

Vital Signs in a New Church

by Denny Kenaston

A healthy church must have a commitment to vital reality with Jesus Christ, a vibrant relationship with Him, and a willingness to give up everything and follow Him.

Duration: 1:26:15

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:13-18

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes his role as a helpful assistant who assesses the health of small church communities. He shares that he gives a sermon to four or five families, discussing the state of their church and whether it will thrive or not. The sermon focuses on eight points for committing oneself to the brotherhood, including staying connected to Jesus Christ and supporting the ministry through prayer. The speaker then transitions to discussing the vital signs of a new church, emphasizing the importance of examining the congregation's relationships and commitment to determine its health.

Transcript

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You're all back. Welcome. Did you have a good day? I did also have a good day.

I want you to open your Bibles this evening to Matthew chapter 16. I'm going to read there in a few moments. We're going to get a bit more practical this evening in our messages on the church, God's holy witness on earth.

The title of the message this evening may seem a bit odd to you, but if you'll stay with me, I think you'll understand the title of the message. Vital signs in a new church. Vital signs in a new church.

Now, I tried to figure it out this afternoon how old this church is. How old is this church? It's around seven years old. Maybe that seems like a bit of an odd title for me to give to a church that's seven years old.

Give you a sermon on the vital signs in a new church. But if you'll stay with me, I think you'll understand. You know, when a little baby is born, especially in a hospital, I'm not much for little babies born in hospitals, but when little babies are born, especially in hospitals, they take their vital signs.

And do you know they check the same things that they check on a 50-year-old man when they want to see how he's doing? Same vital signs, same urgency if one or two of them are off. Amen? Whether you're two hours old or 50 years old, the same urgency is there if a couple of those vital signs are off. Well, for about the last ten years now, I've spent a good portion of my time working in church planting ministries.

And even more so in the last five years. I would say that most of the focus of my time is spent in church planting ministries. During these years, I've made many observations about churches.

I've seen many groups of Christians attempt to start a church for five families. Oh, listen, when you meet them for the first time, they are excited, they're full of zeal, they're going to go for it. I've seen some successes, but I've also seen many failures.

Though they were full of excitement in the beginning of their little endeavor of starting a church in their area, I've seen many of those churches fail. But I've also seen many of them succeed. Now, I'm sure you can understand if this is my ministry and I'm involved in this kind of work, I'm going to be taking notes at every success and every failure.

What makes these churches go? And what is it that causes them to lose their way in a year or two? And then they are no more. Just like there are vital signs in a healthy body, they check your blood pressure, they check your heartbeat, they take the sound of the air passing through your lungs and listen to that, they run blood tests upon you, maybe they check your reflexes, there are several things that they do and they call them vital signs. It's the first examination that is done by an EMT.

If they're out on an emergency call somewhere, check the vital signs. Just like there are vital signs in a human body, there are vital signs in a healthy new church. And I have learned through the years to be able to spot what those vital signs are.

Many times I get these requests. In fact, I get so many of them, I cannot keep up with them all. Brother Mark Rubaker is helping me do them.

But I get these requests. Kind of like a patient to a doctor. Brother Denny, could you come for the weekend? We want to start a church.

Would you come for the weekend and preach for us and sit down and evaluate us and tell us what you think about our dreams and our visions? I get those requests all the time. And I've done it many times. So instead of a doctor sitting down next to a human who may not be feeling well, I'm like the doctor dropping in there on those four or five families and I spend a weekend with them and then at the end of the weekend, I sit down with those men and tell them what I think about their little body and whether I think it's going to make it or not.

The sermon that I'm going to give you this evening is the first sermon that I give to them. It generates very good discussion for the rest of the weekend. And again, you may feel this is a bit odd for me to give you a

sermon that I give to four or five families off here or there or wherever it may be.

But you'll understand as we get along here, you should see their faces when I give the title of the first sermon on that little weekend. I mean, they sit up on the edge of their seat. They get out their pen and paper.

You know, I mean, these are desperate people. They want to have a church. And they're ready to take notes.

So this evening, I just believe that we can glean some things that those little fellowships also glean out of this sermon. They listen to it with an evaluating heart. Do we have these vital signs in our midst? Well, through the years, I've realized that the same thing, that the same vital signs that you find in a new little fellowship, those are the same vital signs that you should find in a healthy church no matter how old it is.

And I've learned this, that if those vital signs drop down below their proper levels, there's going to be trouble in that church. I don't care how long it's been there. I don't care how good the leaders are.

If certain amount of those vital signs drop down below their level, there's going to be trouble in that church. So the same things that get a little church going and get it on its feet are the same things that keep a church going many years later. And brothers and sisters, it seems very fitting to me this evening, you being seven years old, that you would, just like those little fellowships, get out your pen and paper and sit on the edge of your seat to take notes and examine your congregation and see if it's okay.

Find out if we're going to make it or not. You know, it's the same way in marriage. You know, you can meet a young couple.

Maybe they just got married. Maybe they're almost ready to be married. And, you know, you can check the vital signs of that relationship.

And, you know, it's real easy to see those vital signs. If there's a sweet relationship building there, we've been checking Samuel and Kate's vital signs, and it seems like they're going to get married. But you know something? Those same vital signs need to be checked in our marriages, don't they? And if those vital signs are not there in our marriage, you can be sure there's trouble in the marriage.

