

Digging Ditches

by Joe Root

The sermon emphasizes the importance of digging ditches in our Christian life to experience the living water that comes from God, which is essential for our spiritual growth and well-being.

Duration: 1:37:30

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Consecration"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the 'ditch of direction and vision' in relation to the preaching of the word of God. He emphasizes the importance of being channels through which God's blessings can flow to others. The preacher encourages the audience to dig ditches by immersing themselves in the Word of God and meditating upon it. He shares a personal experience of memorizing a passage from 2 Timothy chapter 3 and highlights the power and significance of God's Word in our lives. The sermon also references the story of three kings in trouble from the book of 2 Kings, chapter 3.

Transcript

Love and greetings to each one of you tonight in the precious and powerful and most worthy name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. It's in His name that we've gathered tonight. We're anticipating yet another message from His Word.

I wasn't able to be here today, but I listened to all three messages on the telephone and was deeply blessed. And may God continue to water and fertilize His Word as it goes out in this place and in each heart. Would you turn with me tonight to the second book of Kings, the third chapter.

The third chapter of 2 Kings. I would like to read a passage to you. The setting of this passage that I'm about to read is three kings that are in trouble.

They're in a bind. They're in a trap. They were heading out to battle together.

The king of Israel, the king of Edom, and the king of Judah. Those three kings were confederate together, and they were going into battle, and they found themselves in trouble. They chose a route to go up against the enemy that had some circumstances that I do not think they were expecting.

And the circumstances specifically were they ran out of water. Now, when you've got an army of soldiers and you've got armies of men that are hiking and that are hauling supplies and they're hauling weapons

and that are marching through the wilderness and up over mountains and you run out of water, it's a problem. Two weeks ago, I was climbing up a mountainside with a brother and we ran out of water.

Fortunately, that brother is an experienced hiker. An experienced climber. And he just pulled out of his backpack a little tiny stove and a little tiny pot.

And he went and scooped up some of the snow off of the mountainside. And soon we had water. But these three kings had no such opportunity.

They were out of water and they were in a bind. Let's read together. Second Kings chapter three.

We'll begin reading at verse six. And King Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time and numbered all Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me.

Wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up. I am as thou art. My people as thy people and my horses as thy horses.

And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went and the king of Judah and the king of Edom. And they fetched a compass of seven days journey.

And there was no water for the host and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas, that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord that we may inquire of the Lord by him? One of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother.

And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay, for the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel.

And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, you shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain.

Yet that valley shall be filled with water that you may drink, both ye and your cattle and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord. He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

And you shall smite every fenced city and every choice city and shall fell every good tree and stop all wells of water and mar every good piece of land with stones. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armor and upward and stood in the border.

And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water. And the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood. And they said, This is blood.

The kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil. And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites so that they fled before them.

But they went forward, smiting the Moabites even in their own country. And I'm going to stop reading there. Three kings in trouble.

Three armies marching together. One of them in particular, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was a godly man.

Jehoshaphat was a good man. I believe the Bible says that when Jehoshaphat took the kingdom, it says something very interesting about him. It says his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.

Now, usually we think about a heart being lifted up is not a good thing. That sounds like pride. That sounds like self-exaltation.

But Jehoshaphat's heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. Praise God tonight. I pray that every one of our hearts will be lifted up in the ways of the Lord.

Jehoshaphat was a good man. He was a good king, but he was in bad company. He was in the company of Ahab and the company of the king of Edom.

A good king in bad company. And Jehoshaphat found out that the troops were drying up. And I'm not going to comment on all of that story.

There's some real life lessons of Jehoshaphat. This isn't the only time in his life that you find a good king in bad company. It seemed like that was one weakness of Jehoshaphat.

Even though his heart was toward the Lord, more than once he found himself in bad company. But that's not really the basis of the lesson tonight. Tonight, I'm thinking about the provision of God.

