

The Bible-Driven Church

by Jeff Noblit

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a Bible-driven approach to church that prioritizes God's glory and obedience to His Word over cultural trends and human ingenuity.

Duration: 1:14:15

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:13, John 14:15, Acts 5:29, Colossians 1:28-29

Topics: "Church Revitalization", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power and presence of God's Spirit in transforming lives and bringing about repentance. He highlights the role of the church as the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. The speaker criticizes the idea of the church providing entertainment for people, stating that the church's mission is to proclaim biblical doctrine that sets hearts on fire for God. He also emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's commandments and the global calling of the church to be witnesses for Christ in all parts of the world.

Transcript

Take your Bibles and let's turn to Matthew chapter 16, how I am grateful to God for Brother Vic and VCY America. We have not known each other long, but in the providence of God, discovered each other and have found that the Lord seems to be doing an amazing thing across this country. He's bringing individuals, churches and ministries together based on truth, not based on the latest style or the latest ingenuity and clever idea, some smart thinker, but old 2000 year old truth.

And how I'm thankful Brother Vic for the years you guys have stood in the gap and unashamedly and courageously stood for truth. And being at a church 26 years like I've been at my church, I can only imagine what 50 feels like in a ministry that we thank God for you. Look at Matthew 16 with me.

We'll begin in verse 13. I've entitled this the Bible driven church. I think we have this thing wrong as far as the you might vaguely call it the emerging church or the purpose driven church or the seeker friendly church.

You see, what we have is a purpose driven God who has a purpose to glorify himself by redeeming for himself a people he calls his bride that he might have that redeemed bride with he and his son for all eternity that they might give him the glory he deserves and desires from them. We have a purpose driven God, but as his people and as churches, I believe it's a little wrong headed to say we need to be purpose

driven. We just need to find out the purpose we've been given and submit to that and watch God do his work, building his church.

I care not to be about anything successful that's not true. I care not to be about anything that is making a lot of noise that is not solid and truly of God. You and I live in a day that cries for discernment, cries for discernment.

We ought to have as our passion to be used of God, to build churches that are thoroughly glory of God focused, that are Christ honoring and that are Bible saturated. Now I'm not talking about clever use of the scriptures for our own agenda. I'm talking about having a sound exegetical theology and that the theology we get from the scriptures rules and mandates our methodologies in the church.

I call it the Bible driven church. We begin in verse 13 of Matthew chapter 16. Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking his disciples, well, who do people say that the son of man is? And I said, well, some say John the Baptist and others, Elijah, but still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

And he said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus said to him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. Can I just stop there? No one comes to Christ by the ability or the strength or the cleverness or the ingenuity or the creativity of a person, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.

But my father who is in heaven, verse 18, I also say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Now jump down to verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, God forbid it, Lord, this shall never happen to you. Then he, um, but he turned aside and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan, you are a stumbling block to me for you are not setting your mind on God's interest, but man's. Now Jesus turns to these disciples and he says, who are people saying that I am? And they say, Jesus, it's good news.

Some say you're like Jeremiah and others say, well, you're like the mighty Elijah or one of the other great prophets of the old Testament. Now, if someone comes to you and says that you remind them of Jeremiah or Elijah in Southern vernacular, you ought to hug their neck. That's a compliment, but that is not sufficient for the son of God.

And then he looks to the disciples and he says to them, now, who do you say that I am? And Peter knocks a grand slam home run. Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. I don't have time to exegetically lay it all out, but Jesus in effect says on the proclamation of that truth, I'll build my church on the preaching of that truth.

I'll build my church. So Peter's batting a thousand doing great, but then he blows it. He totally blows it.

And I see right here, the great struggle in our churches today between being glory of God, focus, Christ honoring and Bible saturated are being man centered, pragmatic and numbers, idolatrous and success oriented. Notice what it says in verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised on the third day.

So Jesus says, all right, you guys are with me. Peter's been the spokesman. You're going to go with me.

You want to build this assembly of true believers. And then Jesus in verse 21 says, and by the way, here's how we're going to do it. I'm going to Jerusalem.

I'm going to be delivered up. I'm going to suffer and I'm going to die. And then I'm going to rise again.

That doesn't look like a very culturally relevant way to build your following. That does not look like a very sophisticated, clever approach to keeping your crowd. And so Peter still somewhat shallow, just like Jeff Knoblet is sometimes very shallow and perhaps yourself thinking as a human discerning with human discernment.

Begins to pull Jesus aside. The text says it very claim plainly. And he says, God forbid it, Lord, this shall never happen to you.

Well, perhaps we ought to be benevolent about Peter. After all, we all find ourselves there sometimes. But in this case, this was so fundamental and essential.

The Lord looks at Peter and says, get behind me, Satan. Right now, Peter, you're thinking under the influence of demonic forces and man's ideas and not the will of God, the father. You want to be about my work and about building my church, but you want to do it your way in your understanding with your ability and by your power.

And that's the satanic lie that entered Peter on this day. And that is entering our churches at this very hour. All they say, things are so changed.

The culture is different and people are different and society is different. And we've got to do various and sundry, different things. That's exactly where Peter was.

The outward veneers a little bit different, but the core principle is the exact same thing. Peter wants to build the church enthusiastically. He wants to build the church, but he wanted to do it his way instead of humbly submitting to God's way.

Can I say something to you? If you can explain the growth of your church, it's not of God. There must be the mark of God's life and God's power and God's blessing, converting souls and drawing men and women to truth that the world would stop at and say is irrelevant and say is outdated. One of the great problems in our churches is not the purpose driven movement and not the seeker friendly thing.

