

Message 11

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, the practical wisdom of the book of Proverbs, and the sufficiency of God's grace in our lives.

Duration: 51:03

Scripture: Proverbs 14:21, Proverbs 16:23-24, Proverbs 16:28, Proverbs 16:31, 2 Corinthians 12:1

Topics: "Practical Wisdom", "Fearing God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the practical wisdom found in the book of Proverbs. He emphasizes the importance of hard work and warns against mere talk that leads to poverty. The preacher also highlights the significance of showing kindness to the poor, as it reflects our attitude towards their Creator. He shares personal anecdotes to illustrate the need for grace in everyday situations and encourages the congregation to fear the Lord and shun evil. The sermon concludes with a reminder to spread the gospel and be grateful for the grace that is sufficient in our weaknesses.

Transcript

I just had these two final messages and I was realizing that throughout the week I perhaps have given a little bit of a distortion. I've given the idea that it's mainly these 12 passages that have helped me keep going all these years. It's the whole of the Word of God that's kept me going all these years.

But these are just some of the highlight passages that God has used in a special way. And as we got to this final day, I just thought there's so many other things I want to try to say. I wanted to try to say how important the Psalms have been.

I try to spend time in the Psalms every day. And we read one or two Psalms during the week. And then I touched on this, but I would like to emphasize a little more this morning the importance of the book of Proverbs.

So we're going to look at the book of Proverbs and then we're going to look at that passage in Corinthians that I've been referring to. Before we do that, however, we want to pray for a few more of the nations. We prayed for a lot of nations, but I'm going to just try, if I can remember, to pray for some that we haven't prayed for.

And if I, you know, do pray for one we've already prayed for, I'm sure that won't be the end of the world. Let's pray together. Laura, we just thank you that we've been able to touch nations during these days.

And Laura, I think we've prayed for so many countries, but we've missed out a lot of the Latin American countries. And I think of Uruguay, which is very unlike other South American countries, where the church is relatively small, where humanism out of Europe is stronger than Catholicism. And now there's a lot of others suffering there because of the economy.

Pray for my friend Siegfried from Canada. There's a great OM work there in Uruguay. And Paraguay isn't that much better.

These two very distinct nations. And we cry out to you for breakthroughs in Paraguay and Uruguay. We think of the crisis that's been going on in Bolivia, this landlocked nation, which again does not have near the church growth as some of the other countries.

And so we pray. So many Indian groups, so many of them isolated out in the mountains. We reach out and we touch Bolivia.

Laura, we've been made aware of all that you're doing in Brazil. Perhaps 20% of the nation now professing faith. But we know at the same time there are phenomenal needs in Brazil.

And then we'd reach out to French Guineans, Suriname, Guyana. Thank you that the ship has been able to visit many of these places and that there is some response from many new churches. And then we would reach into the West Indies, Lord, in Jamaica and Puerto Rico and Haiti and Dominican Republic.

Some of these places have been hit by storms and hurricanes again. And most of them have phenomenal church growth, but also tremendous poverty, especially places like Haiti. So we reach in and we touch the West Indies.

None nor we would touch Central America, Nicaragua and Honduras and Costa Rica, Guatemala. These nations again, phenomenal, huge Christian populations. Yet many seem to remain babes.

Many face economic complexities. And so we reach in and we touch Central America and also Mexico, where church growth has been off the charts. And at the same time, think of all the Mexicans that have come up to America, giving us one of the great mission fields and pray that all of us may be able to learn a little more Spanish and befriend these Mexican people.

We just pray that the church in the United States of Latin Americans may grow and others will just get involved in other churches as they learn English. We thank you, Lord, for the vision you've given us for the whole world. We thank you for this book, Operation World, and pray that it may be mightily used for a global ministry of intercessory prayer.

In Jesus name, Amen. Amen. Prayer is not optional for those that love Jesus.

It's amazing how even many non-Christians are starting to get into various kinds of praying. What a challenge that is. I shared with you how I met that lady and she said a proverb a day will keep the devil away.