And I'm thinking about how these three kings were in a bind. They were in a dilemma. The troops were dry.

The mouths were parched. I don't know how many of you have been so thirsty that your tongue begins to get sticky and it feels like it's starting to swell. And your lips kind of start sticking together.

And you're just parched. And you feel like you could just drink and drink and drink. Just like the advertisements I used to see for Gatorade.

They said for that deep down body thirst. And I don't know if you've ever felt that deep down body thirst. But I think that's the way these armies were.

They were dried up. They were thirsty. They were marching.

How can you go to battle when you're dried up? How can you even get along another day, even walk any farther when you're all dried up and you're thirsty? The kings knew they were in trouble. But Jehoshaphat, the one man of God said, isn't there a prophet of the Lord around here? That's a good question. A good

question.

Where's someone who would speak for God? Someone knew that Elisha was in the neighborhood. Elisha, the one who poured water on the hands of Elijah. The servant, in other words, of Elijah.

He's around. Let's go talk to him. So they went and they approached Elisha.

And Elisha immediately rebuked the king of Israel. That wicked king who had departed from God. And he said, what are you doing here coming to me? Why don't you go to the prophets of your father and mother? Why don't you go to the ones that they worship and talk to them? But he said, I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat.

And they began to plead with Elisha. And Elisha said, bring me a minstrel. As the minstrel played and he sought God.

He had a word from God and the word from the Lord was this. Make this valley full of ditches. Make this valley full of ditches.

Tonight, that's the lesson that the Lord has laid upon my heart to share with you. I'd like to encourage each one of you, young men and young women, and every one of us that are here tonight, to make your Christian life full of ditches. Tonight, we want to emphasize that living water comes alone from God, from our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we are called to dig some ditches. We want to think a little bit more about that before we go further. May we bow our heads for a word of prayer.

Oh, Lord, our gracious heavenly father, we come tonight in Jesus name before your throne, recognizing, Lord, that you alone have the water of eternal life. Lord, we come asking that you would be pleased to pour out some of that water in each heart tonight. Father, I pray that you would open up some channels of blessing to each one of us tonight.

We could glean some thoughts. We could glean some insights and how we can engage through your strength to open up some opportunities of blessing, Lord, that you're so delighted to pour out. We acknowledge that the goodness and the grace is alone from you.

We also acknowledge, Lord, though, that you invite us to open the door. You invite us to open the channel for your love. So we want to do that tonight.

Lord, would you please be present? Open every heart. Drive back distractions. Drive back drowsiness.

Drive back prejudice. Drive back anything, Lord, that would hinder your word tonight. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Digging ditches. Is there anyone here tonight that's dry? I know for those of you young people that have been here this week, you've been sitting in an atmosphere of the preaching and teaching of the word of God.

You've been spending time together in prayer and in singing and in fellowship. And that seems like a time of refreshing showers of grace divine. We sing sometimes, there shall be showers of blessings.

And mercy drops round us are falling. And yet for the showers we plead. And so surely we've been in a place where we've been experiencing the rain of our God.

The moisture of our God. And yet tonight I know, because I've been there, that it's possible to sit right in the midst of a group of Christians, right in an atmosphere of discipleship, right in a place where there are God's people singing and praying. And be very lonely.

And be very dry. And be very discouraged. And try to listen.

And try to focus. And be wrestling and struggling inside. I know that's possible.

In fact, I would even suggest that it's probable that there's someone here at least tonight that is in that condition. And tonight I just want to invite you to open your heart to the Word of God tonight. Because whether it's tonight, or whether it's in a couple of weeks from now, or whether it's some other time when you feel dry, and you feel discouraged, and you feel parched, and you feel like you're not sure that there's strength to go on, the Lord is inviting each one of us to dig some ditches.

So tonight we want to talk about digging ditches. And I want to talk about five ditches. Five ditches.

