

Equipping the Church

by Neil T. Anderson

Neil T. Anderson's sermon emphasizes the importance of equipping the church to understand their identity in Christ and the necessity of compassion in ministry through personal testimony and experiences.

Duration: 1:19:14

Scripture: Romans 8:16, Ephesians 4:22

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing one's identity in Christ. He mentions a book called 'Living Free in Christ' that helps individuals understand how Christ can meet their critical needs and establish their identity in Him. The speaker believes that the primary issue is not just getting rid of demons, but getting right with God. He encourages listeners to submit to God and resist the devil, and shares a testimony of someone who found victory by applying these principles. Additionally, the speaker mentions the importance of studying and knowing the truth, and highlights the significance of addressing childhood issues in order to overcome problems in adulthood.

Transcript

Probably no one in the country right now whose ministry has been more effective in reaching more people with the truth about their identities in Christ, the reality of the battle with Satan, and our victory over that battle, than Dr. Neal Anderson. And we are so privileged and pleased to have Neal with us today. Ah, good morning.

So, it's fun to come back here amongst friends. We are, aren't we? I was so jealous of Irwin last night, you know, being able to mimic Billy Graham. All I can do is Ross Perot.

And my third party ain't doing very well right now. If I start being kind to those babies, will you right-wingers support me? Well, anyway, let's get rid of all the worst first. I was asked to share a little about what we've experienced in Africa.

And I just got off the phone Wednesday morning with Joe Wasman, who's part of our ministry. Last August, we got a rather emergency telephone call asking us to come over to Liberia. And Liberia would be almost next to Rwanda in terms of atrocities that have gone on the last ten years or so.

And it's a remarkable thing because when a lot of the slaves were brought back to Africa, that's where they were brought. Eighty percent of the nation is English-speaking. That's their national language.

And it's probably been, historically, one of the strongest Christian countries in West Africa, anyhow. And back in 1982, there was a coup, and bloodshed has been going on, tribal warfare ever since. Elwha's Christian radio station, Sudan Interior Mission, was destroyed, I think, in '91, something like that.

It has just been an atrocity. The worst of it is that, by and large, it's Christians killing Christians. And that was somewhat true in Rwanda, in a lot of ways, from what I understand.

But anyway, it got to the point where they just said, politically, we can't solve our problems. We need to turn to the church. Could you imagine Clinton and Dole saying, we can't solve our problems, we need to turn to the church? I mean, you know, it has to get pretty desperate.

And it was desperate. If there was one key person in this thing, the president that was exiled in '82, her daughter, fled the country, she saw her own father killed in front of her, as well as her brother, and fled the country, and is now back. There she became a Christian, and came back with a message of repentance and reconciliation.

When the door opened up for the possibility that the country itself, politically, was turning to the church to ask for some help, who was dealing with corporate problems like this? And she was familiar with our ministry, as well as other mission groups there. So they called and asked if we would come over. Well, I knew I wasn't the one.

Frankly, I was on vacation. That's not the real reason. I mean, if God called, I would go anywhere.

But I've never been to Africa. And Joe and Kathy had been, and I said, no, Joe and Kathy are the ones to go. Had just come on loan with us from Evangelical Free Church.

Had been part of their foreign mission society. You could write a book on what happened next. Of how the skid was graced for them to go over, her passport had expired, our country stepped in, gave them both a visa, met them at the airport, bumped them up to first class, got them over there, trained some key national leaders on personal as well as corporate freedom, and then met with 120 political leaders, educational, military, and tribal leaders.

Led them to personal freedom, then corporately. It has set off a spark that just kind of boggles my mind. It's almost, what do we do, God? And Joe just got back from five weeks over there.

Just a crash tour through several countries, equipping leaders like this. And we're going to send a team back next summer. I'm going myself next year.

Really looking forward to that. There's a movement going on around the world. A little over a year ago, I was in India.

And they had a major, what they call a cons conference. It was a conference on basically reaching India for Christ in our lifetime. And the message again was unity.

And other than Dick Eastman's one time, I was the only white guy there. And it was just in timing with us starting our own office there and realizing that whether you're dealing with the caste system there or the breaking up of Czechoslovakia into two countries, Yugoslavia into how many, we don't know yet. And all of

specifically for me.

And knowing enough to have committed prayer support. You see, I probably have been a little bit like the sailor who said, damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. And my wife's whole ministry is, she prays that they all miss.

See, and I've, all those torpedoes. And I realize, you're out on the front line, you are a target. The more that you do to help people, frankly, the more opposition you get.

Which causes a lot of people to say, I'm going to back off then and not do that anymore. And you've got to fight through that temptation, because there's going to be one for everybody here. The moment you set a few people free in Christ, you're going to create a stir.

Some who want help, and some who want to discredit you. And it's going to happen across the line. It's always been true, always will be true.

Well, I'll live a perfect life. Oh, wonderful. There was only one who did, and they crucified him.

And, you know, so, you know, and woe unto you if all men speak well of you. And that's, I'd like everybody to speak well of me. I like to be a friend to everybody.

But I'm not going to try that at the expense of speaking the truth in love. And there's a price to pay with that. Well, anyway, that was a painful thing with my daughter.

I can't tell you what it's like to be the chairman of a theology department, practical theology department, moonlighting in the church with the title Minister of Family Life, and show up with a daughter who's pregnant, all of that. And I've got a granddaughter out there someday. We chose the best thing to do was to dop it out at that time, and let Heidi reestablish and confirm it.

Let me tell you something, as tragic as that is, there's life after that. There was two boys who drug her into a party at school. Remember that plane collision over Los Angeles? Two planes collided several years ago? One of those boys was on that plane.

The other one came and asked us for forgiveness, of which we did. When I gave my daughter away, it was the most emotional experience of my life. And Mava was right there, because I gave her away to the most wonderful Christian man that you could ever hope.

If I could pick, hand-pick, I couldn't have done a better job. And I realized that God made that right. And in our own family, my little daughter, who wanted to stay a virgin until she got married, her temple was violated.

Well, that was hard. There was actually a harder one for us. It was next year.

My wife had developed cataracts, and this happened quite a few years earlier. It was really my motivation to get my wife out of the senior pastoral role. There's enough pressure in ministry in and of itself.

But I told Joanne at that time, and I love pastoring. I mean, I think a lot of ways, if I could, I would do that right now. You know, as much as my heart is, I don't feel I'm a counselor, I feel I'm a pastor.

But I realized, for the sake of my wife her mental health, I had to get her out of that role. That was my primary, almost only reason at that time, I think, that God used to guide me to get my first doctorate. And I didn't know what God wanted me to do.

I had no idea at the time. I ended up being a seminary prof. At those days, they wouldn't do lens implants. So they let each eye cloud up, and eventually they clouded over, and they would remove the lens.

And then she would be adjusted first with the Coke bottle glasses, and then finally contact lenses. And anyway, about six years after that, her doctor suggested that she have another, have an implant. And at that time, they would do that.

And so I was excited about that. I said, I think that'll be great. So she went in and had a lens implant.

And it triggered off 15 months of the darkest period of my life. What was interesting about it is, is that my ministry was going like this. And my family was going like this.