The problem is the old hollow, empty, lifeless, powerless orthodoxy. Now don't misunderstand me. I am very committed to orthodox doctrine, but it must be infused with the life of God.

And some of you, the best thing you can do for your church is go get on your face and seek God with brokenness and tears until the life of God infuses power in the great doctrines of the faith. We don't need to change doctrines. We just need power and life and God in the midst of our churches.

Too often we find ourselves exactly where Peter is, though, instead of thoroughly following God's plan for God's church, we come up with our own ideas. And you know what the result is? God removes his hand of power and blessing, so we have to resort to all types of Madison Avenue, Steven Spielberg type of gimmicks and idolatries to where our churches become six flags over Jesus because God's not doing anything. So we have to manufacture something to make it look like something's going on.

And it's a blasphemous sin in the eyes of God that these things are going on. The editor of a large American newspaper said this not too long ago, just when we need the church the most, it has become just like us. We simply do not need psychology to help us build Christ's church.

We do not need psychology or psychiatry to build his church. We do not need sociology to build his church. You don't even need to study community demographics to build his church.

What we need to do is submit ourselves to become diligent, humble, spirit led students of the word of God and work out from the word of God, a sound biblical guideline for what his church is, how it's supposed to function and how his power works in it and commit ourselves to that and pray and see and preach and teach and die. If God didn't move right there, because brothers and sisters, if God does not build his church with the truth, he's certainly not going to build it on a lie. Now I want to give you for the body of our message, the purpose statement of my church.

And let me say this to you. It's not the model. It's not the only purpose statement you can have.

But as I began to study years ago about some of these purpose statements that were coming out, some out of Chicago, some out of California and some out of other places, I began thinking, you know, I think it might be good to have a purpose statement because so many, even of our old mainline denominational churches have lost their moorings somewhere in a dusty filing cabinet. They got a good statement of faith, but they forgotten what it is. And it might be good to have a purpose statement, but why don't we just have a thoroughly biblical purpose statement? And so that's what I set out to devise.

And I would be underestimating to say that this one simple sentence that is the overarching driving guideline for the church that I pastor has at least 100 hours of prayer and study in it. It may not be the one for you, although there are hundreds of churches who've adopted it and you're welcome to use any of it you want. If you take it and improve upon it, all I ask you to do is this, call me and tell me the improvement.

It might help me and I need to change it because there's only one thing settled forever. Everything else we keep reforming and keep adapting and keep changing the lineup with God's truth. Here's the purpose statement.

The purpose of first Baptist church of muscle shows is to glorify God that has to be first by obediently making and equipping disciples of Christ both locally and globally by the power of the Holy Spirit. You could say a lot of other things and there are many other good things to say, but to keep at a simple statement that's worked well for us. I believe to glorify God by obediently making and equipping disciples of Christ both locally and globally.

Perhaps the last statement is the most important by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's talk about glorifying God. We'll take you to section at a time and look at it here to glorify God.

You know, I'm very concerned that a whole lot of what's going on in modern church growth, more glorifies the cleverness of some man than truly glorifies God. Ephesians 3:21 says to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

We must gain a passion for God's glory in his church. We must get desperate for that. We must have prayer meetings over that.

God, would you so use this church? Would you so reform this church that we would be a testimony of your glory that you would still move in this church that we would see the kind of brokenness and contrition and repentance and transformed life that we would no longer just have the form of godliness, but we would also have the power thereof, the glory of God in the church. The Bible says the church is Christ prized purchase. Acts 20:28 says he purchased the church with his own blood.

You know, I like to think of a lady when a lady goes out and she purchases that special dress. I've come to learn that these fashion designers can tell ladies now whether you're a winter, spring, summer or fall, and they'll tell you that you ought to wear certain colors and certain things because it helps to project forth your beauty and your confidence in your eyes and your hair and different things. And by the way, aren't you men glad God made ladies to be pretty the way they're pretty? But you know why a lady buys that special dress that fits her? Because in the right way that glorifies her.

It says something about her. It speaks of her style and her personality. Well, so our Lord purchased his church, so it would say something about him, who he is, what he's like.

I don't know of many of our churches that are giving a good accurate portrayal of who he is to the community around them. The church is his prized purchase, and a lady purchases that special dress because in a proper sense, it glorifies her. The church is his building.

We see it in our text, upon this rock, I will build my church. When a contractor builds his best building, the greatest work of his lifetime, it glorifies him. It makes a statement of his ability, of his skill, of his wisdom, of his craftsmanship.

And so Christ says, you're my building. I want you to make a statement about me so that you reflect myself and glorify me. The Bible says the church is Christ's body.

Colossians 1:18, he's the head of the body of the church. You know, I like athletics and I like watching the Olympics. And you, have you ever noticed after one of those sprints, a hundred meter sprint, usually there's a reporter that goes over there while the guy's totally out of breath.

And you know what he does? He takes the microphone and he puts it down to the legs. He says, legs, you're in a good race. Legs, you're in so fast.

Legs, you're in so good. Legs, how'd you do it? You know, that reporter never does such a ridiculous thing. You don't expect him to.

What does he do? He puts the microphone at the head. The legs did the work. The head gets the glory.

That's the way his church is to be. We're the body of Christ. We work and we labor and we strive and we commit ourselves to faithfulness that the head may get the glory.

The Bible says that the church is Christ's bride. His bride, Ephesians 5, 23, Revelation 21, 9. Now, when a bride is chosen and won by a groom, in my church, you don't court a girl, much less ask her to marry you unless you get clearance through the father. I'm the father of three daughters and I like it that way.

And when you've been in one place 26 years, pretty soon people get to believe in what you teach and they begin to follow it. So that's courtship and engagement goes through the father and therefore the girls never have to turn down dates. Their fathers do it for them.

