

The Early Church Model

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon highlights the importance of being open to change and growth in the church, just like the church in Antioch, and emphasizes the need to rejoice in the success of other Christians.

Duration: 59:14

Scripture: Acts 11:20, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Early Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenge of spreading the gospel in a modern world filled with distractions. He expresses concern about the lack of effective evangelism and the need to find new ways to reach people. The speaker shares a personal experience of attending a church where the emphasis was on pre-evangelism rather than directly sharing the message of Jesus. He questions the effectiveness of this approach and highlights the urgency of ensuring that people hear about Jesus before it's too late. The speaker emphasizes the importance of relying on the hand of the Lord and His grace rather than relying on human effort or following legalistic approaches.

Transcript

If you, when you read the book of Acts, which is our record of the early church, you'll notice a change kind of sudden in the book of Acts, because when the book begins, it's focused on Jerusalem, and it's focused on the 12 apostles. Matthias having been chosen to replace Judas, who had betrayed Christ. The Spirit is poured out, and the early chapters are all about what God is doing in Jerusalem among the Christians.

As they're being made, making new believers, evangelizing, teaching, they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and in the fellowship, sharing, loving, breaking of bread, probably, not only common meals together, but communion, and then also prayers, they pray together. And then it just goes on, and it's following Peter, and then the first persecution happens, Peter and John are busted and kept in jail overnight, and then they appear before the Sanhedrin, and so on and so forth, but the church keeps going ahead. Then Stephen is martyred, and it's still about the fact that the Christians now are being sent out.

It's interesting that Christ had told them to go out and preach the gospel everywhere, and they didn't, so then after Stephen's martyrdom, it says that all the believers, such a great persecution broke out that all the believers were spread out. This is a concept totally radical to our churches, totally radical, but it's the way it's supposed to be. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but all the believers were scattered, and everywhere they went, they proclaimed the word of God.

There was no sick person in the pew, or at least dominating the scene, like, oh, just help me make it through another day. They were so strong in the Lord, amid persecution that everywhere they went out, they proclaimed the word of God, and disciples were being made everywhere they went, in Samaria and Judea, just like the Lord had told them to do. Not the apostles, not Peter, not James, not John, no, not them, the believers, and we have developed, unfortunately, this system where the show is up on the platform, the pastor and the leaders are supposed to be the ones who do the ministry, and the people just sit and get entertained once a week on Sunday, totally foreign to the scriptures.

All in favor, say aye. Aye. So pastors, what a challenge to us.

The believers are supposed to reproduce themselves. Yes, Paul says to Timothy, do the work of an evangelist. Yeah, and leaders are supposed to proclaim the gospel, but it's the people.

Just think, pastors, I've been pondering this, my wife and I, for the last month or two. Just think if everyone in your church, Pastor Rivera, my friend who's here from Manhattan Grace Tabernacle in El Barrio in the east side of Manhattan, just think if every one of his people in his church won one person to the Lord, or brought one person to church between now and the end of the year, just every person. Don't take the city for God.

Don't be Billy Graham. Don't, just one person. If every member of your church just between now and the end of the year led one person or brought them, and just one in the next five months, you'd have to move out of your building in a year and a half.

And it wouldn't cost any money. But the problem with that is that the maturity, the spiritual wholeness, the health of the body of Christ is not what it should be. So the church, instead of being aggressive and going out, we're always in a mode of help me, and we're all in intensive care units, and everyone's trying to make it through another week.

But the church is supposed to be strong and militant and vibrant. How many say amen? Amen. And again, as Pastor Gary, that was very confrontational of him, but I was needed.

It's on us, isn't it? It's on us, because we're the shepherds, like priests, like people. We're supposed to lead the people into some wholeness of grace, and understanding who we are in Christ, and fullness of the spirit kind of lifestyle, so we can go out and be a blessing, not always give me, bless me, help me, help me, bless me, pray for me. You don't know what I've been through, you don't know about my childhood, and all of that.

I mean, good, let's pray for you, but a little of that goes a long way, amen? When are we gonna get up and do the work of the Lord? But then suddenly the book changes, because Paul, who was agreeing with the martyrdom and the killing of Stephen, he gets converted. And now, once he gets converted, immediately the book of Acts changes, and now the rest of it follows Paul, not Peter and John. Not the 12 apostles, and another thing shifts.

It's no longer Jerusalem that's the center of activity. The hub of activity that we're focused on by Luke, as he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is Antioch. A church begins in Antioch, and it seems like there's more grace in the church in Antioch than there is in the mother church in Jerusalem, because it's the first church where the Jews and the Gentiles, the Jews and the Greeks, are actually meeting together as God had planned.

Now, he sent Peter in Acts 10 to Cornelius' house, and those were the first Gentiles who got converted. But now a church is actually happening where there's Jew and Gentile together, which is unthinkable to the mind back then, because anti-Semitism was so strong, the Gentiles hated the Jews, and Jews are still, there's anti-Semitic feeling against them. And the Jews would call the Gentiles dogs.

And if you walked even in Samaria, the rabbi said, if you travel through Samaria, you gotta get the dust off from your sandals, otherwise you're contaminated. So there was an exclusivist attitude with both of them, and now the gospel's breaking it down. And that's the church that Paul is sent out from, Paul and Barnabas.