The surgery was successful. There was nothing wrong with that. But it triggered off something that defied explanation.

Doctors couldn't find anything wrong. She got sleep deprived and majorly depressed. Something I've personally never shared publicly before, but I want you to know how bad it can get.

Because it was bad anyhow, and it's always the darkest before the dawn. My wife really couldn't function as a wife or as a mother. She was at a time where it could be a midlife thing.

They explored that. That wasn't it. Major depression.

She fought going on any kind of antidepressants, but finally she did. And she didn't want to take any kind of pills. But she did for about two months.

And then I took my son to a soccer game on a Saturday morning. I came back. There was a note on the door.

I'm over at Whittier Presbyterian Hospital. I've checked myself into the chemical dependency unit. I've never had anything hit me like that in my life.

I just, what? And it turned out it was a friend in church who was chemically dependent on prescription drugs. She was married to a doctor. It was just a sad, sick thing.

And Joanne was not chemically dependent. I mean, it was the furthest thing from it. Her medication wasn't even that high.

Two months on antidepressants is not going to make you chemically dependent, folks. And, I mean, it's absurd. Well, I raced over there right away, but I couldn't see her because they have a two days where you can't see it.

They're in, quote, detox. And so I couldn't even talk to the administrator. I said, to put this in perspective, our cost up at that time, it caused us to sell our house.

And so we had absolutely nothing. I had no money at all. I said, how could she do this? I don't have any insurance.

I don't have any money. I found out on a Monday that she took our MasterCard and committed herself to \$3,600. I'm a seminary prof, folks.

You know what we make as a seminary prof? I mean, it would take years to repay that. And I said, and here I'm back in the hole again, and I've got no house to sell. And I said, my wife is not chemically dependent.

Well, you're in denial. In order to support my wife, I had to sit there for two weeks in a group and say, I'm a co-addict, co-dependent. I had to say that for two weeks.

And finally my wife realized what a joke this is. And if you want to add a little insult to injury here, everybody on that staff, from administrators down, were all homosexual. I mean, it doesn't get any lower than this, folks.

I didn't know whether my wife was going to live or die. Neither did my daughter. And it scared her, so she kind of stayed away.

My son got very, very quiet. He had a wonderful relationship with his mother. And Carl just got quiet.

At that time, Carl was, frankly, some kind of an athlete. He made, in a large school, starting left-wing varsity soccer in his ninth grade. And never played competitive sports again.

Which, frankly, is fine with me. In my conflict of role at that time, I've never felt so sensitive to something. And I said, am I my wife's counselor? Am I her pastor? And I realized, if I was that, I couldn't be her husband.

And I had to commit myself to just be her husband. My role was to hang on every day and say, this too shall pass. In Isaiah 21, there's a passage that says, Washman, how far gone the night? Washman, how far gone the night? Washman says, morning comes.

Oh, hang on to that, folks. If I didn't believe that today, I wouldn't be here today. Morning comes.

This too will pass. Even if it's death, folks, you're going to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. If I didn't have that experience, I wouldn't have any sense of hope.

That's all I'm dealing with here. And if God had any kind of a sense of humor, here I am, chairman of the practical theology department. The man who taught our pastoral counseling resigned that year.

And the dean himself asked if I would switch over. And I said, great. I got a wife I can't fix.

And I thought this would go on maybe for a week or a month. It went on for 15 months. During that time, we lost everything we had.

God stripped us down to absolutely nothing. It's a fascinating experience to find yourself in a place like that because I come from kind of a stoic, self-sufficient, Norwegian farm background that had a tendency now and then to raise its ugly head and say, Well, what's wrong with you anyhow? Do a few push-ups. Read your Bible.

All that got mercifully stripped out. And I had a few Job's friends show up to help me out. One person actually suggested that I was not loving my wife, and that's the reason I said, Boy, I mean, watch your

words when somebody's going through a trial like that.

I'm telling you, it's really fascinating. I've never been there before. I'd always been on the giving side.

Suddenly, I found myself with something I could not fix. No matter what I did, no matter how hard I prayed, there seemed to be absolutely no answer at all. It was silence from heaven.

Looking back, there was one person who stood pillars above everybody else in helping me during that time. It was old Nick Kertanik. Nick's probably 72 years old now.

He's a Bible teacher. Been for years at Biola. Had his office right beside mine.

Nick's just a dear soul. Let me tell you why Nick was qualified. Fifteen years prior to that, he was two weeks away from death with melanoma.

They did a radical mastectomy, and for whatever reason, God spared his life and healed him. Just a dear soul. You say, What did he do? Oh, he stopped by my office once a week.

Just walked in and he changed. I said, Let's pray. That's all he did.

And I can tell you folks, that meant more to me than any word of advice. The advice was nothing at that time. I don't care what you told me.

I knew all the advice. There was nothing you could tell me that I wasn't willing to do. But I couldn't do anything.

Couldn't fix it. And it's always the darkest before the dawn. Well, we had a day of prayer on campus.

I had nothing to do with it, actually, other than participating. And on Wednesday evening, the undergraduate students go down and sit on the gym floor and have communion. And I just went and sat with them.

I was late on campus, so I just sat there. And if God ever spoke to me, he did there. No voices, no visions, nothing like that.

Wasn't anything anybody said, to be honest with you. But the way that God just kind of funnels your thoughts. It went something like this.

Neil, there's a price to pay for freedom. It cost my son his life. Are you willing to pay the price? I said, well, Lord, if that's the reason I'm willing, if it's some stupid thing I'm doing, then I'm not.

But I want you to know something. I left there that night, and I knew it was over. I knew it was over.

And it was. Within a week, my wife woke up one morning. She said, I slept last night.

Never looked back. Never looked back. You say, why? Why did you have to go through that? Well, one, I already suggested.

I think he took away my cliché answers and simplistic fixes. I think that was a smaller one. I don't think I'd ever been too much into that anyhow.

Another big one for me personally was just the whole sense of compassion. When the Lord says, go and learn what this means, I desire compassion, not sacrifice. If there is one essential prerequisite to helping the hurting people, that's it, folks.

Compassion. You learn to weep with those who weep. There are times when you just got to hold on to somebody, and that's all you can do is just hold on.

And boy, I want you to know, so that speaks volumes in and of itself. So compassion, I think, was a big one for me. I mean, I think most of us who are helping people on a regular basis like that are about that far away from tears all the time.

I mean, I am. It doesn't take much to set me off anymore. I mean, the stuff that you hear is just incredible.

You know, I went through a period, I want to hear this. And frankly, I don't think I could if I didn't see the resolution. I don't think I could.

I don't see how these people sit in these hospitals and see no resolution and hear these incredible atrocities. Frankly, they just get hard. They get numb after a while.

And I just pray, I don't want my heart to get hard. I don't want it to get numb. You know, I want to stay sensitive to the needs of our people in this world.

I think from God's perspective, the biggest part of it was this. I think what God very skillfully did is he brought Neil Anderson to the end of his resources. That's the greatest day of my life.

Frankly, only then do you really discover God's. As long as you think you can set a person free, God will just let you go ahead and try it. Then one day you realize you can't do that, can you? You can't do that.