So I've been reading proverbs pretty well every day ever since. My favorite proverbs are right in the middle. So I'd like you to turn to Proverbs chapter 14, just for a few of the verses that again and again

have motivated me and kept me.

I got up very early this morning but I found myself not quite as motivated and the last couple of hours I've just been pushing myself and struggling to keep going. I have a whole lot of things I need to get done and over to the post office. Roy's gonna help me with that.

And I just find that sometimes it's much harder, isn't it, to keep going than other times. But it's normal. And some of these verses have really helped me.

Again, I recommend the whole book of Proverbs. If you haven't read it through lately, one for every day in the week, every day in the month, get going. But let's just let's just pick a few proverbs out of the very middle section.

Chapter 14. Look at verse 1. The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears her down. Wow.

He whose walk is upright fears the Lord, but he whose ways are devious despises him. A fool's talk brings the rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them. Where there's no oxen the manger is empty, but for the strength of the ox comes an abundant harvest.

I'm hoping that's justification for my messy room at this moment. A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies. The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning.

So powerful. So much wisdom. Let's just jump on to verse 16.

A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hot-headed and reckless. A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated. The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

Look at 23, 21 I mean. He who despises his neighbor's sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy. Doesn't that take us right back to the seven people laying by the side of the road? And when we looked at the Good Samaritan, there's a lot of nuggets through the whole Old Testament that confirm what we shared in that message of the Good Samaritan.

Verse 23, all hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty. So practical, isn't it? The book of Proverbs is a practical book. Just so many challenges to use common sense.

Praise be to the living God. Look at verse 31. He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker.

Whoa! And whoever is kind to the needy honors God. When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge. And then moving on to chapter 15.

I've always struggled with the sins of the tongue. And chapter 15 and a lot of other Proverbs especially are dealing with the sins of the tongue. There's also a lot in the Proverbs about lust.

And often when I'm mentoring young men who have lust problems, and I have a whole network of men who are accountable to me for their walk with God in the area of lust, and I always encourage them to look at Proverbs 3, 4, and 5. There's three whole chapters in Proverbs just written for men just on the lust issue. I guess God sort of knew. I'm not saying that women don't have problems sometimes in that area.

Chapter 15, a gentle answer turns away wrath. Oh, if only I had learned that sooner in my life, even though I'd read it. Harsh words stir up anger.

I never forget when my leaders who I was accountable to, and they were noticing at times I still would overreact to certain hot buttons. They gave me two lists. Dale Roton gave me one list, and Dennis Alexander, a godly man who's now a scientist, was one of the leaders of our work in the Middle East.

He's now a scientist in Cambridge. He's written a number of great books. They gave me two lists.

Why not to overreact? And I put those lists in the Bible that I was using a lot at that time, and that was a huge help to me. And this is also a help. A harsh word stirs up anger.

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools gushes folly. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and on the good. The tongue that brings healing is the tree of life.

A deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. Remember Time magazine some years ago? That front page was basically, the United States is now a nation of liars. I'll never forget the cover of Time magazine.

Their research into our culture showed that lying was so acceptable. That's why we had presidents that had been so gifted at lying. And I never really blamed the presidents or even the White House as much as I blame our degenerate universities that years before this became more public to the average person, they were teaching, they were teaching these students and intellectuals that these things were basically acceptable.

Lying and fornication. Do you know that a new book has just been written out, written by a non-christian about our universities, saying that the basic thing in universities is fun and sex and drink. It is not studying.

Now I'm not saying I agree with that. He's a non-christian, maybe just wanted to sell a lot of books. I only read the review, but what a bombshell that book has been on our arrogant, sophisticated higher education system here in this country.

And that's not to say God can't work through that. That's not to say there aren't some godly people in that. We need more godly people in that.