And I will tell you something, men, are you listening to me? Your daughters need your protection from these men in the world today. I don't have to worry about it. I put two or three on the road in the last couple of months.

But if a man wins the hand of a young lady, he wins the father. He wins the girl. And by the way, if the right guy comes along, I'll work with him to win my daughter's heart.

Amen. But if when a man wins a bride, she becomes one with him, she takes his name so that his name might be known in the gates, the Bible teaches she is to be an extension, an expression, a glorification of her bride, her groom. And that's why the Bible says we're the bride of the church.

We are a completion. Is it not an amazing thing that the all sufficient purpose, omnipotent, holy, absolutely true and righteous God has chosen to complete himself by redeeming such wretches like us and making us his bride. And then we are to reflect him and bring him glory.

You know, as I think about this, there are two things I do not want anyone messing with. I don't like people to mess with my body. I went to the doctor some time ago and he was a surgeon and I had a couple of things that had to be, I don't want to get too much detail, but removed off of my body, sort of an outpatient thing.

And I'm telling you, it just got to me. I don't like people sticking stuff in me and cutting on me. You know, the Lord don't want folks messing with his body either.

This is a true story, somewhat humorous, but a true story. I don't preach to be humorous, but sometimes stories are funny. I was in a jewelry store some years ago in my town and we kind of know everybody.

You know, when you're from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, it's not a growing metropolis, by the way. And in this jewelry store, this particular man was known as something of a womanizer, the man that owned the jewelry store. And my wife was with me on this day.

Now, my wife is a beautiful woman, both inside and out. And she was standing over to my left about 10 feet away and no one would have known, I guess we were actually together. And this particular man known to have an eye for the ladies came over to my wife and said, can I help you, baby? That got my attention.

And I walked over to him. I said, sir, she ain't your baby. I'm not a fighter.

But on that day, had he not understood what I meant, I would have gladly dragged him over the counter and helped him understand what I meant when I said, she ain't your baby. I don't need anybody messing with my bride. Now, let me say something to you tonight.

Get your hands off the bride of Christ. You have no business preacher. You have no business, Mr. Elder.

You have no business beacon or make track in the church of commandeering and messing with Christ's bride. It's his bride to be overseen, shepherded, loved, protected and built by his word for his glory. Can I get amen? Amen.

It's not the deacon's church. It is not the pastor's church. It is not the denominations church.

It's not even the majority vote church. It is Christ church. And he has left us a fairly sufficient manual on how his church ought to run and function.

Last thing we need is another slick guy with a laptop computer to come in and tell us how we can get our church to take off. We'd be better off with a 14 year old boy that loves God and will preach the word of God the best he knows how and pray that God will work and bring his blessing and his power on the ministry. Well, to glorify God, there's much more I could say, but I've got to move on to glorify God.

How are we going to glorify God? Well, the second phrase is so key and it's the second phrase because it is so key as the second phrase by obedience. Now see this sitting romantic and this sitting glamorous and this won't pack out congregations or crowds to tell people that you're going to give them a 2000 year old simple understanding of the church. The only way people will be interested in my message is if the spirit of God has made them sick of what's going on in our world and they have a new desire to see God's word applied in God's church for God's glory.

Obedience in the church. You see, we bring Christ the glory he deserves through a total commitment to obedience to his will for his church. It's not our church.

Pastors need to tremble before God. I mean that literally there are times when I'm mindful of the souls of men in my care and it's a terror before holy God. It's not mine.

I'm just a steward and I must run it according to the master's dictates. God does not want us to be any smarter in our church work. He just needs us to be more obedient to the work of the church and the Bible is a thoroughly sufficient manual for his church.

Now down south in the Southern Baptist Convention we like to boast about having 16.4 million members 10 million of them don't go to church by the way. But down south we are thankful that God did allow us to win a battle over the inerrancy of scripture within our denomination and we saw some good significant changes at our Baptist seminaries back to the inerrancy of scripture. But a battle we never even thought nor realized we've totally lost is the battle over the sufficiency of scripture.

It's worthless to claim that this book is inerrant if you don't passionately believe and from the core of your heart if you're not convicted this book is sufficient for God's church. I mean I think Satan glories in the fact that you applaud yourself we hold to the absolute truthfulness and inerrancy of scripture but our churches function like humanist centers of pragmatism and man-centeredness sufficiency and that ties in so powerfully importantly to obedience. We do not need to learn any more about the baby boomers.

We do not need to learn anything more about the busters. We don't need to learn anything more about Generation X. I'm telling you what they are they're lost condemned sinners doomed under the wrath of a holy God and they just need to flee the wrath of God and find Christ. That's what they need.

We don't need to study these people the scripture tells us what they are. Look at Romans chapter 5 sometimes. Romans 5 says you're ungodly which means you're the absolute antithesis of God.

He's godly you're the ungodly. It means in every respect you're abhorrent and nauseating to a holy God. It says you're sinners in Romans 5. Sinner means that you fall short of every purpose for which God created you.

I don't know about you if I have something in my house that completely fails that everything I bought it for I throw it out. That's what sinner means. You're ungodly.

You're a sinner. I wish I could elaborate on this as a whole message on it. Not only that you're the enemy of God.

Romans chapter 5 says and not only are you God's enemy. Listen friend God is your enemy. Don't fear hell and don't fear the devil.

The devil's not your problem. God is because he's holy. He's godly and you're the ungodly and you're a sinner and you're his enemy and lastly Romans 5 says you're hopeless.