That's what I'm talking about this evening. That's why I feel it's good for us to hear a sermon that I preach to a little struggling group of people who haven't even called themselves a church yet. It's good for us.

And by the way, I preached this sermon, or somewhat like this sermon, to our own congregation about five years ago when we were 15 years old. Vital signs in a new church. We're going to begin reading here in Matthew.

If we could, Matthew 16. We'll read from verse 13 through 18. One of my favorite portions of Scripture in the Bible.

You'll find out I have a lot of those. Verse 13, When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? That's a good question. It's a good question for us also this evening.

And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. And He says unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And I would say to you this evening the

same thing. Who do you say Jesus is? What is the overflowing, welling up within your heart when you think those words? And that question comes to your heart this evening.

Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's quite an awesome statement that Peter made there, and I never get tired of reading that little phrase. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Glory! What a powerful statement Peter made. You are the Christ. You are the One.

You are the Promised One. You are the Messiah. You are the Anointed One that was to come.

Beautiful words, Peter. And I don't know if Peter understood it yet. He probably didn't.

But we could go on and say, Yes, you are the Christ. You are God in the flesh. That's who you are.

Wow! God has come to walk in human flesh among men and women. And Jesus answered and said unto him, And rightly so, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I would say this evening, as we can testify the same way, it was not flesh and blood that hath revealed it unto us either, but the Father which is in heaven, that we can confess with our mouth and with the overflowing joy of our heart, He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Our Father in heaven hath revealed that to us. I mean, think about it. We never saw Him.

We weren't there. We watched no miracles. We saw no crucifixion.

We have none of those things in our minds or in our memories or before our eyes. But yet here we sit today, a whole congregation of people, and we joy and thrill over the thought and over the confession. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

You are God in the flesh. Come down to live and dwell among men. Hallelujah! The Father in heaven hath revealed that unto us, brothers and sisters, and we are blessed.

But there's some responsibility that goes along with that revelation. Amen? Some real responsibility. And Jesus goes on and gets into some of that responsibility in the next verse.

In verse 18 He says, And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, little rock, and upon this rock, big rock. In the Greek, there's a difference there. Peter is a little stone, but that word rock is like the rock of Gibraltar.

Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Upon this rock, upon this revelation, upon this confession, upon this commitment to this God who walked in human flesh upon the earth. Upon this rock, Jesus said, I am going to build my church, my assembly.

I'm going to build an assembly, a heavenly assembly of people. I'm going to build it, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This assembly is going to be a power upon the earth, and the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it.

Now you can take that two ways, and I think it's good to take it both ways. That church will attack the gates of hell, and the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it. Or you can turn it around and say, the gates of hell will attack that church, but they will not be able to prevail against it.

Either way, it's good. I like it. This is the church of Jesus Christ.

Down through the ages, for the last two thousand years, Jesus has proven His promise to be clear and sure. In these words, our Lord Jesus is speaking prophetically. He was a prophet, you know, and He spoke words of prophecy, and here He's prophesying something that is to come.

I will build. That's future. Now in this situation, in this prophecy, that future, it wasn't long before it began to show itself to be reality.

Because we find it so in the book of Acts. Jesus was building His church. It wasn't the apostles who built the church.

It was Jesus building His church. It's clear to see that when you read in the book of Acts. It wasn't just a bunch of men doing what they were supposed to do, following some rules that Jesus gave them before He went back to heaven.

No, it wasn't that way at all. It was Christ building His church through a bunch of men and women. That's the way it was in the book of Acts.

These verses are key verses on church planting. Basically Jesus was saying this, you build your lives on Me and I'll build a church. And He says those very words to us also.

In this day and age that we live in, there are many methods, many books that are written, how to, you know, how to build a church, how to get a big church, how to build a mega church, you know, and they write whole books on the subject and make long lists of things that you're supposed to do in order to, quote, build a church. But I like the simplistic methodology of the Lord Jesus Christ. He simply said it this way, you build your life on Me and I will build a church and the one that I build, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Hallelujah! Amazing! So simple! Yet it will cost you everything, every day. Amen? Yet so simple. This prophecy is a promise.

It's been fulfilled again and again, all over the world for two thousand years. Church history books are full of this promise and the fulfillment of this promise. Wherever it is, wherever they are, wherever there's four or five families, wherever there's two or three gathered together in Jesus' name who do set themselves to serve Him and Him only, a church begins to spring up out of it.

God is no respecter of places. He's no respecter of people. He'll do it in any land.

He'll do it with the rich. He'll do it with the poor. He'll do it with the ignorant.

He'll do it with the intelligent. He does it with all kinds of different types of people and in every culture that you can imagine. Wherever there's a group of people, whatever their language, whatever their culture, whatever it is, if they all of a sudden get a glimpse of the Christ, the Son of the living God, and turn their hearts toward Him and begin to build their lives on Him, up starts rising this church.

Hallelujah! God is no respecter of persons, peoples, denominations, or even theological persuasions. You think about that. I mean, there are churches in the church history books that I don't agree with all of their theology.

You know what I mean? I mean, Wesley baptized babies. I don't agree with that. I think that's nonsense.

Do you know something? While over here he was baptizing a baby, there was one thing that he was real clear on. And that was he built his life on the Lord Jesus Christ and he led his followers to build their lives on the Lord Jesus Christ. And guess what happened? In spite of the fact that they baptized babies, up came a church.

God is no respecter even of theological persuasions. And I don't agree with the theology of a Methodist. There are some things there that I absolutely would not agree with.