But we, we must stand against the so-called intellectual elite dictating the course and the future of our nation. And praise God, more Christians than ever have become politically active. We know it's messy, but I believe it's important all over the world for God's people in a godly way, with love as the aim, to speak out on some of these issues and to have a greater level of wisdom and discernment that you cannot even get necessarily on university studies, as important as they are in our culture.

The lips of the wise, verse 7, spread knowledge, not so the hearts of fools. Look at verse 8. The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him. When you get up in the morning and you spend time in prayer, it pleases God.

When we gather, as we've been morning after morning, over in the prayer house, it pleases God. Isn't that wonderful? That's, even Jesus said himself, my meat, my meat, the thing I want the most is to do the will of the Father. Wow, look at verse 16.

Better a little with a fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. Better a meal of vegetables where there's love than a fattened calf with hatred. A hot tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

The way of the sluggard, there's a lot about laziness in the Proverbs, very upsetting stuff. The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway. Verse 22, plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.

A man finds joy in giving an apt reply, and how good is a timely word. What a powerful chapter. Look at verse 30, a cheerful look. When you go to a restaurant, what kind of waiter do you prefer? What kind of waitress do you prefer? The sullen-faced, sad-looking person that as they wait your table, they look like they're doing you a favor? Or do you like someone that's cheerful and friendly and serves you seemingly joyfully, giving the idea that they're they're really happy that you've come? Some of the airlines now, just before you land, they thank you for flying with them and they say, we know that you had a choice as to whom you could fly with today.

Thank you for choosing United. A cheerful look brings joy to the heart. The good news gives health to the bones.

There's so many proverbs about being positive. I have a natural negative streak. I don't know if any of you wrestle with being, you know, the negative.

You tend to be a little negative, tend to be a little critical. This fear I'm going to become like the Darth Vader of the evangelical world. And I remember once I was in Pakistan, I think it was about 20 years ago, was a period in my life when I was trying to be more positive, trying to be more optimistic.

A few of you have heard this story as it's gone around, maybe in my website, but I'll tell it this morning anyway. And so I was asked to speak at the cathedral and some OM leaders said, could I be a little more careful, knowing that I sometimes say things that are a bit offensive. They said, look, could you just be a little more careful? The bishop is going to be here.

You know, we don't want you to blow it. You know, so I thought through that. And they said also, could you dress properly? I'm not known for my proper attire.

And so I did that as well. So there I was in the cathedral. I had a suit and a tie on.

I was really trying my best. I looked like an undertaker and I was really, you know, trying to do my best. Guess what? Right in the middle of the sermon, a pigeon flew over me, dropped its load on the sleeve of my suit.

You know, isn't that typical negative experience? But God was doing something new in my heart. And I just looked at the crowd and I said, well, praise the Lord that the elephants here don't fly around. Somehow, no matter what difficulty you're going through, it could always be a lot worse, right? So praise the Lord for the little things.

Look at verse 24 in chapter 16. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. What a revolution in our churches, in our nation, if there were more pleasant words, less bickering and grumbling and moaning and more pleasant words.

Wow. Verse 28 in chapter 16, the perverse man stirs up dissension and gossip separates close friends. Slightly practical, no? Gossip separates close friends.

Here's a good one for many of us. Verse 31. Gray hair is the crown of splendor.

Let's have all those with gray hair stand at this time. No, you don't have to do that. Gray hair is the crown of splendor.

It is attained by a righteous life, better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. I guess God's priorities are pretty clear in this great book. And then the seventeenth chapter also is just loaded with insight and better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

So powerful. Children's children are crowned to the aged. The parents are the pride of their children.

And then it talks about arrogant lips, and then it talks about bribery and how wrong bribery is. And then look at verse 12. Better to meet a bear.

There's a big buzz around here ever since last night. You know, when Roy came in telling about the bear, he was so excited, you know, it was like the second coming of Christ. And so here's a verse dedicated to what's happened here at the conference.

Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs. I don't think that one that came around here yesterday was in that category than a fool in his folly. So if you think the big danger around here is bears, let me tell you, the big danger around here are any fools.