We don't need to study about the unique characteristics of this so-called special generation that's come along. We need to be compassionate enough to preach the whole gospel truth so that the spirit of God might break them under the weight of the wrath of God that justly stands over them and they might flee the wrath of God by coming to Jesus Christ in repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Well why would you preach like that to this modern generation? Obedience.

Obedience to what the scripture says. Churches where I come from have become as I said earlier six flags over Jesus are evangelical country clubs. Families in the south probably true in Wisconsin from what I hear seem to choose a church today.

It's just another form of family recreation. How good is your children's program? How good is your youth program? Father that's not the question. The question is can you teach me to be a man of God because the children's program will not answer to God for my children and the student ministry will not answer to God for my teenagers.

I must be disciplined to be a man of God because God commanded me to train my own children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You'd be better off going to church that doesn't have a children's program or a youth program but one that would teach you to be a man of God. Why would you hold such convictions pastor Knoblet? Why would you hold such convictions? Obedience.

That's what the word teaches. Charles Haddon Spurgeon's one of my heroes. Now Spurgeon said this in the 1830s.

Listen to what he said. Spurgeon said the devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that a part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people with the view of winning them. Providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the scriptures as a function of the church.

What we need is biblical doctrine so understood and so felt that it sets men aflame. In John 14 15 Jesus said if you love me keep my commandments. Obedience.

The early church leaders said to their persecutors. Acts 5 29 we must obey God rather than men. I'll just throw this in.

I have people that look at the way God has blessed the ministry and Muscle Shoals and they want to know what we're doing and how we did it and we want to be a help and a servant to anybody that we might could help. But you have to understand I've been there 26 years and I've made a lot of mistakes. I've made some real blunders and I've had to get up and repent and start over again and get up and repent

and start over again and get up and repent and start over again.

But I can tell you this. The stronger I became committed to true biblical doctrine both for our foundation and our methodologies in the church. The more persecution and suffering came into my life in ministry.

If you are not willing for some seasons of suffering forget what I'm preaching to you tonight. It requires some of that. But you know what we found? We found by being obedient and obeying God rather than men though there are seasons of suffering where you want to quit.

Where you don't think you're going to make it. Where it's not going to work. Where you struggle with unbelief.

But if you get far enough up that mountain there's a ram at the top. When Abraham took off with Isaac all he was doing was being obedient. Go sacrifice your son on the mountain.

And he had to walk through all the torment of going all the way up the mountain until he found the ram on the top. You know what a lot of you are doing. You're getting halfway up.

You're getting three-fourths of the way up and you're never seeing the ram. God send a blessing and empowerment on your ministries. So I want to be an agent of God to tell you keep on going.

Keep going. Don't stop. Don't turn back.

Don't quit. Believe that God will bless. Because in those seasons of suffering and in those seasons of persecution.

I mean I'm in a small town. Do you know how many enemies I have? I've had 700 something people leave my church. Not because I was going seeker friendly or purpose driven but because I was going 2,000 years back to the scriptures.

And every time I go to Walmart I see my enemies. It's no fun. You see them whispering about you in the corner.

There's the cult leader. Most vicious slanderous rumors. A report's been out lately that I beat my wife up.

She's been in the intensive care unit. Just horrendous things. My wife said now if the report was out that I beat you up there might be some truth to that.

But just the things you go through. But listen to me. I know what depression is.

And I know what weakness is. But that's where I learned to love God. And brothers and sisters if you want to be a part of building a true church God will bring you through those seasons so that you learn to love Him.

Now listen to me. And He will begin to wean you off of the sentimentalism of past traditions in the church. And you'll begin to love the old traditions in the church because a lot of the old traditions were about God and they were biblically sound.

Some of you cannot have the idolatry of the past instead of a love for God. You've got to learn the difference between the two. Some of you are against the purpose-driven church movement because you have a fond idolatry of sentimental memories of the past not because you love God more than anything

else.

Am I preaching to you tonight? That's Jeff Knoblet's pilgrimage and it's probably yours. And the reason why some of these gross errors are taking over our churches is because we've lost God in our orthodoxy. God never wanted you to embrace and love the form of truth.

He wants you to embrace the truth and love and passionately joy in and have pleasure in the God of that truth. Both ends. John Owen the old Puritan used to say you must learn to pour your emotions into the mold of sound doctrine.

But don't just hold to the past and don't just hold to traditions and don't just hold to the old doctrines because granddaddy did. Do you love the God of those doctrines? The reason these errors have taken over our churches is because our churches were powerless and weak. I'm telling you 5,000 seeker-friendly purpose-driven pastors could not budge my church one inch if I never went back again because those people forgive the similarity are anchored in truth and they love the God of that truth.

They're not movable because there's a maturity, a maturity not that we've arrived. Don't misunderstand me. I want to say that to encourage you.

The maturity in the body that's discerning and alert and aware and they can see the difference between clever gimmickry, clever man-centered ingenuity that uses the scripture versus God-centered love that's based on the scripture. We're talking about obedience. In 1619, Roman 1619, Paul wrote to the church at Rome and said, the report of your obedience has reached to all.

Well that should be our desire for our church. When you think of first Baptist church muscle shows, if you ever think about it again, and by the way, it doesn't matter if you do it all, but if you did, I hope you would say that's an obedient church. We've seen the blessings of numerical growth.

We've had significant growth in the last several years, but that's not what Paul said the church at Rome was known for. Matter of fact, I don't see any report of growth being commended by Paul to any of the churches, but he did commend their obedience. You know, I realized not long ago that the goal should be obedience in ministry, not success.

All you can have some guy that could be a good politician, come through and lead your church and give you success. But it takes a brokenness and a humility and a yieldedness to be obedient to God in the church. And I realized in our ministry, we are sometimes looked to as being successful, that I would not have known the success I know in the church had I focused on success and not focused on obedience.