It's in that church that in a meeting, the Holy Spirit says, obviously through the gifts of the Spirit, separate me, Paul and Barnabas, for the work that I've called them to do. Can you imagine a meeting like that? Where two people are named out loud? Two of the leaders of the church, they had been teaching there for more than a year, along with other great leaders. And the leaders of that church were interracial.

One of them was called Niger the Black, he's from Africa. So there's a lot's happening in Antioch. And when Paul and Barnabas are sent out, guess what? When the first missionary journey is over, they come back to that church.

They report to that church. They don't report to Jerusalem, although they do visit it, they report back to the people who sent them out. Then when Paul and Barnabas have a dispute, Paul hooks up with Silas and goes on his second missionary journey, sent out from Antioch, and when they come back, they come back to Antioch.

So this church in Antioch might be like the greatest model church in the New Testament. You could make that argument. I wonder how it began and how we could learn.

Could we learn something from how it began, how it operated? Now, as we open the scripture here in a second, I'm pleading with you just like Pastor Gary did because he asked you to just, you know, take past ideas and put it behind you so that we can learn. And I wanna say to you, you gotta, as we read the scripture now, you gotta ask God to help you drop your background and your tradition. You gotta get rid of your white Southern Baptist culture or your black Kojic culture.

You gotta get rid of your Pentecostal culture and all of that because we're never gonna learn if we're just looking for verses to back up what we already believe. Most people read the Bible just forgetting verses to back up what they already believe. Very few are students.

We need God's help. So we read and go, oh, I've been wrong on that. Let me learn this.

No, most of us are, praise God, I grew up this way. We're gonna have church. But listen, I think the day's getting too late for that.

What do you think? Christianity is in decline in America. You can save the faith talk and the positive confession. The facts are the facts.

It is what it is. Christianity is in decline. 1500 ministers are leaving the ministry every month in America.

While we're meeting today, 50 are gonna quit. That comes from George Barna. No, focus on the family.

And George Barna just came out with something that 72% of all the people who are in the ministry would quit and leave tomorrow if they could only get a job to make enough money. So imagine the discouragement behind all the pounding of the pulpit and the pounding of the Bible and bless God, hallelujah. Secretly, a lot of people are defeated in their spirits.

Shouldn't be that way. How are we gonna help others if we're defeated ourselves? His dad, my late friend Dave Wilkerson, when he first came from Texas to start Times Square Church in the city, he was doing it about six months and he called me and said, I gotta have lunch with you. You gotta tell me how to pastor.

And I said, please, Brother Dave, just relax. You know how to pastor better than I do. No, I haven't pastored.

I said, you've traveled all around the world. God's used you. I'll go to lunch with you, but we'll just talk about the kingdom.

So we're talking and then he came up with one of his questions that he would come from left field with occasionally. He said, Jim, tell me, how many ministers, what percentage of ministers in New York do you think are defeated in their spirits? I had never thought of that in my life, but his mind went a different way. I said, I don't know.

He said, I think at least 80, 90%. I thought maybe 50. He said, no, defeated.

Don't know what to do. Don't make any converts. Shout in glory, but nobody gets saved.

Don't baptize 10 people in two years and we're surrounded by unbelievers. How could that be? If Jesus is so great, where's the beef, right? No, no, I'm talking real because remember my background is in Bible school. My background is playing basketball and there was a scoreboard up there and that keeps you true.

If you're getting beat down 42 to 18, the coach calls a timeout. You don't look up and say, I don't receive that score. I don't receive that.

No, no, no. I do not receive that score. Coach will slap you with the back of his hand and go, no, that's the score.

And what a team will do, it is we'll change, which is why I'm talking to you today. We change. You're losing 42 to 18.

Okay. So Jim, I was the point guard, played in the NCAA tournament. So now we're going to speed the game up.

We're playing too slow a pace. We're going to go into a zone defense instead of man to man, or we're going to full court press. We're going to do something different because if you keep on doing the same thing, you're going to keep on getting the same result.

But change in industry, in Apple, in American Airlines, in any corporation, change is part of the scenery, but not in the church. The hardest people to get to change are pastors and denominations because they're going to just keep on keeping on. This is the way I grew up, brother.

Don't suggest that what I've been in could be improved upon. The arrogance of that, the pride of that. But my wife and I, when we began with less than 20 people in the church, and the first offering was \$85, total tithes and offerings.

And I'm in the middle of downtown Brooklyn, no crack then, but lots of heroin, lots of alcoholism and hookers, a block and a half from the church, either way you went. If you went to the left toward 4th Avenue and went up to Pacific Street, they were cruising. If you go down to 3rd Avenue and up, they were on that block.

Rundown building, depressing, no seminary training. But I got Bible, plenty of promises, so how do we do this? So I want to let you know, every discouragement that you've ever faced, Pastor Gary and I have faced it, and maybe more. I got so discouraged twice, I tried to leave the ministry.

But that will help somebody here, twice. I'm not proud of that, but twice I tried to get out and God blocked me both days. Made a person call me up and canceled the appointment that I was going to have to get out of the ministry.

God's ways are not our ways, are they, right? If you're here today, it's always too soon to quit. But we have to be open to change. So as I read these verses and we just discuss a few points, you can't be locked into, well, that might be in the Bible, that's not the way I do it.

Then you're doomed. You're absolutely doomed, even though you're Christians and we love the Lord, we're doomed to mediocrity. I'm so upset, I was praying in my heart and in the spirit here as we were singing this morning, because I just came from Green Bay, Wisconsin and Ottawa in Canada, doing something for the Billy Graham Association, meeting with pastors.