Five fresh ditches that you can dig by the grace of God to open up channels for God's blessing in your life. I'd like to talk about, number one, the ditch of devotion. Number two, I'd like to talk a little bit about the ditch of discipleship.

Number three, I'd like to talk a little bit about the ditch of discernment. Number four, I'd like to talk a little bit about the ditch of direction and vision. Number five, we hope to look together at the ditch of delight.

Ditches. I grew up in California, in the Central Valley of California. I lived there until 25 years ago.

And growing up in California, there were canals and channels and waterways all through the San Joaquin Valley, all through the Central Valley of California. And we grow up as young boys. We would go down the road and ride our bicycles.

And sometimes we would swim in the canals. That's not encouraged today. But back then, that's where we would go swim sometimes.

And we would swim in those canals. And they were waterways, conduits of water from the reservoirs, from the snowfall that came out of the mountains in the Sierra Nevadas and flowed down into the valleys and into the reservoirs. And then from there into a network of canals that watered the San Joaquin Valley to become one of the most fruitful places in the world.

Ditches. Canals. Channels.

In the wintertime, though, I've walked right down in those canals, bone dry. Some of them are cement. Some of them are dirt.

Bone dry. Not a puddle to be seen. Not a drop of water around.

So it's a tremendous blessing to have a network of canals and ditches and waterways. But it's of absolutely no value unless there's water. And Jesus encountered a woman one time at the well.

The Bible says in the third chapter or fourth chapter of the Gospel of John that Jesus was going toward Galilee. And the Bible gives us a very curious phrase. It says he must needs go through Samaria.

Praise God. Jesus must needs go through Samaria. Samaria wasn't the usual route.

Samaria was the other way. It was not the way that that a good Hebrew would normally travel. A good Jew wouldn't normally go through Samaria if they had an option.

The Samaritans were considered dogs. The Samaritans were considered unclean. Why go through Samaria? But the Bible says Jesus must needs go through Samaria.

And so as he went through Samaria in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, it tells us that he came to a place where Jacob's well was. And he sat down on the edge of the well. And the disciples took off into town to buy some food.

And Jesus, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well. Have you ever thought about that? The Bible says Jesus was wearied with his journey. Tonight, Hebrews tells us that we have a high priest.

In fact, it says it this way. We do not have a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was tempted in all points, like as we are yet without sin. You think about your high priest.

Jesus was weary with his journey. He wasn't just touched. I'm so impressed with that scripture.

Jesus isn't just touched with our infirmities. He isn't just touched with the struggles that I have. He's touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

That's the high priest we have. He knows what it feels like to be wore out in body and spirit. And so he sat on the edge of the well.

The disciples were gone. And the Bible says there came a woman from Samaria to draw water. Jesus looked at that woman.

This was a very unorthodox and unusual conversation. Jews didn't normally talk to Samaritans. And Jesus just told that woman.

He said, give me to drink. She was startled. She realized that he's a Jew.

She said, how is it that you being a Jew ask water of me, a woman of Samaria? You're not supposed to have any dealings with us. Jesus just told that woman. He said, if you knew who was talking to you, if you knew the gift of God, you'd ask me and I'd give you living water, living water.

She said, sir, where's that kind of water come from? Give me some of this living water. But the wells deep and you don't have anything to draw with. How are you going to give me living water tonight? Beloved Jesus Christ has living water.

And whatever I say tonight about digging ditches, don't forget. It's the Lord Jesus Christ that has living water to offer. He offered it to the woman of Samaria, a sinful, unclean Gentile woman.

He looked right through her. He knew all about her and he offered her living water. And a whole crowd of men from Samaria came running out, too.

And Jesus saw right through them also. And he offered them living water. Tonight to us, he's also offering living water, living water.

It's of him. We want to give him that honor and that glory. He's the one who provides living water.

And he stood in the temple at the midst of the feast. Later, you can recall this. And John, his brothers had said they didn't believe in him.