But we know the success we know because we did focus on obedience and not success. The purpose of the church is to glorify God. That has to be your riding passion.

Get over what you're against until you know thoroughly what you're for and be about God in His glory. How are we going to do that? Obedience, go to the word of God, read our founding fathers of the faith, read the old Puritans, read the old Presbyterians, read the old Methodist and find out what these men believed and what they stood on. Might even read the Calvinist Methodist and throw that in.

Read these things, read these doctrines, read these old theologies and commit yourself to find God in that truth and develop a heart of joy and love and pleasure in that God that you want Him to be glorified by obedience. Let's go a step further. If I'm obedient, generally speaking, what will I be doing in the church?

Well, in the broadest sense, you'll be making and equipping disciples of Christ.

Making and equipping disciples of Christ. In Matthew 28, 18 through 20, Jesus said, Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Now notice what he did not say. He said, go and make disciples. He did not say, go and get decisions.

He said, go and make disciples, not go and get responses. He said, go and make disciples. He didn't say, go and get baptisms.

There are a lot of isms out there. And by the little suffix ism, I mean man made methods that look like the real thing, but they're not isms. Today, we have easy believe ism instead of true conversion.

We have decision ism instead of true conversion. We have response ism instead of true conversion. You talk to some evangelist or some youth pastor, some pastor.

Well, how'd the meeting go? Well, we had so many responses. So how many biblically defined disciples were created by the power of the Spirit under the preaching of the gospel? And you'll find you might have to do like the old church fathers did, and that's come back in three to six months and find out if God did anything or not. You can get a lot of instant results that are not God.

And I tell you how you know they're not God, because they don't look like they came to know Him at all. Their lives aren't changed. Repentance is not evident.

A love for God is truth. His church's people's not there. If they send in their report to denominational headquarters about how many were saved and biblically speaking, they have no idea if they're genuinely saved.

Believe ism, response ism, decision ism. And then we come up with the revival ism. It's a good revival if we can get somebody sharp to come into our churches and produce all these things.

And God hasn't done anything yet. And when you put all this together, you've got believe ism and decision ism and response ism and revival ism. And you end up with a Christianity ism.

It's not the real thing. And all of these Christianity ism people get into churches and all of a sudden you no longer have a true church anymore. You have a false harlot church that it has an appetite for every worldly thing that comes down the pike as long as you'll put a little veneer of Jesus on the outside of it.

Making and equipping disciples is what our job is. Now let me say this so clearly. Disciples are made and equipped cheaply through the faithful preaching of the Word of God.

Now I've met some of you and some of you have told me when we're looking for church and we're looking for a place to go, the one thing you must have is a faithful preacher of the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word about Christ. But how shall they hear without a preacher? Now God does use the personal witnessing of people.

Thank God. He's just a radio broadcast. I was saved listening to a radio broadcast and he uses preachers on the radio and other people too.

He will use other things, but everything that God does is inseparably connected to Bible preaching. Bible preaching. Giving the text its meaning and its application in its grammatical and historical context.

We've done a lot of work at our church. Matter of fact, we've worked very, very hard on small group ministry because God has ordained that the church is blessed in the making of equipping disciples in the partnering ministry of preaching of the Word and all the lay people doing the work of the ministry in small groups. In Exodus 18, Jethro told Moses to develop the people or break the people down into smaller groups for effective oversight in ministry.

We see in the early books of Acts that the church met in small household groups, but also in Solomon's portico. Jesus had a group of 12. Paul had Timothy and Apollos and Titus and others, and then he exhorted Timothy to find some faithful men, a small group and teach them.

So small group ministry is where every single person in the church can be active in ministry. God has blessed our efforts in this area to where today I don't think I'd be exaggerating to say 85 to 90 percent of our members are active ministering in a small group. And that's a church that runs close to a thousand, because, you know, if a person's truly made a disciple, they have a God enabled desire to love the brethren.

And they want to serve and they want to minister and they want to take care of one another. Making and equipping disciples of Christ, preaching the word and every member ministry through small groups, if God would allow. And some of you are interested, maybe we can come back sometimes and break down how all that works.

But that's not the key thing. The house is not the key thing. The key thing is the changed heart.

But sometimes the house who can be a blessing once the changed heart has occurred. Well, it's review. The purpose of the church is to glorify God.

That has to be first. It's all about the glory of God. If we glorify God, what should be next? Obedience.

Go to the scriptures and do what it says. Obediently. If we obey God in the scriptures, what will be the product? Making and equipping disciples of Christ.

Let's go to the fourth one. What's the scope of that ministry, both locally and at the same time globally? We are to have a world missions vision in God's church. You know, from the very beginning, the church had a global calling.

Acts chapter one, verse eight. The scholars tell us you can amplify this way. You should receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and at the same time in Judea and at the same time in Samaria and at the same time to the uttermost parts of the earth.

I remember pushing 20 years ago when I went from associate pastor to senior pastor at my church, I began telling those people we want to impact the world for Christ. And you could, you just imagine the way they looked at me. Muscle shows Alabama impact the world for Christ.

Well, I didn't try to figure out how it would happen. The Lord just said to go to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Matter of fact, in five books of the new Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, though it's worded differently, our Lord gave the same command going to all

the world, preach the gospel, going to all the world or make disciples of all nations.

You shall be my witnesses to all the nations. So you don't wait to figure out how it can happen. You get busy and obedient and trust God's power to make it happen.

You know, today we have HeartCry Missionary Society, which is a part of our church ministry. HeartCry Missionary Society has almost 100 missionaries all over the world, has a million dollar budget almost. And God is beginning to allow us to literally have an impact all over the world where there's no vision, the people perish global and local vision for our evangelism.

