

Disciples as Ministers in the Local Church

by Lewis Abbott

The sermon emphasizes the importance of creating a spiritual climate in the church that fosters growth and discipleship, and the role of the pastor in setting this climate.

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Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:4

Topics: "Local Church", "Discipleship", "Spiritual Climate"

Description

Lewis Abbott emphasizes the role of disciples as ministers within the local church, highlighting the importance of creating a spiritual climate that fosters genuine relationships and open communication among church members. He shares personal experiences from prayer breakfasts and church meetings, illustrating how a supportive environment can lead to spiritual growth and commitment among congregants. Abbott encourages pastors to take responsibility for the church's spiritual climate and to empower laypeople to engage in ministry, emphasizing that true change comes from within the congregation rather than through traditional programs. He also discusses the necessity of commitment and vision in ministry, urging church leaders to be transparent and approachable to foster a sense of community and shared purpose.

Transcript

About five weeks ago, I was at an early morning prayer breakfast with a group of our men and on Tuesday mornings, we meet at 6 30 a.m. And by the way, I need to pause for a parenthesis, you know, some, as Peter in here, is he had to, had to leave. He talked about getting up at four in the morning. Not everyone's metabolism will do that.

I tried that. I got up at four to four thirty in the morning one time for two years running, and I just always went back to sleep. Uh, my body doesn't work that way, and there's still need for the time to be with God, and I have to plan it later in the morning to find time to do that.

But, uh, four o'clock in the morning or five in the morning, there's something that goes wrong with me that just turns me back off. I can get up, take a cold shower, go down and sit down and look at that book, and I go, do you ever have that problem? And I felt guilty about that for a long time, but I did learn and talked to a doctor that not everyone will be able to do it at that time. And there are other times that you need to do it if you cannot do it at that time, and I would encourage you to find the time to be with God and make an appointment and be there.

Now, it is difficult to keep that appointment, as we've all talked about. I find it difficult to keep the appointment and find people and other things infringing upon this at all times. At any rate, we were at a prayer breakfast, and we meet every Tuesday morning.

They met there this morning, but I remember as we went into our time of prayer, we sit around the table. There are usually from 25 to 40 men there, and we sit around the table and eat, and then we share what God is doing and what the burdens of our hearts would be for that morning, and we have a time of prayer. Many times it goes past the hour, as the men say.

Some will get up and slip out, but I recall on this particular morning seeing two men pray for other men, and the men that they were praying for had asked them to leave their home the week before when they'd been out to witness. And Mr. Stringer was extremely burdened about the souls of these men and their lost condition, and I saw a man who is a builder and an outstanding man in our community, weep bitter tears because of the spiritual condition of a man whom he doesn't know personally other than just having knocked on his door. And I thought about what brought this man to this place, and I talked with him.

I shared with him. He went with the hospital to the hospital with me the other day, and we visited together for about five hours as we were making rounds together, and he attributes this to the spiritual environment that he is in in the church, and that's what we're talking about earlier, the spiritual environment or the climate. And as we talk about the climate, we mention the fact that the pastor does have at least a portion of control on the climate in the church.

He is the person who can set that climate, and therefore I'm addressing primarily preachers at this point, and I have to restrain myself to try to talk about the things they've asked me to talk about and not preach, so I'm going to use this in part of my time. I may just preach to you a little bit if the Lord leads that way. Would that be all right? They didn't ask me to preach.

They asked me to talk to you about these things that we're sharing about, but I would like to wind up on a moment of just sharing out of the book of Acts in chapter 8 as we conclude our time together in just a few minutes. But we talked about this spiritual climate a moment ago, and the spiritual climate is something that I did not realize I was responsible for as a pastor and did not want the responsibility for it, but I discovered that that is my God-given responsibility. And in trying to assume that responsibility, I did not even know what the spiritual climate was in the church because I was separated from the people.

Now, I knew them and I blessed them at certain times and was asked to be a part of crisis with them, but I didn't know their heart and understand where they were. Let me illustrate this. Because of the change in the spiritual climate and being open and honest with the people as a human being and allowing fellowship to begin to grow and creating times for fellowship and allowing it to come out in the life of the church, I heard a lady pray several months ago in our prayer meeting and I was in one prayer group and she was in another one.

When we have prayer meeting, well, we pray. We don't come and have me to preach to them, but we pray together. And I was in a prayer group praying with a group of people, but this lady was very moved and I was sitting near her and I heard her prayer.

And she prayed something like this, Dear Lord, I thank you for being in a church where I can be somebody. This was a little lady that never has done anything in the church. And she said, I thank you that I can ask questions and not be made to feel like I'm ignorant and being put down.

Now I got thinking about that and she went on praying in this vein and she thanked the Lord that she could feel comfortable at church and not feel as though she had to just keep her mouth shut. In our Bible study that evening, she asked five or six questions that were very meaningful questions to all the people there. And this lady, as far as I've been able to find out, until this began in her life, had never said or done anything in the life of the local church.

She had just come and sit there. Since I heard her pray that prayer, her husband has been converted and he's there every Sunday. And he was very agnostic and opposed to the church and gave his family a hard time.

He even comes on Wednesday evening now for prayer meeting, which is a miracle if you knew the man. So as we think about the climate, I want to say, one, there's going to be tension if you see your role changing. Because in a traditional church where God has placed me and put my ministry in the context of a traditional church and the burden to see that traditional church change, there will have to be tension.

