

It is good to have everybody here today. Let's begin with a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless our time. Father, we praise Thee and thank Thee for the Lord Jesus. We thank You for this very day. We pray, Lord, that You would open up our ears and our hearts. Let us take Your words to heart. Let us take Your words and apply them in our eyes that others can see. And let our testimony be one that glorifies You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I want to start off thanking the Lord and Bob for this opportunity to preach again. Just eleven years ago this very month, I stepped down from pastor of a church that I had started in the front room of my house. I watched the church grow from its early days and watched it develop. God does not make any mistakes. There is no coincidence when you are dealing with the Lord. When Bob asked me, I knew it was the right time because I did not do it; God did.

I. The Practical Side of Christianity

Today I want to talk to you about what I call the practical side of Christianity. It is speaking to those that are born again, that are a child of God, and you know it. But I could not preach without at least making a comment and addressing those that are lost. If there is a person that is here or listening that is lost, not born again, let me just say this to you: this is the closest you ever get to heaven. It is here. This is it. This is the best it gets for you. So listen and take heed. Do not ignore God when He is trying to call you.

To those that are Christians, this is your help. Your help is here on earth because this is the closest you ever get to hell because of what Jesus Christ did. We live in a church age that is compromised. It is so diluted. It is filled with worldly exchanges. I remember years ago just writing down the exchanges:

- We went from warfare to welfare.
- We have gone from a warrior to a minor.
- We have gone from a sword to a butter knife.
- We have gone from armor to a nice soft robe.
- We have gone from purpose to confusion.
- We have gone from meditation on God's Word to medication away from God's Word.
- We have also gone from God-centered to self-centered.

That sums up Christianity.

II. The Laodicean Church Age

We are going to look real quick at Revelation because Revelation has some keys to set where we are heading today. In Revelation chapter 3 and verse 14, as He is describing the church of Laodicea, He inserts something right in that very first verse.

Revelation 3:14

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

He does not do that to any of the other churches. He does it to this church. Why? Because this church age is so compromised that it thinks that evolution is a possibility. God did not make any mistakes. He put that in there because He knew how bad it was going to be. I used to teach my children, because we had to deal with evolution in school, and I taught them this simple principle that I think deals with everybody who believes in evolution: If you think you came from a monkey, you probably did. That just solves it. I do not argue with them. I just say, "Oh, yeah, okay, you probably did." That is no problem.

That is the church age we live in. This is the church age we see in Revelation 3:16, that the angel that represents this church age has been removed. Then you get to Revelation 3:19. This church age is being chastened by the Lord like no other. He lets it know it. This is what He is doing. This explains why in this time of Christianity, most Christians are the most miserable people you have ever met. They are not happy about anything. God is just whipping us.

I used to think to myself, and I remember as a young Christian, when I read this about this church age, the verse that just set my life on fire was Revelation 3:20. It is the greatest verse, as far as I am concerned, there is.

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

You know what this church age is? There are no longer great churches in this church age. There are just great individuals that have got a hold of God, opened the door, and have spent their time fellowshiping with Him. You are in a church that believes that. This man that is a pastor of this church is the man that gave me back my Bible. He is the man that sent me out. When I read his book on how to study the Bible, he gave me one of his rough drafts. He lit my life on fire.

I remember after I came out here and I said it, and we were talking, I said, "You cheated me in Shepherd School. I did not get all your good material." But I have read every book in your library while I come up here and work, and I will make you a deal: I will help get this church together, get this building off your shoulders, and you keep writing those books. You keep it up, because you do not know the source you have. You and I, everyone here, has this same opportunity to be a great individual for God. You do not need a good church. You do not need a great church. You can do anything if you make up your mind you are going to serve Him.

This church age, He says, "Listen, you just listen to Me, but you have got to open the door." I promise you, when He opens the door, your life changes. I remember that night, I had run away from God as a kid. I got saved, and I know exactly how. I was a small kid, and I was in Vacation Bible School when they had it. I was on this side of the church, and a man named Mr. Ashleman, what made you Christ? I terrorized him at Sunday school. He was in his eighties. I think that is why God gives me my grandkids. But you know what I did? I felt he was buried, and I took

flowers to his grave and I thanked him because he put up with me. I am sure the Lord has explained to him how this developed that I ended up being a preacher.

We all have a choice, and it is a personal and individual choice about your Christianity. That is what we have got to look at. All you have got to do is open up the door, and your life will change. I went to a revival one night, and an old preacher knew me. He must have; he talked everything about me, and he says, "Adam, where are you?" I went forward that night, rededicated my life. Little did I know that the entire church had been praying for me for two years because they knew me from the police department when I would find their doors open.