Watch out for any fools at the Romney Conference Center. We hope there aren't any, but there's a verse we ought to take seriously. If a man pays back evil for good, evil will never leave his house.

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam. So drop the matter, drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. Tell me, is there wisdom here, or am I some kind of a flying squirrel? What is it? I think it's wisdom.

Hallelujah. Now turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 for my final passage in the New Testament, as tonight we'll be looking at Isaiah chapter 6. 2 Corinthians chapter 12. These words that have just helped me so much to keep on keeping on in the midst of the race.

I think we'll pick it up right at the first verse. I must go on boasting, although there's nothing to be gained. I will go on to a vision, to the visions and revelations from the Lord.

I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know. God knows.

And I know that this man, whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know, but God knows, was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.

Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain so that no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given to me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me, but he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. That's the key verse, because that also is what the Lord said unto Paul. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore I boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for when I am weak, then I am strong. Then he talks about how he made a fool of himself and claims that they they were part of the reason.

Let's read that, it's interesting. Verse 11, I made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the super apostles, even though I am nothing.

The things that mark an apostle, signs, wonders, and miracles were done among you with great perseverance. How were you inferior to other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong. Now I'm ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions, but you.

After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for the children. So I will gladly spend for you everything I have, and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? But that, as it may, I have not been a burden to you.

Yet crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery. Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? I urged Titus to go to you, and I sent out a brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit, and follow the same course? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We've been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ, and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder. I'm afraid that when I come again, my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier, and have not repented of the impurity, the sexual sins, and the debauchery in the words in which they have indulged.

Well, I wanted to especially focus on this verse, which in many ways is almost a life verse for me. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. What are some of the areas where we all need to experience grace? There are so many, right? Lots of little things.

Little things go wrong. We need to experience grace. The toaster in my room, when I put my little bagel in there, you know those little frozen waffles that aren't any good for your health? Anyway, Roy gave me some of those, and I put them in there, and the one of them on the one side, it got stuck.

So it didn't pop up. Simple little thing, right? How's it going to get my little waffle out of the toaster? And I ended up turning it upside down after pulling the plug out, of course, and tried to get it out many other ways, and eventually it came out in little pieces, which I still enjoyed. Absolute trivia.

Absolute trivia. Do any of you ever get upset over little things? Little things going wrong, losing your keys? Little things that your wife does that irritate you? My wife has only a few things that irritate me. Well, 20 or 30.

I probably have 50 things that irritate her. Fortunately, they do not come all at once. We just discovered for many years we didn't really have a house.

We were always traveling, and then we eventually got this little house in London, and that was very important for her. The nest, the nest instinct, I was told, that women have. I think some of us men have a nest instinct.

And she then established these various rules, especially in connection with the kitchen. And it's amazing how the enemy uses little things. Like, I tend to be generally in a hurry, and so I take something out of a cupboard, and I forget to close the cupboard door.

Do you call it a cupboard over here? Do you have that word? The cupboard door. This irritates my wife. She tries to restrain herself, but then she eventually shares with me.

And I leave things around. I don't close the cupboard door. I don't put the butter back in the refrigerator.

And then she especially gets excited when I come in from my running. We have rain often in England, and I tread on her carpet, leaving some stains from the woods on her carpet. But of course, that is not a trivial issue.

Then you're moving into major sin. We have to deal with that. We, by God's grace, can look back and see the Lord's grace in the little things around the house and in the car.

And we have grown together. We've come closer together. We've learned from each other.

And many times now, I do close the cupboard doors. And my wife occasionally hints that I am changing. So as I return to England in a few days, you can pray for me that I'll continue to appropriate grace for little things.

God is concerned about the details. I think those of us, as we're older, even men we're not older, we ought to commit our moving around the house. So many older people have terrible falls.

My own father had tremendous falls. Some of you know, William McDonald, that great Bible teacher. He's in his mid 80s.

He didn't have an excuse, really, because he blacked out in the street. Boom, he fell straight on the pavement, broke his teeth, broke up his face. That's just a few weeks ago.

