

Bible Text: John 7:14-18
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Well, I guess Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where Brother David planted the church is uh, if it's not the fastest-growing area in America, it's close. A suburb of Nashville, as you know, Nashville's been growing and growing, and uh Brother David was under Brother Jono on his staff for years there at Chevrovo Mills. I remember the day Jono called me and said, "Man, Brother David wants to plant a church." And I said, praise the Lord. That's great. And uh maybe you don't know how that works in our Anchored in Truth Fellowship when somebody in our partnership churches has a brother like David who says, I want to go plant a church and the church has confidence in them, the Anchored in Truth family don't go around that and and interfere there. We we work through the sending church. So Brother Jono's church, Brother Jono is the mentoring overseeing pastor for that plant but all of Anchored in Truth's family backs him up and that's huge when you talk about helping a guy get a down payment on a house or uh paying his rent, just getting him going. So it would be unbiblical for Anchored in Truth as maybe kind of a parachurch to walk in front of Brother Jono and his church. No, we're behind the local church, amen? It's always, we're I don't have you figured it out? We are rabidly local church centered around here because that's all Paul did and that's who Jesus died for.

So, but their their model of of being the mentoring overseeing church, but staying coordinated with the whole family, it's just beautiful. It's a powerful thing. And it's just like um 3 John that uh brother Richard Caldwell pointed out the other the other day in his sermon where he commended the church there because there were itinerant church planters came through and they helped them. My point is throughout the totality of the New Testament, Paul just expected all the churches to help one another in this mission's church planting effort. And so uh don't be an independent spirit. You don't have to connect with us. We're not the only ones, but there are not many solid groups out there. There's not many solid groups out there uh and we're we're determined to fight the good fight to keep ours as solid as we can.

I'm preaching on the maxim of spirit empowered and I don't know that I have ever come to the pulpit feeling more inadequate for a task. Who's adequate to be the authority on the Holy Spirit? Well, I'm certainly not. I I don't know anyone that is. Matter of fact, uh Jesus told Nicodemus, if you're gonna uh be familiar with uh what it means to be in God's family, to be in the kingdom of God, you gotta understand the Spirit of God is the agency

that causes that to come to fruition, and the Spirit of God is quite mysterious. Jesus said he's he's like the wind, it blows here, it blows there, you just he he's a person and he's sovereign. I like that about the Holy Spirit. You don't just do a little few hoop jumps or plug in a formula and get the power. He's sovereign. But I do believe, and just upfront disclaimer, this is not a polished sermon uh but I do believe I've stumbled around in grace and and got some things that would help us as we strive toward being a pastor, a preacher, a local church that the Holy Spirit is empowering. Uh nothing else matters if that's not true. Uh you can preach the most polished, academically pure expositions of the text and be a failure apart from the Spirit of God. Uh, brothers, we may have a few guys out there today who are good men and I love them, but they care more about their academic exposition than about the local church they're to be building. I call that expositional idolatry. Exposition is not the end, the building up of God's church is the end. Exposition is a means, a foundational and essential means. Well, I'm getting ahead of myself.

John chapter 7, verses 14 through 18. John chapter 7, beginning in verse 14,

14 But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach.

Brother Jono, the scholars say he was probably expositional because it means he just taught and taught and taught. He probably just took the Old Testament text and laid it out for him. Thought that was cool. John Piper says Jesus is a Calvinist. Now we know Jesus was an expositor, so that's all good. Verse 15,

15 The Jews then were then astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"

Well, it wasn't that he hadn't been educated, he hadn't been educated in their schools.

16 So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

In other words, "Here I am in incarnate form and I've brought from heaven, from My Father, what He told Me to do and say and what I understand is what He gave me." Powerful, verse 17, powerful stuff here. Jesus speaks,

17 "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.

He just said, "You consider Me just another man but if you were willing to do God's will, you would know that I'm not just speaking as another man, that what I'm speaking came from God." Verse 18,

18 "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

I was thinking about this, I spent a lot of time just contemplating on these truths and praying about them and I thought about a tapestry and how the ministries of the Holy Spirit might be viewed like a tapestry. Over here he's working, over there he's working. He works in this way, he works in that way. And if you look at the backside of a a tapestry, you'll see a blob of green thread and a line of white and maybe a circle of red, and it doesn't, you don't see what's going on. You just know there's a lot of different things going on. But then you turn the tapestry over and you see a beautiful local church and the words "All for the glory of God." That's what the Holy Spirit's all about. You you don't you don't understand maybe all the different, but that's what it all comes together to bring to fruition, a built up, biblically, spiritually healthy, true church, all for the glory of God. First and foremost in our ministries, to have spiritual power in our ministries, we need a check up from the neck down. There must resonate supreme in our hearts with no close rivals, a consuming glory of God focus for Christ's local church. There must be a radical total self-denial to the end of God being glorified, regardless of the cost. Now we don't live there, but we can continually repent and strive to get strive to be there.