But we cannot gainsay the fact of church history on that one. You can't gainsay it. Those Methodists shook England and it needed to be shaken.

Well, these blessed promises still apply today, don't they? And you are here today because of these blessed promises that we just read. We sit here tonight because these promises are true. And your hearts can say amen with a solid foundation underneath them because you know that it's true.

Because you have experienced it in your very midst. I don't know how many of you are here that were here seven years ago when nothing was here. But those of you that are here that were here seven years ago, your heart rings clear with these words this evening.

You know they're true. God has again come through and honored His Word. I have seen it again and again.

And Christ will have a pure body. He will. And He'll bring one up anywhere where there's a group of people who love Him with all of their heart.

He will have His pure body. With these inspiring thoughts, let's look at some of the healthy vital signs this evening. I think I have eight of them that I want to look at this evening.

And brothers and sisters, I'm sure that you'll agree with me as we go down through these. These are must-haves for every church. It's not just for the little church that's just getting started.

It's for the seven-year-old church, the twenty-year-old church, and the one-hundred-year-old church. Same vital signs. They are must-haves.

And as I give these, I'm giving them... I wrote them down out of observation as I saw these little groups, some springing up and making it, and others attempting and falling by the wayside. Number one, first and foremost, there must be a group of believers who are committed to vital reality with Jesus Christ. You cannot have a church any other way than that.

A group of people, a small group of people, a struggling group of people, they can even be an ignorant group of people who don't even know what they're doing, but if they are committed to a life of vital reality with Jesus Christ, a vibrant relationship with Him, an open heaven over their life and over their family, up begins to grow a church. Christ's words come ringing home to us. And yes, they surely are applied to these words that Jesus gave to us.

But His words come ringing home to us. Give yourself to God. Yield yourselves daily.

Forsake all and follow Me. Give up everything and follow Me. Yea, sometimes sell all that you have and follow Me.

These are the words of commitment that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to His disciples. They understood what He meant when He said, On this rock I'll build My church. They understood what He meant by that.

And it's clear to see there in Acts chapter 2 that the people continued in the Apostles' doctrine and the Apostles' doctrine was the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of Christ were those powerful words of commitment that He gave to His disciples. It hasn't changed a bit. Wherever there's a group of people that are willing to sell all and forsake all and do it again and again and do it every day and do it as many times as they have to, God will lay His hand upon that and begin to work through that group of believers and raise up a church.

So there must be that kind of commitment. I will keep revival fires burning in my heart. You know, seven years is a long time.

And I don't know how it is around here because I'm not around here all the time. I just kind of drop in and out every now and then. But I know what it was like seven years ago.

I remember going to my first Camp Wesley. I remember what it was like there. This vital sign was there at Camp Wesley without a question.

That commitment in the heart of the brethren, in the heart of the sisters, in the heart of the young people that was at Camp Wesley. Yes, the young people. I remember my first Camp Wesley.

I remember the young people. I remember the zeal. I remember the fire in their bones.

I remember the prayer meetings they had. I remember standing outside of a tent when there was about seven or eight of them in there praying and about midnight on a Sunday night when souls were coming through to Christ everywhere. I remember standing outside the tent and listening to those young people weep their hearts out before God.

I remember those things. And I went home from my first Camp Wesley and said, there's going to be a church in Cleveland. There's going to be a church in Cleveland.

If they stay on that road, you can be sure there will be a church in Cleveland. I will keep revival fires burning in my heart and in my family. See, that's an individual thing.

That's not just a corporate thing. That's every one of us, isn't it? Amen. Every one of us have to come to grips with that and we have to come to grips with it all the time.

Hey, life is real. It's got a lot of bumps in the road. There are a lot of distractions that keep coming our way.

And us papas, we are the ones that have to watch over the family and just stoke up them old fires again and again. Listen, brothers and sisters, it doesn't just happen in here on Sunday morning. If it only happens once a week on Sunday morning, something's wrong.

If it only happens on Sunday morning, I tell you, some people are hitchhiking. And there's no hitchhiking in the church of Jesus Christ. Not for long anyway.

You can ride for a little while on somebody else's zeal and their fire for God, but I'm telling you, if that church is worth its salt at all, you're not going to be hitchhiking very long. You're going to realize where you're really at. And say, I've got to do something about my condition with God.

That's just how it is. Openness and brokenness and clear hearts bring the presence of Christ into a life, into a family and into a church. Oh, I know you know this.

I know you've heard it. You've heard it. You've heard it.

It's nothing new to you, but listen to me tonight, brothers and sisters. Openness and brokenness and clear hearts bring the presence of Christ into the church. And this presence of Christ is a magnet which draws people.

It's a powerful magnet. It's a mysterious magnet which works in the hearts of people who come near this kind of a church. I can't explain it.

I don't understand it all myself. It's a bit of a mystery, but it's just like... And I've seen this so many times when God has a people who are set upon Jesus Christ. It's like He knows, I can send them there.

And somehow in His mysterious sovereign ways, He'll cause some searching heart to bump into somebody at a Walmart or a grocery store or a gas station or whatever, or they'll come by and see signs and all of that, and somehow they make their way here. And when they get here, there's something that draws them to come back again. And it's not your smile and it's not your hospitality.

It is the presence of Christ in your midst. Now all those other things are good and I believe in them and they're right, but that won't work. I can take you to churches where they smile and I can take you to churches where they have hospitality plus! And they're dead! It's the presence of Christ! And the presence of Christ comes as the individual believers in the fellowship are in love with Jesus.