And I met in this church of a certain denomination in Green Bay. And the church is the nicest church, one of the five nicest churches in the whole state of Wisconsin, building-wise. Okay? And they've gone through four pastors in the last six years, split upon split, people leaving, fussing, fighting, gossiping, slandering, whatever.

It's down to hardly anything, building seats 1,200, 1,300, which in Wisconsin is the bomb because that state is not the Bible Belt. Right? It's down to that. And the interim pastor meets me and he says, well, look, I'm just retired.

They just called me in here to try to save the ship, but they're gonna lose the building. He said that to me. They're gonna lose the building.

Says that to me in front of strangers. And I was just praying for that church. Well, we're worshiping here because that state needs the gospel.

Like 2% of the people, 3% of the whole state go to church. And here's a guy, where they find this guy, all due respect, where they find him, that he's just gonna glibly say, not we're gonna lose the building, or no, he didn't say, I'm gonna fight and believe God. We're gonna see God turn this around.

He's so discouraged and he's the one they brought in to help. And he's depressed. No, we gotta fight.

If you're gonna do the work of the Lord, Paul didn't say at the end of his life, I have danced a good dance. He said, I have fought a good what? How many wanna fight? Lift up your hand. We're gonna fight.

We're gonna fight in Christ. It won't be us as Pastor Gary brought out. It's gonna be him.

But Paul says, boasts in one place, I labored more than all the other apostles, but not I. It was Christ working in me. So there's this mystical thing. God doesn't use laziness.

If you wanna be lazy and just lay around, get out of the ministry, because that's a shame. Get somebody in there who wants to work. We got all the time in the world to rest when Jesus comes.

Now we fight, then we rest. You don't rest now. You fight now.

You work now. Jesus was so busy on earth and he was the son of God that he had no time to eat. The crowds were so much on him.

I'm praying for that God will raise, Lord, raise somebody up to take that church, turn that thing around and fill that building with people who will serve Jesus. Let's put our hands together and just affirm it. Amen.

Here's how the church in Antioch began. Let's see what we can learn from it. Acts 11 verse 19.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen, we just reviewed that, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message, what message? The gospel only to Jews. Look up here for a second. When Christianity began, the history books tell us, the historians tell us that the Roman Empire looked at it as a cult or a sect of Jews.

Why? Jesus was Jewish. 12 apostles were Jewish. Everybody was Jewish.

And now as the gospel's going out, these people are traveling, but they're telling the gospel message only to Jews. But some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene. Look up here for a second.

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean that Paul stopped at later in his first missionary journey. And Cyrene is in Northern Africa. It's our Libya today, where Gaddafi was.

So some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene go and preach the message, but only to Jewish people, but other people are doing that. But now these men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch, which is in Syria, on the coast, north of Israel. And they began to speak to Greeks, i.e. Gentiles also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord's hand was with them. And a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. The sign that people really believe with their heart, look up here for a second, and not just give intellectual assent, is that they turn to the Lord.

They repent. Repent means you're walking one way. Repentance just means you make a U-turn and you go that way back to God.

You admit that way is wrong and you say, God, I need you. They not only believed, they turned to the Lord. Not only believed intellectually, the faith was the one that saves the faith of the heart, with the heart man believes.

The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. Now news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. And when he arrived and saw the evidence, this is the best report you can ever have of your church.

Notice, no building or attendance records mentioned here, but they saw the evidence of the grace of God. God was at work. They could not deny it.

Barnabas couldn't. In fact, maybe God was more at work there than he was in Jerusalem. When he saw the grace of God, he didn't get jealous.

He was glad and he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. Look up here for a second. It wasn't like we have today where if God is doing something in a church that's not our denomination or our group or our race or our ethnicity, then people get a little rankled and try to downplay it.

They're not one of us. My wife and I faced that our whole ministerial life, being around people who don't rejoice for other Christians, they downplay it, but if something happens in their group, they praise it to the sky. And that's a very sick attitude.

We're all members of the body of Christ and Barnabas was a good man full of the Holy Ghost. And when you're full of the Holy Spirit, you rejoice whenever Jesus is being lifted up and the church is growing. If you have a party spirit or a racial spirit, then it's hard for you to rejoice with other people because you're cultural, you're not spiritual.

You're denominational, you're traditional. You're not New Testament. You're into your roots and all of that stuff.

He was glad to encourage them to remain true to the Lord with all their heart and he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And a great number of people were brought to the Lord and then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul who had earlier been converted. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.

So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people and the disciples were called Christians first where? So this church is not only excellent church, this is the first place they were ever called Christians. Well, we call ourselves today, it began in Antioch. So that was written 2000 years ago.

What's it got to do with me? I'm not in Antioch. We have buildings now, they had no buildings. There were no Christian buildings for 300 years.

So what you take for example, for granted a church building, they didn't know that for 300 years. They met in homes, in caves, in fields, sometimes in secret. They had no New Testament.

Today we all turn to the book of Acts. Imagine that when the people went from Cyprus and Cyrene to Antioch and preach the gospel and converts were made, but they had no written word to go by the Old Testament, no printing presses, they didn't hand that out, it wouldn't help them anyway. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

If the Old Testament could save, Christ wouldn't come. None of the letters had been written yet. So imagine they had no literature, no microphones, no buildings, no money.

