

I. Introduction and Vision for Youth Ministry

Watching as you come through this church and the Lord gets a hold of your heart through the Word of God, and the young men the Lord raises up who can really preach and teach the Word of God, has been an incredible blessing to me over the years as your pastor. You had a good example of that over New Year's last year, and we are going to do that again this year. For me, there is nothing greater or better than that. There is nothing better than listening to my guys preach the Word of God. I know women are not supposed to preach, but we have some women who can preach just as well as the guys do, I guarantee you. God has done a tremendous thing here in raising up the young men and young ladies who really know the Word of God.

But in preaching, it is not just about knowing the Word of God. I have known a lot of pastors who were incredibly gifted with truly knowing the Word of God. They were taught the Bible, but they never really built anything in their life as far as ministry is concerned, because knowledge about the Bible is not all it takes. It takes a man's ability to take what he knows and translate it into the lives of the people he is talking to. And all of you young men whom I listen to, you have learned how to do that. That is truly the key. God has done that better than Jared McClanahan. Jared is our youth pastor. He does an incredible job. He has an ability to communicate the Word of God to your kids and to us. I love listening to my guys preach; I truly do. He has always been a blessing to me, and he always comes to the pulpit with something to say.

We have decided—we put it together, talked about it several times, and had a meeting about it with Danny, him, and I last week—that we do not want camp to end on Thursday morning when you pick your kids up. Technically speaking, they are going to go home with you. But we want to take that week and instill in them, as I said last week, that when we come back from camp, we just keep on going with everything they have learned. Jared has put together an incredible ministry application to do that. I do not know if he will get into all of that with you today, but I am telling you right now, the camp is nothing more than setting our kids up for taking them to the next level once they get back. That is going to require parents to help us as we help the parents.

I am really excited about what God is going to do, and I am excited to hear what Jared has to say to us today. I love him. He and his wife are tremendous people. They do a great job, and they are my good friends. I appreciate that. So, Jared, why do not you come on up here? You do not have a Hawaiian shirt on today, but that is okay. We will let you stay. Love you, buddy. Good morning. That is good. Spill it on yourself right off the bat. Well, it was very full, John. I appreciate that.

I want to first of all thank you all for just being here today. Bob made the risky move of telling you all I was speaking last week, so you had the chance. I remember growing up at my church, there would be weeks where you would go sit down in the back, grab your coffee, grab your donut, and pop a squat in your little folding movie chair. You would be sitting there going

through the song service, and you would be wondering, "Where is the pastor? I do not see him in his normal seat. He must be shaking hands this week or something." He would start getting through the second or third song—they only did three songs—and at the end of the third song, you would think, "I just do not see him. Where is the pastor? Come on, buddy, you have like 15 minutes of work here to do. You better hurry up." Then all of a sudden, the lights would start dimming down. "Oh, no, here it comes. Where is the pastor?" Then you would see on the other side of the stage a guy get up with hair, and you would think, "Oh, no, it is the youth pastor. I knew I should have watched from home today." So, I appreciate you guys being here.

My goal for this time is not just to preach at you. That is great, and I hope to have the opportunity to do that again someday. But this is not a situation where Bob stepped out for a smoke break, and so I just had to come up with something. This is our time to hopefully bring you up to speed with the youth ministry, where we are, and what we are doing with your kids, and to tell you where we have been. I want to bring you up to speed, and I want to tell you where we are headed. I hope that nobody checked out like I would have in the past when I saw the youth pastor get up.

It is easy to say, "Well, I am not a youth kid. I am not a parent. I am not a grandparent. I do not have any affiliation with any kids." So it is easy to check out. But in my opinion, that is a short-sighted attitude, something that I, as a baby Christian, would have thought. Fundamentally, everyone in this church should see themselves as stakeholders in our youth.

Ephesians 4:16

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The youth are included in that. In a lot of ways, I disagree with the concept of youth ministry as it is implemented in most modern churches. The youth pastor just takes his kids, shoves them in a basement somewhere, and teaches them something that may or may not agree with the pastor. Growing up, my youth pastor taught us that we all came from monkeys, and he was a theistic evolutionist and the whole nine yards. Even though that contradicted what the pastor said, nobody cared because the youth were just shoved in their basement. "You do your thing. The adults will be up here and grow spiritually." They never interact often with the wise men of the church. Most youth ministries never interact with the kids who are younger than them.

That is one of my favorite things about the ministry that Bob set up. Our church, whether you like it or not, everyone is squished together in one room. The kids get the opportunity to learn from the wise older men. That is why we try to bring many of you up sometimes to talk to those kids, or that is why we talk so much to our youth kids about ministering down to the Timothy kids. The idea is that youth ministry is not this separate thing where we go off and do our own thing, but we are following the same plan and the same vision that Bob has. I have a little bit of wiggle room inside of what he has defined for me, but at the end of the day, he is still running this show. So, this is not the Jared show with Absalom hanging out upstairs teaching kids weird stuff. This is why I post all the sermons online. I do not know if you knew that we post all the

sermons online. Part of it is for the parents; I want them to be able to listen. Part of it is for the kids who miss; I want them to be able to listen, but primarily, it is for transparency. I want transparency not just with the parents or with the kids, but with the church as a whole. If I am preaching junk up there, you as stakeholders should be concerned about that.