You can pray for William McDonald. He's, by the way, done an entire commentary on the whole Old and New Testament and 40 other books. What an amazing man, another one of my heroes.

But then there's grace for disappointment. Disappointment, I'm sure you know this expression. Disappointment can be God's appointment.

Now, we can say that. We can say that, but practicing that when a disappointment comes, disappointment with ourself, disappointment with a situation, disappointment with our church, disappointment with our marriage partner, disappointment with our children, disappointment with a close friend, I believe it's a major area to appropriate grace, to realize God can work through that situation, to embrace some of the pain and difficulty as a friend and see it as a teacher rather than as the enemy trying to somehow knock you over. It's impossible, as I look back at my life, to even count the disappointments.

We're talking thousands, thousands. When you get as involved as I am with people's situations and nations, you read a lot, you get involved with a lot of people, you see a lot of people come to Christ because whether we want to talk about it or not, a certain percentage of those who come to Christ, they drift away. That's why years ago, I tried to teach our people, don't go around counting every decision as a conversion.

That's foolishness. Call it a profession of faith. Add one sentence after you say, 35 people accepted the Lord, and add a sentence like it.

We're hoping and praying that many of them will be real. Seldom are all of them real. All the people that went forward with me in the Billy Graham meeting in New York City, why if even a third of those are going on for God today, that would be one of the miracles in the history of the Billy Graham campaigns.

In places like New Delhi, a very unique culture, when these evangelists come and they get these huge amount of decisions, those that do a follow-up months later have difficulty finding hardly anyone that's going on for Jesus. We need to understand that a decision is not the same as a conversion. And a profession of faith, as much as we want that, and I'm not against giving invitations, we need the discernment to be able to follow up.

And so, in the work of evangelism, and it's often true of personal evangelism, small group of evangelism, there is an attrition rate. With that will come huge disappointments. In discipling people, in building a fellowship, in building a church, there will be disappointments.

People are with you one minute, and they're gone the next minute. Here in America, money has a lot to do with everything. If you ever did an intense study on the impact of money upon the church, you would probably end up one depressed owl.

I don't recommend that study. But that is our culture. Very few people, very few people, ever become radically free from their culture.

And I believe God, in His mercy, and in His love, and in His grace, He works within our culture. He works even within situations that really have an ugliness factor to them, and that are not right. And God, in His mercy, continues to work and continues to bless.

Even, this is a hard one for people to accept, even when there is sometimes sin in the camp. We had a pastor in Manchester that was in and out of adultery with a woman for ten years, and all during those ten years, he was building a phenomenal church. And God was using him.

Talk about mystery. Talk about things that don't fit in the box. Now, when it all came out, they paid a terrible price.

The people he had discipled, they were disillusioned, they were hurt. When they asked him to leave the church, he felt they didn't handle his situation properly. I mean, who is going to handle these kind of situations properly? They all knew the woman that he had been having sex with.

How are they going to handle this, quote, properly? It was a mess. He then became angry and hurt. I was called in to minister in the church during those intervening weeks to try to build bridges.

Praise God, in His mercy, that church continued. One of the biggest churches in Minneapolis recently had a similar thing. This famous pastor, major adultery.

They brought in one of the leaders in that denomination, who had been pastor of that church before, and he managed to keep the whole church on course through that unbelievable, messy, adulterous situation. We have a great God who can overrule the messes that we make, and whose work, even through soiled vessels, is something we can never fully grasp. Of course, I'm convinced so much more could be done.

The more purity, the more reality, the more of a lasting work that God can do. And for churches, for every church that makes it through a described, there are other churches that, when it happens, it's more or less the end. I remember years ago, when I first went to Mexico, what is it, 45 years ago, they asked me to preach one of the biggest churches in Mexico City.

Huge building. When I got there, they told me the story. Immorality, adultery on the part of the pastor, divisions.