Now, I., as we unpack a little bit of John 17:14 through 18, and then I'm gonna give you a lot of just practical things. I. The Holy Spirit reveals God's will. Well, I know what you might think. You might think, "Wait a minute, the word of God reveals God's will." Well, the Holy Spirit wrote the word of God. And secondly, he illumines the understanding of the word of God. It's the Holy Spirit who reveals the word of God. Now, so we look at John 7 verse 14 and we look at that phrase in verse 17, he looks at these skeptics who don't know God and don't care to know God and don't care about the glory of God. They care about themselves. They care about their religious system they've set up. They care about power and control. And Jesus looks at those guys and he says, "If anyone is willing to do His will." At this point, he's not saying this person knows God's will. He said if he's got the heart, if he's got it in his heart, that my desire is God's will, whatever that is, fine. I don't know what it is, whatever it is, fine. The scholars tell us that the the Greek here emphasizes a determined and singular desire. Jesus is saying any of you that's come to a determined and single desire from your heart to do God's will, you will know the teaching that it came from God.

Now, how does a man dead in trespasses and sin develop a singular, determined desire to do God's will? How do you get there? Well, it takes God to get there. It takes being made alive from the dead to get there. Ephesians 2:1, you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:5, but even when we were dead, my old uh systematic theologian professor, Dr. Jimmy Millican, always would stop in class and we would egg him on because he was a good preacher and we'd get him out of his sermon notes and get him to preaching every class we could. And then you knew he was preaching because his glasses would get down like this and he'd stop and he'd say, "How dead were you? How dead is dead?" Well, his point was there wasn't anything left in there. There wasn't any life in there. There wasn't any good in there. There wasn't any any virtue in there. You were

just, you were graveyard dead. Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved. So to go from being dead in trespasses and sins and then, like Jesus is saying, to then having a singular, determined desire to do God's will requires God to have initiated an act of spiritual regeneration in your heart. It requires being born again. Same idea from Jesus, John chapter 3. It requires being made a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17. All these are the same thing worded in different ways. And I love this one. It takes being of the truth, John 18:37, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." They get it.

God acts on some in his sovereignty and something happens in them whereby there's not a perfect, but resolved, settled conviction in their heart, "I wanna do God's will." And Jesus said, "When that's when that's in there, then when you hear the balancing truths about who I am and what the kingdom is about, you'll know that's right." I'm getting ahead of myself, but brothers, that's why we preach and thunder the word of God in the power of the Spirit, because we cannot convince men to do God's will. Only God can convince men to do God's will. Jamieson-Fausset, and Brown as they comment. By the way, is there anybody better for a brief commentary than Jamieson-Fausset, and Brown? Do y'all read those guys? I don't know who they are, never met them. They've been dead a long time, I'm sure. But just they're just so helpful to me. If you don't use Jamieson-Fausset-Brown as just a quick reference, at least, you need to start doing that. And somebody's gonna come up to me and tell me, you know they believe da-da-da-da-da-da. Don't tell me, I don't wanna know. Just don't. I have people do that to me all the time. Thank you for helping me. I need a lot of help. But when they say when Jesus says here, "you will know," their statement is this is a principle of immense importance. A singleness of desire to do God's will is the grand inlet to light on all questions. Woo, I'm with them on that now.

Now in the broadest measure, what is the will of God for us? By the way, I wanna say this to you: I have finally found the will of God. I have found and I found the will of God for you. You don't have to pray about it. You don't have to discuss it. There'll be no committee meetings on it. I'm gonna give you the will of God. I'm not 97% sure. I'm not 99% sure. Don't come to me and debate with me about it. Not gonna talk to you. I know the will of God for all of our lives. So in the broadest sense, what is that? Well, in reality, doesn't the model prayer make that explicitly clear? The model prayer is a is a model, it's a form. And of course, in our culture, boy, growing up as a boy on ball teams, it was used as a superstitious thing. You know, we hold hand, quote the model prayer. I didn't know what in the world it meant. I didn't, I used to wonder, I was lost, "What's this got to do with a football game?" I had no idea why we did it. That's a misuse of it. But I think when we look at the model prayer, it just nails this thing of the will of God so down so clearly.

First of all, "Our Father who art in heaven," Matthew 6,:9, and 10, if you want a verse reference. "Our Father who art in heaven." The Father is the one we've come to know and the one we've come to love and that's the only reason we can call him Father is because something's happened in our heart where now that we are in this earth and we have human fathers, now we have a greater and more wonderful Father, our heavenly Father,

because God's birthed us into his family. So he's our Father and now he's our Father and we have a singular, determined desire to do his will, what Jesus said here in this text. He's our Father.

Then, "Hallowed be Thy name," regarded as holy, treated as holy. We we desire that God's name be revered and honored. Of course, that also includes that God be served and obeyed and revered in our lives. We desire that for us, we desire it for all the world to do that for him.