I will never forget. I walked home that night. My wife was home. She was pregnant with our second child. I knew how to fit in the house. If you have had a drink, you have been playing cards, you have been doing stuff, you come right in, you turn left real quick, and head downstairs and say, "Hi honey, see you later." I remember she was lost at that time, and she is sitting on the couch, and I walked in that door, and she goes, "You did it." "Whoa, whoa, whoa. No, no, don't, no, you are not going downstairs. You did it." I said, "What are you talking about?" She says, "You walked that aisle. You walked the aisle." I am thinking, "What are you talking about? Don't start an argument with me now." "No, you walked that aisle." You know why? For the first time, I was back home with my Lord, and I found that door, and I opened that door, and I said, "Lord, I just want to serve You no matter what." You can make that choice any time in your life. When He is knocking, you just open, and then you sit down at His table. He has to start with you and start fellowshiping with you.

III. The Test of a Testimony

With that said, let us go over to Hebrews, because back in Hebrews chapter 12, what I want to talk to you today about is a thing that I call a test of a testimony. As I thought about this, you are going to get what God has been doing for the last eleven years in my life. When I thought about this, I thought, "A testimony. What is a testimony?" Well, that is what I thought we would need to find out.

When you are first saved as a Christian, you are to be a witness. If you recall that experience, there are things that you have witnessed. That experience was the nicest part of being a pastor. I saw God doing miracles almost every week. I saw that experience of salvation. I saw the peace that some people had. I saw the forgiveness. I saw those feelings and emotions, and that is what a witness is to do as a new spiritual awareness. It is a new awareness and newness and freshness in your life. All of a sudden, you have different views of life, and all of a sudden, your attitudes are changed, and all transforming things are happening. Remember how fresh it was that day you received Christ? When I see some of you get saved, I hear about you get saved, I have watched that smile on your face. Christianity will wear on you because we are the only ones many times that shoot or wounded. It is just because we still have that old nature, and sometimes we are listening to that more.

You remember that fact that when you got saved, you could not wait to tell people about it. What happened to you? I remember as a kid when I got saved, I went down to the corner store and

gave them the money out of the bank because I had been lifting candy for the last three or four years down there. That store owner says, "How much is this?" I said, "That is all I got, but I have been getting those Tootsie Rolls down there for the last couple years." He did not know what to think. But that is the newness that comes in. That is those things that happen. As a witness, you are the only one that can testify to what you experience and what you witnessed. You are the one that is going to testify to it firsthand.

However, a testimony is something a little different. A testimony is something that you talk about after the test. You cannot talk about it until after the test. As a result of the test, it will take you through to prove what you believe. I remember the day my wife died. I will never forget that. I remember that night I had watched a movie about soldiers in a foxhole. She died on Saturday morning, real early. I had the service all planned. Everything happened. That Sunday I went to my church. I had had somebody already scheduled to preach because I had brought hospice in, and they told me it was very close. That Sunday morning I showed up. I taught Sunday school that day. I said, "I am not here as a martyr. I am not here as a hero. I am not supposed to be recognized. I watched a movie last night where I saw soldiers in a foxhole getting shelled left and right. They died, but they got up that morning and re-engaged in the battle." I thought, "I lost my best friend, but I have got to go for His sake."

Every time I see people ask me, when I left the church, I have not missed a day of church since my wife died. How could I tell you, "You need to go to church," and I do not go to church? Why? Because I was a pastor? No. Because I am a Christian. If I am telling you you need to go to church, I have to go to church. That is part of the test of a testimony. It is going to test what you believe, your convictions. You have to practice what you preach and live it so people see it. Your principles when you are going through a storm will be the only thing that will hold you on. Your commitment to the Lord when nobody cares and nobody looks.

Aaron mentioned the swimming pool. That swimming pool got in? I needed to get back to the ground after I resigned from that church, just like Adam did, and find out and talk to God. "God, what is going on in my life?" He and I had all kinds of talks. He would let me vent out there, dig a while, vent some more, and dig a while. He would go, "That is fine. Go get a drink of water." The whole time I was putting that pool in, I was saying, "Lord, last time I had a pool, I baptized people in it. Use this one." That is the reason, folks, you cannot have a baptistery right now, because we are going to hopefully use that swimming pool. That is what it is about.

I found out that your faith will be tried during your testimony, what you really believe in, who and what. I found that the Bible talks about, and I used to hear these stories, people say, "Adversity builds character." No, it does not. It reveals character. When you go through adversity, you are going to find out who you are, and you are going to find out who He is. If you really believe it, you see those experiences. I remember I loaded my kids up that day my wife died, and they are all with there, and I am driving. We are all going to the funeral home. I am driving. They are all consoling each other. The one over here that was supposed to be setting was gone. I remember that. I remember thinking, "What do I do now, Lord? What do I do now?"

IV. Two Key Principles for Survival

In order for you to survive, you need to understand there are two key principles we need to get down. These are two key principles I think you have to get so solid in your life because when the storms and adversity blow your way, you have got to hang on for everything to realize it. What is going on?