Peter said, silver and gold have I none. All the folks in the prosperity teaching, Peter wasn't one of you. He didn't have anything, but he had something better than your money.

He had the power of God working in his life. I'd rather have the power of God than a bunch of money. You're gonna lose the money when you die.

But if the power of God is on your life, in your life, you have fruit that will remain. So with all those negatives, the Jewish religious establishment was against them and the Roman Empire had no use for them. And during the Book of Acts, two of the emperors that reigned during that time, one was Nero, one was Caligula.

These are the lowlife emperors of Roman Empire history. Transvestites, cross-dressers, fondling children. You don't even wanna read what was going on in Rome.

But the church is not complaining. No one's saying, yo, how can we do anything? The emperor claims he's God. How can you work in an environment like this? They weren't used to all those cop-outs that we've developed.

It was like, let's get this on. Jesus said, you preach, I'll work with you. Let's get it on.

We need some of that today, don't we? Pastors, real talk. If we're not making converts and the church is on grown, who's that on? You mean the devil's more powerful than Jesus? You mean, are you into some Calvinist mode where that's the purpose of God, that we don't make converts? That'll really glorify God, won't it? No converts are made. No, that's on us.

Maybe we're doing it wrong. Maybe we're not preaching the gospel. You just heard about that.

Maybe we haven't got the right hookup with God. I had to face that early on in the ministry where God was showing me the real problem with the church, which I saw lots of problems. The real problem was me.

He had to work with me. How in the world the church can improve and the flock get stronger if the pastor's out to lunch? How's that gonna happen? I no more love those people than I love this monitor here. I just was trying to get through.

I was insecure, I had no training. I was trying to learn how to preach. My sermons were so bad, I fell asleep while I was preaching.

That's the truth. I got some friends here, remember them. They were falling asleep when I was preaching those.

What did we learn? Why did God put this in the Bible? He didn't put things in here just to fill up pages. All scripture's inspired by God and it's profitable. We have to rightly divide it, but it's profitable.

And when we read this New Testament, we're all ears. This is not now Israel. We're not in the 12 tribes.

We don't have a Levitical priesthood. There's no holy of holies here on earth, and there's no temple in Jerusalem that we're involved with. We can go to the holy of holies that's in heaven, enter through the blood of Jesus Christ.

What's in it that we could learn so that I could do a better job in my position and you could be encouraged today? First of all, isn't it interesting that unlike our preoccupation with the cult of personality, they don't even tell us the names of the people who started possibly the greatest church in the whole New Testament. Certain men from Cyprus and Cyrene. Who? Doesn't matter, because it's about Jesus.

It's not like that now, is it? It's all about the minister, all about the bishop, the preacher, the televangelist, the spotlight's on him. He's winking at the camera, blowing on people or whatever they're doing now. And that's supposed to remind people of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, meek and lowly.

So the first thing I learned is that it's not about us. And if you want the spotlight, you can have it, but the Holy Spirit's leaving town because he was only sent to glorify one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, when he comes, he will glorify me.

If I want Brooklyn Tabernacle's name to be pushed up in the front, the Holy Spirit will say, you do it, but I wasn't sent to do that, so you're on your own. If I want people to remember Jim Cimbala and I wanna purport to be some special prophet or have some word that no one else has, the Holy Spirit will say, just do that, but I'm not helping you. When you lift up Jesus, I'll surround you, I will help you, I will bless you, I will anoint you.

But if you're lifting up your denomination, if you're into your whiteness or your Dutchness or your Polish or your blackness or your Latino culture, if that's what you're into, fine, but the Holy Spirit won't help you. Now you're on your own. And imagine trying to be a minister without the help of the Holy Spirit.

And the Bible says he is easily grieved. He's like a dove. And the Bible says, don't grieve the Holy Spirit.

Well, we can grieve him by other things than smoking some weed. We can grieve him by just putting ourselves forward or our church or our doctrinal perspective that makes us feel superior to everyone else. He has nothing to do with any of that.

Churches that lift up themselves or their denomination or the pastor is the showtime guy and is the center. You will not feel the Holy Spirit there. No, he doesn't.

You mean God's gonna share his glory with some two-bit preacher? With some two-bit church? When the son of the living God died on a cross for us, rose again, ever lives to make intercession for us. And you think the Holy Spirit's gonna help you, promote you? So self-promotion and pride is one of the downfalls of a lot of churches. They're in a treadmill.

There's a lot of people who wanna work and they pray and there's some of the word of God's being preached, but the Holy Spirit's not there to really help them because Jesus is not getting all the glory. You know, it was Tozer, A.W. Tozer, the great spiritual writer who said, most preachers don't want all the glory from God. They don't wanna get all the glory themselves, but they would like a tithe.

Where God, I'll give you all the glory, but how about 10% from me? How many wanna give him all the glory? All the glory, lift your hand up. Wave it, wave it at me. All the glory.

So these certain men from Cypress and Cyrene, we don't even get their names. Don't even get their names. We don't even get their names.

He must increase, John the Baptist said, and I must decrease. It's an offshoot of this dying business that Pastor Gary was talking about. If we go up, he goes down.

If we go down, he goes up. Pride, party spirit, wanting to be noticed and seen, it's death because it grieves the Holy Spirit. And brothers and sisters, trust me, when the singers get up here tonight and do their concert and I speak or I go back or Pastor Gary goes back to his church in Colorado Springs and I go back

to Brooklyn and you do your thing this Sunday, how are you gonna do that without the Holy Spirit? Oh, can you have church? Yeah, you can have church.