And then he says, "Thy kingdom come, thou will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We desire with God and we pray the model prayer to help keep our checks in line with our new heart, our our our thinking rather, our minds in check with our new heart. We wanna stay on the flow of the new man and the new priorities and the new convictions and the new values of this new kingdom we're part of. So part of the reason you pray is to get yourself in line with the truth. Pray, "Thy kingdom come," let the kingdom come to bear upon the earth is our desire. Let the kingdom of God come to bear in this godless world and be established upon the earth. Now I think there's an outward reality of that in the full, that it it it presses us to look forward into the eternal state. When Jesus returns, the present heaven and earth will be done away with. I know what people mean by the way when they say Jesus is the answer for the world. I don't go around rebuking people for that, but Jesus is not the answer for the world. He's gonna get rid of the world and he's going to leave his glorified church in the new world. He's not fixing the old one, he's getting rid of it. He's now birthing some people into a new kingdom who will inhabit a new heaven, a new earth. And that's when in the full, the kingdom of God will come to bear on the earth. That's a future outward reality.

So when you you you pray that, it's not wrong to pray the very words, but our heart of hearts is, "We desire, singularly desire Your will, and Your will is for God's kingdom, Your kingdom, Lord, to be established here here on the earth. That is that Your reign and Your honor and Your worship exist on earth as it presently is in heaven." And like Jesus said, if you're if you're willing to do his will, you'll know the teaching that it's of God. You'll be convinced, "Wes, that's what it's all about. Yes, that's what I wanna be all about. Yes, that's what we all should be all about." I can't make you feel that. It takes the Spirit of God to get you there but somehow, Brother Barry, in the mystery of it all, our preaching is used to help people get there. I don't know how that works, it's a mystery, but that's the way you gotta preach. You know, I tell my people, I preach to you this stuff every week because it leaks out during the week and I have to get you filled back up when you get your thinking back straight of what really matters and what is the centerpiece of God's will for your life.

Well, now even though the ultimate outward reality of the kingdom of God on the earth is coming in in the eternal state when Christ returns, and we do pray for and look forward to that, but does this text, this model prayer, this aspect of it, "Thy kingdom come on earth," not point to a temporal, yet true, yet imperfect order that exists on the earth today? Is there not a a temporal, true, yet imperfect, perfect form of, order of the kingdom of God on earth today? Well, yes, the kingdom of God lives in us and there's a sense in which

when Christians are anywhere, the kingdom of God is there. But God's always had a people. He's always been about his people in the earth and I'm 100 percent convinced that there is a place on the earth where there is a true yet imperfect would you say remnant, I use the word order of the kingdom of God on the earth. That is God's local churches. There's no other place on earth where there is a collectivity of people who have a singular, determined desire to do God's will, that God's name be hallowed and honored, and that his kingdom be built. The only collectivity in the history of mankind that has that composure is the local church, if it's biblically, spiritually healthy. Are y'all with me? I'm excited. This this is just I this just stirred me up. It's just stirred me up.

So, did I miss something here? Yes. I hate it when verse 5 gets stuck on verse 4 and you didn't, you forgot verse or page 5 rather, and then you find page 5 and it's just a wonderful thing to find it because it's got some things on here.

This, brothers and sisters, I just want to run through the wall. This is not hard. It's just not hard. The will of God, 100%, no question about it, for your life is to find the most biblically, spiritually healthy church you can find, or at least a godly pastor that's trying to get there and say, "My singular desire is to help that pastor and help that church, because that's the kingdom of God on earth, and that's the will of God on earth, and that's the will of God for me." It's not hard. It's not hard. Immerse yourself. Well, "What do I do in that church?" You go to the pastor and say, "I'm here to serve. Let me know what you need." And then you'll find where all your gifts work when you get the character to use them. You have to do stuff that don't fit your gifts to build character. Then you fall into the place where you're supposed to serve. Enough of this silly, fleshly nonsense of bouncing around from congregation to congregation until you find a church that will let you do your little niche ministry. What happened to your singular, determined desire to do God's will in God's local church, which is the kingdom of God in the earth? It ain't about your niche. It's about having a singular, determined desire to see God's name hallowed through building his kingdom in the earth, which for us in time and space history can only mean, as far as our service together, is local churches.

You say, "Well, pastor, if that's, if that's God's will, then what about God's will concerning a life partner? And what about God's will concerning a job? What about God's will concerning a medical decision or timing of retirement on all we could go?" Well, here it is. It's in our heart. First, you immerse yourself in the centerpiece of God's will, your local church serving there to build up God's kingdom for the glory of God, and then you go to God with these secondary things. This is powerful.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come," for right now that means your local church. Let's build up your local church. "Let Your will be done," the only place on earth where his will is is being done in any way uh close to his uh demands and and will is in the local church. I'm gonna pour myself in there. What's the next phrase? "Give us this day our daily bread." Why should God give you anything to eat if you're not about his work? That's not hard, is it? You don't ask for food until you need sustenance to build his kingdom, his way, for his glory. I I don't think y'all getting this. I don't think you are. It troubles me. You don't get to eat. Figure of speech, okay?