Fundamentally, we are an on-ramp. That is all we are. We are not teaching anything special. All we are doing is taking the newest recruits and bringing them up to the speed of everyone else. So, getting them ready to be used by Bob, that is fundamentally the point of our ministry up there. These kids need to be able to do work in the singles ministry and hang out with that super spiritual and intelligent crowd. We want to get them up to speed there.

I think the example is, I am not affiliated with the U.S. military. Unfortunately, I never had any family members who were in the military, and I never went into the military. But I would still care if they dropped the standards to get into the military. For example, if all of a sudden you did not have to run a mile, you could just walk it. Or if it was not a pull-up, if you just held onto the bar for a few seconds, you were good. Or if, "guns are big and noisy, and I understand they are scary, so we are just going to issue Red Ryders for everybody." In that same way, the youth are the future of our church, and that should be something that we are all invested in and something we all care about.

Whatever ministry you care about, be it the jail, the nursing home, Timothy, Bible Buddies, the cleaning crew, Alpha Bravo, discipleship, or Lifeline—anything that you have ever gained anything out of in this church—give it five or ten years, and the youth of today will either be in leadership positions or at least be the boots on the ground in all of those ministries. So, you should care. I have been here seven years, and I know most of my leaders; we were all just "nuggets" not five years ago. This is something that if you are truly thinking about the future and thinking about the future of the church, you should really care about what goes on in the youth ministry.

II. Review of the Past Year: The Whole Armor of God

So, having said that, let me try not to spill. There we go. I want to quickly go over what we covered this year in youth group. We have not had an opportunity to present that to you at all, and I know many of your parents might have heard it from your kids, but getting something out of a high schooler is always iffy at best. So, let me just take a moment to cover what was going on.

The goal for this year, especially this year, was to address our amazing seniors. We have a killer senior class with Jordan, Caleb, and Kenzie. The thing that the Lord put on my heart, even before I was asked to take over the youth ministry, was the whole armor of God. This idea is that an evil day is coming, and the world is out there; the devil has prepared it for us. We need to be able to protect ourselves. More importantly, I wanted to be able to give the youth the tools they needed to protect themselves. So, we covered the whole armor of God. It was supposed to take six weeks, and it took about six months, but praise the Lord, we got a lot out of it.

➤ Truth: The Loins Girded About with Truth

We covered truth, the loins girded about with truth. We covered the idea of a spiritual authority, a final authority. What is our final authority? Why is it so important to have a final authority? We looked at false authorities like our heart, our mind, and our society. We even took time to look at the philosophies, the traditions of men, and the rudiments of the world. These include modernism, where man says that he is the final authority, and science and everything that you can observe is the final authority. Or, the era that the kids are in now, the postmodernist era, where there is no final subjective or objective truth. Truth is just what you make it. Truth is what I think is true; what is right is what I think is right. Understanding this, we have to understand the context of the world right now so that we can see when it creeps into our lives. Because it happens. You see these philosophies creep into our world, and if you are not paying attention, they will creep in. So, we looked at truth.

➤ The Breastplate of Righteousness

We looked at the breastplate of righteousness. Fundamentally, a breastplate protects your heart. Spirit and flesh are enemies. The idea is that what you do—the decisions you make, the choices you make on a day-to-day basis—impact your heart as a whole. If you are feeding the spirit or feeding the flesh, that changes your heart. So, we looked at protecting your heart with your own personal righteousness.

➤ The Feet Shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace (SWEAT)

We looked at the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This is where we went a little crazy. This reminded me of a period of time when I was a band kid. This is getting nerdy, which is why I am laughing. I was a band kid, and at the end of band camp every year, we would do this thing called larping. If any of you know what that is, you are laughing. If you do not know what that is, you should still be laughing. Basically, we did the cheap kid version of it. You would go home and find your mom's best broomstick, or your dad's hockey stick, or whatever rigid pole you could find, and you would duct tape a foam noodle over the top of it. We would meet on the field of the high school stadium where we did our band. At the end of band camp, you would line up 80 on one side and 80 on the other, and then just dead sprint at each other and beat each other with foam-covered sticks until you could not take it anymore. This is what we did for fun. It was a blast. One hundred-degree weather, just getting beat up. There were stitches. But it was an interesting situation. I realized that you get home and you get your sword duct-taped properly, and you are feeling it. You think it is the most balanced thing in the world. Your little broomstick that you have now cut up, which your mom is looking for, "Where did my broomstick go?" You are testing it out and you think, "Oh, I am going to be really good with this. I have it all figured out. Okay, that works. That works. Okay, we are good to go." So you head out to the battlefield, and all of a sudden, my little short sword, because I am a little tiny guy, comes up against the 300-pound dude with the hockey stick. All of a sudden, you think, "Oh, no. I cannot approach this guy the same way as I would some of the other people here." Or you would have kids who would fashion little belts of duct tape rolls, and they would throw the duct tape rolls and say it was a lightning bolt. But you had to be sure to wait for those guys to get rid of all their ammo before you went in and tried to kill them. Or we had one guy who took a hockey stick, and then he just had a bunch of dirty laundry in his trunk. So he tied his shirts