They said, why don't you come with us to the feast? And Jesus said, you go ahead and go to the feast. I'm not going up yet to this feast, but you go ahead and go. But about midway through, the book of John tells us Jesus went up to that feast.

And he went in the temple and taught. And he went in the temple and he cried out, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Are you thirsty tonight? It's Jesus Christ that has living water.

And the Bible says, this spake he of the spirit, which they that believe should receive. Jesus Christ has living water. But tonight, I would like to suggest that he wants us to open channels for blessing.

He calls us to open channels of blessing. He invites us to make steps toward him. I would like to suggest five ditches tonight to dig if we can borrow that thought from this Old Testament account in second Kings and talk about digging these ditches.

Let's sing another verse of 270. I'm sorry, I think it was 370. Yes, I wanted to sing this and then brother, you called it tonight, which was a tremendous blessing.

I'm thinking about channels. That's what we're talking about when we talk about ditches. We can just open up channels by his grace and through his strength for him to flow.

But he invites us. Make no mistake about it. He invites us to participate.

We have a God. The Scripture says we are labors together with God. You are God's husbandry.

You are God's building. We are labors together with him. Let's talk about these channels.

Let's sing at least one verse of this, maybe the first and the last verse. How I praise thee again. We'll say it.

How I praise thee, precious Savior, that thy love made whole of me. Thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me, that my mind, I channel thee. Channels only, blessed Master, but with all thy wondrous power, flowing through us, thou canst use us every day and every hour.

Jesus, thou spirit, hearts that bow, surrender low, that the streams of living water from our inner man may flow. Channels only, blessed Master, but with all thy wondrous power. We don't have anything to overflow.

There might be some simple ways that we could dig ditches. You know, what's so impressive about that account is the Lord brought the water. Not only did he quench the thirst of that parched army, but he also defeated the enemy through that water.

Those ditches that were dug. Let's begin by considering ditch number one. I've called dig fresh ditches of devotion, or shall we say, dig a fresh ditch of devotion.

Point number one, dig a fresh ditch of devotion. The first Psalm says this. This is Bible school in every one of these areas.

I want to remind you of Scripture. I want to remind you of the Word of God. And the first Psalm says, blessed is the man.

You can turn to it if you don't know it. I'm sure many of you know it. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And in his law, doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.

His leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Dig a fresh ditch of devotion. Blessed is the man.

Blessed is the woman whose delight is in the law of the Lord. We heard about that law this morning already. Praise the Lord.

I want to just quickly offer a few thoughts in this area of devotion. You know, devotion is a whole life experience. Devotion, I believe, is a posture.

It's a position of our lives. But many times we speak of, well, it's time for devotions. Or I got up in the morning and I had a time of devotion.

Or in the evening as a family, we have devotions. And that's a good word. I don't see any problem with that.

Just as long as we recognize that that is a reminder to us that our whole life posture should be that of devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. We're devoted to him. But I'm speaking, as I speak about opening up, digging a ditch of devotion, I'm talking about that deliberate, focused effort that you make to seek the face of God at some time throughout the day.

Yes, all day, but at some special time throughout the day. I wish we could talk more about this, but do you know what a gift the Bible is? We talked the first night about the blessing of the sound of rustling pages. The blessing of the sound of rustling pages.

We have Bibles. Not only that, we have them in a language we can understand. What a tremendous blessing.

What a privilege there are people tonight on this earth who do not have access to this in a language they can understand. We have Bibles tonight. What a blessing.

What a privilege. And sometimes I wonder, do I realize? Do I realize what an opportunity that is? There's a dear brother and a dear sister that are very close to me that we love very dearly way down in southern Mexico tonight. I know that they've spent all week.

Probably tomorrow they'll come back into the city if the Lord wills. They've been trying to learn a language, trying to learn a dialect, trying to learn an indigenous tongue that is very total and very different than Spanish. Because those people don't have a Bible in their own language.