I'm not saying that literally, but God is saying, "Now you're ready to be sustained because you're gonna live on the earth for what really matters, My kingdom, My church, and My glory." How come I missed that for 44 years? Do y'all get that?

I'm looking at getting me a new dog and I have agreements with my pets. I got a cat the other day and I said, "Here's our agreement, squirrels, ground squirrels, moles, rats, mice. You kill those regularly, you get to eat and live here." And she's not doing real good, I'll just tell you. Why should she eat if she's not doing what the master of the house got her to do? Brother John, is this hard? It's not hard is it? And I know some of you live and die for your precious little animals. Well, they're just animals. They're going to die and rot in the ground and fertilize the grass one day. Don't make them gods. I hate preaching when I'm tired because I say things I should not say.

If you'll get it you'll get a singular, determined desire to do God's will, which is his church, which is his kingdom in the earth and to the eternal state, if you'll get that right, if you'll say, "That's God's will, that's my heart," all the rest of God's will for you is downhill. It'll just fall. You you'll find that life partner. You'll find the right job. And by the way, here's what John MacArthur said this, he's right, if you've got these things right, and you're not violating any Scripture, and the choice you're trying to make about God's will doesn't violate Scripture, you've got the blessing of your spiritual authorities, do what you wanna do. If you got the centerpiece of being committed to God's kingdom in the earth, which is his local church now. If you don't have that down, you're gonna be confused, you're gonna be irritated, you're not gonna be blessed, and God might not even give you anything to eat because he n't say it, "Don't ask for food if you're not on My team. Go to somebody else and ask them for food." I just love this stuff. Can anybody write that but the Holy Spirit of God?

Tim, put my time up there if you would, brother.

So the Holy Spirit guides us into God's will. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes and makes us, if you're willing to do his will, it makes us convinced we'll know the teaching. We'll know the teaching. Running quickly through this, some other important points. The Holy Spirit guides in sermon preparation. The Holy Spirit guides in sermon preparation. John 16:13, he will guide you into all truth. Now, the backside of this, of our main text, John 7 here, where he gets to verse 18, he says, "I am from God. I got My My Father. I I've got My teaching from My Father. And if any of you are changed by Him and have a heart desiring to do His will, you'll know the truth who I am and what I'm about. You you you'll get it." He said, "but there's other kinds of people." Verse 18, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory." There's only two kinds of people, people that wanna get in on God's will and bring glory to God, and people that wanna get in on their will and bring glory to themselves. That's the only two kind of people there are. And that's what Jesus pointed out. He said there's others who are about their own glory.

So we wanna make sure in our sermon preparation, we're not those who are thinking about our own glory. You can't expect the Spirit's help on that. Now you might have men that think, "Oh, what a sermon," but you hadn't built God's church. You hadn't built God's

church. The things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man. A man will not be able to proclaim the word of God with spiritual power if he goes to the pulpit with any residue of, "I want glory," in his heart. You know, an atheist an atheist could follow the academic rules of exposition and probably give you a pretty good feel for what the text was saying and where it was going, but he can't properly grasp the truth because Jesus said you had to have a heart changed and willing to do God's will to know the teaching, to know if it's true, for it to have power.

Brothers, as we prepare to preach, we need the Spirit to illumine us, to grasp the authority and the certainty of what the text is saying and and join in the premier work of the Son of God in building his local churches unto the glory of God. I meant to verbalize that to you earlier because when I say 100% know God's will, let let me verbalize it to you again. It is to join in the premier work of the Son of God in building local churches for the glory of God. What what in the universe could be more central to the will of God than what his precious Son's premier work is? He don't need you to do the work. He wants you to get in on his Son's work. He wants you to be on mission with the Son in his premier work of building local churches, true biblically, spiritually healthy local churches, so that his name will be hallowed in the earth.

So, when we exegete a text, Dr. Dr. Seale may have to correct some of this later, but I'll do the best I can. I've got my degree. I'm done with that. We interpret it grammatically, historically, culturally, contextually, systematically, and spiritually. Jesus said, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown said, this is this is the inlet to light on all questions. They're insights you gain both in the interpretation and the application of the text when the Spirit of God is on you in the study. It makes a difference. It brings life and light to an otherwise cold, formal, academic exposition.