1. God is in charge and complete control.

In Matthew 10:29, He says:

Matthew 10:29

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

Man, for a penny? Nothing is going to happen without the approval? That means, "God, You approved my wife getting cancer. You approved of her dying this way. Lord, why?" I read over in Job 42:2, He says:

Job 42:2

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Do you realize God cannot—you cannot withhold a thought from God that He already does not know what you are thinking? So do not go with Him with the pious word, "Oh Lord, how much I love You." And He goes, "That is not what you were saying a while ago. You are questioning Me. You are doubting Me." "Well, Lord, I know Romans 8:20. I have read that so many times." He goes, "Yeah, but you do not believe."

Psalms 139:2

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

He knows your ups and downs in life. What I was going through, it did not miss God. Sometimes we must think we are up there, and God the Father is sitting there, and then God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and all of a sudden someone says, "Hey, did you see that?" "No, I missed that one." That is not what goes on. He knows everything. He knows what is happening. When you get those bad reports, when all those things go bad, He just gets that way. With God, there are no accidents. There are no coincidences. There are no misses, no flukes, and there is no such thing as luck. He has a plan. He does not make mistakes, and either you are going to trust Him or not.

2. He knows all that is going on.

Sometimes I used to think God was so busy, He must not have a clue what was happening. Or, "Did You not see what took place?" I remember when my wife found cancer. I drove all the way, my wife and my son, we drove all the way to Alabama because a dear friend of mine's son, he is a pastor, had committed suicide. We went down and spent a week with them, trying to help them through that, and doing those things, and helping them to understand why their child committed suicide. On the way back, my wife says, "I am going to have a mammogram." "Oh, okay. Why?"

"I feel a lump." "Oh, okay. Got lots of stuff going on in church. Can I get back to church? Can I get this? We have got this mission program going on. We have got all these things to do."

Acts 15:18

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Isn't that something?

Proverbs 5:21

For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.

Wow. We try to think about that in our head. With three kids, I had a hard enough time keeping track of them. There were times I thought I would get, my wife would get one dressed, and I would get one dressed, and meanwhile, the other would be stripping off clothes. Then, when I would set them all down, and being a policeman, I knew that, put them there, put the light on them. "Okay, which one of you broke the window?" It is always, "What is the fourth kid? He did it." "Who?" "Well, I do not know his name." Really. So I fixed him. I got a picture of somebody else's kids. I sit on the table, and I told my kids one night, "Here is the fourth kid. I caught him. He is no longer with us." You have got to outfox those kids. Those kids are pretty sharp.

Then it is about that time that my one son spoke up and says, "Don't forget, Dad, I will pick your nursing home." "That will be enough out of you, son. You are starting to sound like your mother."

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

I started thinking about this, and here is the simplest way I can do it. It is just a simple form. Do you realize God is never not on time? God is never not perfect. God is never not good. God is never not faithful. God is never not defeated. You know why? Because He is never not God. That is as simple as it could be. I cannot understand all He can handle and all the things He could do. But He is never not God. You get that dug into your life, and you start going, "Okay, all right. He knows what is going on. Yeah, He knows what is going on." That is why when Bob asked me, I had to chuckle. I said, "Just down the street." I had made a decision to leave the church that I had started in the front room of my house. It was at its peak, and everything was going. The Lord said, "Time to change, Terry." I still remember it. I still remember it. I remember if I am going to believe God and trust God, I have got to do what He asked me. That is the thing; you start seeing that.

V. Understanding Testing and Suffering

If you recall, there are seven things that you are not to be ignorant of that are taught in this church. As a matter of fact, I was so excited when I got back, read one of Bob's books, and he had the seven things laid down. I go, "Man, you did not teach that before." You know what one of them was? Understanding, testing, and suffering as a Christian. You are not to be ignorant of

it. Most Christianity is, "Oh, you get saved with Jesus, your life will be perfect from now on." Oh, yeah, you better buckle in and get seat belts. It will be a turmoil like you have never seen, because all of a sudden, you have now become a threat to the enemy. You are no longer that.

Let me just say, for you casual Christians, and there are always some, you will become a casualty. The more casual you are about your Christianity, the more likely you are going to be a casualty. These things develop. But a testimony is one of those things that you have to have.

I read that verse, and then I read over in 2 Corinthians 1:7, that you are going to be partakers of His suffering.

2 Corinthians 1:7

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

It said, "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of the trouble that came to us." Then I remembered over in 2 Timothy 3:12:

2 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

I went, "Oh, yeah, okay." There is one thing that we miss a lot of times. I am just going to sidetrack it. Just hold your place over there in Hebrews. But go with me to Ephesians 6. I want you to see it so you do not think I am misquoting it or out of character or something. But Ephesians chapter 6, and we are going to look just quickly at that old armor of God that He has got. As He lays that down.