Now we have opted in most of our churches for everything to remain status quo. I don't mean you're trying to create trouble. But when you come in and begin to get people to understand that there is to be fellowship and a warm spiritual climate and a way that we can respond to one another and a time to pray together and that people can have opportunity to learn how to pray through the church and through its ministry, then you're going to discover that there are those who are threatened and they feel out of place.

And they feel out of place because they've not been around that kind of thing. I've been used to having deacons in a traditional church that said, now don't call on me to pray because I don't know how to pray. Have you ever heard that? Can you imagine being a deacon in a church and not even knowing how to say a prayer? Secondly, when we pray as a general rule, we pray our rosary.

I have noticed all the way from California to Massachusetts, and I haven't been there to New York, in churches over the last several years in different places that I've had the opportunity to be in and visit, that you can spot a Baptist prayer in church. And it sounds the same here in Texas as it does in Georgia. They've been there.

Have you ever noticed this? And I began in this very traditional church, 104 years old, of attempting to lead the people to see the need for change as we talk to God and started talking to God rather than praying a sermon to the people. And a little lady came to me, one of the most spiritual ladies in our church. She's 83 years old.

She said, Mr. Abbott, I didn't know you could talk to God like that. Where did you learn how to do that? And now I've given her some materials on learning to pray, and she's told me that they use this every morning now for breakfast, and they're learning how to pray in their family. And there are two sisters who live together, one's 83 and one's 84, and they're learning all over how to pray and talk to God.

It's transformed their lives, and their lives are living testimonies as to how the spiritual climate of people beginning to communicate to one another out of fellowship can change lives. Now there's another word that I didn't get to earlier, and that's the word commitment. Now that's a loaded word, and I'm going to load it up for you now.

The word commitment, as I'm using it here, means that if you are wanting God to change the spiritual life, the spiritual climate, and begin to create out of the church a body of people that are committed to God,

and he's using them in ministry, then you are going to have to be committed with a vision. In other words, committed to something beyond just what's going to happen next week because God begins to work in your life. Or otherwise, you're going to be attacked, and you're going to be threatened, and as you're threatened by it, you're going to crawl back into your traditional home.

You see, there are those that are going to just hit you over the head because they think you're attacking God if you're wanting to see genuine spiritual change in the life of the church, and they think you're attacking organization. Now remember that in a traditional church, it has been my conclusion that you cannot throw out all the organization. If you do, you're going to throw away the baby, along with the bathwater.

So there's got to be a commitment to tinker with and work with the lives and the spirit of these people until you see God bring about the change, and this commitment must be accompanied with a vision of a direction, a destination, not an ultimate goal because I don't believe we know where that's going to be. But a definite destination of a direction that you're going to be headed in, and unless you're committed there, you're going to be deterred by those who do not want the church to become the body of Christ. They are threatened by it, and there's no two ways about that.

I have people right now in the congregation who are threatened by it, and they wish that it were not that way, although they're in tension and beginning to grow. It has not driven them away, but it has caused tension to come to their lives. But in this commitment, there must be loving concern for individuals.

Now this means individuals who don't understand what you're talking about. Of all these things of discipleship and everything we've shared here, I must have the attitude toward these people, and the church must have the attitude of loving people where they are. I think of a man, his first name is Joe.

He comes into church 15 minutes late, comes to every church service Sunday morning, Sunday night, not on Wednesday. Now this man will take a miracle of God if his life ever changes. He comes in late, and he leaves first.

You know the kind of guy I'm talking about? But he's always there. He is enjoying church tremendously. He's not getting much out of it.

His life's not changing, but he enjoys coming, and he hears and sees all that God is doing. Now what is to be my attitude toward this man? Am I to care for him? Am I to love him? Or am I to look down my nose at him and say, now, now Joe just doesn't know where it is, and we've got to go on and run off and leave him. I don't believe our Lord would do that.

And somehow or other, God's going to finally reach Joe. I don't know how. I do not want to alienate him, neither do I want to wait for him.

But I want to love him, and I want to teach the people to love this person, and help him begin to see. Gradually, God may wake Joe up someday. But until he does, we're committed to going on.

Now I've found that we oftentimes in a traditional church get lost, and can't see the forest for the trees. And we wind up worrying about the Joes, and not knowing what to do with the whole body. So there must be a commitment that is accompanied by the vision to know where you're going.

Now that doesn't mean all the hows, and knowing all the programs, and the way to get there. But it does mean that we are willing to pay the price to get out of institutional bonding, without throwing away the program. Now ladies, if you go to WMU, I want to encourage you at this point.

Our WMU was dead. We had 15 women coming, and they would list their prayer lists, and they would pray, and they would look at each other, and they would wonder why the other ladies weren't there. Have you ever attended a WMU meeting like that? Deader than a hammer.

And you know, we stopped calling it WMU, and we started calling it this journey into discipleship. And then it came back into WMU, and now they've got so much going, that they recently published a book, because people were inquisitive about all the ministries they were involved in. We have a book that has 16 pages in it, and all it does is describe the ministries that the WMU are doing.

And they have so many different meetings, I don't even know when they meet anymore. And you know these materials they gave us in 1965 about the Mission Action Group. How many of you ladies remember that? Any of you remember that? And all the ladies told me, it's destroyed our WMU.

You remember hearing that? Just, oh we just can't. And they kept doing the same thing, and it kept getting deader. If the thing can get deader, it just got deader and deader.