Number three, and I have nine subpoints to this one, but they'll be brief. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:30 reminds us, do not grieve the Holy Spirit and and the context there is of Christian brothers backbiting and using bad words and ugly spiritedness. So we have to check our hearts when we come to church, check our attitudes, check our dispositions, check our hearts, check our attitudes, check our disposition when we sit down to study and not grieve the Holy Spirit. I'm not sure what that means, but it's not good and I would think it means that you cannot expect God's power on your ministry and in your church if you've got people regularly without a purpose to repent, grieve the Holy Spirit. These are those, the grievors of the Holy Spirit are those Jesus was talking about in John 7:18 of our main text, he who speaks from himself seeks his own glory.

Subpoint one, study empty. Study empty. He must increase and I must decrease. I go to that study, I open my Bible and there must be a resonating communion of prayer of, "Oh dear God, may I be little and may You be big. May I not be seen and may You be gloriously seen." Study empty, empty yourself before him as you go to the study. I try, I'm not great at it, but I try and with regularity, I try to go to the Lord and God has just blessed us so abundantly. He just blessed us with more material things than he ought to. He's just blessed us. But when I started in the ministry, you could not have had more of

nothing that I had. I mean, I had nothing on top of nothing. I had a '72 Cutlass Oldsmobile. I think it was an \$1,800 car. Of course, \$1,800 meant something back then. And had a few pieces of clothes and maybe maybe literally a bed and a the chest dresser, chest dresser, drawers, whatever you call them, where you put clothes. And I'd go to God regularly and say, "God, I don't know what it's gonna cost. I don't know." The world we live in, guys, we don't know what tomorrow, they may lock us up next week. But if I come to the end of this thing with nothing again, so be it. If I have to end with nothing, I started with nothing as far as this world's good, so be it. Go to the study empty of yourselves.

Number two, to have spiritual empowerment and not grieve the Holy Spirit, learn to adore the doctrine as you study. You know, you know, you don't want to go to the study just for this right here. You want to just as much, and in the first case, "Oh God, help me love these glorious truths." You see, every truth in this book is an expression of your God's character, and you want that to be in your heart. Learn to adore the doctrines of God. Treasure them. Hold to them. Glory in them.

Number three, maintain a spirit of repentance as you study. A humble spirit of repenting and reforming your own heart should be continual as you study. How many times I put my glasses down and said, "Oh God, make this true in me. Oh God, help me. Help me to hold to this. Help me to walk in this." And see, so what some of us do, we start our study with a little repentance. Brother, you can sin 100 times in five hours of study. You have to keep repenting. I learned this in Romania years ago during Ceausescu's way. Ceausescu, the the the communist dictator, had just been executed, but the country was under terrible oppression, and the Christian churches, the Baptist churches, were terribly uh uh persecuted and they told us, "We don't call people Christians because that means nothing over here. We what we call our folks is repenters. You're a repentor. You didn't just start, you didn't just repent. You repented and you keep on repenting until you get to heaven and you got a glorified body then you don't have to repent anymore." But throughout the flow of our study time, brothers, pause and say, "Oh God, oh God, make this true in Jeff Noblit. Make this my heart. Give me grace to walk in this in my life." And we preach that sermon strong to ourselves and repented ourselves before we take it to our people and call them to repent.

Number four, to not grieve the Holy Spirit and hopefully our help to spiritual empowerment is preach in faith in the Holy Spirit that God will use his word to build his church. Brothers, I mean in the spirit of your soul have a backbone like a saw log and say, "I expect God's Holy Spirit to use the word of God to build this church. It is not my charisma, it's not my uh uh antics, it's not my dynamic, it's not my leadership skill, God, but I expect the Spirit of God to take the word of God and build a church for the glory of God." There's something to that, guys. That's being a singular determination to do God's will right there. Then you'll know the teaching, the spiritual blessing and illumination and power will come upon you and help you. It is possible to do a good exposition and yet produce a people that are primarily proud of their primarily rather proud of their knowledge, proud of their doctrine, and therefore you're not producing a people who are gospel-humbled who lovingly serve one another in the local church. The key is the heart

disposition and motive of the preaching pastor. When you're more passionate about being known for your good expositions than preaching for the good and the building up of your local church and for the glory of God, then that is the percentage of expositional idolatry that is in your heart.

Number five, maintain the motive of equipping the saints for the work of the service. Ephesians 4:11 and 12, he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastor teachers. Why? So that I might have an extended conference speaking ministry because my expositions are so wonderful. No, that's not God's will. He might do that. No, God's will is for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. That's your local church. Maintain that motivation. That's what I'm all about.