If that's what you wanna do, have church the rest of your life, but make a difference, see miracles happen, see changed lives, see so many baptisms that you can't fit the people anymore in the church. Don't you wanna see that? There can be lines outside your building. Why can't there be lines outside your building? I just was walking in downtown Philly yesterday.

I noticed there's a lot of unbelievers out there. Well, what are we here for? To have church and run around and have Bible studies till we're blue in the face? Do the angels rejoice when we have a Bible study? No, the angels rejoice when one sinner repents. Oh, come on, let's put our hands together.

God is gonna come and do something great. We go down, he goes up. Number two, notice that their reach was universal.

They were the ones who understood God's heart now better than everyone else. God permitted the Jewish Christians just to read Jews for a while, but now that time was up. And I wanna tell you, time is up now for some of the attitudes that we have.

Well. They went to the Jews and the Gentiles. That was unthinkable.

That would make the black-white problem in our country look like a walk in the park. Compare Jew-Gentile hostility back then. Read history and find out antisemitism is as old as dirt.

And Jews look down on the Gentiles and call them dogs, and now they're worshiping together. And they went to both people preaching the same message. There was no separate message for Gentiles, a different message for Jews as we somehow have concocted.

Paul says several times, I preach both the Jews and Gentiles one message, repentance from sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And they went to both. They were not discriminating.

What I'm linking all of this to is that odd phrase which has struck me for the last 20 years or so or longer. The hand of the Lord was with them. What kind of praise and worship they do? Doesn't say because it doesn't matter.

Did they use PowerPoints? Were they cutting edge or old school, new school? No, they were Bible school. They were preaching the good news of Jesus. But what made it all happen was, look, the hand of the Lord was with them.

And the hand of the Lord in the Bible means power. Now, obviously, brothers and sisters, the power of the Lord and the hand of the Lord is not with all preachers and all churches. For whatever reason, are they Christians? Yes.

Are they in Christ? Yes. Have their sins been washed away? Yes. But come on, be real.

Laodicea was a Christian church. They were all Christians and they were lukewarm and ready to be vomited out of his mouth. Don't tell me the hand of the Lord was with them.

Don't tell me all these churches in Philly that don't have 20 people to gather and yet they have buildings that seat hundreds. And in Brooklyn, which is called the Borough of Churches, the borough I live in and

work in is called the Borough of Churches. It's the fourth largest city in America after New York, L.A., and Chicago, just Brooklyn by itself.

And there were so many churches built in the early and mid and late 1800s and early 1900s, it's called the Borough of Churches. But they're mostly all empty. And my wife and I walked by one in downtown Brooklyn the other day, been turned into condos.

And at one time was the place where the word of God was being preached. But then the neighborhood changed, you know, and everybody fled. Or sin became too up in your grill, up in your face, and everyone went, well, I gotta get outta here.

I wanna raise my family in a good environment. Well, that's just wonderful. That's just great.

So let the world go to hell in a handbasket, but you make sure you're in a good environment for your kids. I don't know, I can't reconcile that with the word of God. It must be God's will for somebody to stay.

Here's the only target group the Bible tells us about, because that word target group just drives me. I lose what little sanctification I have. Here's your target group, the world.

God so loved the world. If you do not wanna reach everyone who God loves, you should resign from the ministry, give it to someone who wants to do it right. But if you only wanna reach white people because you're white, if you're into your black thing and you only wanna reach black people, you don't want the white folks, the man coming in the church, if you're playing to the anger of black people, you're playing to the anger of white people, if you're Hispanic and wanna keep it all Puerto Rican or whatever, how in the world is the Holy Spirit gonna bless that? Come on, can we say amen to that? Come on, sister, give me a well.

Come on, sister, give me a well. Amen. Amen.

Because they went, certain men from Cyprus and Cyrene, they went and preached the gospel to everyone. No age group. That's business, that's corporate America.

That's not the Bible. Corporate America's techniques are invading the church and I talk to ministers and they're telling me the newest thing they've learned and I went, where is the verse for that? Oh, it's not in the Bible, but you know, this is the way the world works, Jim. My foot, I don't wanna know how the world works.

I wanna know how God works. How many say amen to that? Listen, my wife and I faced this long ago. If the doors aren't open to everyone, the Holy Spirit's not coming in power.

End of story. Now, you can get loud and work it up and get the organ going. And the Lord said.

That's not the Holy Spirit, that's just. That's predictable. And time's running out.

Come on, how many are with me? Time's running out. You can't have cultural, racial churches anymore. Well, you can have them, but what a waste of a life.

So that's all my wife and I have known. People, white people, Italian people, or whoever coming near our church in downtown Brooklyn and, you know, seeing the musicians in the congregation, which is interracial, but all kinds of minorities in the islands and Trinidad and Jamaica and African Americans and

South American, Asian, and all that, and they go, I like your preaching a little, and your wife's choir is like the bomb, but coming down here around all this, you know. And then we got black people coming and telling our members, I can't believe you sold out and go to a church with a man.

What are you, a plantation person? That's all I've ever known. They have no love for the Lord, no respect for the Bible, no sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. It's about who they are, their culture, their race, and we're all the same underneath.

Let me get a knife and cut your arm and cut my arm. Same blood is gonna come out. It's red.