together to form a rope, and then at the bottom of that, he took a bunch of Walmart sacks and Quick-Trip sacks and all that kind of stuff, filled it with the rest of his dirty laundry, tied it to it, and made a giant mace out of his hockey stick and his dirty laundry. That was different, too. You kind of had to get a couple of people involved to go attack that guy. Someone would tie up his little laundry ball, and the other person would go get him in the back. My point here is, no matter how much you study your sword, you think it looks good at home, but when you get out into the battlefield, all of a sudden there is a lot of stuff you do not know, a lot of things you did not realize, and a lot of things you did not expect. Fundamentally, witnessing is the same.

So, I did not want to just take time to lay out the principles of how to get someone saved and things like that. I wanted to hopefully give the kids some opportunity to practice. That is what you would do in the military. You would not just give a guy a sword and say, "It is sharp, go stab things." You would make him practice with it. In the same way, that is what we did with our SWEAT, which stands for Soul Winning and Evangelism Trainings. The premise was that we took about a week or two on each individual stop on the Romans Road. We would take moments to discuss the key to soul winning: the idea that the way you get people saved is not through a program, not through following certain steps, but through the relationship that you have with God. The same way that a husband and a wife reproduce themselves through their relationships, that intimacy with God is how we reproduce ourselves. So, we took time to lay out all of these principles of soul winning and how you witness to people, and how you witness to people around you. We even broke up the room, and half the room would be unsaved, and half the room would be saved, and we would take time trying to witness to each other. This is that practice, the sword practice that I was talking about. It all culminated in a final test, and I am pretty excited about this. Let me brag on our kids here for a moment.

Let me see. Let us make sure I got everybody. I am going to make you kids stand up because I am a jerk. Caleb Bousquet, stand up. Jordan, you stand up. Jordan Hermosillo, you stand up. Macy, you stand up. Elena, where are you? You stand up. Grayson? Where is Grayson? Grayson, he better be standing out there. We have a couple more kids who are still waiting to test, too. My little brother up in Nebraska finished his test this week as well. So, I want to tell you what these kids were required to do to pass this test.

First of all, we do have a—this is serious. We have a rubric and a clipboard. What more do you need? First words, 100% required to pass. We are serious here.

The first step, in the key to soul winning, they needed to have a verse memorized to explain to me the key to soul winning, and they needed to be able to explain the key to soul winning. Then for each stop on the Romans Road, they would need to explain the stop on the Romans Road. What is the point of taking someone to this verse? For example, `Romans 3:23`, you would take them there to show them that they are a sinner. I would expect them to have notes in their Bible so that if there are any side tangents they need to go to, I want them to be able to have the notes in their Bible that they can rely on, because you just cannot memorize everything. Then, on top of those supplemental notes, I want them to know what the requirements are before moving on. If someone does not believe they are a sinner, there is no point in telling them about the grace of God, because they do not think they need it. So, we are trying to equip them. They would have to

memorize those for each and every individual stop on the Romans Road. To top it all off at the end, I have a couple of different scenarios that the leader who is testing them would pick from. Whether they are an unsaved person who does not think they are a sinner, if they are an unsaved person who cannot believe that their sin would send them to hell, or if they are an unsaved person who believes there is more than one way to heaven, we would intentionally, in every single situation, plant some lies that you would encounter in the real world—like that guy with the hockey stick that you need to approach differently than the other ones. So, we did that. Through that, they would then have to try to win the leader to Christ.

The goal was not necessarily to get through it all. Some of us played hardball and would make them just stop halfway through because we would not get it right. But all these kids that you see standing today were able to put in a ton of work. I know many of them went home and spent time with their parents, and spent days. That is a lot of verses to memorize. That is a lot of notes in their Bible. I do not know if you remember how difficult it was to put notes in your Bible for the first time, but that makes you sweat bullets. So, these kids all were putting it together and did amazing. Anyone who did it has now gotten a proper patch, because it is not an old patch thing if there is not a patch involved. So, anyone you see who is running around with this patch, you can go ahead and quiz them; you have my permission. You guys can sit down now. I milked it long enough. We have some amazing kids in this church; we really do. I just think back to what really got me to where I could witness to people, and it was practicing a restart. Someday, that is my hope: that we would be able to take this group and hopefully have actual practical things where we can pair them up with a leader or pair them up with someone and actually go do this, actually go witness, instead of just playing around upstairs by ourselves, having a little role play upstairs. So, we are going to see where that goes, and we are still thinking on that. I just think about how much the world tests the kids on stupid stuff. How many of us did that biology test and immediately forgot everything? It did not matter. So, we are going to get serious too. I think that is something we can do.

➤ The Shield of Faith

Moving on, we also covered the shield of faith: the idea of what faith is. It is a simple question, but when you try to put a definition to it, it takes some thought. We studied the lives of faithful men like Abraham, Noah, and Moses out of 1 Samuel 11 and took time to just do character studies. What does it look like when someone has faith in their life?