And they said it's because we printed those materials. Well now bless your heart ladies. Did you know the women in our church are gobbling up those materials now, because they are designed to make us do, and to cause us to do, what God's called us to.

But the interesting thing was, that we were trying to lay a program on these people, rather than God calling them out. And now we see God calling these women into various areas of ministry and service. And as he's doing it, they need handles, and we begin to equip them for it.

And these materials are designed perfectly for that. That's what they're made for. So as we talk today about institutional bonding, I want you to see that our commitment is not to do away with the tradition.

It is not to do away with the program per se. It is to do away with making that program the Lord. And serving the program, rather than the program serving you and your people.

And I have been one that for a long time was in slavery to a program. Have you ever felt you're enslaved to it? You've got to go because it's time to meet. You've got to do this, you've got to do that.

Have you ever felt that way? If you have, go this way. I'm glad I'm not by myself. Some of you may never have felt that way, but I've felt that way many, many times.

And now, as I begin to look and to see what God can do once people are released for ministry with the idea of the Lordship of Christ, as we talked about earlier, being applied to the program of the church, the people become inner motivated, and they want to respond to what God has for them to do. And therefore, the positions are being filled, ministries outside the church are multiplying, and I don't have to promote them. Now, one of the key things that I said earlier this morning, that I need to share with you a little bit more, is that I do not have to start those ministries.

God didn't call me to do all those multiple ministries. God called me to pastor the church. God called me to have a vision.

God called me to preach the word of God. And let me say a parenthesis there, as we're sharing here. I learned from my background and education that it would be difficult for me to preach expository preaching in a church, because they would not take it.

But I've also found that people are hungry to hear the word of God taught and preached. And for now, a year and three months, we've been working verse by verse through the book of Romans. And from there, we're going on to another book and another one.

And it has enhanced the life of the preaching more than anything else that I've ever done. Continuing to study in the word of God, systematically going through, relating it and applying it to the lives of the people. And that's all we get is a steady diet on Sunday morning, is applying the word of God to the hearts of the people.

Now, the only thing that's happened as a result of that in this old traditional church, is that the preaching crowd has doubled in two years, doubled. And that's all we've done. Not promoted, not attendance campaigns, anything else, but just purely stay in the word of God, teach it, illustrate it, apply it, say what it says, and let God do the work.

And he'll do it. And out of this kind of environment that we have talked about, where I have told you already, that preaching was ineffective, because there was no discipleship going on, no relationships personally. I have seen the preaching ministry enhanced rather than torn down.

Many people have asked me this question, as I have shared this in different places at associational meetings and so on. Well, what does this do to the traditional preaching service and all? It actually enhances it. And it has improved it to the point that people are taking notes and all of this kind of thing in the service, simply because they are hungry and they have been equipped to know how to feed themselves a little bit.

Not everyone is involved in that, but many of the people are. Now, we came down to another word just a moment ago, and that was the word organization. And I want to hit this with you in just a moment.

We talked about, first of all, that the point we're trying to move to is to help people find the will of God for their life, God's call for ministry. And as we do this, it focuses upon the individual. Now, we talk about discipleship training for adults.

Look at this right quick. I hit these in different ways, but I want to come back now and pull it together in an outline. First, there are principles that we want to operate on as we see the vehicles develop that can allow people to be called of God into ministry.

First is, that is to be redemptive in purpose. The classes that we offer, the relationships that we offer, are to be redemptive in purpose. And when we say redemptive, that does not mean that everybody in it is going out and leading others to Christ.

But it means that we are effective and faithful witnesses to what Christ is doing. And the redemptive idea is that everything we do, if it's giving a cup of cold water, if it's a crisis closet, whatever it is, that out of that ministry and out of that teaching, we are to be leading people to see what God is calling them to, whether it's salvation, whether it's to ministry, whatever it is. It is to complement the existing programs of the church, any discipleship training.

Now, here again, we're talking about a traditional church, where most of you probably live and work, not to tear down or destroy what you're doing. And then to teach the concept that the Christian life is a journey. Jesse was talking about this very effectively earlier today.

The concept that it is a journey is vital and people need to pick up on this. Let me share with you about a man named Jim Copeland. Jim is 34 years old.

He's an accountant and an executive rising in the company that he works for. He's been in the church where I pastor for all of his life, 34 years. And Jim is an outstanding young man.

About a year ago, he gave his testimony on Sunday morning and he said, I've been a Christian since I was nine years old. He said, in the last several months, as our pastor has been teaching and as I've been through these classes, I have discovered that I am still where I was when I accepted the Lord. But he said, now I'm beginning to grow and I have started my journey with the Lord and growing.

And I don't know what's going to happen in my life and I don't know where I'm going, but I'm excited about growing now as God's child. That was his testimony. This was a man who has already elected a deacon in the church and didn't even know how to grow.

Today, Jim is teaching a Sunday school class. He's discipling three men on a one-to-one basis. He's at the prayer breakfast every Tuesday morning, comes early, drives into Atlanta for his job and is being used effectively in ministry, even at his job in downtown Atlanta.

They are beginning a prayer and sharing group there at his company. And God is using Jim in an extremely effective manner in witnessing and leading people to Jesus Christ. But he caught the idea that the Christian life is a journey and that he didn't have to have it all together before he started.

Then it involves commitment. And I talked to you about the commitment you'd have to have as a pastor, but if a person is going to get involved with it, it's a commitment to be a disciple or a follower. In the church, we talk about being committed to at least one year's training.