So that someday, hopefully soon, they can begin to teach the word of God. But we have it tonight right here on your laps in your own language. Have you ever counted the Bibles in your home? Be interesting to know how many Bibles you have in your home.

The word of God. What a tremendous blessing. Thinking about digging fresh ditches of devotion.

And I'm thinking about reading God's word. And I just want to invite you again tonight. I know you've been invited many, many times.

But again tonight, to make a fresh resolve to read the word of God. Read the word of God. I like to think of it this way.

Practice change and obey Bible reading. Reading the word of God. Looking for what the Lord is going to speak to me.

And I'm kind of old fashioned. I like old time ways of helping me. I can say with much gratitude that as a young man, I committed my life to Jesus Christ.

And I made a profession of faith. I was baptized. I became a part of the body of Christ.

I was a part of His kingdom. And I always had an interest in the word. But it wasn't for about a year until there came a time, I was in high school, that the Bible began to grip me.

And I began to wake up early in the morning. And I couldn't hardly put it down. And times at work when I'd have a little delay time waiting on something, I had a little Bible in my pocket that I could read.

And it began to make sense. And I started to link this scripture with that and pull it together. And I just want to encourage you.

The Bible is not beyond your grasp. And we're all different. We're all cut out different.

Our personalities are different. Our giftings are different. Praise God.

God is a lover of beauty and diversity. And He expresses that in the body of Christ. But every one of you, I believe, have some access to the word of God.

You can hear it. You can read it. You can listen to it.

The Bible, it's a tremendous blessing. Learn to read it. Learn to love it.

I wish we could talk more about that. I want to speak also about meditating upon the word of God. Meditation.

And if you're going to meditate, you really need to memorize. And I've shared this several times. But when I was a young man, I don't know why he did it.

But I'm so grateful that my father one evening challenged me. He said, son, before you go to bed tonight, I want you to commit 2 Timothy 3 to memory. Now, it was early in the evening and we had many hours yet.

And somehow the time was ripe. And I caught a vision for what my dad was asking me to do. And so I went in my bedroom and 2 Timothy 3 is not a very long chapter.

But I poured into that chapter hour after hour that evening. And I only say this to encourage you. Maybe you could do a few verses.

Maybe you could do two chapters. Maybe you could do a book in that time. But somehow the Lord gave me the grace that night to pour into that chapter.

And late that night, I went out to my father's chair where he was still reading. And I said, I think I have it. And imperfectly, but I quoted 2 Timothy 3 to my father.

I think I was 16 years old. And something about that instilled in me a desire to memorize God's word. Because to this day, I'm 53 years old.

But to this day, when I'm driving, sometimes I begin to quote in my mind or sometimes out loud 2 Timothy 3. And it's such a blessing to me. It's been a warning to me my whole life. It starts out, this know also that in the last days, perilous times shall come for men shall be lovers of their own selves.

Covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof from such turn away. But it goes on and it turns into encouragement. And it speaks at the latter part of that chapter, how that from a child you've known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

And I'm trying to inspire you to memorize. And it goes on and says, all scripture is given by inspiration of God and it's profitable. That means it's useful for doctrine, for correction, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction and righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished.

That means totally equipped. That means ready to go for all good works. Memorize God's word so that you can meditate on God's word.

Because there's something about memorization and meditation that ingrain the word into our lives and into our consciences. And it will speak. Doesn't the proverb say something about wisdom? It says, when you wake, it will speak with you.

The word of God speaks with you when you have it committed in your heart. Dig fresh ditches of devotion. Read the Bible.

Memorize passages of Scripture. Get some little three by five cards and put them in your pocket. Maybe just one verse or two verses out of your reading that day.

Write it down and tuck it in your pocket. There's an elder in our congregation. He's in Asia right now, but he often will ask.

And sometimes it could be kind of intimidating to young people or to some brothers or sisters. But it's been a tremendous blessing to me. I just know that he's probably going to ask.