It's impossible for you and I to do that. I'm not sharing this with you to solicit some kind of sympathy for me whatsoever. Don't you feel sorry for me, folks.

That was the birth of Freedom in Christ Ministries. Everything after that changed for me. You know, my mind wasn't any different.

My capacity to think didn't change at all. And I had a nice little ministry going on, I think, at the school before that. But everything changed.

I did switch over and teach pastoral counseling. I never would have done that apart from that crisis. I'm a disciple.

That's where my heart is at. If you would have asked me five years prior to that, would I ever be teaching pastoral counseling, I'd say, No, I don't think so. If you had asked after that happened if I'd ever write a book, I'd have said, No, I don't think so.

It's the grace of God. A guy in Canada asked me, he says, What's automatic writing? I said, I think it's what I do. It's not.

What was born out of that, really honestly, was victory over the darkness and bondage breaker. I never had any intention to leave seminary. I enjoyed teaching.

I thought I had an assignment for life. It was comfortable. Then I really realized God, a few years ago, released me and said, You need to go to the churches.

And I didn't want to do that. Honestly, in a lot of ways. Because, frankly, I didn't want the fight.

I wasn't afraid of the demons. It was, you know. I remember sitting in a faculty prayer time.

We had our faculty retreat. And Bing Hunter, who then became dean, and now he's dean at Trinity. He heard me pray this prayer.

I said, I got a prayer request. I said, I know I need to write a book. I said, frankly, I don't want to.

I'm not afraid of the spiritual battle. I've worked through that in my own personal life. I mean, God took me through the dredges.

I just didn't want to deal with all the academia that we like to think higher education is truly liberal arts. And there's nothing but open-minded people here with new world views and suggestions. I said, frankly, it's the most entrenched portion of our society.

You know, and I don't know how to overcome that, to be honest with you, but it's true. The higher you go, the more committed you are to your perspective. And after all, mine's right.

And, boy, I tell you what, we've got to be drug through to change our worldview sometimes. It's rather profound. Well, anyway, so it's kind of fascinating what came out of that.

Most of you are familiar with those two books and what our thoughts are here. The real issue to me is not near so much getting a person free of a demon, but to get them right with God. That has been my core belief from day one and realized the primary issue here.

In James 4, 7, which is probably a summary of my ministry, the real issue is to submit to God. That's the real issue. And then resist the devil.

And I made a life commitment, a twofold thing. One is to show how Christ really is the answer and how truth will set us free. I mean, that's my primary focus.

I want to see Christ come back in the center of my life, of my marriage, my family, my ministry. He is the hub. And everything else is spokes to that.

It's as simple as this. That he came to give us life. That we're to abide in Christ.

We're not called to bear fruit. Do you realize that? We're called to abide in Christ. If you abide in Christ, you will bear fruit.

And to get Christ back in the center of our lives and of our ministries. Not for that just as an end in itself. But until our people and our marriages and our families are free.

Only then can we collectively come together in unity and reach this world for Christ. And so as much as my heart is committed to world evangelization, I'd have to say it's probably going to be stymied to the degree that we don't have Christ in the center of our lives. And so anyway, I feel I'm this year kind of on the end of a long, long journey.

Which isn't ended in one sense, but let me explain that. Of completing a whole training package for our churches that would catch the vision. Think about this for a moment.

What if you pick very carefully 20 people. Train them for about a few months. Those 20 people would commit themselves to help one person every other week.

That's not overwhelming, is it? I mean, most people would be willing to say, sure, I'll meet with somebody every other week. Do you realize in one year's time, that's 520 people you've helped? You know, the multiplication process is rather fascinating to me. Let's say a few of those turned around and helped a few others.

It didn't take a mathematician to realize that if every church in America did that, you'd see something rather phenomenal happen. That all could happen in the next two years. Do you know what the limit is? Leadership.

You know, you get so frustrated with some pastors. Just get out of the way and give permission then. You know, you got all kinds of people out here who desperately want to hear this.

And maybe because you have your own pride or feeling inadequate yourself. You know, I love pastors. I'm not here to destroy pastors.

My heart bleeds for the church. I think God's avenue of working in our world today is through the church. I'm committed to that.

I'm not going to bypass it. I've been tempted out of my socks to do all kinds of other things to replace it. But I'm not going to do that.

Because I think that God has committed himself today to work through that local church. You know, we say evangelism. What ministry comes to your mind? Honestly.

Catholic crusade, right? Say discipleship. What comes to your mind? My life commitment is I say both local church should come to your mind. That's our function, isn't it? To establish our people free in Christ and start having them multiply themselves in that community.

My workshop this afternoon, I'm going to let a couple from Crystal Evangelical Free Church share with you what's going on up there. They have their own conference. Their workbook's right back here.

We did our conference here a little over two and a half years ago. In that time, they have led 1,200 people to freedom in Christ. 1,200.

95% of that's done by lay people. Catch the vision. That has to happen.

We can't send them all to Fred Dickinson. You like that? I know you do. We can't do that.

Don't send them all to me either. I'm not the answer. Christ is the answer.

I'm not the deliverer. That's the Lord. And if we don't see the scriptural mandate to equip the saints to do the work of ministry, it's not going to get done.

There's not enough professionals in this country to reach more than 5% of our population if that's all they did. You've got to catch this vision, folks. And believe you me, you've got all kinds of people in your

church.

It's like going back to poor old Moses. Where am I going to get meat to eat? If you're a pastor, you'll be there saying, I'm not getting fed around here. Where am I going to get meat to eat? And God says, I want you to choose 70 elders who you know you can put in charge of this task.

They were already there. He just didn't catch the vision. There's 70 others out there.

Equip them, turn them loose. You need some help. You try to do this by yourself, you'll kill yourself.

I've isolated myself so bad right now. Just so I can have a family life, it's unbelievable. I said, I'm not the answer.

I'm not going to start a counseling place someplace. That's not the answer. The answer is the church.

We've got to equip an army here. That's what we have to do. So anyway, if you turn to page 12, I'm trying to avoid a commentary from my ministry here.

But I want to tell you the things that I've had to wrestle with. If you can find a better book to cover that portion of it, God bless you, use that one. I always tell people who complain about my ministry, I say, what are you doing to help folks? And if what you're doing is more theologically accurate and bear more fruit than mine, I'll tell you what I'll do, brother.

I will say, God bless you, get behind you, support you, and go back and teach seminary again. And I'm going to tell them, I'm not even going to say it. You know, what we try to do is the best we can.

We've got visually oriented people today to provide tapes, whatever, you know, that we can have. And you can read this thing here. But everything was seemingly born out of necessity.

You know, we had help of people, find a person, get them free in Christ. They realized their whole mind had to be programmed again. And so we hand them the book now, Living Free in Christ.

And help them show how Christ can meet the most critical needs of their life. To establish their identity where it belongs. To work with God, folks.

It's the Holy Spirit. Bearing witness with my spirit that I'm a child of God. Here's 36 days, little lessons.

Sit down. Renew your mind. Program it again to who you really are as a child of God.