If you will stay in that place, brethren, you will be here 15 years from now. And see, I mean, come on, let's get honest, the honeymoon's over at Cleveland. Are you going to be here 20 years from now? What are you going to be 20 years from now? What kind of young people are you going to have 20 years from now? These are questions you need to ask yourself.

This is the best thing you could do to ensure things 20 years from now. Get hot and stay hot! That's it! You know, that's the way it was in the early church, wasn't it? Yes, it's true. Christ built His church there in the book of Acts, but those people were excited.

They were so excited about Jesus, they were on fire! And God built a church. Number two, these little groups, they are desperate. Desperate! The ones who make it are desperate.

They're urgent about having a church. Think about it. Put yourself in their shoes.

Many of you have been in their shoes. They've been alone for a long time. They got a glimpse of something that they saw was right.

They longed for it for a long time. Some of them longed for a long, long time. And finally now, there's four or five like-minded ones who have come together.

They are desperate. It has to go. It can't fail.

My family's life, my family's spiritual life is at stake. It can't fail. That's their mind.

It needs to be the same right here, amen? That same kind of an urgency. But you see, it's not as easy for us to be urgent because it's all here. See? It's all here.

Building, chairs, people, singing, song leaders. I mean, it's all here. We've got it, man! We need that kind of desperation in our hearts.

It should never go away, brothers and sisters. It should never go away, but it can easily go away. It's just like second generation Christians, you know? You grow up in a Christian home.

Your mom and dad fought for everything they got in their spiritual life, and now you're just riding in on theirs. That never comes out right, does it? There needs to be that desperation that says, we must have a church! We must! That's the way I find these little groups. They're desperate! And just to show you what a dangerous place you're in.

I stood up here last night and preached. And you know what I preached last night? There was a representation of one of those little struggling churches here last night. They listened to the sermon very differently than you did.

Very differently. They were just like this. I watched them! All night! I fed off of their faces while I was preaching.

They were just like this. Oh, such a balm to their hearts out there struggling along by themselves with just two or three others. There needs to be a desperation in our hearts, brothers and sisters.

We can get complacent real easy. It's real nice around here, you know. We've done our work now, and we have this nice little place here.

Brethren, it won't work. God needs to lift our sights higher. Praise God for what He has done here, but God needs to lift our sights higher.

There's more to obtain. We haven't arrived. These people are desperate.

It's not good to be alone for a long time, and they know it. And when they get together with a few others and they've got a hope and a prayer that something is going to happen in their area, they are desperate. You know, when you're desperate, listen to these, you yield more easily to one another.

You work together much more easily when you're desperate. You pray more fervently when you're desperate, and you stand the test of trials much better when you're desperate. Vital signs for a new church, let's just take our pulse tonight.

See how the old beat is going. Number three, they pray. They pray.

And God bless you for filling up the prayer rooms with praying men. God bless you for that. Maybe some of these points are just preventative maintenance.

Amen? But they pray. I've seen them both. I've seen little groups who don't pray.

I've heard them say things like this. Yeah, well, you know, we've got lots of little children and we just can't fit a prayer meeting in, so we don't pray, but God knows our hearts. I've heard those kind of statements.

I've seen them just kind of saunter in the back of the building, you know, and slip in after the service starts, you know. Fifteen minutes or so, they come slipping in there, you know, and take their seat, you know, and it's like, you know, okay, bless me now, preacher. Bless me.

I need food. Give me something to eat, you know. That's kind of their mentality.

But I've seen the other ones too. And usually, it's hard to find a place to pray when you're just a little group somewhere and you're meeting in the backside of some building or on the storefront and there's only one room and there's no place. I've seen them crawl back behind a little wall in the corner of the auditorium and weep their hearts out.

I've seen them wiggle their way into the boiler room where it's dirty and dusty and put some old pieces of carpet down there and get down on their knees and cry to God. I've seen them packed into a little room eight by eight standing up like this because that way they can get more of them in there and it's so full you can't push the door open. I mean, they want a church.

They want a church. I've seen it. It's beautiful.

I've seen them start out with a little corner in a boiler room and watch that thing grow and pretty soon take these things out and pretty soon take this out too and pretty soon take this out too and before they were done they had everything emptied out of the boiler room and they emptied it out every Sunday morning because it was the only place where they could pray. Pile the stuff over up in the corner. Throw a few carpets down and let all the people get in there, get down on their knees and agonize before God.

God would have mercy upon them. Well, that's very different than somebody who just kind of saunders in, you know, 15 minutes after the services starts, you know, sits in the back and says, Okay, preacher, now bless me. I need a blessing.

I've been busy all week. Would you feed me? Oh, what a different mentality the one is compared to the other, isn't it? They pray, brethren. Their very life depends on what God is going to do in their midst and they cry out to God effectual, fervent prayers.

Oh, I wonder where you're at, my friend, tonight. I wonder where you're at with God. I wonder where your prayer life is.

I wonder if there's any cry in your hearts or if you just pray your monotone prayers. You know, we know what to say when we pray, don't we? We've learned all the right things. We say it in Jesus' name.

Oh God, our Son, we can say all those words, but where's the fire burning in the heart that causes those effectual, fervent prayers to rise like incense unto God in desperation? They pray. They fast and pray. Why? Because they don't know what they're doing for prayer every Sunday for 22 years.