So they built this huge building. They built this huge building, and now no one, hardly anyone, was going there. No wonder they invited this brand new missionary to come in and preach this sermon.

Is there not a tremendous lack of wisdom, so often today, the way we go about things? Is not, instead of prayer, and seeking God, and His glory, the main factor, is it not money, and buildings, and reputation, and publicity, and numbers? Forgive me if I'm wrong. That doesn't mean God won't continue to do something in the midst. For He is merciful, He is forgiving, He is sovereign.

So grace in the midst of disappointment is a major, major factor. Why is this emerging church movement, some people say, going to be the biggest next wave that hits the church in the United States? It's already hit the church. Don Carson, a brilliant theologian, has just written a whole book warning us about the emerging movement.

I'm reading the book right now. A lot of people who are in more conservative churches often don't even know what's going on. They wonder why most of the young people aren't in the church anymore.

The young people, to a large degree, throughout the nation are moving into emerging church situations, or new church situations. Don Carson, in his brilliant book on the emerging church, points out some of the strong points, but he also points out many of the weak points. And I fear that in the reaction, because the emerging church, with all of its complexity, is built on reaction against legalistic, traditionalism, fuddy-duddy-ism, and all that kind of thing which is so prevalent in established churches.

And even those who are leading that movement, I won't give any names, they are generally reacting to some kind of legalistic, fundamentalistic Christianity with all of its weaknesses and with all of its complexities. The church situation in the United States and around the globe is going to get more complicated. Therefore, there'll be the tendency on the part of some of us to pull back, to pull into our little Christian ghetto, and not read much, and not listen to much, and not fellowship with much, become reactionary.

It's also linked with insecurity. I believe it's a great mistake. And I recommend to you, if you want to know what's going on, subscribe to Christianity Today.

We don't have that many good monthly Christian magazines. Most magazines are denominational, some are good. By the way, in England we say denominational.

That's a good twist on a word, isn't it? So you come over and visit us, and we'll teach you proper English, and then you'll say denominational instead of interdenominational. I've been working on some of my words for a long time. Disappointment, complexity, things that don't make sense, divisions among God's people, now this whole new emerging church movement with the positives, with the negatives.

One of the leaders of the church in Britain, who's supposedly in this movement, I know him, he never told me he was part of this. He's got up in front of the whole nation and denied the penal aspect of Jesus Christ's death upon the cross, and accused more traditional evangelicals of believing in some kind of masochistic God. Boy, was this a bomb on Britain about two years ago.

And yet I know, he's a godly brother. The Lord is using him. It's a mystery.

And myself, again and again, I have to go back to passages like this. Claim the grace just to keep on going. Claim the wisdom to try to understand as much as possible and leave the rest with the Lord.

To try to be positive when the whole situation looks a bit negative. And believe me, the way ahead is not going to be easy. I would stand up how quickly certain people condemn this church in Chicago called Willow Creek.

It's not sort of my favorite kind of church. But as I read about them, as I spoke at one of their youth events, they seem to be biblical people. They seem to believe the basic doctrines.

They just had different kind of church services. They came out with different words, which were misunderstood, like the word seeker sensitive. But as I have followed Willow Creek and know people who go to that church, I just believe it is one of the truly great churches.

Of course, American culture is well infested there. But God is bigger than that. And if you go to Europe, you will discover that the Willow Creek Association and their vision and ministry is almost more appreciated in Europe than it is in the United States.

And recently, can you imagine in Germany, they had a pastor's conference. Ten thousand pastors came, unheard of in Germany, because they have some basic principles about church growth and winning people to Christ and facing the postmodern world. And if you read Bill Heibel's books or books by some of the other preachers there, you'll see they're quite basic.

Now we have Saddleback. Saddleback is being talked about now globally more than Willow Creek. It's a little more apple pie, Saddleback, than Willow Creek.

It's the Southern Baptist Church. You wouldn't know it. About a year ago at this time, I met with Rick and Kay Warren, and I found him just such a down-to-earth, humble brother.