Ephesians is such a great book, because it shows you your structure of what you are supposed to have. You are supposed to be right with God, then you get married, then you start dealing with your children, then your parents and all that, and then your job and your occupation. As you start going down through it, He gets down to chapter 6 and He is in verse 10. He says, "Finally," you know what that is? That is your priorities in life.

You know what one of the criticisms was? When my wife found out she had cancer, my kids were devastated. You know what I did? I had Jim Darris Gabbage come over and I said, "I need you to fill in the pulpit of this church. I will keep the church running, but my wife and children need me now more than any other time." I stepped down, and you know what some good Baptist lady in my church did? She told my wife that I was out of the will of God then, because I put her ahead of the church. I remember my wife, and she was going through chemo, crying. I went over, and she told me that story. I said, "No, my dear, look at the Bible. You are my priority. We are one flesh. You are my number one priority over everything in this life. The church is what God has given me to do." I tell you what, that first Sunday she came back, I preached on Job's three friends. They said, "Did you feel better?" I did. I told my wife, "I feel a lot better." Some lady said, "You are all upset and all riled up." I said, "You should have seen me before Christ. I really tempered it down now. That is a lot better."

But notice what He says here. He goes down through here, and He lays all the armor of God out. But look at verse 13. This is scary. I remember preaching this at my church, and then God said, "Okay, by the time you live it."

Ephesians 6:13

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

"You mean something is coming my way that I am not going to be able to stand? It is going to knock me down like never before. What are You talking about, Lord?" Look what He says here: "He may be able to withstand in the evil day." "I am going to be in an evil day." And what have I got to do? "Having done all to stand." In other words, whatever evil day is going to come, that evil day is going to knock me down where I cannot even stand up anymore. God said, "What are you going to do?" That is the thing. That is where Proverbs 24:10 says:

Proverbs 24:10

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

Proverbs 24 has the verse that I defined every Christian. You are going to have Christians fail all around you. That is just life. But here is the key. Proverbs 24:16 says:

Proverbs 24:16

For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.

You know what it means? He is going to fall seven times. He is going to fall and fall and fall and fall. You know how you know what kind of Christian he is? If he gets back up. That means that is what you have got to do. Because He goes on in that verse and He defines who you are. He says, "But the wicked shall fall in the mischief." In other words, they go back to the old world and get more sin. But you want to know what a just man does? He does just what he can to do what is right. He is not perfect. He is doing everything within him. When he gets knocked down, he gets back up. He may be crippled, just like Jacob was, but he gets back up. That is what all of this is about. That is what is all that is happening.

VI. Chastisement: Its Nature and Reactions

Let us go back to Hebrews again. Just think about this because you are going to have this time of ungodliness. It is going to be coming your way, where it says we are going to be partakers of suffering. We are going to suffer afflictions. But now it is unbelievable. You are going to have an evil day coming your way. It is going to be hard for you to stand up. That is what a testimony is. That is the time and testing that is going to creep into your life. You are going to have to decide what you are going to do about it.

Look here with Hebrews chapter 12. We are not going to go through the whole thing. We are just going to go through the parts of it because here is the key. I want you to know it. I am giving you this warning because I want you to come through and please and glorify my Savior. That is all I

want. But I have got to give you the keys. I want to help you know what I have been through so I can pass it on so you can go through it. Because when you go through it, you will not have anybody. You will not have anybody.

Look what He says here in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 3.

Hebrews 12:3

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

First thing you better do is consider Him. That is your number one prayer. First principle down: God is in complete control. Second principle: God knows what is going on. Second, I am considering Him. I have got to consider Jesus Christ in all of this thing.

Hebrews 12:4

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

In other words, you may think you have overcome sin, but you have not been through much. Talk to Him about it on the cross when He took your sin and my sin and nailed it for Himself. But here is the key.

Hebrews 12:5

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

Notice there are two ways that you deal with chastening. There are three, but we will get to it in a minute.

- The first one is they despise the chastening. You know what that is? That is the Christian that becomes bitter. They feel contempt. That is the ones that, some of them stay in the church, and you know them because they go around, they have got a frown on their face, they are not happy about anything, they do not trust anybody, but they are still in church because, doggone it, "I am going to go to church because it says to." Well, praise God for you because maybe you will get rid of the bitterness. But the other ones are bitter and walk away from the church, and they badmouth the church. You see, when people are mad at God, I have found out this very clear: when people are mad at God and they cannot get to God and they do not want to tell Him to His face, they go after the things God loves. That is the church and the pastor. They go after them like left and right because you need to realize, people, when people go after the church or the pastor, there should be a big warning light come on. Warning, warning, hurting, hurting, hurting, hurting people hurt people. When people are hurt, they are going to hurt others. That is just a natural reaction. That is the human side. You know how they get over it? That is when you just embrace them and say, "You know what, I know you are hurting, but I love you." You know what that does? They get bitter because they despise it.