You know, I thought years ago, you know, you're a young preacher and you're full of yourself. People tell you do a good job. And so you think I'm going to be the next John MacArthur. I'm going to be the next Adrian Rogers. So you start putting your sermons out there and then God sends factions and divisions and enemies and persecutors and slanders and underminers to humble you. There's only one problem with you thinking you're gonna be the next John MacArthur or Adrian Rogers, it's because you're not John MacArthur or Adrian Rogers but you can be a good pastor for your local church. And then if all the rest of that happens, so be it. God just had to humble you and get you to the place where Jeff Noblit said, "If I can just pastor a true church, Lord, and somehow then we might help others, that's enough for me. That's enough for me." And that's what we experienced here and I'll never be, I don't wanna be, I don't have the style, I don't get it, I don't know how to do it, as far as being the world's preacher, you know. I'm not good enough, I get I don't I mean that's just true. But over the decades we kept seeing these guys pop up that would contact us who had been listening to my ministry who wanted to know about how to have a more biblically spiritually true church and so we try to help them and we try to help them we try to help them and today it's Anchored in Truth ministries. But it came from the overflow of just being focused on, "I want to have a true church. I want to join with this with God in this the premier work of the Son building the kingdom on the earth, that's his local churches, for His glory." That's the singular, determined desire. That's back to our original text. And if God does other things, fine.

Number six, be done with man-centered evangelism and conversion. I don't know anything that would probably grieve the Holy Spirit more than all of this foolish, fleshly antics that evangelicals have done in the last century and a half at least to quote, get people saved, end of quote. It ought to be that people are getting saved because the Spirit of God is using the word of God to regenerate their hearts. And I often say this, let's be balanced, let's be careful. Calling people to the front isn't necessarily wrong but if you're not careful, it can be very misleading. Asking people to repeat a prayer isn't necessarily wrong, for God's sake, don't let them think that's a little sacrament that gets them into heaven. We've got to see more than that. When we when we did away with those things, I don't know, 30 years ago, I don't know it was a long time ago, I was preaching through the book of Ephesians and just thundering the truth of what the sovereign work of the Spirit does and what repentance of sin looks like and what conviction looks like and what

faith faith looks like according to the word of God. And Brother David Brand, you know what started happening? Somebody would walk up and say, "Pastor, six months ago, I don't know what happened, but I think God saved me." That's what you're talking about. Somebody else would pop up. A whole lot of our long-term faithful members. No pressure. We didn't have Bailey Smith to preach God's three deadlines or not J. Harold Smith. None of that. We didn't have any firey evangelists. Just one after the other. Just kept coming. "I've just I've just felt my sin like I've never felt it before in the last year, pastor. I just have a joy and a rest in peace now. I'm not sure, but I think God saved me." And so they would just start coming through the baptistery.

And it's amazing, you know, you know what makes a wonderful, blessed, loving, sweet, effective church? It's to have a church full of saved people. It's unbelievable. It's absolutely unbelievable the difference. And I'm not trying to put nobody down or be be unkind in my tone or tenor, but Brother Jono, I would say the majority of what I was taught in my first 15 years from mentors in my denomination was how to build a church with unregenerate membership. How to keep the unregenerate members happy. And it was just, it it was lonely, brother. You know, it was lonely to step out in those days and try, we didn't know what we were doing. We just knew what we needed to get away from. Be done with man-centered evangelism and conversion.

Number seven, measure success the right way by the maturity of the body. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 3:1 through 3, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" Now it was common in this day, there's a lot of false teachers and stuff, they would bring a letter of commendation from a reputable ministry or apostle maybe to these churches, let them know, "You listen to this guy, he's solid." And Paul said, "Should I have brought me a letter of recommendation to you, Corinthian, so you'd like me?" He said, "But you are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." Paul Paul said, "Look, I don't know if if you'd like to have had a letter of recommendation to like me better, receive me, or or support me as as the apostle that's come. Actually, I was the one who built the foundation here. I was the human instrument, but here's what I've got. Aren't you different? You came out of the darkness of pagan Corinthian wickedness, and now you have a love for God and His truth. That's the change that shows the proof of my ministry."

I have people a lot tell me, "Pastor, you outta write a book, put some of the stuff you've learned through the years in the book," and I hope to do that someday. But in one way, I like to say this is my book. Meet my people, look at my people. The proof of ministry success is the fruit of the people's lives who are in that local church. Now, look, Brett Beasley's sitting down here and Brother Brett did a video for my 40th anniversary. And Brother Brett said, "Well, Brother Jeff, I guess you're starting on your third 20-year vision." Because I'm always telling you guys, you better have a 20-year vision. So look, don't judge the effectiveness of your ministry on year three or year seven. or year 12, or you'll go out and jump off Tennessee River Bridge and say, "I this ain't working." But if

you'll hang in there and keep being faithful, somewhere between year 13 and 14, year 20, I think you'll get over that bell curve and you'll say, "We're a long way from arrived, but I have a strong core now of solid, regenerate, gospel-humbled church members. And this thing's looking like a church." And that's the measure of a successful ministry. Some sometimes people will ask me about a very prominent preacher and uh uh they'll ask me about, you know, is he solid? Is he a good guy? And I say, I want to see his church. I want to talk to his people.

So let's be done with the idolatry of hoping we're going to be the next great conference circuit preacher or the next great celebrity preacher. Again, if somehow, brothers, we can just leave one biblically, spiritually healthy local church, then that God might use that to help others, that should be enough for us.