I would want you to know that I'm in the process of meeting with a friend of mine on Thursday here, staying over to meet with him in order for us to finish working on a second year's curriculum. We're going to be talking about in that second year's curriculum, family living, interpersonal relationships, creative activities that can involve the family in the growing process as a family. And this will be a curriculum of training that we'll put in as a second year of training in the journey classes on Sunday night.

And we're working on and already moving toward a third year. My hope and dream is that someday we're going to have churches that will have three years seminary training in effect on a layman's level where it deals with the practicalities of handles of how I can be what God saw me to be in my family, in my community, and in my church. And our hope is that this is what church training will become on every Sunday evening.

The one year God has blessed and over 200 people have already been through this one year's training. And all but two of these people, by documented statistics, all but two of them that have been through these classes are involved in definite ministry, which is a fantastic thing. Now, the interesting thing is I don't teach all those classes.

They're laymen teaching those classes. I don't know how that affects your ego now, fellas, but there's some of those men that do a better job than I do teaching some of those classes because God's called them to it. We've got to be willing to let them do and be what God has called them to be.

All right? Then be committed to seeking a ministry. If you enlist in the spiritual journey as we've been talking about it today, we ask the person to enter into this commitment of seeking what God has for him to do in his life as a ministry. Now, there is something that I have learned that ministry may vary.

In other words, God may have something for a person to do in the next six months and then that ministry in and something else will take place. Let me illustrate this. One lady said, you know, my ministry I'm discovering is with my family.

And she began to tell us in the practical ministries class the needs in her family. And we were able to affirm in her life that that's where she needed to invest her time. She did that.

As a result of doing that, she saw her brother, who is an alcoholic, I believe she said recently that he had been converted because she took time to invest herself in her family. Now, that meant that she did not have time for the institutional programs of the church and she had to be released for that responsibility. And she said there are times past that had I done that I would have felt guilty because coming to church made me feel like I had to serve God by being here doing the things you told me to do.

How many of you people are lay people? Raise your hand. Let's see. Have you ever had those guilt feelings? Be real honest.

Have you ever had the guilt feelings if you didn't serve and do the things you were told to do in the structured organization of the church that you were not made to feel like you weren't serving God like Jesse talked about earlier? Raise your hand. Have you ever felt that way? That's a vast majority of those who say they're lay people here that have felt that way. This is an awful kind of attitude to prevail in the life of a church.

And to free people to be able to come to you and to a church staff and educational director, whomever it may be, and say, look, I just need to share this with you. God does not want me doing this anymore, is a tremendous sense of freedom. And also it gives the people a sense of worthwhileness as they respond to what God truly wants them to do.

And then the climate we have talked about, the leadership style. Let me say just a few words about this concept of a leadership style. Most men that I come in contact with who are pastors are enslaved to the same thing the people are and to the pastor image and consequently do not want to have any weaknesses, do not want them to show if they have any, and they put up a false front which is basically hypocrisy because we've been taught to do that rather than being an honest, sincere person, transparent.

And in our leadership, then we alienate ourselves from people. Now, by the way, I didn't introduce my parents, but they're here. They're special people in my life and they live in Tyler and I asked them to meet me up here and spend the time with me.

So they're back here with me. But they'll remember this incident. I related not long ago in a message that I got caught one time stealing watermelons.

Now, I know you never did do that. Did any of you ever steal a watermelon? Raise your hand. Come on.

The rest of you raise your hand. All right. All right.

Praise the Lord. That's a good watermelon. Well, I got caught one time.

But anyway, I related this in a sermon on Sunday morning. That night, a lady came to me and she said, she said, Louis, I want you to know that that sermon this morning did more for my family than anything else you've done since you've been here. I said, what in the world are you talking about? She said, you told about stealing a watermelon.

She said, you know, my son now sees you as a human being. And he went home and that's all he could talk about. He said, I didn't know preachers were like that.

And fellows, if you're a pastor, there are many people who do not see you as a human being. And consequently, it's difficult for them to find God through your life because they don't see your humanness. And you think about that.

I had a young man just recently who called me on Saturday to meet me in the church. He was having to leave town because he had been involved in a drug ring. He had turned state's evidence and had worked with the FBI and his life was being threatened and he had to leave the state.

And he wanted to come and talk to me. And he called, initiated the conversation, wanting to know now that his head was clear and he's off of the drugs, could I help him understand how to come to know Jesus Christ? And I asked Jeff, I said, Jeff, why did you call me to meet you down here at the church? And you know what he said? He said, I've discovered you're a real human being and I wasn't threatened by coming and talking to you. And I don't know about you, brother, but you may be a good preacher.

But let me tell you, unless somebody can call you and say that, there's something missing in our lives. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ was that individuals were able to come to him. They wanted to touch him, they wanted to talk to him, they wanted to look in his eyes, they wanted to see him.

And the beautiful thing about Jesus is that he would turn around and look at them and he would respond to their needs. And in our leadership, if we do not have time for individuals we don't have time enough for the mass. Now you can't get to all the individuals, so that means the church is going to have to become a ministering body.

And out of our lives as pastors is going to have to come an example that others can follow and that many ministers can be called out. This lifestyle or leadership style is reflected, as we said, in honesty, simplicity, in a non-pretentious manner, willingness to let the tension be created that we've talked about. It's also characterized by sharing your dreams and your visions and testing them out.