➤ The Helmet of Salvation

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

➤ The Sword of the Spirit

We looked at the sword and how it is quick and powerful, how functionally a sword divides things, how it is best when you let the blade do the work, and how practice is key to being able to use it effectively. We took time to explain the principles of comparing spiritual with spiritual. So, we broke out the concordances. We made a page, a worksheet, with all these words that have difficult definitions in the Bible. Then, with our leaders, the kids worked together to use concordances to actually define these words, not with man's dictionary, not with our own thoughts. We asked, "What does the Word say? What does the Bible say? Compare those spiritual things to spiritual." So, we did that.

➤ Prayer

Then we ended on prayer. We spent, I think, at least a week on every single individual type of prayer in discipleship. We discussed the idea of Christians as forward observers in the military. Those are the guys with the radio who get to call in air support. Functionally, the biggest weapon that a soldier can wield, the most power that a soldier can wield, is that radio. It does not matter what small arms you carry; it is not going to beat the A-10 going "burp" on top of that mountain. In the same way, for a Christian, the most powerful weapon we can carry is not something we carry ourselves, but it is the ability to call in proper air support. So, we looked at, "Why is that air support not coming in? What are things that we necessarily...?" There are times you have prayed that it did not turn out like you thought it would. Why did that not happen? So, we discussed those things. My goal was to just answer those common questions, not avoid them, but go at them head-on and discuss these topics. That kind of wrapped up probably three-quarters of our year.

III. Review of the Past Year: Dating and Relationships

I saw that we have some really cute seniors, so I thought, "We need to cover the topic of dating to make sure they got what they need." But it was something that had been on my heart for a while: meeting the kids where they are, addressing the questions they have, and trying to get ahead of it. The relationships you pick are functionally the most important thing in your life, outside of how you handle your relationship with the Word of God. Most of the people I have known who have "thrown their wife away" with relationships started doing that in high school. So, the goal was to hopefully get ahead of that and just give some principles: Who do you marry? How do you marry? When do you date? Why do you date? How to have a God-honoring relationship if that does actually happen in your life? So, we looked at all those things and have just wrapped up the last few months, dealing with some topical stuff, getting ready, and preparing for what we have after camp. That brings you up to speed with what we have been doing.

IV. Where We're Headed: Samuel as a Model for Youth

Now I want to tell you where we are headed. Go ahead and flip with me to the book of Samuel. I want to cover Samuel's life for a moment. It is not even cliché, but this passage comes up a lot

when you are dealing with kids. Samuel is one of the greatest analogies, one of the greatest examples of a good youth in the Bible. So, we commonly go here. Naturally, when we were thinking about where I wanted to take the youth for the next year, and what the Lord had for them, Samuel just came up. So, I took some time looking at it, investigating the story, and reading these first three chapters fairly often. All of a sudden, the similarities between the story of Samuel and the story of our youth today popped out to me. So, what I want to do is take some time. I will quickly recap the story of Samuel here at the beginning, but then I want to touch on three different points where I think Samuel's time and our time mirror each other.

Starting in 1 Samuel 1, we are introduced to Hannah. Hannah desperately wants a child but cannot have one. It says in 1 Samuel 1:10-11:

1 Samuel 1:10-11

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

So she has made this promise now to the Lord. She has requested, "Lord, please give me a kid. And if You do, I will give him right back to You, Lord. I will give him right back to You."

Obviously, God answers that request as part of the story. Everyone has heard it. 1 Samuel 1:27-28:

1 Samuel 1:27-28

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

So we see Samuel; she fulfills her promise. The Lord gives her her son, and then she lends him to the Lord.

As a result of that, we see the famous passage that Bob talks about in 1 Samuel 3, the calling out of Samuel. This is our basis for the principle we follow for when anyone wants to get called into the ministry. Let me read 1 Samuel 3:8-10:

1 Samuel 3:8-10

And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

So Samuel now has a relationship with the Lord. He has been called out by God. As a result of that, 1 Samuel 3:19-21:

1 Samuel 3:19-21

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

He grows. So I want to show a pattern here.

➤ God's Problem: A Sinful, Apostate World

The first step of this pattern, the first similarity between Samuel's time and our time, is that God has a problem. Obviously one that He can solve, but He has a problem: a sinful world, a sinful, apostate world. Samuel comes into existence at the time of the Judges. Any of you who have read the book of Judges know that that is probably the nuttiest place in the Bible. There are people doing the wildest, most crazy things. It does not make sense until you read the last verse: "There was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." I do not need to point out the parallel with today. There is no king in America, and every man does that which is right in his own eyes. It is like we talked about with the truth. The whole premise of all society now is that truth is subjective. You do what you want. I define what is right for me. You define what is right for you. Nobody is allowed to have any other opinion. The tolerance. We have changed the truth of God into a lie. We worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. It is a straight parallel with what was going on in Samuel's time and the time of Judges.