So these people had the hand of the Lord with them, and one of the reasons was they saw people, listen, just remember this above all things. You can't do God's work. Listen from someone who tried to do it another way, couldn't, and I'm asking him to help me today.

If you have to see people the way God sees them and you have to feel what God feels, and when the Holy Spirit baptizes you in that love, race will be the last thing you will ever think of. You won't even notice. You won't even notice.

Mariano Rivera, the great closer for the Yankees, he said to me, one of the first times I met him, he's eating in my house, preaching my church. We've traveled together. One of the first times we met, we were talking, and he said, he's from Panama, really loves Jesus.

Phillies need him, I think, this year, you know? But that's aside, I don't wanna go there. No, let's not go there. No.

He said to me, Pastor Jim, how come the Yankees are more integrated than the church? Just looked at me and said, he said, because on my team, nobody cares what color Jeter is, or me, or A-Rod, or whoever. It's just one thing. Can you play? You're my teammate.

You're wearing pinstripes. You're my man. I'd die for you.

I'd go to the wall for you. He said, but I noticed it's not like that in the church. 11 o'clock Sunday morning in Philly, is still the most segregated hour of the week.

In New York, they died in 9-11. They go to crack houses interracial, died interracial in 9-11. Mayor Giuliani said that great sentence in my church during the funeral of one of the four people we lost.

We lost more than any church in the city, and when he spoke at the funeral of this police officer, was a Jamaican brother in our church. He leaned against the pulpit. I can see him now.

He was the mayor then, of course, and he was tired from doing all of these funerals. And he leaned and he said, I want to tell you something. I'm not saying I've lived this way, but here's what I've learned by doing all these funerals.

I'm not saying I lived this way, but here's what I've learned. When the firefighters, and the EMS people, and the cops were walking up those smoky stairwells, and that all the people were coming down, just screaming, crying, some quiet, whimpering, taking their shoes off because they had to come down 40, 50 floors, not knowing what was going to happen, and they're all escaping, and these guys are going up into their death, and they don't know it. He said, not one cop, not one firefighter, not one of them said, I wonder how many people I'm saving that are going to make, they're making over 300,000.

I wonder how many black people I could save. I wonder if they're Jewish who I'm going to save. He said, no, nobody thinks about that because when you're saving lives, every life is precious, and they gave their life for that, and they would save anyone.

Nobody's going to check what race. Oh, no, you're not my race. I'm not going to pull you out.

No, they pull everyone out. Are the firefighters going to be more loving than the church of Jesus Christ? And then we put on top of our, like I have over me and behind the choir risers, God is love. So these people were baptized in a love.

I know this. You already can tell I'm not a great speaker. I don't have a great speaking voice.

I'm not an orator. Never was, never will be, but I know one thing. If God helps me and rebaptizes me and fills me so I love the people the way he loves them, I see them the way he sees them, I feel what he feels, I will preach well.

I will get through because love always gets through. Come on. Can we say amen? When a father or a mother reaches out to a wayward son, a wayward daughter, wayward daughter, wayward son, you don't use notes, and you're not trying to be eloquent.

You talk from su corazon. You talk from your heart, and you get through because that's your daughter going down the drain. That's your son going down the drain.

You don't use all biblical stuff and her, her, and praise God. You think Jesus talked like that? Just annoys me. Do you think Jesus talked like that? Can you see Apostle Paul doing those games? No, because when you love and you're fervent, you just gotta get their heart.

These men from Cyprus and Cyrene, let me bring this to a close. They were unnamed. All the glory went to God.

They were part of no group, no party. Lord, deliver us. And they went to everybody.

If you don't wanna reach everyone, how in the world can you preach the gospel with integrity since he died for the sins of the world? Some of us want God to clean the fish before we catch him. He doesn't do that. You gotta just take the fish he gives you.

But my wife and I have found this. If the doors aren't open to everyone, then the Holy Spirit's not gonna come in power. If you got some target group, church growth silliness in your head, get it out of there today.

And go back to the Bible and say, God, whoever you send, send anyone, send everyone. Gay, straight, black, white, Latino, rich, poor, homeless, send them. And we'll love them in your name.

That's why God had blessed my late friend, Dave Wilkerson, so much. When teen challenges began, who do you think we're looking for, the upper crust? No, you're a drug addict. Whatever color, whatever, whatever.

Or Nikki Cruz, or whatever. The beauty of it is that the love of God transcends our cultural, racial stuff. The Bible says that everywhere they went, they preached the message of the good news of Jesus.

I can borrow with what my friend just preached on. They didn't preach Moses. They preached Jesus.

They didn't preach the law. Now you have to use the law to bring conviction of sin. But you have to use it, and the minute it has its effect, through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

You got to appeal to conscience. Most people have violated their conscience. No matter how ungodly they are, the conscience still operates to some point.

You have to appeal to nature and creation. How in the world do you think this all came about without a creator? However God leads us, we got to get them to the place where they're pricked in their hearts. The Bible says, they said to Peter, being pricked in their hearts, what must we do to be saved? So you have to be a surgeon.

You have to be so wise to use, rightly divide, the word of God instead of just preaching nonsense. Some of the sermons I think growing up, and some of the outlandish applications of scripture, stuff from the Old Testament has nothing to do with our lives today. And you get that, if you don't rightly divide it, you get that Old Testament spirit, the horse and the rider, he's thrown in the sea.