Now there are times when you have visions and when you have dreams of what God wants and you're working with a problem and you share it with people and it's not the right thing. I recently had that to happen because we had a need in the church and it was a financial need and it bothered me because I thought there wasn't enough preparation being done to do it and the men weren't taking care of it, the weather officers, and I presented to them an idea that might help. Now they listened to me patiently and I was meeting with the deacons at the time and they said, Pastor, we appreciate what you said, but they were very tactful and we went around the room and we have a kind of environment they can all express themselves.

Every man was negative about what I said. We got to class about the sixth one. I said, whoa, wait a minute, and I just tore up the little idea and the plan.

I had it all worked out, you know, there's a good pastor supposed to. We just went over and threw it in the trash can. I said, brother, let's go to this is the wrong thing to do.

Now, I thought it was a good idea. It really was not a good idea because it would not work and the men knew it. Well, how am I supposed to respond? Hit them over the head and make them do it? I hope you catch what I'm trying to say here.

You do not need to be threatened because you don't know all the answers, because you don't have all the plans. They had a better plan. You know what their plan was to do? To do nothing but pray, and I'm happy to tell you we had to have \$200,000 and we had to have it in a short period of time, and last week we paid that \$200,000 and we haven't done anything except call a prayer meeting and announce that it needed to be done.

That's all we did. That sure did bother me with my background. I want you to know I just wanted to go do something.

You know, I came from the oil fields in East Texas and I knew that something ought to be done and I saw that mountain of money that needed to come in and I didn't know where it was going to get it. We had to have it at a given date because a building was going to be completed and they want enough money in the till to pay all the bills, you know, and those people don't like that if you don't pay them after they've done the work, and I said, fellows, we need to do it. No, that's all we need to do.

So we did what they suggested. They said the people understand and we do not need a campaign. We just need prayer, and we went to prayer, called the church to prayer on Sunday night, and the money is paid.

Now let me tell you the other end of that story. When I left, the financial secretary gave me a report. There's \$22,000 left in the bank account, isn't that amazing? I just can't get over that.

That kind of gives me a tingle when I think about it, and my plan was in the trash can. Now I'm laboring that point because I want you to see something. The pastor is not called to a church to be God, and folks, I may be wrong, but I believe, as they quoted Gene Dixon here earlier, that we are on the verge of a great spiritual awakening that came in the last century, another great awakening, that it's coming primarily through the laity, and that there is a need to focus ministry on the hearts and the lives of the men who are called pastors and preachers because many of these people are locked in, and there's vested interest.

That's where my paycheck comes from, and we're locked in, and they need ministering too. If you're a layman in your church, and I want to preach a little at this point, you begin seeing part of your ministry as ministering to your pastor. Some of the most hurting people I know are preachers.

They're desperate. On a percentage basis, you'll find that out of Christian people that the divorce rate is high. People getting out of the ministry is increasing rapidly, and those who are frustrated to that point, I don't know how we would estimate it, but we have people coming constantly to us at the church, who are in the ministry professionally, who are hurting to the point of wanting to quit, and they don't know what to do, and this is a constant flow of people, and I'm sure many of you run into the same thing.

They are so frightened, they don't even know another pastor that they can talk to because they're afraid to expose themselves to him. Many of them are so frightened, they're afraid to talk to the wives and be honest about it because we've boxed them in to the success syndrome, to the secularized church, not allowing God to really bless and bring the organization and the program that is needed. Now, just a moment of looking at organization.

I'll give you a picture here, and I want you to see this for one reason. I did not begin but one of the ministries that are here, and I never meet with these people, and I get reports from them weekly, and there are approximately 300 people involved in these, and now this list exceeds 50. Just look right quick.

These ministries will all function this week, and I don't want you writing them down or think about it. We use the traditional organization. We use child evangelism, any kind of tool we can get in order that people can get a handle on it to minister and to do what God has called them to do.

In order for those ministries to function, I need a sheet of paper here. Let me see if I can find one. In order for these ministries to function, we have a director of lay ministries.

This is a layman. You can't see that at all. Tell me when you can see it.

Can you see it yet? Maybe that's good enough to see. All right. To develop and promote small groups that meet throughout the congregation of ministry and growth.

Now this is Mr. Gay Settles who works in this area. He's a deacon. He is retired and gives his full-time to ministry.

He has an office at the church, but he is a non-salaried employee of the church. He now has two ladies who serve as his secretary. They are also non-salaried and are volunteers.

One of those ladies will become a full-time minister at the church soon and will work full-time. Secondly, to assist the pastor in training small group leaders. In order for ministry and fellowship to begin to grow in the hearts and lives of the people, there have to be people equipped to do this kind of ministry.

We have a quarterly workshop where we continue to train new group leaders in how to do group dynamics and working with a group in order to get them into their ministry and what they're supposed to be doing. Check with groups each week and get progress reports. These are the things that he does.

Select and assist in the selection of materials to be used in the group. The reason I'm giving you practical things like we're sharing here, these are things that I found that frightened men when they began to try to get things started in the church. They're afraid of groups.

They're afraid of the charismatic thing. All of this kind of business. We have more reporting and more understanding of the materials that these people use in all of these ministries than we do in the Sunday school.

Because they feel a strong need to call us to let us help them with their problems. They know we're open to it. And we've not had a reporting system like this for Sunday school as a tradition.