Because the one common denominator I found of everybody embodied to us, none of them knew who they were in Christ. Why? Why not? Where's the Abba Father? This is not an aberration in Scripture. This is the core to present you complete how in Christ.

Now that's the most repeated prepositional phrase in the New Testament. And I realized how many people have been hurt in that way. I was, I got a point in there that I had to write, call my son and say, Can I use this as an illustration since it involves you, Carl? And he said, Sure, Dad.

And I was about all choked up crying as I was thinking about it. But when I moved to seminary from the pastorate, Carl really was known as an athlete. And I mean, we'd have soccer teams, baseball teams call and ask me if I'd be the coach.

They didn't want me, they wanted my son. It was embarrassing. And so you know if they got me as a coach, they automatically got my son.

And so anyway, when I left that area, five years in the same area, same coaches, teams, whatever. It was a very difficult move for Carl. It really was.

And leaving that behind and frankly his reputation preceded him. And we got over there. And a club soccer team called and asked if Carl would like to be on the team and checked it out.

Good coach. So that's where we went for the next seven years. But anyway, first practice, Carl was playing with reckless abandon folks.

He's tearing up the turf out there. I'm kind of going, Man, coach is drooling. Boy, I'm going to use Carl here and I'm going to use him there.

And end of the practice, everybody leaves and Carl comes up to me and I could just see the insecurity in his face. I said, Carl, what's wrong? He said, Well, am I on the team or aren't I? I said, Carl, you're on the team. The roster's already been set.

Where you play is up to the coach. How well you play is up to you. Dear Christian, you're on the team.

The roster's already set. Where you play is up to the coach. How well you play is up to you.

I can't tell you how many gifted, mature Christian leaders have pulled me aside and said, You just described me tonight. And you'd go, You? With your giftedness and your talents? How could you feel that way? Let me take a shot at it, folks. Somewhere maybe in the recesses of their mind, maybe they begin to think, Maybe I'm here because of my gifts and my talents.

Maybe if I don't perform, maybe God's going to cut me someday from the squad here. Then I find somebody on the end of the bench, and you'd have to be pretty sharp to figure out what their gift and their talent is. It's there, but it's not overwhelming, you know what I mean? And they're thrilled to death to be a member of the team, because they know they're not there because of their gifts and their talents.

But neither are you and I. We all are what we are by the gifts of God. He hasn't equally distributed gifts, talents, nor intelligence. He hasn't done that.

What is equally distributed is Himself. And the only legitimate basis for our sense of unity coming together as the body of Christ to establish a legitimate sense of self and identity can only be found right in there. Beloved, now you are a child of God.

What would you rather do, be that or rock a scientist? Well, I can see why you'd like to be both, but the point of it is, is that one thing we can all be, the great equalizer is, is that we're all children of God. And all He's going to do is ask us to be accountable with what He's given to us. And He hasn't distributed that equally.

And the only joy you're going to find is using what He gave you. And doing it to the glory of God. Well, anyway, the next consequence that came out of this thing obviously was, if people are paying attention to deceiving spirits, then how are you led by the Holy Spirit? You know, if I could take my ministry and do it for only one purpose only, it would be to free people up so they could be led by the Holy Spirit.

This is a terrible thing to say, but it's our observation and I think it's true. Only about 15% of our Bible-believing Christians are living free, productive lives in Christ right now. And let's think that through for a moment.

How does the kingdom of darkness operate? The devil doesn't have any legs or arms. Spirits are dismembered. They don't have physical capabilities.

How does he rule planet Earth? He takes people who are non-Christians, who believe a lie, and they live out a lie. Basically, that's how the kingdom of darkness operates. How does the kingdom of God operate? Takes people filled by the Holy Spirit who will be led by the Spirit to do God's bidding.

Now what happens if you got that whole half, most of our Christian community who are not sensitive to believing in the Holy Spirit, who are paying attention to deceiving the Spirit, do you see what happens to the kingdom of light? It becomes rather dark. No fruit. No leading.

All of those who are being led by the Spirit of God, those are the sons of God. My sheep hear my voice. And they follow me.

One of the great roles of leadership is to get people that in touch with God so that the Holy Spirit can lead them. The sickest part of that is I want to control them. Fruit of the Spirit is not staff control.

Not spouse control either. It's not even child control. What is it? Self control.

Get rid of the controllers. They're robbing God's place in people's lives. Do you realize that? There's nobody probably more insecure than a controller.

I want to see everybody released to God so that He can guide them. Not anti-authority here at all. He'd guide them according to Scripture to be under authority, which we all are somewhere.

And so he wrote to walking in the light. The whole point of that was is to understand the problems that are really keeping me from knowing God's will and doing it. I'm supposed to renew my mind so that I can prove that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect.

And if I can help a person get free in Christ where they can renew their mind so they can walk by the power of the Holy Spirit and not carry out the desires of the flesh. Moving them to that point. Helping them get radically right with God.

Understanding how God leads them in their life. How they can renew their mind. To establish again the only legitimate foundation of truth we have and that's the revelation of God's word.

In John 17, I ask not that you take them out of the world but you keep them from the evil one. How? Sanctify them in thy word. Thy word is truth.

There is no substitute for studying to show ourselves to prove as a workman who needs not be ashamed for rightly dividing the word of truth. You've got to know the truth. You've got to know that.

Then what came next? Well, the obvious one was parenting. Because most of our problems that we were dealing with we found originated when they were children. Have you discovered that? You're dealing with adults? When did their problems originate in most cases? When they were children.

So we did some research and wrote Seduction of Our Children. And we've got a book I'm going to tell you about tomorrow coming out and I know Mark has one coming in that area too. We're looking forward to that.

As well as the family one that Jim did which is very, very good. So it's a very important issue dealing with our whole family understanding parenting from that regard. Well, uh, then what shows up? If you let a hundred people through the steps to freedom how many are struggling with sex? A hundred? And uh, I'll tell you this is gross folks but I, it's just I've got to be honest with you if Satan was manifested in our presence he'd be about 90% gentle.

I can't believe how much sex plays a part of this thing. It's just overwhelming. And I said it's almost seemingly resistant to normal treatments as though I can't have an answer for this thing.

We did a, we researched our own faculty or student body, student body at Talbot and uh, I wouldn't dare share the results with the faculty they wouldn't let me anyhow but 60% said that they're presently feeling guilty over their sex life. 60%. Half of those said they would take a class if it was offered with them and confidentiality was assured.

We never offered it. That's tragic to me. And we got to have some answer for something like that.

Is my God big enough to deal with your sexual problem? Oh, he's got to be. If we knew what to do here the key to that I found out is really in Romans 6. That you are alive in Christ and dead to sin therefore do not allow sin to reign in your mortal body. If I'm going to do that don't use your body as an instrument of unrighteousness.

Can you commit a sexual sin and not use your body as an instrument of unrighteousness? A lot of kinky stuff out there but I can't think of any way. Guess what's going to happen? You're going to allow sin to reign there. Well, what do you do about that? See, there's where complete repentance.

Oh, I confessed it. Confession is not a complete answer. I don't know why we, we fell into that little trap.

That's the first step in repentance but it is not complete repentance. I always tell people, I said, if you open that door over there there's a talking dog on the other side of that door. He says, let me in, you know, come on.