Number eight, remove the unrepentant sinner. 1 Corinthians 5, you got a boy who's in an immoral relationship with what, a stepmother, just a gross, open immorality. Acts chapter 5, you got Ananias and Sapphira, very unique situation, but yet an open, willful uh uh wickedness of Ananias and Sapphira wanting to use the church for their own glory. And here here's what I'd say, there's so much to talk about on church discipline. First of all, number one, you're never gonna discipline out all the sin out of your church. But I think there's a principle here, when you see Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and you see the the boy in adultery in 1 Corinthians 5, that God will bring the glaringly scandalous things in front of you. You you can't avoid those. You have to act on those. Are you hearing me? The glaringly obvious, unrepentant, scandalous, brazen type of sins, you go for those first, and a lot of the others take care of themselves. So don't form an FBI agency to go snooping around. When people come to me and say, "Well, did you hear about old sister So-and-so?" First thing I'm gonna say, "What are you telling me about it for? You go and talk to her and her alone, period." Secondly, when I hear something like that, I just put it on a shelf because a lot a lot of good saints, the Holy Spirit catches up with them. It gets right in a little while. You don't have to chase everything down. Put it on a shelf and if it it starts to stink, then we'll pull it off and deal with it. But there's, God will, the fifth day of my senior pastorate, other than myself, the most prominent senior staff member on my church was accused of a two-year adulterous affair. You have to deal with those. That was the fifth day of my pastorate, and we dealt with it. And it wasn't easy. This church, no church in our area had ever seen anything done like that.

But in Acts chapter 5, after Ananias and Sapphira are dealt with, when you get down to verse, I think 14, the text says, and all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number. But you gotta go through verses 1 through 13 first, where Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with, to get the Spirit of God blessing the ministry again, to see that kind of conversion growth back in the church. If the Spirit of God is gonna be unhindered and ungrieved and bless your ministry, you have to have a true intent and purpose to clean up the brazen, unrepented of sin in the body.

And let me add this too, I know I probably have a reputation out there. I mean, there was years when I was the church discipline guy. People just all week, "I want you to come and preach on church discipline." Well, I did that for a few years and it caused a lot of

trouble in a lot of churches because they weren't ready for it. So I don't even do that anymore unless I know the pastor and the situation real well. But brothers and sisters, we are we have a practice here. If a brother or sister gets in sin, and it becomes known to any degree, brother Matt's over here, he he helps lead, Brother Steve helps lead a lot on these issues, our elders, of course. Um we sin probably, Brother Matt, by waiting too long sometimes, being too long-suffering. We just work and work and work and try and pray and put our arms around them. And if in the slightest way they look like they're turning toward repentance, we're for them, amen? That should be our hearts, restoration. Sometimes people teach, well, the purpose of church discipline is restoration. No, it's not. Ananias and Sapphira were not restored. Sometimes it's restoration, and those are glorious. Brother Jono has seen a bunch of those. I've seen a bunch of them. But sometimes, brother, God's removing the goats from the sheep pen because you can't have those who do not have a singular, determined desire to do God's will in your church and expect the Holy Spirit to bless, at least not knowingly have them.

Oh, I wanna talk about factious people because in Titus chapter 3, uh what verse 10, we have a a an abbreviated approach to church discipline because the man is factious. When you have somebody in your church trying to build a party of people together to start their movement, you see, you know what a faction is in the church? A faction is the attempt to change loyalty. Somebody rises up and said, "I want your loyalty, take your loyalty away from the church elders. Remove your loyalty to church elders and move your loyalty to me, because I'm starting a movement in this church." Paul tells Titus, stop that immediately. Even if they may have a pretty good point, the damage they're causing through their faction is more serious damage to the body of Christ than the point they've probably got about something in the church that's not right. Are y'all hearing me on this? And we got this wrong at Grace Life Church. We did this wrong for decades. We were disciplining everything in the world and we never disciplined anybody for failing to resolve conflicts biblically. And so we got our ducks in a row and realized that should have been one of the very first things we established. Look, we're gonna have disagreements. We're gonna have hurt feelings. That's gonna happen, but you're gonna have to resolve it biblically and not form parties or factions. If you start forming a party or faction here, Buddy, we'll be on you like a duck on a June bug. It's not gonna happen. And if a person says, "Yeah, but dah, dah, dah, dah," we'll say, okay, we agree with that, but that's not the way you settle it by getting you 12 women upset to fight your fight with you.

Ladies, are you hearing me? Most of these problems are women led. Old Joe might be the spokesman, but mama's behind him pulling the strings. And by the way, a woman that does not submit to her husband is not gonna submit to the authority of church elders. Mark that down. Tom Clay's my music guy. God, he's a good guy. Tom is totally sold out to sound doctrine and honoring his pastors and his elders. He'd been here about 10 years. He said, "You know, I've learned something. Wife led households don't stay long at Grace Life Church of the Shoals." Just an insight. I hadn't thought about it, but that's what he told me.