➤ Spiritual Corruption

The second thing that was similar in that concept was that it was a time of spiritual corruption. Not just the world—the world is always bad—but spiritually, the church or the Jews in that time period were spiritually really messed up. In 1 Samuel 2, it talks a lot about Eli's sons. They were a couple of priests who were supposed to be ministering, but they were basically screwing everything up. They were doing it all wrong, taking everything out of context. They were basically doing whatever they wanted, disregarding what God said back in Leviticus. In 1 Samuel 2:22, it talks about how the women of their congregation came to the tabernacle and ended up sleeping with them. If that does not line up with today—if I cannot go a week without seeing some mega-church pastor having a sex scandal—that lines up with today. They took the offering of the Lord and filled their own bellies with it. Again, it lines up exactly with a lot of the way that churches are run these days. They are twisting the arms of the people to make them give more. It talks about that these two bad priests were literally saying that they would take the

offering by force if someone did not give it. How often do you see pastors today just guilt-trip their congregations? They are just trying to buy extravagant buildings that they cannot afford and then put that burden back on their people. This is the exact same situation. They turned people away from the Lord. They were so vile and so evil, these men who were supposed to be holy. It says, literally, word for word, "men abhorred the offering of the LORD." People hated going to do their offerings. Why? Because they had to deal with these punks who were screwing everything up and doing it all wrong. That is the exact same thing that is going on today. If you think about most people, why do they dislike Christians? If I had a nickel for every time I heard someone call Christians hypocrites, I could send every kid to camp; there would not be any issue. For the most part, they are right. The world sees what is real in that situation.

➤ No Open Vision; The Word of the Lord was Precious

Lastly, another similarity between Samuel's world and ours is that there was no open vision, and the Word of the Lord was precious in those days. Maybe the people did not treat it like it was precious. They do not now either. But it is the exact same state that we are in as a church. Whereas God had previously dealt with Israel through visions and signs and things, during this period of time, Israel was so far away from God that all He gave them was His Word. That is the exact same thing that we have got. All we have got is His Word, and that is enough.

So God has a problem: this sinful world. But He also has a solution. Look at 1 Samuel 2:35-36 with me. What was God's solution?

1 Samuel 2:35-36

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.

God's solution to a sinful world was to raise up a faithful priest. Obviously, my argument is that that is His solution today as well.

➤ Traits of Samuel (and Christians)

A couple of traits about Samuel. There is a lot about him; you could study Samuel forever and keep coming up with more. But just four simple similarities I see between Samuel and our lives as Christians.

1. Wholly Given to the Lord

First, Samuel was someone wholly given to the Lord. He was literally committed at birth by his mother to serve the Lord. Some people might say that is not fair; he could not consent. He is basically a slave. If you think about it, he would have to spend every day in service to the Lord. He would have to do things that maybe he did not want to do. He would maybe have to not do things that he wanted to do. It is a hard life. But it was through that lending that God was able to

use him, and I do not think Samuel would take it back. When you realize that we are in the same situation, it kind of... Look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Now, praise the Lord. Grace be to God. I am thankful that He has given me grace. I am thankful that He lets me do basically whatever I want to do, within reason, technically. But that does not mean I should. Just like Samuel technically was committed to the Lord, I was bought and paid for too. Paul calls himself a bondservant, a slave, all the time. We are supposed to be the same as Christians. I do not know about you, but I do not live my life like that very often. I do not live my life like I was bought and paid for like a servant. When I am at work, if I am wasting my boss's time, and I am on the second game of darts with my coworkers, you start to feel bad. You start to get that feeling, "I should probably get back to work. I am wasting the boss's time." But then I will come home from work and kick off my shoes and put my feet up and live for myself all evening. I never think twice about the person who really paid for that time.

2. Called Out

The second thing about Samuel: he was someone who was called out. In 2 Peter 1:10:

2 Peter 1:10

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

There is not one of us as Christians who gets to say we are uncalled. Sometimes, growing up, I was always anxious about the idea of, "I hope no one ever makes me preach. I hope no one ever makes me witness. I hope no one ever..." Maybe the Lord never called me to do that. Maybe I just need to be really good at reading my Bible or something. Maybe I can just do that. But no Christian gets to claim that they do not have a calling. Think about it in the army context. Does the army ever recruit someone and then say, "We are good, just go ahead and go back home and play video games; we will call you when you need to"? The army does not say that. In the exact same way, God does not recruit a soldier, give him a soul, and then say, "I do not have any work for you; just go home, have fun for the rest of your life; I will bring you back when I want to." He does not say that. Just like a soldier is given orders, we as Christians are given orders, and we can choose to ignore them or not, but that does not deny the fact that we also have a calling, just like Samuel.

3. Given a Message

Samuel was given a message, a hard message. He was given a hard message to Eli to basically tell him all the things he had been doing wrong and the doom of where he was going. As a prophet, he was given many more messages. As Christians, God has entrusted us with messages as well. It is not always going to be an easy message. In fact, the message of a Christian is

sometimes a hard message, at least part of it. Telling people that they are sinners is not the easiest thing in the world, but telling them there is a Savior, that is all right; I enjoy that part. I always think about Isaiah 53:8:

Isaiah 53:8

And who shall declare his generation?