You'll get away with it. Everybody's doing it. It's a lot of fun.

So you open the door and the dog comes in and glonks onto your leg. Would you beat on it or beat on yourself? By the way, when he goes through that door he changes from the tempter to the accuser. Have you noticed that? You give in to sexual temptation.

It's just overwhelming. You give in to it. Immediately afterwards, what happens? Oh, what a rotten sickle I am.

I'm never going to do that again. He goes, sin, confess, sin, confess, sin, confess. I give up cycle.

What's wrong with that? It's not the complete cycle. It's sin, confess, resist. You know? So the dog comes in, glonks onto your leg.

He's the accuser. You go, oh God, forgive me. Guess what God does? He forgives you.

Actually, you're already forgiven. He died once for all. You're forgiven.

And you just confessed it. Dog's still there. You just did the first half of James 4, 7. You submitted to God.

That's good. What's the second half? Get that stupid dog out of here. Now, see, to me, complete repentance would be, I opened the door, you know, accept God's forgiveness, resist the devil, and close that stupid door.

You know, that would be complete repentance. You know, it all comes down to two things. Romans 12, 1 and 2. I urge you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice and be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Break the stronghold. You've used your body this way. Now God says use it as an instrument of unrighteousness.

How do we get people to do that? Repentance. They'll stop and pray and say, Lord, would you reveal to my mind every sexual use of my body as an instrument of unrighteousness. You know what God does? He reveals every use of your body.

He does, folks. I've had people come in and tell me about an incest, or a rape, or one affair, and they'll pray that prayer, look at you and go, well, that'd be kind of embarrassing. And you're about to hear the next 20.

Why didn't they share that before? Well, embarrassment maybe, whatever. And at that time it's precious because, say, listen, I care only for your freedom here. There's no condemnation here.

I just want you to see you get free of that. You renounce that use of their body with so and so and so and so, now give your body to God as a living sacrifice. You just broke the bondage, folks.

Now you've got to renew your mind. But now you can. You better do Romans 12, 1 first, before you do 2. Because if you just try to win this as a battle for your mind, you're probably going to lose it.

And, well, that's all in the book, in dealing with that issue. We've got one coming out, freedom from addiction. I'm really excited about this one.

Mike and Julia Quarles are staff members in Atlanta. If writing a book is giving birth to a baby, this was a gorilla. And it took a long time coming out.

And I'm not out to badmouth the 12-step recovery program. I made a commitment years ago, I don't badmouth anybody's ministry, folks. That's not what we call to do.

Speak kindly of one another. But there's some holes in the program. There's some deficiencies.

It's not what they're doing that's wrong. It's what they're not doing it. I mean, if you had a mule that's drinking contaminated water and going the wrong direction, and he didn't do it very well, so he doubles his efforts and keeps trying harder, finally flops over, you know, laying there in the ground.

What's his answer? Stop giving him contaminated water? Take a hose and wash him off so he looks better? Others say, well, you're going the wrong direction. So they grab their tail and pull that old mule around, now he's facing the right direction. What does he need? Life.

He's dead. You know, turning him around in the middle of the road and stop giving him contaminated water, you know, that's noble, but that's not enough. Ephesians 5.18 says, Be not drunk with wine, therefore abstain.

What does it say? Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled by the Spirit. They got the wrong goal. Abstinence is not the goal.

Freedom in Christ is the goal. And you get that person established free in Christ, now his needs are going to get met. You just take away the alcohol, the pain is still there.

That's how he was dealing with the pain. And you got him off the alcohol, it got worse probably. So you got to get him established in Christ.

Standing every week saying I'm an alcoholic is counterproductive to your recovery program, people. You're a child of God who struggles with alcohol. And frankly, there's not a step in there to forgive, and I'll tell you right now, that's the biggest ticket to be free from your past.

There's a ticket, one to go ask for forgiveness, that's noble, good. It's not what they're doing that's wrong, it's what they're not doing that's so critical. And so I'm excited about that, I'm ready for the flack.

Machiavelli said in The Prince, There is nothing more perilous to do than to introduce a new order of things. So if you think my hate mail is good now, you wait till that one comes out, man. You know, and we're trying everything we can to avoid that, because I don't like pain anyhow.

But the truth of the matter is, you know, you can be a descriptive writer and say what's going on, and you'll never get any flack. You'll be a prescriptive one and you'll get it. You know, and you do everything you can to say, I'm not against what you're doing, God bless you, and I don't want to take your program away from you.

But you see, that thing started at one time with a bunch of committed Christians who knew Christ was the answer, and they put it into a program. People started to see results and said, well, they won't commit themselves to Christ, so can we use your program over here? And what started out as a Christian program went totally secular. It got resurrected again by the Christians about 10 or 15 years or so ago.

Christians said, well, let's bring that thing back. They thought it was the program. It isn't the program, it's Christ.

Isn't that interesting? That's always going to be true. That's the same problem with steps to freedom. Steps to freedom don't set you free.

Who sets you free is Christ. What sets you free is your response to Him. It's just a tool.

It can be used wrong, it can be used right. It'll pass, it'll go away someday. You know, it's just need of the moment kind of a thing.

Those things come and go and always have in church history. Unfortunately, what happens is the first generation comes along and they develop it and they use it and they know it's Christ and they're dependent upon God. Next guy comes along, he's dependent upon the tool.

He thinks it's the tool that does it. Now, that's always been true and it'll be true again, unfortunately. So, treat it for what it is.

Then we had to move on and realize we can help a person get free but I put them back in that dysfunctional church. What do we do? Well, you know what came out of that one two years ago, setting your church free, which I'm going to talk about this afternoon. Then we also discovered that you can resolve things as an individual.

You have not yet resolved as a couple. And that's why I want to share them out. I want to share a couple of concepts here that I think are just critical.

If I had to say what's my life work, it just came out. You'll see it like this, it's in your bookstores now. Helping others find freedom in Christ.

Let me tell you a rationale behind this thing. And some probably won't like this but let me tell you where I'm coming from. I think we've polarized and have done it too long.

I think we have a conference on spiritual warfare and I think this is frankly the most balanced one you'll ever go to in this country. But a burden that I have is to see that what we're trying to accomplish in Christian counseling or discipleship, as you would have it, needs to always deal with the whole person. If I took James 4, 7 and said, submit to God, resist the devil, you say, well, how much of his problem was influenced by the devil? And if it was from zero to 100%, it wouldn't make any difference what I do, I would still do the same thing.

And I don't try to figure out what it was. I think the real issue is, is I've got to help this person submit to God. What I'm trying to do is, is that because of our western world view, we have a view of the world like this and many of us have put another little circle out here and say, well, that's demonic.

You refer to that. Tell me what it is, Neal. Some put an X across it, it doesn't exist.

And others will say, tell me when it's that and I'll refer out and put that in some other umbrella. And I'm saying, what's wrong with that? It's not out there, it's part of this. And frankly, I think what the Lord has given to us is a whole gospel for a whole person that deals with all of reality.

And so, when you look at what we've developed in terms of steps to freedom, that's just, the primary emphasis there is to help you get right with God. See, that's what led me to that years ago. I said, why is this person struggling? They're a Christian.