And when a person becomes so famous as he has now overnight, it must be incredibly difficult, especially as his wife has been battling cancer. But I thank God. I thank God for Saddleback Church.

God works in different people in different ways, in different churches, in different ways. And I believe when what Swindler calls the grace awakening, when this grace awakening comes to our lives in a greater way, which is basically what we talked about yesterday, 1 Corinthians 13 actually functioning in our lives. So if

you want a quick definition of grace awakening, and I recommend Swindler's book, please write the title down.

It's 1 Corinthians 13 actually functioning in your life. That is a grace awakening. And that hit our movement about 20 years ago.

We had some of it from the earliest days, or I do not believe we would have ever got the airplane off the runway. But about 20 years ago, as we were being honest about some of our legalism, some of our judgmentalism, some of our overemphasis on things that were not that important, God brought this grace awakening into our movement. People became more forgiving, more big-hearted.

People stopped judging who had a better car or who lived in a bigger house. People fellowshiped more widely, were able to accept other mission agencies who had different policies, able to accept them in a more sensible, balanced, godly way. Charles Swindler's book, *Grace Awakening*, and the book that all of you have, *Out of the Comfort Zone*, this book was greatly influenced by his book.

This is an appeal, especially if you've read the first chapter. Any of you read the first chapter? It's an appeal to bring grace awakening into all mission work, the differences in strategy, the differences in how we do church, how we evangelize. Of course, we have to eventually draw the line.

Of course, we have doctrinal convictions, and if people go too beyond those doctrinal convictions, denying basics from the Word of God, then we have to draw the line. That's why this book, *The Grace and Truth Paradox*, I think is so important to what I've been trying to say here this week. So his grace is sufficient.

His strength is made perfect in weakness. Throughout the week, I've tried to be honest concerning my weaknesses. I've touched on my struggle with impatience and irritability.

I've touched on my battle with lust. I've touched on other areas, including difficulties I've had in understanding certain situations or churches, even my struggle with doubt. I don't think we should immediately condemn young people because they have doubts.

The new emerging church movement is a bit bizarre, and I think it's the danger of getting extreme on the whole thing of just emphasizing our doubts. We'll almost start boasting in our doubts, even about basic doctrines, especially, of course, the teaching about hell. That is often ridiculed, and a lot of funny material is coming out concerning the end times, concerning the doctrine of hell.

I believe it is good at times when appropriate to share our weaknesses. If I've shared any of my weaknesses this week in an inappropriate way, I would ask your forgiveness. We're all different.

We're all pilgrims. We're all learning. But I want to make it clear.

I'm a struggler. I've got weaknesses. I fail.

Sometimes I sin. And I'm here because His grace is sufficient. His strength is made perfect in weakness.

His grace is sufficient. His strength is made perfect in weakness. Blessed be the Lord God.

Let us pray. Can we have a few moments of silent prayer? You've been so patient listening to me. Just talk to Jesus.

Just share with Jesus your burdens. Acknowledge your weaknesses and claim His grace, His forgiveness, His mercy. Ask Him for a greater level of discernment to face the complex Christian world in which we live.

To know how, as all members, not just your own local little fellowship, which if you're not careful can become just like a cult, but pressing on in fellowship with all of God's people, whatever their nationality, whatever their race. Let's have some moments of silent prayer and heart searching before I close. Lord, I pray for each one here this morning, that You would minister to them, that Lord they would grow in grace and a knowledge of You as a result of these many hours we've spent in Your Word, looking at perhaps a couple hundred verses over this past week.

Lord, some of my own words, let them just fade away, but may Your Word last forever, like a burning fire in our hearts, and we'll be sure to give You all the praise and all the glory. Guide us, Lord, as to who we can bless through giving them a book, through sharing a cassette or a personal testimony, that again the impact of this week together will have a ripple effect out way beyond New Hampshire, way beyond Romney. For we ask in Jesus' name, remembering that it was He, Lord, who told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person, and we give You the praise for the privilege of being part of that.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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