- Notice the other one is faint. That is a person who says, "Okay, my feelings are hurt. I am done. I am walking out the church. I am gone. Sayonara. Don't even bring up God. Nope, I am an atheist. Okay. I do not want to hear it." They cannot handle the conviction. What? They are hurting. God has let them down. The very God that said He would take them, never abandon them, has let them down. Now all of a sudden they are getting... And they forgot. Not everything in life is perfect. It is called chastisement. What you really do not understand is when He is doing that, it is because He loves you. He does not do it to punish you. He says, "Oh, I am going to get even with Terry now. This affliction. See how he handles this." It is not that. I used to watch these people that something would happen. Someone might just walk away. I knew they would say, "Well, now you say, what happened to them? What is all that bad?"

Look what He says about this chastisement in this verse. It is exhortation. You know what that is? He is urging. He is trying to encourage you. He is pleading with you. Do what is right. He is also rebuked. You know what that means? That is scolding. That is criticized. We do it with our kids. "Come on, son. You can do it. Come on, son." Then the other one says, "That is it. Stop it. Were you not thinking? That cape that was on you did not make you Superman." You have to. Then the chastening is an educational type training. It is disciplinary corrections. It is to instruct and to help you mature. The chastening is the way that God uses to speak unto us. My kids do when I said, "Okay, that is enough." But then when I put on the dad, "Hey, did you hear me?" "Oh, my old man is mad. Settle down." Sometimes God has got to do that to get our attention. We get so busy in life and so trying to be a Christian to try to do all this. He said, "Hey, you did not bother to read or pray today." "Oh, is that important, Lord?" "Yeah."

I remember the first church Bob sent me to. Bob is notorious for doing this. I went with him to Osceola, and I was just new at the church and doing stuff. I will never forget, went down there to see the church, and the guy ran off everybody in the church. We had one Deacon that decided to come to the meeting, and Bob said, "We have, I will have a pastor. I will have somebody down here preaching next week." And he says, "We are going to rebuild this church from scratch." So I am driving back. I said, "So he is coming down." He said, "You are." I said, "Bob, I have never preached before." He said, "Why? You have got a whole week." I have been down there three and a half years. I remember the first Sunday I had the one Deacon showed up. Second Sunday, you got second Deacon show up. It took a month, but I got their wives to come next. I mean, I just doubled my attendance week after week. But it was a great training crowd. I remember one of them said, "What were you going to do?" And I was reading my Bible. I said, "What am I going to do? I am going to study the Word of God and pray and let God bring him in." He did. I turned it over to a pastor. You see, that is the things you have got. He takes you through these times to get your attention. When my storm hit, somebody says, "What are you going to do now?" "What am I going to do? Just call me Mary. I am going to stay at the feet of Jesus. I am going to study His Word left and right more than I have ever studied." Somebody said, "Would you want to start a church?" "No, I do not want to do it again. I enjoy studying my Bible and ministering to people." That is the thing that this does to you.

We will look here in Hebrews 12:6.

Hebrews 12:6

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Chastening is to afflict you. Notice that every child will experience it. In fact, the scary part about it is, there are some people that I never was sure about their salvation except the fact that I watched God kept knocking the snot out of them. Isn't that sad? That is the only way you know. It is just sad that when you see this and you go through these things and all the things.

I remember going over to a friend's house. It is a friend of my wife's, actually. Her husband died. He was involved in the church and quit the church and turned sour. He would have nothing to do with anyone, including his wife and his kid. I started saying, "Well, what was wrong with him?" You know what I found out happened to him? He was in a faith healing church. As a matter of fact, his mother was a pastor there. She got cancer. She died. His God did not heal her like she had healed all those other people. Her false teaching poisoned her son. He walked totally away from Christianity, destroyed his wife, his family, and his life because he was mad. I heard that. I just wept. I just wept. The devil won that one. We just handed it to him.

But look here in Hebrews 12:7. Here is your third reaction to chastening.

Hebrews 12:7

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

There are three ways that when you are getting chastened by the Lord, that you have got to deal with it.

3. You can despise it. You can be bitter. They are not happy about all life.
4. You can just give up on Christianity and go out to the world and think you are going to be happy.
5. Endure. Endure is what it means to remain in place and bear the trials. You have got to bear it.

You find out over in Romans 5, as He takes you through it, guess what? Then the next thing that comes after tribulation is patience. You know what I thought? I thought when I stepped down from that church, I could go to any church, I could start a missions program, I could take over the Sunday night, I could do anything that church wanted me to do. You know what they did? My first church I went to was my home church. You know what they did? They put a spy on me, because they were scared to death I was going to start another church. I went to one of the bigger churches, and I am sitting there, and the guy is talking to me about different things. I knew more missionaries than he did, and I had done more than he did. He says, "Oh, by the way, you can work in the parking lot." I said, "Well, I appreciate that. I used to do that at Kansas City Baptist Temple when I was a policeman. I moved past that." He did not care. He is just looking for somebody. He did not hear anything I said. Other churches come in, and I could always tell. He would be watching. "What is he saying? Who is he talking to?" That is why a lot of times when I go to church, I do not talk to people because, you know what? All of a sudden people think, "Oh

boy, he is going to steal them." Get over it. They are paranoid. You know what? I said, "You are Lord. You are still in charge, aren't You?" I just knew right then it was happening. I had no problem there. None at all. But you had to endure.