So all of these people that are ministering, it may be a ministry group out of a Sunday school class, they'll report in through the same way. Then they'll oversee the schedule of meeting times in order to coordinate the use of the nursery. This is a big item if you have a large number of people beginning to be in ministry.

And I saw this grow and didn't know what to do with it. And we began to try to deal with it effectively in administration. We saw the workers budget just blow out the top.

And in one year we saw nursery workers billed over five thousand dollars as people had to have a place for the children while they were doing what God wanted them to. Now most of this is carried forward by volunteers now. They're people who feel that's their ministry while others are doing what they're supposed to be doing.

And it's back down now to less than a thousand dollars a year with people just volunteering, using their time. Assist in resolving problems that may arise in the group. Mr. Settles does this, keep a log on the ministry teams going out.

We have people going out on lay renewal weekends. We also have ministries of deacons going out and sharing in other churches now where they go and will share with with other churches and spend the weekend with them in retreat. And we keep a log on this so our church will not be crippled on Sunday as many of our people now have ministry and other congregations even going to other states at the present time.

In May we'll have a group going to Illinois. Last month a group went to Louisville, Kentucky and worked with the association and association retreats. Seven of the deacons went on one weekend.

We keep up with these so we know where they're going. Develop a ministry to new members and there's a whole lot to be said about that in the spiritual partner program. Just suffice it to say what Jesse was saying is a primary weakness in the church of not keeping up with people who are converted.

And we attempt to keep a personal contact with them and someone personally assigned to them in their spiritual development. Number nine, find talent experience from this of the new members in order to connect them with with the things that are going on. This is very important.

See there are people that may be ready to be involved in ministries but they don't they've not been there long enough to go through all these journey classes. They can go ahead and get involved in ministries and go through a developing process at the same time. Then research materials and sources for aid for ministry groups.

This takes a great deal of the man's time. Now that's suffice to say that this man has a lot of jobs to do and you can see that he is very busy. But the reason I wanted to show you that is simply this.

Anything that you get into, if you're going to be working with individuals and you're committed to a vision of seeing God doing something in your life and the lives of people in your church, it's going to take detail, it's going to take ministry, and it's going to take administration. The working with the nuts and bolts to see that it works. Now this all works in the church and I spend no time with it at all.

But I taught the man that's doing it how to do it. I've been his pastor for nearly eight years and out of that he has learned and learned my heart. I have disciplined this man and when you ask a moment ago about discipling people, the first thing that came to my mind is that I disciple the staff.

There are five men and my job is to disciple these men. That's the primary responsibility that I have. Not only the new Christians, but if we are to grow together and God is to give us a ministry together, my job is to disciple them and help them have a vision and understanding of what God has called us to.

So consequently, the discipling ministry God has for me now in the local church is that I meet with this group as a group once a week for two and a half hours. Then I meet with each one of these men singularly by themselves, discuss their particular work, their vision, their commitment, the details of it, and work with them on it to see how God is using them. That's an investment of my time in multiplying myself to a choir, to the youth ministry, to the Sunday school ministry, and working through the lives of these men.

And they know my heartbeat and I know their heartbeat. Larry Montgomery is associate pastor in charge of administration and education. Now today, Larry is doing many of the things that I need to be doing.

And did you know he can go into any given situation as far as we're able to discover right now. And he can go there and speak for me without fear of crossing me up, or making me angry, or getting in a wrong position with me because he knows my heart. And he can say in my name, here's what Lewis would want to do in this case, or we're committed to doing this, and I have no problem with it.

He does not have to come back and tell me because if I know, when I know and hear what came up, I'll know what he did. I know the man that well. Here again, the price that has to be paid to know the people that you work with.

This is what Jesus did. You must remember this. He did this with those people that were called the twelve.

And then how many did he choose to spend a great deal of his time with and know even more personally than that? Three. And what better place to begin than with you, with your staff, with key men in the church, if you don't have them. Because those are the people with whom you've got to work.

And we're talking about leadership again. Now, let's pause for just a moment here and want you to notice the contrast between the traditional and the renewal journey, or the spiritual journey, where people begin to seek out and to grow, and how there needs to be a path from one to the other. And this is something that God just laid on our hearts that we haven't seen anywhere else, but it is working effectively.

Over here, we have alternate structures, or in-house structures here. We have church training, Sunday school, brotherhood, preaching, WMU, committees, etc. Then we have the world over here.

The church seems to primarily function over here. It turns itself on when it comes to do its thing, and it turns itself off in the world. Well, there needs to be in the world, the renewal journey of people living their lives out, and where they're journeying inward and journeying outward, where they are called into ministry here, and also where they're called out of this ministry into ministry in the world.

They need to be able to have a holding pattern over here, until God really begins to reveal to them and create in them an understanding of what they are to do. And if they need to move in this direction, or in this direction, they need the blessing of the church. And in this kind of freedom with responsibility, we have seen the lives of people continually transform.

And the interesting thing is that I do not have to transform them. This process can take place this week in my absence or my presence. It makes no difference.

And God is using the people through this kind of philosophy and not destroying the structures to begin to find what God wants them to do and to move in that direction with a definiteness and an inner commitment where we do not have to promote it. I'm glad to say to you, we do not have to promote visitation. We have a great deal of it going on, but it goes on out of the lives of the people who have been called to that

specific ministry.

Is it time to stop? What time is it? I've lost track of time. What time am I supposed to be through here? Where is that? Where is what time am I supposed to be through here? All right. All right.