That's a lot of prayer meetings on Sunday morning. Oh, not everybody is there, and I wish there were more there. I wish we could fill two big rooms instead of one big room with men weeping and crying to God before the Sunday morning service.

I'm never satisfied, but bless God, for 22 years, every Sunday morning, there's a group of men and sometimes women and young people on their faces weeping and crying to God that God would bless us. Prayer. It's there.

The ones that make it, make it on their knees. If I see one where there is no prayer, I don't have a whole lot of hope for it. I don't have a whole lot of hope.

And if I have anything to say about it, I put them to praying. And they say, we're not going to pray. We don't have time to pray.

Skip that point. I tell them, I'm not sure if I'm going to come over here and pour my life and time into your little assembly if you're not going to pour out your heart to God in prayer. I'm wasting my time.

They pray. Number four. They have a like-minded vision.

We talked about vision last night. It would have been a good time to give an invitation. I think I would have had every man at the altar last night.

Will you be one of those men that's filled with a vision? But they have a like-minded vision. The ones that make it. If they don't have a like-minded vision, it just doesn't go.

They start good. They're real excited. And when they start, the ones that don't have a like-minded vision, they usually start with these kind of words.

Well, we don't agree on everything. And you know, we've got our different opinions about this and that and this and that, but our fellowship is in Christ and we're going for it in Christ. The only thing is, as time goes on, they all find out that those differences of opinions do matter.

And before you know it, they lose their way. And one's gone. And another's gone.

And another's gone. And then it's gone. I've seen it many times.

There must be a like-minded vision. And when I say that, I don't mean every little detail needs to be exactly the same, but there must be an agreement in the heart of the brotherhood where this church is going. And in that, there needs to be some bending and blending of the hearts so that that church can go in one direction.

The Bible is true. Without a vision, the people perish. And without a vision, a church is not going to make it.

Not going to make it. And it needs to be a like-minded vision. It must be.

You just think about it for a minute. You believe in courtship around here. I know you do, so I'll use that as an example.

What if you have a couple of families that come in here who believe in the dating game? Start flirting with your daughters. Can you keep on fellowshiping in Christ? No way! It's more than just fellowshiping in Christ. We have to see the same things.

We have to know where we're going. We have to. And I don't mean down to little bitty details, but like that one, that's a major... That's not going to enhance fellowship very well, is it? If after the Sunday morning service, I've got to keep my eye on that fellow over there who's got his eye on my daughter over here.

Uh-uh. There must be some like-mindedness. And I've learned this through the years.

If there isn't, it goes away. You say, well, Brother Denny, we're like-minded here. I mean, hey, here we are.

Look at us. Well, amen. But let's keep our preventative maintenance up.

Maybe there's some places where you need to bow your heart, just like one of those little fellowships does. You know? Brother was sharing with me today how he had a different vision of how things should be here, and he bowed his heart to it, and how he sees now how beautifully God worked. Maybe sometimes we need to do that, you know? Just bow our heart.

And it's much easier now, brothers, sisters, you have elders. You have a ministry here. Imagine being five families with no leader.

There must be a like-minded vision. We must be speaking the same things. We must be minding the same things.

There must be agreement in basic direction, and theology, and applications too. It means we blend our hearts together. And I know that for some of us here, maybe that's not as easy as it is for others, you know? Some of us are used to being in a brotherhood, and yielding one to another, but there are some of us in this room who have stood alone for a long time.

Now, all of a sudden, we're in an assembly of other brothers and sisters. And you know, those stand-alone muscles, they are strong. I mean, you have exercised those stand-alone muscles for years, standing out there by yourself, leaning against the wind, and all kinds of controversy and criticism about how weird you are, and you have developed those strong stand-alone muscles.

And praise God. But dear brothers and sisters, it takes different muscles to blend your heart into a brotherhood, and maybe those muscles aren't very strong. You need to exercise them.

I'll yield. Okay. That's fine.

I see where the church is going. We're going that way too. Well, I've got my own convictions, and we're not going to budge.

Yeah, well, you may not budge, and you may sit by yourself again someday. You know, those little groups that make it, oh, they blend very easily. Very easy.

Because they've got to have a church. My dear brothers and sisters, you also have got to have a church. Number five.

They leave a clear past behind them. They leave a clear past behind them. Most of them have had a rocky past, by the way.

Because they've been bumped around, kicked around, criticized, called wolves, and every other thing that you can imagine, as they tried to figure out how they're supposed to live in the midst of a worldly church. So they have some pretty rocky pasts. But you know what? If you get three or four of them together who have not cleared up that rocky past, you have got trouble.

The seeds of disintegration are already planted in that little fellowship. They have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. And we ask questions like that to these little groups and these

brothers and sisters.

You know, how are things with the elders back there? Oh, you know, if something rises up, you know, and some strong words quickly come out of their mouth, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And I encourage them, don't go on until you get that thing clear, until you can get on your knees and work through that thing with you and God until you're clear and you can go back to that pastor or those elders or whoever they are and bless them and be free of your attitudes no matter what they've done to you. I mean, I heard one just a couple weeks ago, two dear brothers in a congregation and God was giving them a different vision and a like-minded vision and one of them was an elder in that church and they went to the rest of the congregation and sat with the elders and said, we have a bit of a different vision and the elders said, yes, we know you do.