I like what Charles Spurgeon said. Now, I'm a Spurgeonist. You have to understand that.

Someone asked me one time, are you a five point Calvinist? I said, no, I'm a five point Spurgeonist. If you understand how Spurgeon viewed it, that's the way I view it. That is, we must urge, command, beg, plead with, instruct all men to repent and come to Christ, leave no one out.

I don't know who the elect are. Amen. Spurgeon said if God had put a yellow stripe down their back, we could lift up the shirt tails and see who the elect are.

But God didn't do that. So I don't know who he's going to save. I'm just urging all men to come to Christ, both in the Shoals area locally where I live and globally.

In Acts chapter 13, the church at Antioch was having a prayer meeting. Now, you've got to understand as far as I know, there's only one church in a quite large city of Antioch. And a lot of people in Antioch probably had not heard the gospel.

And a lot of people in Antioch were not saved for sure, but they begin praying and the Spirit of God said, set apart your two best, Paul and Barnabas, to go into the world. You know why? Because it's not about the acceptance of the gospel. Often it's about the availability of the gospel.

The gospel was available in Antioch, but it wasn't available in a lot of those other cities. So Paul and Barnabas take off and they did an incredibly good job. In Acts 24, the Jews, all upset over the success of Paul and Barnabas ministry, hired a hotshot lawyer called Tertullius.

And Tertullius began to accuse Paul before Governor Felix. And this is what Tertullius said to Felix. They have stirred up dissension throughout the world.

I want the testimony of your church to be that people all over the world say there's this church in Wisconsin and they're subsetting the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wouldn't that be glorious? Why not? Several years ago, we heard about the Hakaru people in Peru. It's a people of three villages, seven hour hike back into the Andes mountains.

So we got our, mostly our younger guys, college guys, some young married guys that were vigorous enough to make the journey. And we begin to send guys up there and just send them up there and send them up there. And I don't know where you are on this.

And I'm not telling you that all that I'm about to criticize is wrong. It's just that a lot of this is incomplete in our evangelism. I didn't send our guys up there and say, now preach 30 minutes and get all those villagers to pray a prayer because you know what they've done? Every person that village would have prayed that prayer and add Jesus to their polytheism.

He'd been one of the many gods they didn't want to offend. And I'm sick and tired of missionaries and others going overseas and doing the little hoop jump thing and coming home and bragging about how many got saved and they didn't get saved at all. I said, you keep preaching the gospel and keep preaching the gospel until they come to you and say, God has changed our hearts.

We've come to know and love and embrace this Jesus and see our sins as wretched and ungodly before Him. And we're embracing the Son of the Lord. Jesus Christ is our only hope and salvation.

Maybe that's why Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. It might take some work to see people truly converted. You might have to preach to them and preach to them and witness to them and preach to them and witness to them and preach to them and witness to them and listen to me.

If God, the Holy Spirit regenerates their hearts and changes them, you don't have to hold their hand and help them pray a prayer. God is not that weak. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

Not our power, His power. I don't know how many trips we made back there in those mountains. One day, one of our young guys was preaching and he got through and might be honest, they're quite discouraged.

They've been going and going and going. People show up and listen, go back to work. The senior adult lady came with tears in her eyes and began to express how she saw the weight of her sin and she'd come to embrace Jesus Christ as her only hope and savior.

A young man came up and others came up. And today there's a church tomorrow morning because there's only an hour difference between central time and their time. Tomorrow morning, seven miles back in the Andes Mountains, there's a little church in the village of Toupe among the Hikaru people who are worshipping, praising, loving, adoring and giving glory to Jesus that they did not know a few years ago.

Brothers, we don't need to help God's gospel. We need to preach it. Stop telling me all this silly nonsense about how you're going to make a powerful gospel power with your puny efforts.

Preach it, share it, admonish people, plead with people, pray for people, but let God do the changing because you can't change them anyway. Well, we should not back up and we should not let up until the enemies of our Lord cry in desperation the way the enemies of the early church did, as recorded in John 12, 19, when the Pharisees said the world has gone after him. Some of you don't have enough faith to believe your church can fall in love with God, much less go out to the world.

I'm charging you in the name of God to get on your face and seek God in prayer until your energies are revived and you believe God's power can come on your churches and revive them to the truth. And when God's true power is blessing God's true message, these modern church growth nonsensical things will be exposed as the frauds that they really are. But we're not going to defeat them with clever words and arguments.

We must humbly show them the power in transformed lives. We come to the last one and I'm done to glorify God. It's got to be first.

By obediently making and equipping disciples of Christ, both locally and globally. Pastor, how are we going to get that done? How's my church going to have any real global? How are we going to really see the power of God? Well, it's his power that has to come. You must be so scriptural, so obedient to God that your prayer is God, if you don't come and if you don't bless, we're sunk.

We're sunk. You know, there's a purpose for churches having dry seasons is to get you praying again and depending on God. Don't change the message.

All of this nonsense about making our precious Lord more attracted to the culture. He's beautiful just like he is. Don't if you tamper with Jesus, you lose him.

We don't need the culturally relevant Jesus. We need the true Jesus of Scripture. If you tamper with, toy with and adjust the gospel to make it plentiful to this modern culture, you lose the gospel.

These church growth experts and purpose driven guys have done something that even God can't do. They've removed the offense of the gospel. I don't want the culture to like it.

I want them to be saved by it. Somebody says, that gospel won't sell to this generation. No, but it will save this generation.

It will properly proclaim it and preach it and share it. And one reason why it's a day of discernment is if you'll study what's being said, there's some good things in a lot of what's being said, but it's so shallow. It's so dumbed down that it's no longer the truth anymore.