Have you ever taken the time to actually answer that question? It is rhetorical in that I do not want you to say anything, but in your brain right now, answer that question: Who will declare this generation? Who? We always hear that phrase, "If not you, then who?" It is a great question. Think about the people you interact with, your coworkers, your classmates if you are in school, the people you bump into at the store. Are they going to do it? Will they? Is there anybody in this city who has more of an opportunity from the Lord to be the ones to declare this generation than the people who grow up in this church? I do not think so. We are all going to be held to a pretty high standard, I think, when the time comes around.

4. A Source of Bread (The Word of God)

Lastly, Samuel was someone, as we looked in 1 Samuel 2:36, that the world can come to for bread. We know that bread is a type of the Word of God, and so it perfectly relates to us as Christians in this time of spiritual famine that we live in—this time where no one believes the Bible, no one teaches the Bible. We have the opportunity as Christians to be the people who give that Word out. Bob always talks about the prepared sinner and the prepared servant: how if someone in his church is willing to prepare themselves to deal with something, he will then put that person in a situation to help out the prepared sinner who wants to get right but does not know how. I did not get permission to tell his story for my little brother, but I do not feel too bad; he can deal with it. But I think about him. We were going through discipleship once, and just randomly, I do not know why it came up, but we just decided, "While we are here, we are just going to cover the principles on finding a spouse out of Genesis 24." We were just like, "Yes, we will just cover that real fast, hit it up." He took the time, he got it down, he did what he was supposed to do with it, he paid attention, he took notes, and did a good job with it. I feel like it was a week later, maybe, it was not long—maybe a week—he ended up at his youth group in the bathroom with a kid, soaking his shirt in tears because he had some girl problems, and Luke was able to open up the Bible and explain principles to him. That, to me, is the opportunity that I want for every kid in this church: to be able to be that prepared servant. That was a blessing among blessings in my life, and that is what I want for all of the youth as well.

So, we see the similarities. God had a problem of a sinful world. God's solution was to raise up a faithful priest. Lastly, I want to look at His method. How did He raise up that faithful priest? The Bible does not talk about Samuel being extra nice. It does not say he was extraordinarily smart. It does not even say he was really that hardworking. You do not hear any of that stuff. We do not really know much about his character traits when we first meet him. He is young; that is about all we got. What does it say about Samuel, though? Going back to the prophecy of that faithful priest, 1 Samuel 2:35:

1 Samuel 2:35

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

We know that the mind of God is stored in the Word of God. In 1 Samuel 3:19, it says, "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." 1 Samuel 3:21 says, "And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD." So, we realize the one thing that Samuel had, that nobody else had at this time, was a respect for the Word of God and a relationship with the Word of God. When you look at God's pattern that He set up—a sinful world, a faithful priest, and His method to raise up that faithful priest—it is the Word of God. That is fundamentally how I want to pattern our youth ministry. We want to raise up faithful priests. We want to raise up people who can go into that sinful world and be effectual and make a difference and be those prepared servants to reach the sinful, hurting world. My goal then is to use the same method that God used back then: the Word of God.

V. The Future Plan: Developing a Relationship with the Word of God

Moving on to the actual plan. Here is what we are going to do with our youth this next year. The main goal would be to just help the kids develop their relationship with the Word of God. I do not want to just teach them things about the Bible. I do not want to just throw principles at them willy-nilly. I want to help them develop a relationship with the Word of God. One of my major grievances with a lot of modern youth ministries is that they emphasize behavioral modification over spiritual edification. That is, they want the kids to act a certain way and look a certain way, but they do not care if they have the spiritual basis underneath that. That is my biggest gripe with modern youth ministries.

I grew up going to a big church, and eventually we ended up leaving the youth group there because it was just such a pile of hooey. Every week there was a new topic. This was the biggest church in my town; it was a proper mega-church with fog machines and the whole nine yards. They had good funding. They could have bought any curriculum they wanted to. They could have had any pastor they wanted to. They could have done anything. This should have been the most well-equipped church in the world to teach its youth kids. You would go, and there would be a message on not doing drugs, a message on kindness, and a message on relationships, and that was great. But by the time I made it to college, I was a spiritual wreck. Apparently, just making you act a certain way is not what changes your life. Learning to act like a Christian, learning to walk the walk, is not what changed me. When I look at what changed my life, it was the Bible, and actually learning it. I think back to when I went through Bob's outlines of the books. It took me a couple of years because I was a little slow and a little undisciplined. But I got there, and if any of you have done that—Bob has every single book, an outline online, and an hour sermon on it—you can take that, and if you read through the whole Bible and get those outlines in, all of a sudden, about halfway through, I was just like, "Things are clicking. I am

understanding," and my life was never the same after I developed that relationship with the Word of God.