They said, we'd like to just go and start our own little fellowship and we'd like your blessing, you know, to do it. We don't want to make any trouble. We just have a different vision.

We're not saying you're all wrong, but we just have a different vision. And they got a good word from the elders and it seemed like everything was going to work out alright. They came to another meeting one week later and the elders crucified them and run them out of the church on the rail as it is.

Wounded and broken and disillusioned and hurt by what was said. They were called legalists and you're way off the deep end and they just, they just wrote them off and told everybody in the congregation, stay out. Well, now they've got some things to work through and maybe you have some things to work through and maybe those things have not been worked through.

I just want to encourage you, the ones that make it, make sure the past is... Yeah, you may not be able to go back there and get that pastor to agree with you, but at least your heart can be clear toward that pastor and when you think about him, thoughts of anger and bitterness don't come up out of your heart. We can't live that way. You know what happens if you don't clear those things up? You enter into your new church life with a reactionary spirit about you and that never comes out right.

The old pendulum swings way over here and when it's time to make decisions about things like maybe, oh, what about church authority? We don't want anything to do with church authority. That's a reaction because of a bad experience over here. You can't do that.

You can't do it. It won't come out right. And by the way, the fellowship of the criticized will not build a New Testament church.

We had to come to grips with that back home many years ago, about three months after we started 22 years ago. It dawned on me one Sunday afternoon. All we're doing on Sunday afternoon is talking about all the things that they said about us this week.

I said, wait a minute! Brethren! We can't build a church on this! Did you hear what they... No. What did they... They said we were this and they said this and no! Yeah, they did! Those guys! And I mean, we had the fellowship of the criticized. It was really moving.

But it dawned on me one Sunday afternoon, this is not going to build a church, a New Testament church. It's not going to come out right. And we talked about it and we repented.

We just repented of the whole thing. I said, we're not... Forget it! Let them say what they want. Let them do what they want with us.

We're going to love Jesus and forget it and go on! I'm so glad we made that decision way back there three months into our fellowship because I'm telling you the other does not build a New Testament church. The fellowship of the criticized will destroy you in due time. So, maybe you have some things to work through.

Maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking, oh, he's ringing my number on that one. Hey, that's alright. Just open your heart to God and say, God, I am going to get it clear.

And you see, I can't... Maybe you think, it's beyond me. I can't see my way through. Go to one of the ministers and say, I need your help.

Will you go with me? Do what you have to do. Get it clear. The church here will be the better for it.

Number six, these little groups, I've noticed one thing about them. They are spiritual pioneers. Now, we all know what a pioneer is, don't we? That term comes from a time in American history when the people of the East got in wagons pulled by horses and traveled from the East all the way to the West.

They called them pioneers. The pioneers, they were the first ones to face that big river that no one knew was there. They were the first ones to build the big raft that they put all the wagons on and floated the wagons across the river and brought the raft back.

And that's the way they did with all their wagons. They were the first ones to build the raft. They were the first ones to build a little store as a little outpost way out there, you know.

They were the first ones to face the Indians. They found the best pass through the mountains. They buried their dead out there.

They were the pioneers. Most new churches have a lot of unknowns. It takes some holy grit, I call it.

It takes some holy grit to start a new church and see that thing through to the end and through its growing pains and all the different obstacles that come your way. It takes some holy grit. It takes a pioneering spirit.

There will be many bumps in the road. And all of a sudden you'll find yourself with Indians circling around you. But it's during those times that the pioneers were proven because they would get up when it was all over, load everybody up in the wagon again and keep on going.

They were pioneers. They wouldn't turn back. They're not going to quit.

They're not going to give up when the going gets tough. They're not going to do that. They're pioneers.

And you know something about the pioneers? And it's this way with human nature. And I'm sure that you've noticed it even here, some of you brothers who have been here for seven years. Once the pioneers make the way through, there's lots of other people who come running along behind.

And that's okay. Not everybody's a pioneer. Lots of other people come running behind.

Or they may even stand on the sideline for a while and say, it ain't going to work, it ain't going to work, it ain't going to work. Once they realize that you made it to the other side and you're on the west coast and

everything's great over there, then guess what? We're coming. We're going to come and join you.

You know, if you don't keep on going, you'll never see that. You say, well, Brother Denny, we're here. That doesn't apply to us.

Listen, there are many, many fields yet to explore, brothers and sisters. Praise God for what He has done here. But listen, a good church and a true church, God always has it living on the edge.

Right? Because we're called to walk by faith and not by sight. And God is going to take us on. And God is going to take you on.

Now, I don't know where He's going to take you. But I know this, it's always an adventure. Because there's a lot of unknowns with God.

It's always an adventure. As I look back over 22 years, hey, listen, we didn't just pioneer one time. We were facing things over and over and over again.

We constantly found ourselves on our faces again saying, God, we don't know what to do. Well, God likes it that way. You see, we are responsible.

We must walk in the light. And once God brings us to a certain place in His light, He's not going to say, okay, my son, my daughter, now you've arrived, relax. No, no, no.

There's always more horizon up ahead. And so, in a sense, it's good if God keeps us on the edge and maybe you feel like that's where you are right now. Some of you leaders here, maybe you think, amen, brother, we are on the edge.

Well, don't despair. That's where you're supposed to be. On the edge.

Crying to God. Looking out ahead. Having that spiritual stamina that says we're going to keep on going and trust God.