I mean, if you take my automobile and you remove the tires and you take out the transmission, you take out the steering wheel, you might still call it a car, but it's worthless. And we've stripped down the truth of our Lord and we stripped down the gospel to where it's no longer the gospel. It's a hollow semblance of what it once was.

We're talking about the power of the Spirit. Jesus said in Matthew 28, 20, lo, I am with you always. Well, that's the key right there.

If you're sick of the worldly pragmatism and man-centered and biblical shallowness that's taken over so-called churches, then your charge, my friend, is to stop the criticism and start the praying to where true churches with true doctrine will be empowered by God so that the community will look and say, that is the real thing. That is the real thing. You know who called me just the other day? I'm in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

You know who called me? An editor with the Wall Street Journal. They're doing an article on biblical health and church discipline and came across my name. What does it mean when the lost culture understands the truth better than the church growth movement? Is that not amazing? I mean, they're saying we know something's amiss here.

We know something. We're not Christians and we're not in the church, but you ought to be like this. Now, don't misunderstand.

They'll, they'll fuss at us and persecute us for being with the truth, but at least they expect us to be with the truth. Colossians 1, 28 and 29. And we proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Well, Paul, how are you going to do that? And for this purpose, also I labor striving according to his power, which mightily works within me. When I'm out in my pulpit on Sunday, I'm trusting the spirit of God to transform lives under the preaching of the true gospel. And if that doesn't work, I have no plan B. You know what God's been blessing us with? We're seeing, seeing a steady parade of folks coming through

the baptismal waters.

We require them to give a testimony of repentance and faith before they're baptized. I wish you could, matter of fact, you can, I think you can download it off of our website. Here are the testimonies of these young people and these senior adults and these moms and dads talking about the weight of their sin, how they saw their wickedness.

One lady's testimony was she paced the floor all night, fearing the wrath of God. When's the last time you heard that? The spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness and the judgment to come. She said, I paced the floor all night fearing the wrath of God.

And then I found Christ. You know what I think we're doing with good intentions? We're baptizing people just when they're being awakened by the spirit, but not yet converted. We're baptizing people maybe when they're starting to be convicted, but not yet converted.

Another man talked about one of the most prominent businessmen in our whole area, said he drove home from work so under conviction of God and fearing hell that he knew God just ought to throw him into hell. And he turned to Christ and was gloriously saved. Strong, clear testimonies of conviction of sin and joy and rest and peace and pleasure in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Heartily embracing him as their prophet, the only truth, as their priest, their only savior, and as their king, their only ruler. If I baptize a teenager, I'll often stand them in the baptismal waters and I'll say, sweetheart, now, you know, following Jesus Christ probably means you'll sit at home on the weekends because you can't do what other kids are doing. Is that what you mean today? Yes, sir.

Christ has changed my appetites and my desires. You may be persecuted and laughed at because you won't be able to do what other people do at the school. Is that what you mean? Are you willing to carry your cross? And sweetheart, not that we're coercively wanting you to say this.

Have you been changed by the power of God so that you're finding pleasure in Christ and not in those old things of the world? Yes, sir. That's what I'm saying. You can get the videos.

I'm not trying to boast on us. Please understand my heart. I'm just trying to tell you, God's spirit is still there.

He's still changing lives. He's still transforming souls. He will still do the work of repentance.

He'll still convict men of sin. He'll still make them aware of the terror of God. He'll still make them know the justice of holy wrath that ought to be on them.

And then he'll show them that although they are mighty sinners, we have a mightier savior. And we're seeing about it. Grace is that much more bound.

And they'll embrace Christ to be the treasure and the pleasure of their lives. Is the power of the spirit evident in your ministry? True story, Spurgeon was leaving his church one day. No, no, no.

Wasn't leaving his church, but another minister had asked him something. This other minister was concerned that he was not seeing God transform lives and save lost souls in his church. You understand this was not the day where you just raised a hand privately and said you got saved.

I mean, they expected you to give evidence in our church. We may spend six months or two years counseling a person before they're baptized. Not because I decided they're saved.

We just lay out from scripture what conversion really is a new creation. The old things have passed away. The whole new things have come a willingness to carry your cross in the culture.

That's true conversion. And when they can respond and say, pastor, that's the change in me. Then we say, how are you? You're ready for baptism.

And that's the way it was in Spurgeon's day. I mean, you had to show a difference. John Wesley made you spend three months with a tutor who watched you to see if it was true conversion, not because they're judgmental or set themselves up as Lord.

Listen, these are the souls of men. These are the souls of our children. We need to take time and be careful and know a true work of conversion has happened because the Bible warns over and over and over against false professions.

It's amazing the shallow sloppiness of our counseling for converts today. Well, this man was asking Spurgeon. I'm not seeing anyone converted.

Spurgeon said, well, you don't expect God to convert someone every time you preach. The man said, well, no. And Spurgeon said, that's why you don't see any.

Now, let me say something to you, friend. You go to your church. If you can't find a gospel preaching church, you pray until God gives you one.

And you go to that church and you get on your face before you go in there and you soak the preaching of the word of God in your prayers and in your tears. And you say, God, I expect you, I expect you for the glory of your name and the faith of your son to show off that you can do what no man can do to change your life today. Evidence by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not none of this nonsensical emotionalism. Don't misunderstand me. Emotions are good, but emotionalism is when you're stirred over being stirred, not stirred over truth.

I like emotions, but it needs to be about truth, not silly, nonsensical manipulations that we're seeing in the church today. And you pray believing God's gospel will change lives in this church by the power of the Spirit. We've grown to where, as I shared with you, we've raised the standard for baptism.