What we are doing here is essentially the same thing with the youth. No device or program or topical study I could come up with—even though we will cover those—no sermon I could come up with is going to change the kid for the better. Fundamentally, what is going to change a kid for the better is the Word of God. So, we are going to do the books, but for kids. What does that look like? I have it charted out; I have a very nice Excel spreadsheet. I am really proud of it; it highlights the right day and everything. I am really stoked, but sorry. The goal would be to go at a slow enough pace that we can go through and spend a week on the outline of the book. Then we are going to go slow enough that we can read along. If a kid just wanted to read four pages a day, they could get through the whole Bible with us. As a class, as an entire unit, we can move through the Bible and learn as we go. It is fun. We do not have any seniors anymore. After these seniors graduate, we just have juniors. So, that gives us two years with the same group of kids. That is how long it is going to take us. It is going to take at least two years to get through all these books, but we want to take the time to do that and exhaustively learn and study the Bible so that we can start developing our relationship with it.

➤ Two Major Goals

5. Develop a Foundation of Bible Knowledge

I have two major goals with that. First and foremost, I want to help the kids develop that foundation, that framework of Bible knowledge. The Bible clearly talks about building Bible knowledge precept by precept. It is an analogy to bricklaying, where you are building that wall, laying principles on top of each other. Our kids are amazing. They have gone through Timothy. They have gone through all the teaching their whole life, and they have thousands of Bible principles, thousands of tidbits of Bible knowledge, lots of individual things that are really good. But what I want to help them do is to start assembling those on a foundation, a framework of Bible knowledge. Bob clearly talks about it a lot, and the Bible talks about it too: the idea of a systematic study. If you try to learn something—if I were to go to the Bible and pick out, "Okay, I am going to read this page today," and then randomly the next day pick the next page, and then flip through randomly the next page—I would never learn the Bible. You have to do things in a systematic, orderly fashion so you can make sure that you have done it properly. That is what I want to provide for the kids: this idea that we can... Stop blowing, buddy. Hang in there. We can make this framework that then all of these thousands of pieces of Bible knowledge they have, they can bolt onto the Bible as we are going through it and have them all assembled into one place.

6. Learn to Dissect Scripture on Their Own

The second major goal is that I want them to be able to learn to dissect Scripture on their own. Fundamentally, I want to get myself out of a job as fast as I can. I want to be able to say, "You, tell me what is going on," and then I can just sit back and let it roll, because at the end of the day, it is not my relationship that is going to change them; it is their relationship with the Word of the Lord that is going to change them. What that is going to look like: in discipleship, we learn a lot

about youth. We disciple a lot of kids in our team, and sometimes you get to those moments where you are trying to see, "Did that kid get this?" So you ask them a question, "Can you explain that verse to me?" And you just get a straight deer in the headlights. They are terrified. Maybe they know it, maybe they do not, but they just get a deer in the headlights. That is all right. It is no shame; it is tricky to sometimes extract Bible principles on your own. But we also see sometimes where our kids have been around so long that many of them can just memorize the meaning of a verse and never actually know how to get it out for themselves. "I know that this verse means that; I can spout off that meaning. It sure seems like I am pulling that out of the Bible by myself, but I have just memorized it." The Lord knows that I do that sometimes, too. The number of times I have looked at a passage of Scripture and thought, "Oh, that is what it is actually saying, gotcha. I have just been assuming it meant that other thing." But I want to take the time to help them develop these critical thinking skills so that they can take a passage and feed themselves. At the end of the day, they have to grow up, and they need to learn to feed themselves, and many of them can do it already. It is just like in real life, as Bob was talking a few weeks ago with school. You have all of these classes you go through for a few years where you are learning stuff that functionally has no purpose other than to help you do the real things later on: learning words, learning addition and subtraction, learning sentence structure, whatever. Those are things that fundamentally do not seem like they do that much at the time, but then when you get to the higher-level classes, you realize, "Oh, that is the basis that I need to be able to actually do the real stuff." So, the same thing in Bible study. I want to hopefully cover those topics. We are going to look at things like keywords in the Bible. I know that opened my eyes up—I do not know about you guys—when all of a sudden I started learning those keywords, sitting under Bob long enough on Thursday nights and Sundays, where I thought, "I know what that word means. I know what that context sets. I can understand this passage now, whereas I could not before." I really want to take a whole chunk of the youth room wall. I do not know what we are going to do, something with magnets or something. Basically, we will be able to have keywords and their definitions plastered up on the wall so that we can slowly over time start memorizing and internalizing those keywords. I want to go buy some—I have been on Facebook Marketplace for days trying to find stuff—maps and charts, things that can hopefully help make the Bible realer and make it so that you can tangibly understand some of the things like the geography and be able to set a context for where we are in the Bible. Simple things like understanding the importance of punctuation, or like an "as" when God compares in the Scripture, or who knows what else. There are a million things throughout the Bible that as you are reading, you can just learn little tiny principle by principle, the same way Bob taught me through the books. As you are going, you just encounter these things and you learn them. So, over the course of the two years or more, the goal is to just take the time to lay all those out. Just go nice and slow, find the things that we need to teach, find the things that our youth needs, and help them learn it. We can do some character studies along the way. We have some wiggle room. We can do some old-fashioned preaching. We have the flexibility so that if the Holy Spirit says we need to talk about whatever, we can do it. But primarily, I want to spend the time in youth group. They get good preaching on Sundays. They get good preaching everywhere else. I want to spend time on Thursdays making sure that they have the tools to build that personal relationship with the Word of God that will help them then be that faithful servant who can go to the sinful

world and actually make a difference. That is all I have for you guys today. Thank you very much. Thank you.