Number nine, study when you're in the flow. Study when you're in the flow. Now, that that doesn't mean that you shouldn't have a discipline time, maybe your morning time that you study and all of that, but don't rule out God just getting ahold of you. The Spirit of God just grabbing you sometimes. I went to the uh the recumbent bicycle in the exercise room while I was away trying to prepare these messages, and I got on my bicycle and I dictated five pages of notes that you've just heard. Pedaling a bicycle. I I remember that from Dr. uh Adrian Rogers. We was at a conference and somebody asked him, "Dr. Rogers, when do you study?" He said, "When I'm in the flow. Sometimes it's two o'clock in the morning."

So yes, have a disciplined time to study, but listen for the Spirit of God as you go through your day. He may throw some stuff out there. I can't tell you the times I've been on a a bush hog, and for you folks from Scotland, that's a tractor with a cutting thing behind it. I got Ali or somebody called, "What's a bush hog? You riding a bush hog." What do y'all call them? I don't know. But it just, I I can't tell you the times I've meditated on that thing and just insight after insight after insight because the Holy Spirit will give you insights if you have a single determined conviction to do God's will, that is to get in on the premier work of the Son of building the kingdom of God in the earth which is local New Testament churches and for the glory of God. That's God's will for our lives.

Well, Dr. Tim Seale is sitting back there. He's he's the glue that holds the Pastoral Training Institute. By the way, we've got 24 guys enrolled this this January and most of them are guys who've already got degrees and stuff but they're taking selective courses to kind of get the theology in shoe leather, I like to say it, of local church application. And we're thrilled for them to do that. But um Dr. Seale was uh, when he was a young man, he and I have known each other for decades, he was a he was at a church in Louisiana and they had a community service around Thanksgiving, and you shared your pulpit with all these other guys in town. What a stupid idea. I've got a Methodist Church right down the road here. They've got homosexual pastors in their church, and I'm going to share my pulpit? What kind of, I mean, do we even have to think about this?

Well, they had a guy, not quite that bad, but a guy that that they said, it's community Thanksgiving week, and here's the guy that's going to come in and preach in your pulpit. And Dr. Seale got online and read some of this guy's doctrine. He wasn't just a little off, he was way off. And so the high muckety-mucks in the church where Tim pastored came to him and said, this is the guy that's going to come preach and Tim said, "No. I can't do that." He wasn't unkind, just we can't do that, and expressed the doctrinal conviction, and they pushed and pushed, and Tim said, no. Willing to do God's will. Willing to do God's will.

So they fired him. He was fired. Now don't let this shorten anything you're gonna share tonight. You share, I've told you to share these things. And so, "My sheep hear My voice." Some of his sheep that were hearing his voice came to Tim said, "Pastor, we love what you're preaching. We're learning things about Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit and building the church we've never heard before. Would you would you just stay and keep preaching?" And I think, brother, you're kind of like me, didn't have anywhere else

to go. Some people say, "How'd you stay at Grace Life Church losing 600 active members over these 20 years and people hating you all over town?" I didn't have anywhere to go. Who's going to have me as a pastor? Now you think about that for a minute. I didn't have any... That's a good thing, by the way, not to have anywhere to go.

Brother Ken, you've been through a little of that. Ken pastored his church there in Texas. He was at a country club church, kind of an affluent, kind of flucy place. And he started preaching the truth. You know you can't preach the truth to those people, brother. He comes by, I don't know the story exactly, but I think you came back from a trip or something and a bunch of the men who had been hearing God's voice said, "Ken, we've already got a building rented. We want you to stay here and preach to us." 25 years later, he's got a great church there just north of Houston.

Tim's church. Here's what happened to him. There was a bunch of Presbyterians in the community who hadn't had, undoubtedly hadn't had good expositional preaching, and they came to see him and said, "We love your preaching. Can we just join up with you?" And he said, "Well, let's open our Bibles." And they went through believers baptism. And they said, "Well, you're right, brother." So they all became Baptist and you had a Reformed Baptist church that God blessed. It became the largest church in the area. Now Tim, Dr. Seale, I'm sorry. Dr. Seale teaches an intensive on 1 Peter and 1 Peter has quite a bit to say about suffering for the truth. When Dr. Seale teaches 1 Peter, it's gonna be a perfect academic exposition, but there's insights and understanding and application from his experience of being willing to do God's will that, Brother Tim, you'd not got any other way. Isn't that glorious?

So brothers, if we're willing to do God's will, the Spirit will come along and help us and enable us and birth more folks into the kingdom. Well, I'll just close with that final statement again. I'm not 95%, I'm not 98%, I'm 100%, I know the will of God that you join in the premier work of the Son of God in building the kingdom of God in the earth, that's his local churches for his glory until he returns or we die.