And then I tried to search Scripture to find out what is it that's keeping me from having a right relationship with God? Well, here's the problem. See, we got people in our churches that go, yeah, I suppose I'm a little proud. Oh, good, God's opposed to you.

Oh. Yeah, I'm a little bit of a rebel. Oh, that's terrific, that's the sin of divination.

Oh. Yeah, I'm a little bitter about that right now. Oh, that's terrific.

God himself will turn you over to the tormentors. But you see, we see that kind of pride, rebellion, bitterness rampant in our churches and then we give them one minute to get right for communion. I said, one minute to get right with God takes me two and a half hours with the average person.

Is he a problem here? Oh. Man, we got churches filled with baggage. Absolutely filled with baggage.

And see, what I want to try to communicate is is that I'm not up here just to get rid of your stupid demon because frankly, you don't have just a demon problem. You've got a relationship with God problem and I've got to deal with your whole person to resolve that thing. That's the same problem.

Well, I've got a sex problem. No, you don't, you've got a life problem. Well, I've got an alcoholic problem.

No, you don't, you have a life problem. You can't deal with alcoholism just on the basis of alcoholism. They need to know how Christ is going to meet their needs, who they are in Christ, get rid of the bitterness, the pride, the anger, the jealousy and all the control mechanisms that go with it, then you can have some answer for you here.

You can get on with the whole life. When Mike realized the truth of Romans chapter 6, when he finally got a place there, 25 things I tried that didn't work. That's worth reading in and of itself.

And then he came to realize who he really was in Christ. And that was his ticket out of there, folks. That was his ticket out of there.

It is for all of our people. Well, turn with me to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, I'm sorry, 224. Let me just highlight a couple of things that are, I think, so critical.

In terms of preparing people for this thing, I mean, we've, as best as we can, it's laid out there for you. And frankly, by next fall, almost all of it is already, it's all in youth editions. And our, listen to Dave this afternoon, what's going on, they're booked up all next fall and then the following year.

But just helping our young people. Look at the sexual problem, just in and of itself. If you've used your body as an instrument of righteousness, you've allowed sin to reign there.

Right? Now, what happens if you get married and you haven't resolved that? You're a torpedo in your next generation. You really are. I'm going to cover that a little bit tomorrow on setting your marriage free.

And what percentage of your kids do you think are sexually active? You know what it is in the inner city? 100%. A study came out, 40% of our black community is sexually active by the time they're 10. 80% by the time they're 14.

100% they claim by the time they're 18. And you, you have an unresolved issue here and you bring it into marriage, what God wants you to have in your marriage, you're not going to have. You haven't resolved that.

Actually, our setting your marriage free, I'm just going to adapt that thing to premarital counseling because just trying to tell people what a role of a husband and wife is in preparing for marriage when they've got three generations of baggies they're bringing into it, they better deal with some of that. Before they get married, better to deal with it before you get married. You found out, didn't you, that you didn't marry just that person, that sweetheart? You got their whole booming family with them? You figured that one out, didn't you? You know, I really love her, but her brother, man, he's something else.

Let me just comment on choosing people. If you go to your church and you say, you know, who all I could be trained for this? Don't do that, man. Select.

Because 80% come are deep trouble and they're looking for some answers. And you better choose the best you've got for this ministry. Who do they need to be? Look at it.

Verse 24, And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelservant. Let me start here. Lord's bondservant.

What is Christian counseling? It's a compassionate application of repentance and faith. That's what true Christian counseling is. And secondly, it is not a technique that we learn.

It's an encounter with God. Who's the wonderful counselor? It's not you and me. It's God.

He's the one who grants repentance. We simply have to get God into this thing. I've had more people come back and say, I can't believe what you got out of that person.

I used to hear that a lot. You know, he brought somebody in and some counselor had been working with this person three, four or five years. Walked through the steps of freedom and said, they never told me that.

How'd you get that out of them? I didn't get it out of them. Who did that, people? God. That's who he's praying to, see? Then you brought God back into the center.

I've seen Christian, quote, counseling get so secularized that they forbid their counselors to pray or use scriptures in counseling. Unbelievable. They call it Christian counseling.

It's Christians doing secular counseling. That's all it is. I said, the only one who can set this person free is Christ.

The only one who has the power and capacity to free them from their past, that's God himself. You know, this thing is so transferable. I was down at Gene Getz's church.

Drove over to Tyler, Texas. Doctor over there was director of the University of Texas Medical School in Tyler. And his daughter was anorexic and we had the privilege to help her.

And he wanted me to come share this with Pastor. Down at the Bible Belt, you can get away with this. He passed out our books to everybody, all of his social workers.

You can't do that in some states, you know. But he's a doctor and he's head of it, so he did it. And they were all Christian anyhow.

Well, I got over there and this black social worker gave a testimony. I've never met her, never seen her, whatever else. And she said, Doc, here gave me this book and I've just gotten into reading it and I think this client has some problems.

Like you described there. So she said, here. And took a body breaker, opened up chapter 12 and said, read this prayer.

And took the book back, do that. You know, went back and forth like that. God set her free.

And the husband came in the next day and said, I don't know what you did for my wife, do it for me. All right, here. Told him back and forth like that.

And then she said, you know, I think I need to go through this. And she said, last night I sat down, I went through that and Sunday I worship God in spirit and truth for the first time in my life I sat down. God's a deliverer, folks.

We just got to teach our people to repent. Well, I did. I told them to forgive their mother last week.

And I said, yeah, that'll be a big one. But that's not all she needs to do probably. That'll be quarrelsome.

You know, learning not to argue. One of the hardest lessons I learned in my life, because I was the next aerospace engineer. I could win arguments, folks.

I mean, I'm, want to do an intellectual battle? Let's go at it. And I'm not intimidated by anybody, to be honest with you. That's all pride.

That's all that is. I was winning all kinds of arguments and no converts. And I learned after a while, and in fact, I taught evangelism, and this is how I taught it.

Here's how you avoid the argument. You got off the issue. And it's all a side thing.

And I said, learning the greatest skill you'll learn in helping people find freedom in Christ is don't go down rabbit trails. Because the devil or they will take you down a thousand and one. You got to keep them on track, keep them focused, and get back to the issue here, but not quarrelsome.

Say, I want to argue with you. I said, well, all right, go outside. I'll be out in five minutes, but go ahead and start without me.

John Stott said years ago, he said, we cannot pander to a man's intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to the intellectual integrity. And I think that's true. We need to have an answer for the hope that lies within us.

But you can see through somebody after a while, they just want to fight. I'd say, God bless you, go fight. Not with me.

I'm not a fighter, anyway. I'm a lover. And you don't get anything by that.

Just verbal excursion. And there's just some people who like to fight. You ever notice that? Make sure they're not on your board.

Your life will really be miserable and quarrelsome. Be kind to all. Proverbs says, what's desirable in a man is his kindness.

That's what it says. Want to see something, men? Watch this. Ladies, don't respond until I tell you to.

If you had to choose between strong masculinity or kindness in us men, which would you choose? My wife said one time, she said, you know when you really turn me on? I said, when's that? She says, when you're kind to my children. Work, folks. I've been kind ever since.

