. She got up there, and she talked about what God had done in her life

and how she had decided to give it all and do all that. She challenged all the young girls and the guys to really do what is right with the ability God gave them. Afterwards, a bunch of little girls came up—teenage girls—and they were really just drawn to her. She was really magnetic, and boy, she really spoke well. I remember one little girl said, "You know what, that was really great tonight." She was crying. She said, "That was really great tonight." She said, "I would give the world to have a testimony like you have tonight." That little girl, probably eighteen years old, looked down on her and said, "You know what, that is exactly what it cost me: the world." Sacrificing it for Him. That is the first kind of people you have.

Then Nehemiah 3:20:

Nehemiah 3:20

After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

Here are some more people. The second group of people are those who work earnestly, but they never understand the concept of sacrifice. They do a good job, but they never understand why they are doing what they are doing. Romans 1:1 is a great thing. It says:

Romans 1:1

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

You know why Paul was such a fireball for all he did for the Lord? Paul was not just separated from the world; Paul was separated to the Gospel. Christianity, the second group that are earnest, they get separated from the world. They just never get separated to anything. It is all right to get separated from the world, folks, but you better get separated unto something, and that will be the Word of God. When you do not, you never understand sacrifice. When you do not, you are a good person; you do some things, but it is not about the good things you do here. It is about the workmanship of Christ. Did you understand all that He did for you? It is the difference between the convenience of Christianity and the sacrificial Christianity.

Then the last group, Nehemiah 3:5:

Nehemiah 3:5

And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.

This will be our third group, and these people will never do anything. They will come to church, but they will never put their neck on the line. They will never step outside of their comfort zone one time. Or they will come to church; they will even bring their Bible, but you will not see them any other time. They have too many things to do, places to go, and people to see. They just never come to the place of real commitment. They are saved, I believe they are. These are the Tekoites, the minimal, if anything at all. Everything else in life will take precedence over what they need to do. These are the three kinds of people who will make up any church, and you need to understand it so you are not surprised when you see it. Honestly, the average church probably has

5% sacrificial, 15% earnest, and 80% non-committed. Our church, on fire, that follows the patterns and follows the Book, will have 80% sacrificial, 15% earnest, and 5% or less non-compliance.

VI. Five Great Characteristics Of This Church

Today, on anniversary weekend, I want to give you five great things about this church—and I am going to be done—that we have built over the years. You want to know what a New Testament Bible-based church ought to be? Here it is.

4. All nine gates are up and running. All of them. That is what makes this church's lifeblood flow. We just did not find out what we believed and encased ourselves in it. We put gates up that men and women could come in through the Bible doctrine of the teaching. They could get in wherever they were. They could get in if they were hurting. They could get in if they wanted fellowship. They could get in if they just got saved. They could get in if they wanted to really learn the Bible.
5. Based on Nehemiah 3:1, 3:20, and 3:5, God is keeping a record of who is doing what.
6. As I have said throughout my message, here you can have as much as you want. There are no restrictions on you.
7. Heaven is an incredible place. We talk about it; we read about it; we think about it; we preach on it. Heaven is a place that is incredible. There is no pain; there is no suffering; there are no tears; there is no fear; there is no anxiety; there is no sin; there is no trouble. Only peace, joy, fellowship, laughter, safety, and the eternal presence of God in His Word. In the Bible, there are three kinds of laughter. There is a laughter of God, that is for unsaved people. There is a laughter of sinful merriment, that is your unsaved crowd. Then there is a laugh of victory. When the rapture takes place, I know there are some great trials. When there are no great trials in your life, it is just a grind of life, is it not? We are here today, and we enjoy today, but we have to go back out and face it this afternoon, certainly tomorrow when you go to work. Some of you have health issues; some of you have financial issues; some of you have marital issues; some of you have personal problems; some of you have kid problems; some of you have this. It is always going to be something. This life is a veil of tears. Do you have any idea the laughter and the shout of relief that is going to take place when we finally get out of this place, and we stand up there, and we know that this is all gone, and boy, here it is, man? Amen. It is going to be incredible. That shouting match is going to go on for probably a thousand years. It does not matter then, because there is no time. Only peace, only joy, only fellowship, laughter, safety, and the eternal presence of God. In my mind, honestly folks, in this life, I think a real church ought to be a little slice of that. In this old world where you have all the hurt and pain, there has to be a place where you can come where you can get set free from it for just a little while. A place that you can come where nobody is going to hurt you. We can laugh about the good things, laugh at ourselves. Be thankful for what God has done. Focus on the salvation of somebody else. Get our minds off our own troubles. See some people that really have some. I think that heaven is going to be an incredible place, and I think every church ought to be just a little slice of what heaven is going to be like so you can find a place of rest and comfort in this world. Somebody said one time that for an

unsaved man, this earth will be as close as an unsaved man will ever get to heaven. They also said that this earth for a saved man will be as close as we ever get to going to hell. There is a lot of truth in that. In this hell on earth, it is nice to have a little slice of heaven. God has been so good to us.

8. God has a pattern for everything. He had a pattern for the tabernacle. He has a pattern for the heavens. He has a pattern for your life. He has a pattern for the issues to solve in your life. He has a pattern for the Bible itself. He has a pattern for how we go to church. It is never about the man who builds it. It never is. People make the mistake of thinking it is. It is not. God could have used anybody. When God could not get a preacher back in the Old Testament, He used a jackass. He knows whatever He needs to do to get the job done. It is not about the man. It is about the pattern that a man follows. In this little life, you have the uncertainty of our country's future, which is bleak. Or you have the certainty of the models and the patterns and the principles of the Word of God. We, as God's people, we ask for the old paths, for the good way. And we walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. Every head bowed, every eye closed. Father, with that.