Are you a quitter? Pioneers are not quitters. They keep on going. You know what usually happens too? Oftentimes they quit just before the spiritual breakthrough.

You ever notice that? I'm sure you have, especially some of you who deal with souls that you're laboring into the night. It's real easy to quit just before the breakthrough. You must be tough.

You can't just quit. Why? For those little groups, they've got too much at stake to just quit. You've got to have a church.

Number seven, they had a commitment to brotherly love. Brotherhood. And you know, for a lot of these little groups, that's even a new word to them.

They're not used to that word. But they'll listen to a tape on brotherhood. And they'll listen to this concept of brothers making a decision.

And it's so new to them. Oh, the preacher, he makes all the decisions and we're just there on Sunday morning. We show up to hear him preach.

Now all of a sudden, there's these new thoughts to them. We are a brotherhood. A brotherhood decision.

The brethren didn't feel clear about this or that. And these little groups, they rise up and say, We want to have brotherhood! Sometimes I wonder if we want to have it as much as they want to have it. Because there are some challenges at times with brotherhood.

You don't always move forward as fast with brotherhood as you do if one man is saying, Hey, I think we ought to do this! And everybody else says, Okay. You know, that guy who says that, he's not always right. It's nice to have a solid group of men who can look at something and say, Yeah, amen.

That answer's in my heart also. Let's go. Brotherly love.

This is where you blend your hearts together. This is where you work through your conflicts. And you know, they do have them.

Those little groups, they have conflicts. There have been some times when I travel on a weekend and all I did is patch up holes. And heal wounds.

And get everything clear. There are conflicts. But that group that says, We are going to be a brotherhood.

We're going to learn to live together. We're going to learn to love one another. We're going to learn how to work through our conflicts.

We're not going to leave. They make it. They make it.

It is the difference. A brotherhood or no brotherhood is the difference between a preaching center or a living, breathing, functioning body. You don't want a preaching center here, brothers and sisters.

Just a good place where people can come and hear a good sermon, do you? A preaching center or a living, breathing, functioning body. Which one do you want? That's what a brotherhood is. That's what brotherly love is.

It produces a living, breathing, functioning body. There's accountability there. There's opportunities to serve one another there.

Servanthood. You know, some time ago, and I'll never forget this little conversation. I had a conversation with a man out west.

And he was by himself. And he was longing for a church. And he said these words to me.

He said, Brother Denny, I am a fireman and I know what brotherhood is. But I long to have a spiritual brotherhood. You know, when he said that, I thought, I didn't catch what he said.

So I said, What do you mean? You're a fireman and you know what brotherhood is. And as he said it, I said, Yeah, you're right, you're right. But he said, Look, us firemen, we are a brotherhood.

We face that fire together. We battle those flames together. We watch over each other while we are fighting those flames.

If we go in three men to fight the flames in the living room, we have one eye on the flame and one eye on our brother. He said, I know what a brotherhood is, Brother Denny. If my fireman brother falls down because of the smoke, I stop what I'm doing and grab him immediately and care for him and get him out of there.

He said, I know what a brotherhood is, Denny. But I long for a brotherhood in my church life. I have no such thing where I go to church.

I thought, Wow, that's a good definition of a brotherhood. Accountability, love, concern and care. And you know, we're all in the same place and we're fighting the same enemy and I got one eye on the enemy and I got one eye on my brother and I see my brother struggling and I'm going to go there and see how he's doing and he's going to sense concern in my heart.

He's not going to sense a judgmental attitude looking down at him. What did you fall down in the middle of a fire for, man? Get up! That's not what you say when somebody falls down. You go reach over there and you get a hold of him and you say, My brother, here, let me help you out of this.

Let's go. You get him outside there and you get his air moving again and you get him revived and you get him back up on his feet and you go back into that building and turn that old water loose on the fire again. That's what a brotherhood is.

I thought, man, this guy, he knows what a brotherhood is. He really knows what one is. Do I know what one is? Hard things come up in church life.

You're here for seven years, I know that you know what I'm saying when I say those words. Hard things come up. Difficult things to work through.

Ministers have difficult things to work through. They need a brotherhood. Not somebody with a gun pointed at them.

Alright, we're going to see how you ministers handle this one. We're watching every move you're making. I'll tell you what, that's pretty tough.

Pretty tough way to fight a fire. There are difficult things that come up in church life. But oh, that commitment.

Ah, we are a brotherhood and we're going to stand together and we're going to pray this thing through and we're going to love one another through it and we're going to give each other the benefit of the doubt. You know, that's about as practical of a definition of love as I can give you. We're going to give each other the benefit of the doubt.

If there's a doubt, I'm going to give you the good side of the benefit. Oh, I'm sure he didn't mean that. I'm sure he didn't mean that.

Amen? I think you're misunderstanding that completely. I'm sure it's not that way. That's giving the benefit of the doubt.

Hey, if you don't do that in your marriage, you brothers and sisters who know this, it ain't going to go too well if you don't give the benefit, the good side of the benefit of the doubt. Amen? Number eight. These little groups that make it, they understand the blessing of authority.

I have seen whole churches salvaged by taking one word of counsel from a seasoned minister. And I've watched churches fall by the wayside just the same way with this attitude. We don't need anybody to help us.

Christ is the head of the church. We'll work through it on our own. There's something not right with that attitude.

It's true that Christ is the head of the church and it may be that you could work through it on your own. There's something sour in that attitude that doesn't come out right. We don't need those guys.