You know what Job said? In the middle of Job's troubles in Job 5:17, he says:

Job 5:17

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:

Job said that. Job lost everything.

Proverbs 3:11 says:

Proverbs 3:11

My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:

Look what He says in Hebrews 12:8.

Hebrews 12:8

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

You know what He says? You are illegitimate. Because there are a lot of people who think they are Christians that come along and say, "Okay, I will just add Christ into my life." They did not receive Him. They added Him. He is like something, "Oh, I will just take Him off and put Him on the shelf." And then all of a sudden I will do like the other Christians. I will bring Him out when I need Him and put Him back on the shelf when I do not. Because a lot of Christians do that. I used to joke at some of them. I mean, I had someone had the gall, a pastor one time come up to me and says, "What are you doing? Pray for you and your children." I said, "Really?" I said, "I praise God for that. What are their names?" He did not know. "And by the way, what are you praying for?" Now, mind you, I did not last long in that church because he preached one Sunday about death and hell for him and Revelation. He spent almost twenty minutes telling me how the word hell was Hades. I knew him. I was a cop. He was a cop. I just went up to him and I says, "Can I just ask you a question?" He said, "What is that?" "How many people have you arrested that use the word Hades?" He just looked at me. I said, "I bet if they had a Greek manuscript, they could have got it right." I looked at my wife. I said, "We are done." You see, that is the games they play.

I remember when I went through this, I thought I would go to meet different pastors and stuff. I sat there and I think, "Lord, they do not know what is going to happen. You are the only one. They cannot help me. You are the only one. You are the only one, Lord." That is how it works. Your chastisement is a sign and an indicator. You being a child of God, that God is personally involved in your life, and He loves you. Does not that change things? When you are going through and you are really feeling down, and you go, "Lord, I know You are doing it for my good. You are doing it because You love me. I know You are wanting to change some things.

Okay. All right, Lord." That is the good part. You have got to get the right perspective of what He is doing.

Let us just quick review. Think about this.

- Every child of God will experience chastisement. It is a proof and it is a love of God's involvement.
- There are four ways you could handle this chastisement. You can despise it, or you can faint, or you can endure it.
- There are four basic reasons why God chastises you.

VII. Job's Experience and the Test's Purpose

I would not be able to tell you this whole story because there is another part I really have to warn you about. I think this is one of the hardest parts. Just turn with me back to Job chapter 23, if you would. As we go into this, let me give you a little bit of history. This is why I am preaching this today. Because it is very personal and real to me, but I really want to warn people. Because if you go through this, I want you to realize you can make it. You can endure no matter whatever comes your way.

That evil day struck my family October 4th of 2004. My wife found the lump of cancer. From October 4th to January 12th, we had, which was seven years and two months until she passed away. In that time, we had fifty-two chemo treatments. We had ten operations. We had more hospital visits than I could count. She was in there for even months at times. It was just one of those evil days. But I told you with God, there is no coincidence, right? The day of her visitation, after she died, we had a visitation. The day of her visitation was the exact day that we started the church. The nineteenth year for that church was held at, the anniversary was held at the funeral home that night, saying goodbye to my wife of thirty-something years. I am there going, "You make no mistakes. You make no mistakes." In fact, that nineteenth year, I was teasing Bob when we came over here and I started doing stuff. I said, "You know, I was complaining to God once. I said, 'God, couldn't I even get twenty in?'" And Bob says, "Yeah, it is our nineteenth year." "Really? I guess I am going to get my twenty in." God just picked it up.

It always worried me that evil day, where He says, "A thousand years is one day with the Lord." I am going, "Oh man, I hope He does not go by that calendar." On July the 12th, one year, eleven years ago, the Lord had me give back His church to Him. I remember sitting in that parking lot, and I am looking at the church, and I am saying, "You know, Lord, I lost everything. Everything I got gone. What am I going to do?" I am in there reading my Bible and sitting in the car, and God says, "No, you have not." I said, "Yeah, I have." I said, "What, Lord?" I remember saying, "Church, are You serious? The church?" He says, "Then you have given up everything for Me." Church members were not happy, but I knew it was God's will. God was so gracious. I had a man take over the church, and the church took off.

It is about this time that prior to all this happening, my wife dying, God in the book of Job gave me a glimpse of what was coming my way. It showed me that I was going to lose everything. I thought with the last name Job, Job was probably a good book for me to read. So I thought, "You

know what? I think I am going to really dig into this book." There were several key things I found.