Let's stop. Okay. Thank you, sir.

Let's stop right now. Do you have maybe some questions to ask about the structure, about the conflict? You ask it and we'll share it with you. You may not know the answer.

Yes, sir. Yes. Church training, our friends, they go through these journey classes.

Then they move either into Bible studies, our support group, our ministry group. For instance, there's a ministry on Sunday night that they do their organizing and planning and preparation for their ministry. They do this on Sunday night and actually go out and do it because that's the only time that they have.

Therefore, they go out and do their ministry at that time. They do it during church training many times. They don't get back in time to hear me start preaching, but they're doing what God's called them to do.

They feel free to do that and not intimidated because I don't have them there so they can hear me say my little ditty. Does that help answer your question? All right. Any other? Yes.

Yes. Whole congregation. As a matter of fact, the whole congregation was called to prayer on Sunday night, announced on Sunday morning.

This was the given plan that we had come up with and that was all we were going to do. They stayed and prayed. Yes, to a great extent.

We're hoping more and more. One of the charges that young people have had is that the church has just been ministering to itself and not to the world. A group of our young people will be getting training this summer on how to conduct evangelistic Bible studies in backyards, this kind of thing.

They're involved in a number of these things. A group of them are planning to go down to Peter Lord's Church with Cecil and be in retreat there. There are a number of other things that they're involved in and they work also with some of the adult groups.

Yes. Yes. And we have a small group discipleship training going on with them now.

We have a minister of youth who works with them and you're familiar with Barry St. Clair, the reach out strategy. They don't call it that now, they call it something else, but we employ this basically. He works with them in this.

Yes. And calling out other lay people to be involved with and so on. Yes.

Started with the idea, remember this morning we used the idea of the word search and searching and allowing God to search so we could know the mind of God and the deep things of God. We began not knowing how long we'd take. We took about six months.

And as we assembled, the staff began to come together. We prayed, we talked, we shared, we worked with others, we became a group, got a group together. And as we began to have a vision of what God could do with the talents and abilities we had in that place, then we began to put some pieces together.

The way it could develop in order to get a vehicle to release people and prepare people for ministry. And this took about six months, then it took about four months to permeate the congregation with the idea and to get their feedback. By the way, that's something I've not told you in haste here.

There needs to be in the congregation to allow change to come a way you can get feedback. You need to be able to hear from the people. I mean, like I'm asking you to ask questions, let the people ask questions, let them be critical too.

Let them ask critical questions, negative as well as positive and not feel threatened by it. But we waited until God put the thing together and all who were involved in the process felt that here was a way we could go about it. Then we got feedback from the church and it was offered some as God spoke through the congregation.

Does that answer your question? All right. I did too. Well, it's not a how to, it's this vehicle.

If a person is called of God and committed to it and feels accountable and is made to feel accountable for his ministry, he'll do it. For instance, I was called of God to be a pastor and I had to commute to school in order to make a living. Well, I didn't have to have anybody to promote me to get up at four o'clock in the morning.

I got up because the alarm rang and I was committed to it. And the thing that has bothered me for years is if I'm committed to that and God's called me to that, if God's called you as a layman to that ministry, why aren't you motivated the same way? And I believe it's because you don't understand the call. Once you understand it and are motivated by God's spirit and not by a preacher laying guilt on you, you'll move and do it.

And if a person doesn't want to do it under those directions and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and God leading him, then let him wait till he grows to where he can do it. That's right. Don't promote Sunday school attendance.

Don't give out any numbers. Now, the sidelight of this is interesting. Baptisms have come up now about 600 percent.

Sunday school attendance has not quite doubled, but almost. The size of a Sunday school has doubled, lacking about, I guess, about 60 people right now. It's actually doubled.

In two and a half years, we have seen a Sunday school come. It took it 104 years to get that size. And now in two and a half years, it's had approximately in another month it will be 100 percent increase.

There's not been a promotion campaign. There has not been an enlargement campaign. There has not been an effort to go out and recruit a bunch of new Sunday school teachers.

But the organization and the Sunday school has doubled in size. Sir? Parishes. Right.

All right. Any other questions? Yes, ma'am. Yes.

Yes. Right. We do.

We do. And still have a traditional organization. And it is worked with very effectively.

And the minister of education works is one of the best I've ever seen. Tremendous fellow. And that's Larry that I shared with you.

And he is so excited. He got excited the other day and he said, you know, I can't believe it. He said the Sunday school's growing and we're not doing what I was taught to do.

He said this is so exciting. You know, he said we haven't given away any balloons or any bananas and we haven't given away any yo-yos or bicycles. We haven't run any buses, haven't done anything.

And the Sunday school's doubled in size. We haven't had to recruit a bunch of people to be teachers. God's called them out of the kind of environment.

Sir? No pizza party. But now let me tell you, I want to say this seriously. There is risk involved.

There is tension involved. And there must be a commitment to the corporate lordship of Christ. That's what we started with this morning.

Because fellows, we're going to go. And if you go out and win somebody to Christ, they might flog you with 40 lashes. But come on anyway, we're going to go.

How many would we have? Now, this good book right here tells me that as they were scattered abroad and as they ran from the persecution, what did they do? They just kept on doing what God called them to do anyway. Now, what motivated them to do this? The thing that has troubled my heart for years and has crippled my ministry has been the fact that the people who heard the truth were not motivated to do what these people did. Now, once God motivates them, and I don't have to do it, then they'll do it.