Able to teach. You've got to know the truth. You're up against the father of lies.

And some of this stuff is so subtle. You know, let me just give you an application of that. And this is just a learning experience we all go through.

And Jim shared what all of you have had. How many of you have had somebody go catatonic on them, like Jim explained to me, guys? And the first time that happens, it can be a little intimidating. Oh, call 911, you know.

What did I do? I got them there. I've got to get them back, kind of an idea. I said, the first time that happened to me, I kind of went, this is really strange.

And I had about 20 messages on voicemail, so I turned around and got them off. And when I was done, I turned around and she started to stir and we went on. And I just said, the best thing you do is just don't react.

If you went out and got a cup of coffee and came back, they'd be back okay. But one of our own staff, Carol, learned a lot better way. And you know, it comes back to our, Jim's discussion the other day of power or truth, or what was the other commitment? I said, I do all three.

I mean, this is the funniest debate. You kind of go out and say that somebody's against somebody else. I said, I won't argue for a second over method.

God's using you, God bless you, you know. And I shared with you a minus. If you've got a better method, I'm going to listen to you.

But what's interesting about this, sure there's times when you have to confront that. That's not what I'm speaking against whatsoever. Prayer, I just feel that in the long term, what sets these people free is what they choose to believe.

And I've got to help them come to that point of repentance and truth and faith in God, know who they are in Christ. Well, anyway, if you make, and we have people do that, the third point there, commitment. We always help them make some commitment at the beginning.

If they've done that, here's all you'd have to do. God went catatonic on you. Say, just, I would just look at the person and say, Satan, you have no authority here.

This person has given their life to Christ. You can open your eyes now. You know what happens? They open their eyes.

Close across the board. And the key is, is don't lose control in the first place. And that's a skill you'll learn over a period of time.

Just don't lose control like that. You're moving too fast. You lost him is what actually happened.

And so you, you, you learn as we all learn. And we're all still learning, by the way. About the time you think, I think I've heard it all.

Well, just wait till next week. I had a guy who was a counselor, actually counseling people out of his house, professional counselor, charging money for it. Came in to need some help.

Took a knife and had cut himself clear across his belly and sewed himself up. And he wasn't doing very well in life. And so he tried to convince everybody he had cancer.

That's a pretty severe defense mechanism. I mean, he actually did that. I thought, you know, bizarre stuff.

I said, how is he counseling people? Not very well, obviously. But patient went wrong. You're going to be wronged.

I've seen Mark Bubek get wronged bad, folks. I've seen Fred Dickinson get wronged bad. I've been wronged bad.

I can't believe the stuff I hear about me. And the big one is, Neal teaching Christians are demon possessed. That's all I hear.

Write them off immediately because of that. I personally have never said that. But it's amazing what you have to deal with.

Here's a new one for me. This is really a new one. Neal's dying, denying the atonement.

If anybody read my stuff, do I deny the atonement? That came right out of the Calvary chapels. It's because Christians could have a problem, then I'm denying the atonement. Or here's another one.

I believe that Christians have the authority to do the will of God. So Neal teaches that we're little Christettes and we can just march around. Now Bibb Sacks says I'm a gnostic.

You live long enough, you'll hear the whole circle after a while. You just kind of scratch your head and you go, what do you do? And the answer is, keep trusting yourself to God. Don't be defensive.

That's a hard one. And I've seen it. Patient went wrong.

I saw a church, I don't want to say which one it was, outside of Chicago, going after Dr. Warner when he was at Trinity. A man went in, the pastor went in and said, how can you have a man like this on your faculty? Two years later I did my conference there. Next week I'm going to be in a community where a pastor in town rose up against me.

This year, two years later, he's encouraging all these people to come. Patient went wrong. When you get inside to this thing, patience is an incredible virtue.

You want to help somebody find their freedom in Christ, it takes patience and big bladders usually. Let me, let me point out two fascinating things here. When you think in terms of Christian counseling, because, honestly, write this down in your Bible and think about it ten years from now.

When this hits the market, I'm going to get some flack from the intellectuals, no question about it, because of what I'm suggesting, that this really is an encounter with God. We've got to get Christ back in the center of this thing and it isn't primarily technique, it is God himself. And, you know, you kind of undermine five years of higher education by saying something simplistic like that.

Anyway, I bring out a couple of points in here that are something I want you to think about. How much would you be willing to share all the dirt in your life just for the purpose of sharing it? How many would you be willing to do that? I mean, honestly, just share all the dirt in your life? I wouldn't. Why would I want to do that? How many would be willing to share all the dirt in your life for the purpose of gaining some understanding why you're all screwed up? Well, some do now, see.

And you can explain with great precision. Gee, now I know good skills of accurate and whatever it is. Truth, you know, compassion.

Like I said, I brought your whole story out and with great precision was able to explain in great detail why you're all screwed up. So, now what, see? See, when you introduce the gospel, you've got a capacity to be a new creation of Christ. Are you, as a child of God, primarily a product of your past or are you primarily a product of the work of Christ on the cross? Do we believe in the gospel? Is the person a new creation? I can't fix your past, but I believe by the grace of God I can get you free from it.

And that's what I believe we're really called to do. Otherwise, you're just a victim all your life. And you don't have to be that.

You say, now how many would be willing to share all the dirt in your life for the purpose of resolving it? Now watch what happens, folks. It's amazing, when they work through all those forgiveness issues, why are they sharing all that with me? To resolve it. Well, we want to go through all the pain first, then you'll be ready to forgive.

You'll never get there. And if you keep rehearsing the pain every week, guess what happens? Do you resolve it or make it worse? You're making it worse. So, why don't you visit that once, learn how to forgive that person, bring out all that pain, but as they're bringing it out, you're forgiving them and you're resolving it.

It's fascinating. Here's another interesting aspect of that. How many would like to go into a surgeon and do a little exploratory surgery? And say, I'm not sure totally what your problem is, but we're, and by the way, I only got 50 minutes, so we'll get as much done as we can today and can you hang in here? I'll be back next week.

And, you know, then we'll do a little more exploratory surgery. That guy's going to die on you, folks. He's going to absolutely die.

There's not a surgeon in the country who wouldn't open a wound and close it in the same setting. And I have, frankly, the audacity to suggest I don't think we should do that either. You revisit that pain just to share the pain and you don't have a way to resolve it.

I say, don't visit the pain. You'll do more damage than good. And I said, why don't we do that? We don't have a theology of closure.

We don't have a theology of resolution. How do you resolve that? How do you stop the pain? And the only one who can really close that wound up is Christ. He's the one who binds up the brokenhearted.

He's the one who sets us free. And there is none other. Well, a couple more here real quick.

With gentleness, correct the notion of opposition. If you were mighty in God's spirit, how would it manifest itself? You know what I believe? Gentleness. Honestly.

There's a little Elijah in all of us, or Samson. I'll grab the jawbone of an ox. I'll smash people in the submission.

It really is gentleness. I'm going to just absolutely destroy myself with probably at least ten of you here, but the best movie I've seen in ten years, the best expression of Christianity I've ever seen in my life is in a movie right over here, Dead Men Walking. I was absolutely tore up for hours after watching that movie.