God break their teeth, bust their heads. You know, those are some of the prayers in the Old Testament. But Jesus said in the New Testament, bless those that curse you.

Love your enemies. So you got to rightly divide, otherwise you're going to get a militant Christian in some redneck attitude Christianity where you want to blow everyone up who disagrees with you. That's nasty.

But they preach Jesus. When you and I preach Jesus, the Holy Spirit will come and help us. The hand of the Lord will be with us.

Not law. I can't say it better than him. Not try harder.

Not just, come on now, what's wrong with you? I saw a guy years ago, I was in Florida, vacationing with my wife, and I was turning, I turned on TV and there was a gospel program, a fundamentalist kind of church down there. And this guy was preaching and he went like the, here was the end of his sermon. Tragic.

So as you've all seen, I have just proved to you that God is holy. And the Bible says, be holy even as I am holy. Now close your eyes now and bow your heads.

And I want everyone who knows they're not as holy as God, would you please lift your hand? Hello. Hello. Well obviously everyone, yeah, I would say I'm not as holy as God.

So everyone who lifted your hand and now you mean business and you are going to be holy as God, would you come forward? And the altar was flooded with people who came forward to promise to be as holy as God. And he looked and said, look at all these people. But it's going nowhere.

Because I didn't hear Jesus in the whole thing. I just had a group visit our church about a year and a half ago, two years ago. Someone recommended them and I, kind of a youth oriented group or something.

They sang for 45 minutes. They never mentioned Jesus once. I'm like, what's that about? It was bothering me about after 15 minutes, I'm wanting to hear, give me a little Jesus here, please.

You know, this is like a Christian church as in Jesus Christ, you know? Maybe the cross, the blood. No, no, he's creator, look at nature and all of that. And then they turned it back over to me and I got up there

and I said, everybody, let's start singing.

All, sing with me. All hail the power of Jesus. I had to do it because the atmosphere was weird.

And I wrote a letter to those guys. I said, hey, dude, what is that, what you just did? I said, I've been doing this for a while. You're the first group I've ever had that sang for 45 minutes and you're like the thing the youth are supposed to follow? We're in trouble, friend.

And he wrote me back, no, see, we're using a new approach. You're from like, you don't understand the new way. It's called pre-evangelism.

Yeah, but what if somebody dies before you get past the pre-evangelism? And they never even heard about Jesus. What in the world is that about? I'm venting a little bit today. I'm in therapy still from that meeting.

It's horrible. But they preached in Antioch, what made that church was they preached Jesus. Not join the church, not Church of God in Christ, not Assemblies of God, not Pentecostal distinctives, not whatever, fundamentalism, Calvinism.

They preached Jesus, that he died. Paul says, I delivered first of all to you that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he rose again from the dead. Brothers and sisters, are you preaching that? And on that note, as I close, are you doing the work of an evangelist pastor? We're here to encourage you, just like I wanna encourage myself in the Lord.

Paul tells Timothy, not be an evangelist. Timothy was a pastor in Ephesus. But Paul tells Timothy, do the work of an evangelist.

I'm asking you now, how much of your budget, how much of your time, what prayer intensity do you give to like, how do we evangelize? Don't ask me how to do it. We didn't come with any model church ideas. I learned last night that church, Springs Church in Colorado Springs, they're doing some interesting things this summer to try to get the gospel out.

We're feeding three to 500 people at the end of every afternoon service with free food that we've hooked up with a Midwest food bank. And people can only get the food because a lot of people are hurting in the inner city. They can only get the food if they sit in the afternoon service.

And me and my associate are making sure they're gonna hear Jesus, food for the soul before they get any for their belly, right? But listen, it changes. I was in the office with Dave Wilkerson, forgive the repeated references, but with Pastor Gary and Kelly sitting there, I think about my friend and Nikki Cruz. How many know the name Nikki Cruz? Lift your hand, okay.

Nikki Cruz, just this is eight years ago. He walks in with the office, see Brother Dave, we went out to have lunch or something. And we're sitting there and he said, Brother Dave, I wanna do this thing in the streets or something.

And Brother Dave said to him, Nikki, look, lately we've been finding here you set up something and just do a typical street meeting. It doesn't get the people's attention. That day has passed.

No, no, no, don't you believe in street work? And Brother Dave said, Nikki, you're a Christian because I was doing street work. So don't go there with me. But in New York, it's changing now.

You know, back in the 1890s and early 1900s, the Salvation Army would go to East and to London or then when they came to America under Mr. Railton and they set up shop and they would go in the street and with the drum and the trumpets and the salvationists and the kneeling and everything, that drew a crowd. It was 1884 in London. Today with internet, Broadway, movies, sports, it's a different place.

So how do you get the people's attention so we can give them the gospel? I don't know. That's what you and I have to do is pray. God, how does our church do the work of an evangelist? How do I as a pastor motivate the people, see the people taught to witness, to invite? Pastor Gary and I are coming more and more to the conclusion, he and I were sharing it last night, that it's getting back now like to the book of Acts.

You know Billy Graham, I met him a few months ago for the first time in my life, and one day soon he's going to be gone, and I don't see anyone of his stature. And that day, I don't know if that day is over, I'm not a prophet, but I know one thing, we've got to find ways to spread the gospel. You know how many young black men and girls are being shot or joining gangs? Young Latinos, young whites are doing Oxycontin, and now there's this new thing out now that's replacing Oxycontin, OPAMA or whatever it's called, it's going to, the experts are saying it's going to make Oxycontin look like cotton candy.