He'd say so. Well, brother, what's what's some fresh bread from today? And and it's just a little bit sheepish if I can't think of anything, anything, anything that from God's word today. But if you have a little three by five card and you've written a verse down, written a couple of verses down, you can always pull it out and read it through the day and say, well, here it is, brother, digging fresh ditches of devotion.

I'm thinking about the blessing of the Bible. I need to hurry on. Still thinking about a ditch of devotion.

I'm thinking about prayer. That's a part of devotion. So many scriptures we could go to.

But the fourth chapter of Colossians says this. I like these words. Continue in prayer and watch in the same with Thanksgiving.

Have you ever watched in prayer? Do you watch in prayer? That's what Colossians says. The apostles, he wrote to the Colossian church, a place he had never been. He told those brothers continue in prayer.

It isn't just praying occasionally. It's continuing in prayer and not only that, but watching in the same. Now, that word watch means literally means to stay awake.

It means to be alert. It means to be on the lookout. It means to be watching for God's answers.

It means to be seeing what the Lord might speak and praying and also listening, watching. Continue in prayer and watch in the same in Thanksgiving. The Word of God, prayer, fasting, the discipline of fasting.

I know you fast. I wouldn't be surprised that some of you are fasting this week. We have a similar discipleship week in the mountains of the Cascades in Washington, much smaller.

And we've just decided to to make an afternoon of fasting where we don't serve an evening meal just to help train that discipline of fasting. But I want to encourage you if you've tried fasting and just don't feel like anything so spectacular has happened. I want to give you this encouragement.

I think it's good to fast. Jesus said there's coming a day when the son of man, the bridegroom is not going to be present. And then shall my disciples fast in those days and we're in those days.

So we should be fasting from time to time. But I had an experience a while back. It's been a couple of years now that I particularly remember.

I've been blessed many times by fasting. Sometimes it's been particularly meaningful, maybe a time of difficulty or seeking wisdom or direction for a decision fasting. But many times it's just the discipline of fasting and there's no special fireworks or sparks that that really happen.

It's just the discipline of fasting. And God says to do it. So we should obey it.

And God will pour out his blessing in his time. But here's what I want to encourage you with. A couple of years ago, I had fasted maybe maybe two or three days.

I don't just recall, but a little longer than sometimes. Sometimes I'll just fast a day, sometimes longer. And the scripture says that we aren't to appear in the fast and make a big deal about it.

So we look spiritual. I don't think that means we need to be ashamed of it. Or if someone realizes that we're not eating, that we need to be ashamed of that.

But the point is that we're not trying to put on a show. But I remember I was seeking direction. I was seeking clarity.

I think I felt dry like we're talking about tonight. And at the end of that fast. That evening, I realized I fasted for a couple of days and I don't really feel like I have any fresh inspiration.

The next day I had to get up early and drive something to do with my work. I was driving along several hours as I was driving. Couple hours into my drive, I realized.

I'm just feeling so inspired. The word of God is just flowing. It's just clear in my mind.

And it hit me. I was frustrated with my fast because nothing really happened during the fast. But it came later.

The blessing flowed down later. So I just want to encourage you. It might be a week later.

It might be a day later. But from time to time, I encourage you to exercise the discipline of fasting. What about media fasting? Have any of you ever done that? I don't know to what extent.

I'm sure there's a variation in this house of your use of media. But I want to encourage you to give serious consideration. If you're a person who uses media to take a media fast at some time.

Maybe there's something in your work that you must check email or something like that. But what about taking a fast from music, from Google searches, from other things? Just taking a fast. I'm not here to condemn.

I utilize media. Try to do it in a proper way. But I have found, in fact, I've done it myself.

I don't feel like I have a particular struggle or bondage with media. But there have been times that I found that I was starting to read a news article. And there are things in media that are not overtly sinful.

Yet I like to call them spirit darkeners. It's just a diversion. It's not really healthy or edifying or good news.