Now, I'm not there today, but there's going to be a group of people tonight to go out to witness. Do you know who they are? They're college young people who are caught up in studying and all the other social milieu of their lives, but they will meet this evening at our local church and pray and go out to witness the people one-on-one. And did you know that I did not have to organize it, that I did not have to plan it? They were motivated within their heart and they came to me and they said, Pastor, we hear what's being said and God has led us to do this.

Will you help us? And we got them with a secretary that's in charge of outreach, got them in contact with the right people to go see, and seven people committed themselves the first Sunday they asked them to do it, and they're going out tonight to share their faith. I didn't have to promote them to do it. Is that your answer? But you see, persecution came, but they were inner motivated.

Now, there's another word that I want you to notice here, and that's the word laity. It's the people of God doing it, not the preachers. The apostles stayed in the same place, it says, and these would be identified as the preachers.

The laity or the people of God were sharing what God was doing in their lives, and personal evangelism was a byproduct. In other words, it was just happening, just happening, because the people were motivated by God's Spirit to do what God had called them to do. Now, there's another characteristic there, and this is one that just fascinates my mind, and that is, it says in verse 8, and there was great joy.

Now, I want you to ask yourself this question right quick. Let's say that your husband, women, had been put in jail, and he had been beaten, and he wasn't going to get to work for at least a month. You knew that,

and you didn't have any bank account, and you wondered where your food was going to come from, and it was time to go out and share your faith, and if you didn't go out tonight, you'd be afraid that Saul was going to come take you all to prison and leave your kids by themselves.

What kind of spirit would you be in? Would you be joyful? Now, the word joy means being happy, rejoicing. What kind of spirit would you be in? Something is unique about what God does, because the Bible tells us there wasn't just joy, but there was great joy in that city. Now, the more I think of that, it can almost bring me to tears.

It didn't make any difference what obstacles were in the way. It didn't make any difference what the hindrances were. These people had caught a vision of who Jesus Christ was and what they were called to, and the more they were persecuted, and the more problems they had, the more committed they were to the fact that what God was saying for them to do was right, and they rejoiced in it in spite of circumstances.

And so much of our Christianity is dictated in its practice according to the circumstance. How many people in our congregations all over the country are controlled by their circumstances? They can't do this, and they can't be that, and they can't follow what God wants them to do because of their circumstances in life. These folks in the early church rose above the circumstances, and God wants to call his church today to do the same thing, but it's got to be done out of the people of God, the laity responding to the call of God, and not just to the pastor standing and doing his thing and everybody watching.

The player-coach concept is really what we're talking about here, of being involved so that people can get a glimpse of what God can do. For years, I was preaching and enjoying it greatly because I was getting blessed out of it. You know, the people might not enjoy it, but I want you to know I was enjoying that preaching.

And if you've ever preached, you know what I'm talking about. If you don't enjoy preaching, you ought to quit. I mean to tell you, I was enjoying it, and I guess they said they were enjoying it, but it wasn't changing their lives.

Now, when this characteristic of great joy about what God has called us to comes, they will begin to get hold of what you're teaching out of the Word, and it makes the preaching live. There is something about this vision getting in the minds of people that has changed my preaching. It's changed my life too, and I feel accountable to those dudes.

They're going to grow up and leave me if I don't go on and do it, you know. And out of their lives come great joy. You know, I've just stopped right there.

I want to tell you about a lady named Josephine. Last year, she led a child evangelism group in an apartment complex. Twenty-three children accepted Christ.

Many of these children in apartments moved, you know, and the parents moved. A very unruly bunch. And just a few months ago, the telephone rang at Josephine's house on Sunday morning, and it was the parent of two of these children.

And they said, we, along with our children, are being baptized today, and they lived in and our children would not let us go to church this morning until we called you to tell you thank you. Because of your ministry to our children, our family has been saved. Now, praise God, brother.

And there's great joy in that house. There's great joy in our church when we hear about that kind of thing. But it's men on mission, and joy will come.

These men were on mission, and joy came. Then, just in closing, there are always the counterfeits. You can look down in verse 9 and following, and there was a fellow who tried to counterfeit.

And you're always going to find that. You know, if anything, the real thing is worth having. There are always going to be those who try to counterfeit it, or who have hypocrisy in their lives.

That's going to always be around. Don't let that deter you. That was around in the early church.

Then, there's also the characteristic of obedience. These people obeyed. Philip obeyed and went on out into the desert.

Now, I want you to get a picture of what Philip did in closing. Philip was in the midst of a revival meeting. People were being saved everywhere, and God said to him right in the middle of the night, spoke to him in his heart, and he said, Philip, I want you to go out into the desert.

Now, there's not anybody out in the desert, but he obeyed, and it says he got up immediately and went out there. Now, had he been a good Baptist deacon, he would have said, now Lord, I'm willing to go, but I've got my responsibilities here, and look what all is happening. That's the way most of us would respond.

Most Baptist preachers would respond that way. But you see, there's got to come in my life, and in your life, and in the life of church, the willingness to obey the direction of God. If you don't know the direction of God, wait upon God with patience.

In developing a program, in going to an individual, whatever you want to, however you want to lay it out. It can be individually, it could be corporately, but be prepared to be obedient, even if it cuts across your traditional life, even if it cuts across your training, even if it cuts across what you have been committed to, but God is definitely leading you, and wait until you know his leadership, and God can bless you as you lead churches, as you make disciples.

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