Addiction is absolutely, the people who make, it's really oxycodone, but it's called Oxycontin, they found a way so it couldn't be crushed and snorted and injected. And don't you know those addicts, the minute they learned that you couldn't do it hardly, they got a new one, and this thing is going crazy. And it's everywhere, it's in the hood, it's in suburbia, it's everywhere, what are we going to do, sit and have church, circle the wagons, and have a Jericho march? No, we've got to do something.

Certain men from Cyprus and Cyrene, without even a New Testament, went in and founded the greatest church in the New Testament, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Paul says, my preaching was not with wise and enticing words, but with a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit, so that your faith would not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I wonder how many seminaries in Philadelphia or around the country in your denomination or that you know of, how many Bible schools are saying that's the model of preaching? None that I know of.

It's be clever, be wise, be persuasive, and Paul is saying, my preaching was not with wise and persuasive words. I wasn't a clever communicator, never tried to be, but when I spoke, you knew God was there. How many would just like six months of that preaching? Come on, lift your hand.

Just the next six months. The rest of the year, that when we speak, there's a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh, pastor, you really believe in that? You have a low esteem for the word of God if you're dismissing me.

That's a very low view of scripture. Paul says, here's the model of preaching, not with wise and persuasive words. Yeah, you're going to be logical, we're going to present it right, but unless God, the Holy Spirit comes, who's going to penetrate the heart of these young people and these adults? Only the Holy Spirit can do it.

How many are with me on that? Say amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. You can preach truth. All kinds of empty churches in Brooklyn did not depart into false doctrine, and they're preaching grace.

They're preaching grace, or they're preaching law, they're preaching whatever, they're preaching from the Bible, but without the Holy Spirit, without that wind blowing, but we can have it. Do you think God would send it? After sending his son, when Jesus went back to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit. You think if we come to him today and sing, oh, come Holy Spirit, oh, how we need you, he's going to go, no, I'm not going to help you.

No, he will help us. Do you believe that? How many believe that he could turn our churches around, even before this year is up, he could turn our church around? Well, of course he can. With God, nothing is impossible.

I got to go down. It can't be about me or some denomination or some party. I got to have my doors open to everyone.

Are you willing to do that? How many are willing to have anybody and everybody in your church? One more time, lift up your hand. Anybody and everybody. Otherwise, you're on your own, because the Holy Spirit, he has a very focused mission.

Glorify Christ, reach the world with the gospel. And he only wants to work with everyone who Christ died for, which is everybody. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and multitudes turned to the Lord.

Every time I hear that we baptize 80 people, 85 people, then a couple of months later, we baptize a couple of dozen more. Inside, I'm so thankful, but then I say, oh, God, can't we one time baptize 300 people? 300 souls, their destiny changed for eternity. Just think of the privilege we have.

We have the message that changes people's destiny for eternity. We're the only ones who have the message that saves a soul. The White House, the Senate, they don't have a clue.

They're part of the problem. The UN building, Christ is not knocking on the UN building trying to get in like that portrait has him. He's knocking on our churches trying to get in and saying, I want to work with you.

Let me work with you. Close your eyes with me. Every pastor, pastor's wife, anyone who gets up in front of people and speaks and has been convicted in any way, shape, or form, pastor, today, I have had the Holy Spirit whisper something to me.

I want to see God begin a new work in my ministry, my church, my life, so that the hand of the Lord is with me, so I preach Jesus, so my heart is open to everyone, so it's not about me and some little group that I represent, that I see the world the way God sees it. I feel what God feels. I can weep over Philadelphia like Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

If you're here and would just like to have a word of prayer with me here in the front, get up out of your seat and come up here. Come on, we're going to sing and pray. Anyone who's just like, yes, just get out of your seat and come up.

Every pastor, pastor's wife, come on. Whoever humbles themselves, God will exalt. Come on, come close.

Now Lord, we come to you today, Pastor Gary, myself, Tony Evans, and working behind the scenes, Jim Maxim right here from Philadelphia, who you've used so mightily to make this possible. We did not come to this beautiful auditorium just to just look at each other. We are hungry for you, Lord.

We are hungry for something from heaven. I thank you, God, first for your grace, your sovereign, mysterious will that has chosen to put us in positions of leadership in the body of Christ. We did not choose you.

You chose us. And I thank you for that. And you promised to help us.

You didn't send us out to do nothing. You sent us out to do something. But at the same time, Lord, we need wisdom.

We need humility. We need a fresh baptism of love. We need to be cleansed from party spirit and racial overtones, doctrinal pride.

We need to be made lowly like Jesus. We want to be like certain men from Cyprus and Cyrene who went to Antioch and told the good message of Jesus Christ to everyone, both Jew and Gentile. And we want your hand, the hand of the Lord, to be with us.

We want and need the anointing of the Holy Spirit. God, there's a quietness in our hearts now because this word has searched all of us, starting with the speaker. And we ask you to have mercy on us and help us.

But we know you love us and we know you're for us and you're in us. And now what we're praying is before this year is over, that there will be a Holy Ghost explosion in our churches, Lord, in every church that's represented here today. We drop and throw away every divisive barrier, name, race, denomination.

We drop it in Christ's name. And we recognize and affirm that you have made us one in you. We root for each other.

We pray for each other now.

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