VI. Parental Partnership and Church Support

One of the great things that I love about this church, and being a pastor for over 20 years here and watching God do some tremendous things in the lives of people, is that no matter where your child is, from the nursery up to the Bible Buddies, the Bible Explorers, to Timothy, up to the high school, your kids are in good hands. The men and women who teach them, who take care of them, they know the Word of God. They have grown. As a parent, I know the responsibility of training up your children lies with you; there is no question about that. But in the days that we live in, you know as well as I do, there are some tremendous challenges out there that your child faces. A parent has to have the ability to have a support team around them. That is really what we do here with kids, no matter what their age group is. We do not try to take them from you. We recognize that we cannot do your job with them. But we also realize that we are here to be a support team around you as mom and dad.

I said it last week: as mom and dad, you can bring your children up, train them, work with them, disciple them, and do all the things that you do. But when they hit about 15, 16, or 17 years old, I do not mean to suggest that you give up the influence in their life, but they need a broader horizon. They are now meeting kids at school. They are facing things that we as parents have never experienced. This is the time where they need the young men and young ladies in this church who have gotten through those things and have the Word of God that can mentor your child and be the support that your child needs within your family.

I have said it many, many times, too many times in my 50-plus years: I have seen kids go to the world. I have seen them die way before their time. I have seen them struggle, and I saw in kids who had tremendous potential. But they never realized that potential because the world got them before we ever had a chance to do anything with them. You need to understand that we are here to help you. My prayer, my goal, is that we lose not one more child to the world in this church. It is a thing where it takes all of us together.

We have planned for this camp on a level I have never seen before. Anyone who has worked in our youth department as a leader, your kids were in really good hands. Each one of those guys, over the years, brought those kids to another level. Every one of them did a fantastic job and were used by the Lord to get those kids to the plateau they are at right now. Now it is Jared and his wife and the workers in there who are tremendous people themselves, and all of the folks who are here to help those kids get to the next level. That is really what camp is all about. But when we come back, Jared has the plan, and it will work. It will do everything that you need for your child if you become part of the solution and not part of the problem. We can only go so far with your kids. It is just a fundamental truth.

I met with a guy last Thursday night. I would love to have this guy in our church. He called me on the phone several weeks ago. He had heard about our discipleship and all that we do here. This guy is in a church here in Blue Springs. I did not even ask him what church it is, but I am

sure it is a Baptist church. This guy really has a burden to disciple people. He called me and said, "Could I get copies of everything that you are doing?" He said, "I really have a burden for discipleship, and I really want to bring that into the church and train some people to really disciple other people," because he said, "building disciples is what Christianity really is." The guy is probably—I was going to say he is old—he is probably in his young 70s. He is a great guy; I fell in love with him. I took him into the bookstore and just gave him everything he could handle. He said to me in my office, "I really have a burden to disciple." I said, "Well, we will help you wherever we can." He said, "I really appreciate that," and "We will try to do what we can do." He said, "I fight an uphill battle in our church with discipleship." I knew what he was going to say. I asked, "How is that?" He said, "Well, the pastor is a good guy, and he preaches the Bible, but he is really not behind discipleship." I told him, "That is really the key. Because if the pastor is not on board with what you are trying to do, pushing it and making it a priority—because he is the leader of the church and he is the one who should do it—you are going to have an uphill battle." He understood that, and we had a great time.

Having said that, it is the same way with your children. If you are not 100 percent on board with what Jared and his guys and gals up there are doing, and you are not supporting it with your kid, it is going to be an uphill battle for them. Just like that man cannot replace the pastor's job of pushing discipleship, we cannot take your responsibility from you of having your children here to get everything that they can. God has given us the greatest opportunity here for children that you could ever want to have. But if you do not use it, it does not do anybody any good. Pray for us when we go to camp. I have a whole plan of things that I want to try to accomplish. I am going to come at it from an angle that I have never really come at it before. I have four days to get done what I want to get done. I want to get those kids to a level that when we come back, they are ready to go. But I need you as parents. I need you to understand that when they come back, you are probably going to have a changed kid. But I need changed parents. I need parents who are going to support what we are doing here for your kid's sake. It is just that simple, because I do not want to lose one more kid to this world, and we do not have to. It is our choice. So, pray for us. We look forward to having a good time, and we will give you a report when we get back. But just know that your kids are in good hands. They always have been in this church. Every pastor and youth pastor we have had has done a tremendous job. The people who run everything from the nursery right up to Timothy, everyone, they do a tremendous job. They have been trained. They know their Bible. They love the kids, and they are willing to make that investment. We need you to make that same investment equal to what we are trying to do, and we will get some things done. I pray here in a moment, Jamie, you will be up here. Make sure that if you want to put money on your books for...