And maybe someone sends you something. You should look at this or look at that. And before long, you just don't feel very blessed and vibrant and a bit dry maybe.

How about taking a media fast and asking the Lord to clear your mind and show you if there's some areas that you should be cutting off your arm or plucking out your eye. Dig a fresh ditch of devotion. Bible, the Word of God, memorization, meditation, fasting.

And you know, it's not enough just to sweep and garnish our houses. Sometimes we think we'll do that. Sometimes I think even in a week like this, we can do that.

All right, I've had a little struggle in this area. And I'm going to confess that. And I'm going to repent of that and make a fresh resolve not to do that anymore.

I'm going to stop doing this. I'm going to stop wearing that. I'm going to.

I'm going to. And we think of these things that are sweeping and garnishing the house. And there is very much a place to do some trimming and some pruning and some purging in our lives.

But just remember that the Word of God gives us this very clear example that Jesus taught about a demon, he says, who is gone out of a man. He says it this way. Jesus said, when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, it walks through dry places, seeking rest and finding none.

It says, I'll return to the house where I came out. And he finds it swept and garnished. And he enters in and brings seven other spirits worse than the first.

And the last state of that man is worse than the first, the Bible says. And I think there's a principle there that we can see that it is not enough just to cut off some things. I'm going to stop doing this.

And I've been kind of drifting into this. So I'm going to cut those things off. Amen.

Well, you should. But make sure you fill the house. Fill the house with devotion.

Dig a fresh ditch of the Word of God and of prayer and of memorization and of fasting at times. And singing. I want to hold up singing.

And, you know, I love to listen to good singing and good music. And God bless you. You sang beautifully tonight.

I don't do it too often, but I do listen sometimes to singing and the music. But I want to encourage you. Don't stop singing yourself.

Make sure your voice is singing as you go throughout the day, as you drive, as you travel. Sometimes it would make a lot of sense just to shut that thing off and sing. Sing with all your heart.

Sing as a family. A couple of brothers together. Sing.

I grew up without the ability to play music. And when we would go, groups of young people, I can think of a brother and I driving across the country. We did a lot of singing.

We just sang together in the carloads. Dig a fresh ditch of devotion. The Word of God.

Prayer. Fasting. Singing.

Oh, joy. Oh, the joy of a glorious countenance and of the beauty of singing, the beauty of singing. You know, Jesus said this.

And I'm going on to the next one. But Jesus said, the light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light.

I think that's what devotion can do for us. It can help single our eye toward our Lord. Why am I even here? What is life all about? I want to live for God.

I want to be full of Him. I want His water in my life. And so the light of the body is the eye.

And if your eye is single on Christ, your whole body is full of light. What a blessing. There's so much more.

I have too much in my notes. So I'm going to go on to the second point. And that is dig fresh ditches of discipleship.

We've talked about digging fresh ditches of devotion. We know that the water comes from Christ. But I want to talk to you point number two.

About digging fresh ditches of discipleship. I have several things to say in this section. And I'm going to put it under two headings.

I want to illustrate these two headings this way. I mentioned earlier that my wife and I are trying to learn another language. We're just beginning really to learn Spanish.

I've been able to get by with Spanish for a number of years. I grew up in California. I had a lot of Hispanic friends in the public school.

I worked with a lot of Hispanic people. So I can get by. I can travel and I've done just a little bit of training in Spanish, but not very much.

So right now, that's one of our focuses is on learning language. Some of you have worked on languages a lot more difficult than that. But there are two primary ways that people learn language.

And both of them are important. And I want to make a point out of this as we think about this area of discipleship. One of them is what I'll call focused teaching and training.

It's direct training. It's maybe sitting in a classroom or one on one or spending time in some kind of direct teaching. That's one way.

And that's important. And that's necessary. There is another way that has grown in its attention and appreciation and recognition of how important it is.

And it is called environmental immersion. Immersion. And that is immersing yourself in the context of the language.