It's a guy in death row, the most vile, sick, unrepentant man you'll ever see. And this woman goes in and out of sheer love and grace leads him to repentance. Oh man, it is so powerful.

She said in the movie, I just want to be like Jesus. I think that's what Jesus would have been like. No.

Most of us would be outside protesting, marching, demanding the capital punishment. Not that that's wrong either. See, they do a good job presenting both sides to this thing.

It's raw. That's why it's called R. There's no sex or violence in there, but I mean, it's raw. But if you're helping people find freedom in Christ, you're dealing with raw issues every time you deal with somebody, folks.

So don't be afraid of it. I encourage you. Boy, I'm telling you, I was impressed.

If I had editorial rights over that film, I wouldn't change one thing she said or did. I couldn't believe that Hollywood could produce something like that. Honestly, I think it's better than Chariots of Fire.

That showed great conviction. This showed great grace. It was really amazing.

But gentleness brought this man to repentance right before he died. I'm telling you, I just want him to stand up and say, that's Christianity, folks. Not crucify him, but love him.

You know the best expression I've seen of that on the problems of homosexuality? I was up in Oregon and a couple took me out for lunch and they said, we're using a material so excited about this. And Oregon was going through the same thing Colorado was going through politically on the homosexual problem. And she said, I just feel so bad about the image the church is getting through this time and we're out to get these people instead of loving them and in compassion restoring them.

And she felt God call her down to work in a group. The problem was it was a closed group. By that I mean you had to be one of them.

And suddenly she'd become very self-conscious about the fact that her hair was kind of short and she was wearing slacks. Maybe I better let my hair grow out, put on a dress or otherwise they'll think I'm one of them. Then God grabbed her heart and said, sweetheart, that's what I did.

I mean, have you read anywhere in the Gospels where Jesus walked around and said, listen folks, shape up, I'm God. Actually, it is so absent you've got to really search Scripture to find a declared statement that he was who he said he was. What did he do? He took upon the form of a man and dwelt amongst us.

And she went down and she sat in that group and she identified with him. Three months later she's a spokesperson. Another three months later her husband is chairman of the board and they're setting these people free in Oregon.

I just want to stand and say, no condemnation. Why are we taking on that role? Why don't we have a ministry of reconciliation and be ambassadors for Christ and stop putting down and start building up? Frankly, I'm ashamed at times to down myself with certain clinically depressed and my wife said, why don't you go see Neil? And she said, him? He's always up. Well isn't it who you should go see? Somebody who's up? I mean, if you were really sick would you find the most snivelly emaciated waste of doctor in town and ask him what his health secret is? Well that wasn't the problem folks.

You know what the problem was? She didn't believe because I was always up that I could understand that I could give her mercy. You know the worst indictment upon the church today is that people find more mercy in a secular 12 step program in a local bar than they do in some of our churches. But they don't have any grace to help in time of need.

And we've got the grace to help in time of need and you'll never even have an opportunity to give it if there isn't mercy given first. That's why he said, be merciful as I've been merciful to you. I'm not condoning sin.

I'm providing an opportunity for them to share with us so we can help them. And if there isn't some compassion, some mercy, then God helps to help us. Because my God is compassionate and merciful.

Well how can I go to God? I mean if he wants a new wife he can create one tomorrow. I remember Jesus. Isn't that the context in Hebrews? We don't have a high priest we can't relate to who is tempted in every way such as man who despised the cross and suffered the most shameless penetrating thing.

Do you realize that's why I can go to him? Because he walked amongst us. He suffered every temptation you suffered. You know, I've been accused.

Nothing like he's been accused. I've suffered hardship. Nothing like he did on that cross.

Doesn't even remotely compare. And he did nothing wrong. We deserved it.

He didn't. Oh what grace. If perhaps God may grant repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.

See, he's the only one who can do that. That we may come to our senses. Where is the battle? Right here.

So we can come to the knowledge of the truth. Having escaped the snare of the devil and held him that held captive to do his will. Folks, we'll do whatever we can to resource you, help you in any way we possibly can.

I don't know what more I could do personally but I've got a dream for you. If we can get our people free and established in Christ and their churches we can come together. Let me close with a rather remarkable testimony.

Dear Neil, 1993 I purchased a set of your tapes. After listening to these tapes I began applying your principles to my problems. I realized that some of my problems could be spiritual attacks.

I learned how to take a stand and won victories over some problems in my life. It's only the tip of the iceberg. I'm a deacon and preacher in a Baptist church.

My pastor was suffering from depression and other problems that I was not aware of. In 1994 he committed suicide. This literally brought our church to its knees.

I knew of some of the problems of the previous pastors and felt it was spiritual but didn't know how to relay it to the people since the devil or demons can't affect Christians. Right? Right? The church elected me as their interim pastor. While in a local bookstore I saw a book of yours and said I need your church free.

I purchased it, read it. I felt with all the spiritual suppression in the church this was the answer. Only one problem, to get the rest of the church to believe.

That's the problem. Anyway, after a few weeks of preaching on spiritual things I knew we had to act in sending you church free. The previous pastor that killed himself would not believe your material.

He would never read or listen to your message. That's a logical problem for me. I mean, I don't believe what that guy's teaching.

What's he teaching? I don't know. You'll actually come across that. You know? It's amazing.

Slowly, the people accepted my message. I was able to contact one of your staff. Flew to Houston in 1994.

The leaders of our church through the sending you church free, the leaders loved it. We found that to be true. We got people dragging their feet coming in, not going out.

I mean, it's great to get a bag of rocks off your back, folks. And so going out, I've never had a problem. Going in we have.

You know, people, I don't want to dig up the past. We're not digging it up. It's still there.

Anyway, the leaders loved it. Next, I felt, step one was passed. Next, I want to take all the people through Steps to Freedom.

Six weeks later, I was able to do so. Really don't understand it, but we were set free from the spiritual bondage of multiple problems. Can't put it in a letter.

I'd write a book. During all of this, one of my middle-aged members who was an evangelist was set free, learned who he was in Christ and is back in the ministry. Praise the Lord.

I saw the twin daughters of our deceased pastor set free, able to forgive their father. Twin girls were able to go on with their lives. At one point, one of the twins was contemplating suicide.

This is a new church. God's free to work here. In September, we founded our pulpit community.

Our church voted 100% for a new pastor. This has never happened in our church before. This is an independent, fundamental, Baptist church.

That's probably why it never happened there before. Anyway, well, when you do think God's way, you get God's results. I have all of your material, videos, textbooks.

I love your ministry. I work one night a week in the Harris County Jail next to the Los Angeles County. We have the largest county jail in the country.

I work with homosexual men and I've seen many of them set free in Christ. Isn't that exciting? Can a church go from that kind of despair to victory in Christ? The answer is, sure, if you want it. Absolutely.

You can have all of God that you want to have. I'm convinced of that. I really am.

God is not a respecter of persons. He loves all of us the same. And you're all just as important to Him.

Should we pray for lunch? No. No.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/25/SID25938.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/neil-t-anderson/equipping-the-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net