6. The very first thing I found in Job's book that I went through, that Satan could only do what God gave him permission to do. That is scary. "Hey, Lord, I thought You said You love me." But that was true.
7. You realize that in the book of Job, it was God that kept bringing up Job's name. When I get to heaven, I will talk to my great, great, great grandfather. I am going to ask him, "Did you know any of that was going on?" And he said, "I had no idea." I said, "I bet you would. You would have said, 'No, that was fine. Bring up my name, brag about me once.' That is enough." I said, "But He kept bringing your name up. 'Have you considered My servant Job?'" How do you, He loved Job. Really? I found out that God does some things because He is bragging about us. That is all.
8. The third thing I found out, when the devil is into things, he always brings things in waves. "While he was yet speaking, while he was yet speaking, another came while he was yet speaking, and another came." You know why the devil does that? To overwhelm us. When you are overwhelmed, the devil is piling on you. He knows you are down. He is going for it. While I heard that, I remember God brought back to my memory because I remember from the month of February to June, nine deacons in my church quit. "Cannot take this anymore." I had nine left, but half of them left. "Cannot take this anymore. I am going to want to lost my wife. You cannot take it." So I thought that was the pile on, wasn't it? "Lord, while he was yet speaking, while he was yet speaking," that is the pile on.
9. The fourth thing I found out. After all that Job had suffered, it was said about him as this: "And in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God." You know what that told me? We have so many times we blame God, and we blame Him for our problems. When He goes, "No, that is because I love you. That is because I am trying to get your attention. That is because I want to get you to pay attention to Me. Look Me in the eye, Terry." The Lord does those things, and I saw that, and I went, "Okay, I understand."
10. As I went through, I went down and the fifth thing, I started identifying personally with Job, how he felt. I found in Job chapter 3, he lost all purpose and meaning and direction in his life. That was me. I had no more purpose. It is gone. He suffers personal grief and despair. That is me, Lord. I am reading through that book. I am going, "Lord, that is me."
11. I went to Job chapter 4, and all of a sudden judgmental accusations come forward. I mean, I heard things that I had done that I thought it was me. I had nothing to do with killing Kennedy. Everything was thrown at me, and I am going, "I did not do that. Wasn't even there then." One time I said, "I do not think I was born then. I couldn't have done that." All those accusations that come up, and then all of a sudden in this time that Job is going through, he had a time of uncertainty. Nothing was stable in his life. He was just uncertain what tomorrow was going to bring. Then you find over in Job 2:4, you know what happened? Job did self-defense kicked in. He started defending himself. Then I realized God says, "As long as you defend yourself, I do not shut up, Job." You get back to the end. Job shuts up, and God says, "Okay, I will take over." At the very end, He tells his friends, He says, "If this guy does not okay it, I am going to kill you for what you did to him." Okay, no problems. As you watch all that, I was going, "Okay."

12. Then I found in Job chapter 19, the loss of personal relationships, people that you have been in love with. Every one of my deacons came in, they would say, "You know, Terry, I got saved here. You led me, Lord, or you taught me the Bible, and I love you." Finally, it got so after the fourth, when I started, every time they come in, I say, "Don't even tell me how much you love me. Just tell me what you are doing." I could not take much more love. They were overwhelming me with it. I understood that loss of personal relationship.
13. In Job chapter 29, he lost his position in life, his self-worth, and his self-importance.
14. Then I read over in Job 9:33, Job says this:
15. But the seventh thing that Job learned, and this is the most hurtful thing that Job lost, was close contact with God. Man, when you are going through these times, he really wants, "Okay, God, am I in Your will, please?"

Look what Job says in Job 23:8. And look how he is looking for God.

Job 23:8

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.

Job 23:9

On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.

You know what Job is saying here? He says, "But he was not there." He says, "He has always been there in my life. Where is He? God, where have You been through all this, all these cancer treatments, all this stuff? You have always been there." He then says, "I cannot perceive him." He could not sense God's presence in his life. That is the most loneliest time for the first time you feel all alone. You go, "I am a Christian. How come this is happening, Lord?" Look what he says, "I cannot behold him." He cannot say, "I cannot even get a glimpse of him." He says, "He hideth himself from me." It is a feeling of abandonment. "I have been abandoned by You, Lord." When he says, "I cannot see him," I could not even see His hand in my life. Always before, I could always say, "I saw God's hand. I saw God's hand in this." That was not there. You are deserted. You are without God. What are you going to do? This is the real test of your Christianity.

Look what Job does in Job 23:10.

Job 23:10

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

You have got a choice then right there, and Job makes it. You are either going to stick with God's ways in your life, or you are going to go do things your way. That is a crossroad that you will be at, that you have got to figure out what you are going to do. This is where Peter talks about the trial of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes. Though it be tried with fire. You are going through a fiery trial. Let me tell you, it leaves scar tissue. You know you have been through it. But what follows is Job's decision on what to do.

Look what he says in Job 23:11.

Job 23:11

My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.