We'll be okay on our own. That doesn't come out right. It doesn't come out right.

You know, with these little groups, it's pretty easy for them. Most of the time, they don't have a clue what they're doing. It's like me.

I open the hood on my car if something isn't going right. I stand there and I look in there, pound a little on this, wiggle this, come over here and look a little bit. Hey, I don't know what I'm doing.

I'm not sure what's wrong. Then all of a sudden, here comes a mechanic and he walks up next to me and says, Hey, brother. Little problem? Yeah, I don't know what's wrong with this thing.

Would you like a little help? Yes, please do. That's how they look at it. They don't know what they're doing.

They got the hood open, but they don't know what makes this thing tick. They don't know how to make it go. Usually they just say, Please come and give us some direction.

But you know what? You brothers and sisters here, you need direction from your authorities just as much. But it's not as easy for you to see it because you didn't just flip the hood open on the engine. It's years down the road.

But I'm telling you, you need the words of that mechanic just as bad today as you did seven years ago when you first flipped open the hood and said, How does this whole thing work? You still need it just as much. And if you let this one go, it ain't gonna come out right. I guarantee it.

There's a lot of homeschoolers in this room. I know that. A lot of what we call remnant people.

But you know what a lot of people say about the homeschoolers and the remnant people? And it's good to hear the criticisms of what other people say about us. But you know what they say? They are the most independent bunch of people I have ever seen. They don't know how to fit in the church.

I mean, they just do what they want, when they want, they come when they want, go home when they want. It doesn't matter to them. They just are independent.

We need to take that challenge. You know, I heard a sermon some time ago by a preacher and he was kind of criticizing in his sermon. You know, and people said, did you hear this sermon? And I sat down and listened to it and then they came back and said, well, what did you think? I said, I agree with him 100%.

You know what he was saying? Those homeschoolers out there, they don't want to fit in, they don't want to bow their hearts, they don't want to be under authority, they just want to do what they want to do, when they want to do it, wherever they want to do it. Well, I have to say, I travel around the country quite a bit and worked a lot with these people and it's kind of that way. It's kind of that way.

May God change that criticism. Listen, brothers and sisters, the church of Jesus Christ was designed by God to meet needs in our lives and one of them is this point right here. We need authority.

I don't know if you realize it or not, but brethren, your children need to see you bow your heart when you don't agree. You ask them to do it all the time. No.

I'm not talking about controversial issues, we're talking about things here in the fellowship. They need to see you bow your heart. They need to know, you know, dad doesn't really agree with this, but he is sweetly bowing his heart.

They need to see that. You ask them to do it, sometimes you need to do it. That's part of church life by the way and it doesn't just fall on the people.

I've had to bow my heart lots of times in 22 years and my children need to see me, the pastor, bow my heart and they have and they know that papa has a different mind on this, but he just sweetly bows his heart and leads his family. This is the way we're going to go. Praise God.

We get to bow our hearts. Let's do it. Oh, that's so good for the children.

To see their papa bow his heart. You know, it's easy to get complacent. I'm coming down to the end here now.

It's easy for us to get complacent, but think about it. Think if we lose these things, where we'll be in five years. Prayer, brokenness, openness, vital reality, submission to authority, a pioneering faith-filled spirit, a clear vision and vital reality.

You take two or three of those away and leave this church there without those two or three for five years and we all know where we will be. It won't come out right. And then I thought about this, you know.

We talk about brotherhood commitment. How about taking these eight points for the brotherhood commitment? You want to make a commitment to the brotherhood? Yeah. Here's eight points you can start with.

I'm committing myself to the brotherhood. I am going to do my part to keep my heart vitally connected with Jesus Christ. I'm going to do my part to keep a like-minded vision in the fellowship.

I'm going to do my part to be in the prayer meetings and support the ministry on my knees. And on and on I could go with all the points again. What a beautiful brotherhood commitment.

In closing, there are three types of church plans that I have seen. Number one, where there is one man who has a vision and he inspires others to follow him. You can't have a church that way.

Usually what you get out of that is one church. One church. Second group, where a group of men have a vision.

Not clear. And they're trying to make this thing work. And they don't even have a leader.

And usually what you get out of that is no church. But the third one is the one I would like you to consider this evening. That is where you have godly leaders and visionary men who unite their hearts together at the foot of the cross to glorify the Lord Jesus upon this earth.

And usually when you get that, you get many churches. What do you want in ten years? One church or many churches? Where some godly leaders and some godly men with a vision unite their hearts together

at the foot of the cross and say, we are going to build for the glory of God. I tell you what you'll have in ten years.

You will have churches that have sprung up out of this. I just want to encourage you to go for that one. And I do believe that's what is here.

I sense that that's what is here. Not just one man with a vision and everybody else following. But a group of leaders and a bunch of men who have a vision who are willing to build together for the glory of God.

You will see many churches if you just keep on going in these eight areas that I've mentioned this evening. Now, I wonder where you're at tonight. I wonder where you're at.

I'd like us just to bow our heads and close our eyes tonight. And I guess my challenge is to you men. You men and you young men tonight.

Are there some things that you need to make right? Do you need to hit the altar tonight? You know, one brother said to me last night, Oh, Brother Denny, I wanted to run to the altar last night. Run tonight! I just want to open the altar for a few minutes while we're here with our eyes closed, sitting here in silence. If you need to do business with the Lord, you just come.

The next ten years are in your hands.

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