We baptize somebody as soon as they're converted. But the question is, biblically speaking, how do you know they're converted? Work out from Scripture what biblical conversion is, and then you baptize people when they qualify according to biblical definitions of conversion. You know, when we first began doing this, the baptism was kind of dry for a while and Satan whispered in my ear and said, won't work.

People are leaving, not coming. Your numbers are going down and God just wouldn't let me go. I said, well, they'll just have to go down.

I'm not going back to the gimmicks and the games and the manipulations and the hoop jumps. We're not doing it. If God doesn't convert them and transform them, we're not going back.

We've raised the standards for church membership. It's not easy to join our church. You have to go through a class.

You have to meet with the elders. You have to sign a covenant. You have to sign that you agree with church discipline.

You have to make five affirmations of a faithful intent of service and faithfulness to the body. You wouldn't marry a man you didn't expect to be faithful in your marriage with you, ladies. Let me say something.

The body of Christ is more important than your marriage. And your marriage is very important. Didn't look like it was working good for a while, folks.

I mean, I'm in the Bible Belt. There are two churches on every corner and none of them do these things. You can walk down the aisle of a Baptist church in the southeast and be a stark, raving atheist and they take you.

I'm serious. I mean, I don't know anything about you. If you just walk to the front, they'll take you.

At one point, we had disciplined a lot of people in our church for not attending church. And by the way, we're very compassionate. We're long-suffering.

We reach out. We write letters. We knock on their door.

We're very loving. We appeal to everybody we know how, but so many just didn't want to come. And so we removed them in church discipline.

Two blocks from my church, another Baptist church put up this marquee. I'm not, I wouldn't lie to you. I don't lie.

Exactly what it said. Has your church rejected you? We'll take you in. I thought, well, hallelujah, a new church growth method.

Get those that are disciplined from another church and hadn't repented yet. I'm serious. That was their marquee.

Numbers is everything. So we maintain standards of accountability and church discipline in our church. We unapologetically teach that the church is not about you and it's not about your felt needs.

It is about God and about God's glory. And you know, we found if you can get people off of themselves and on to God and find pleasure and got in God and in bringing him glory, all of a sudden their needs get met. But always in that order, we strive to do all we can for all missions.

We expect every member to be actively serving in a small group. These things are not popular. I mean, you're supposed to design the church to be amusing and entertaining.

And the churches that are doing amusing and entertaining things are growing in numbers. But listen to me, it's a malignant growth. It's not true growth.

OK, how big it gets or how popular it gets. So how are you going to survive after? How am I going to survive if I have these standards and I have these convictions? You won't. Unless God blesses shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence is where you'll be.

God, if you don't bless, we're sunk. That's a great place to be. I mean, God forbid the church kneel in prayer and get desperate for his power to show back up.

I mean, why do that when you buy somebody's book and find slick, clever things to do? We don't need slick, clever things. We need the power of God on the truth. The hearts of men and women and young people and boys and girls will have to be changed to desire that kind of church if you're going to make it.

You could not be more radically different than the other churches in your area than we are. Our worst persecution comes from other churches. You know, in our last membership process, we had two families from Florida who moved to Muscle Shoals to join our church.

We had two families from Nebraska who moved to Muscle Shoals to join our church. I don't encourage that. I don't ask people to do that, but they said we want to be a part of a biblically healthy church.

Left careers. One man, 30 year career, said, I just want to be in the church that's striving to be true to God in his word. What's my point, brothers and sisters, if you will stand on church, listen to me with a humble spirit.

And depend on God, he will draw people to the truth. He'll do it. We must be loving.

We must be compassionate. We must be faithful. We must continue to reach out to everyone we can.

Just recently, our church had a evangelistic outreach and we had 300 people out on Wednesday night visitation three weeks in a row over 300 close to 350 knocking on doors. So you got to stay out there after folks urging them to come hear the gospel, sharing the gospel with them. You don't sit around on truth and say, well, God's got to bless it.

No, you put shoe leather to your prayers and trust that God will bring into his church those he wants in his church. You know, if you'll give yourself faithfully and generously to a true church, I believe you'll face him one day and hear him say, well done, good and faithful servant. Now, our churches desperately need revival and reform.

And in that order, God forbid, we have hollow reform without true spiritual life and revival, revival and reform. To have that revival and reform brothers, it's going to be persecution and there's going to be suffering. But the glory of God is worth it in the church.

Jesus said to lay down our lives for the brethren. That meant the congregation of believers. God's glory is everything.

He's determined that his greatest glory is through his church. His church needs revival and reform to bring him the glory he deserves. But the church to be reformed and revived to get that glory will cost suffering on the part of God's church members and especially God's pastors.

But the glory of God is worth it. And let me tell you this, I have not arrived, please know my heart, but I think I know what's on the other side of the hill and the blessings I'm enjoying in the ministry today, the love in our congregation, the humility of our people, the joy in Christ, the grasp of doctrine. It's just the most wonderful thing I've ever experienced in my life.

I want to tell you, it's been worth the journey to get here. All glory, all praise and all honor go to the Lamb. Could we bow in prayer and I'm going to turn it over to Brother Vic.

If the Holy Spirit of God has convicted you about wrong caricatures, idolatry, laziness, critical spirit, maybe you've been where Jeff Novick's been in some unbelief. You don't think it can happen. God can't bless the truth anymore.

Would you repent before God has begged God to forgive you? And I promise you in grace, he already has. And rededicate yourself to be about the glory of God in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, Father, may it be that you will do things in Wisconsin that the whole world would rise up and say that is the work of God in his church.

In Jesus name, amen.

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