Job 23:12

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

Let me put this in simple language for you. It is very clear. Job is more concerned about hearing from God than feeding his face. He said, "I would rather hear Him speak to me than have food to survive on." That is how much he loved that. He lost his best friend, and now God is gone, and all of this is happening to him. That was the key that I found in that time.

For three or four years, it is both four to five years, God finally revealed to me what was going on. "God, how could You cut me off like that? How could You not talk to me? How could You do that?" I kept begging Him. In about four and a half years, God brought it. He says, "You want the answer, Terry?" I said, "Yeah, Lord. I will give you some insight that nobody else has got." He said, "What is that?" He brought back to my mind an incident that took place when I was a young kid in grade school, and I am sitting there doing my test, and she walks down, and I had, I got a question. "Shh, Terry, no questions during the test." "What?" I just started bawling. I mean, "God, You mean You were right there beside me, and You just could not answer the questions during the test? Is that what this is all about?" "That is right, Terry. That is right. I never left you. I saw what was going on. I knew what you felt. I knew how bad you hurt. I knew everything there. I was there." He says, "Don't you realize, Terry, that the test, I was there. We review after the test is finished. We do not talk during the test. You have got to make the decision. I do not want to influence you in your decision. I want you to do things because you just love Me." "Okay, God, that is what the test is for." "Okay," He said, "Don't you understand, Terry, after the test is the time for your questions, and I will take you through every question." Okay, I had all my questions wrote down, and He answered every one. He says, "After the test, it is time for understanding."

I learned a lesson. What a time to serve God is all the time. I do not work to serve God to get saved. I do not work and serve God to stay safe. I do not work and serve God to earn favor with God. I work and serve God because I am saved. It would be real easy for me to be sad. "No, I was a pastor. I had a big church, and I had all this, and I had all this, and I shouldn't have to work here." When I told Bob, I says, "Let me do that." You know why I do the things around here? This is God's house. This is His home. I want it to look good for Him. I want Him to say, "You did a good job." Do you know what? Down in that entire kitchen, I had nobody cheating on their wife. I had no divorces. I had no complaining, and I had nobody done her preaching. I said, "I preached too long." It was great. I served God because of that.

When everything in my life was upside down and fell apart, I sat down, and God said, "Do you know how long this test has been going on, Terry?" "No, Lord. Tell me." "Eighteen years and two months today." "What? Eighteen years? Are You kidding me, Lord? If I knew it was going to be eighteen years, I would have checked out." He says, "That is why I did not tell you. I did not

tell you all of that." I have a song in my life that I sing: "Just find Jesus, and I will be there." You know why? Because I want to see the unseen arms that held me through the storms. I want to touch the hand that touched me, that completely changed my heart. I want to hear Him speak those words that brought such peace to me. "Just find Jesus, and I will be there." That is where you have got to be.

Please understand, God will never stop using me during the time of the test. As long as I made myself available, God used me. In these eighteen years, He has given me more opportunities I have ever had. When people found I was not a preacher and I had lost everything, they would listen to my testimony, and I would witness to them. I probably spent more time with Christians that were mad and upset because I have been there. I know how easy it is to quit and walk away. God has blessed me. He gave me the book of Job that got me through that time of the storm. God is still using me. In fact, He had to prove it to me. One week after my wife died, I got a phone call at the church. This guy says, "I am in Arkansas. I cannot make it to my niece's funeral. They are expecting me to preach. I have called seven or eight churches, and nobody will go. Will you go?" I just sat there. He said, "Pastor, is something wrong?" I said, "Yeah. One week ago today, at the time of your funeral, I buried my wife. I will go." I went out to that funeral, and I was out, no deaths. I did not know anybody. I spoke to people and stuff. I listened to testimony. A nineteen-year-old girl with spina bifida had died. She witnessed to everybody. I got up and preached that Sunday morning or that day of that funeral. I will never forget. I said, "If I seem a little solemn here, I know what it feels like to sit in that row right there and lose somebody you love. I buried my wife. Had her service last week at this time." I preached unto them Jesus. At the end of that service, nineteen people stood up. They got saved. That was the time of testing. It would be easy for me to excuse out. No. That was an opportunity God gave me, and I was not going to waste it. There are lots of opportunities in this church for you to serve Him and do things for Him. Do not waste them. The test will come someday in your life. I wish I could help you. The only one that you are going to have to help you through it is Him. You are going to find out what your relationship is all about.

Let us close. Father, I pray that they take Your words and take them serious. That it edifies them. I have delivered the message You have me to preach. I thank You again for the opportunity to share what You have done. I pray, Lord, that this is an encouragement that strengthens them. If anybody is walking the fence trying to be a casual Christian, Lord, bring them over on the side where they make a stand for You, and they start growing, and they learn the armor of God, the importance of it. It is a way to survive. God, You are a God that not only takes us through the trials, but You will also show us why if we will just wait on You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You are dismissed.