Live where that language is spoken. Both of those are very important in learning language. Probably, though, if you had to pick one, immersion might be the more important of the two.

But both of them are important. Both of them have their place. Now, I want to borrow those two thoughts when we talk about discipleship.

I want to talk, first of all, about direct training. Direct learning. Like we do sometimes in a classroom with language.

Let's talk about personal discipleship. Remember, we're talking about digging fresh ditches of discipleship. Personal discipleship.

Let's talk about that a little bit. You might turn and we talked, remember, about learning to turn quickly to scripture. Turn to the book of Hebrews.

Might keep your finger a marker in Hebrews tonight. We're hoping to look at a couple spots there. But look at Hebrews chapter three and in verse 12, the writer of Hebrews breaks into a warning.

And here's what he says. He says, take heed, brethren. He's talking to believers.

Take heed, brethren, lest there's something. There's a potential here. There's a possibility here.

That's why we have the word lest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief and departing from the living God. But and now we're talking about personal discipleship, but exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast until the end. Direct training, personal discipleship. You know, this scripture in Hebrews speaks about a a situation where we can exhort one another daily.

And I just want to say that that speaks of a level of Christian connection that will actually result in this kind of daily exhortation. And I want to ask you, are you in a situation where that can happen? Do you have people in your life that that that you are inviting and that you are allowing and that you are placing yourself in a proximity where you can have some daily exhortation? That's what the Bible says. Brethren, it says, sisters, there is a potential.

I realize that at 53 years old, there is a potential that the scripture says of an evil heart of unbelief, of doubt to begin to creep into my heart. It departing from the living God. And there's a a a situation that really helps combat that, that the Bible gives us.

And it's exhorting one another daily. You know, I do think that is one good use of media. There are times that that you may just feel prompted to send the text.

A prayer or the word of God or even a word of warning to a brother or sister. Exhort one another daily. But I do think that we should not only just divert to doing that or digress to doing that only through media.

We need to do it face to face. We need to have time where we're together and it's direct discipleship. We need to be in a context that encourages that.

I want to be around men and women of God who have a passion for Jesus, who love to pray, who are excited about kingdom visions. I don't know about you, but I want to be around people like that from time to time to challenge me, to reset my compass, to revive my sleepy spirit at times. That's direct discipleship.

It speaks of mentoring. That's a word we use today. Mentoring both by teaching an example.

And we find examples in the scripture where older and younger make a good team. They pair up together. Can you imagine, young men, what it would have been like to be Timothy and travel with Paul? Imagine what it'd be like to travel with Paul.

Here we are, Timothy. We've just landed in Troas. Let's see.

Here. You sleep right over here. I'm going to sleep right here by you.

OK, let's pray, Timothy. Let's have it. Let's sing for a while.

OK, Timothy, good night. I don't know how Paul slept, but I have an idea. He was up pretty early in the morning.

I've been with brothers like that that have been an example to me when I was a younger man. I can think of one brother that I spent a lot of time with. I spent many nights traveling with him.

Many times, 3.30, 4 in the morning, I'd wake up. There he was, slipping out the door with his Bible. I'm going to go find a quiet spot to read early in the morning hours.

Imagine what it would have been like to travel with Paul. What would it be like to travel with you? Are you that kind of brother, discipling others? Imagine what it would have been like to travel with Peter. Men, we need to go up.

The Spirit of God has revealed to me that I need to go up to this city because someone's seeking and inquiring. What about Jesus? The disciples traveled with Jesus. How do you think it was with Jesus? OK,

it's suppertime.

How would it have been to eat with Jesus? How do you think Jesus ate? How do you think he drank? How do you think he went to bed? What would have been like to be with these men? Discipleship. Look for opportunities to be with men and women of God. That's direct discipleship.

That's that's mentoring. And I just don't want to encourage you to do what you can. I realize our our circumstances are different, but I found that usually my observation is people who seek will find.

And I can think Melanie and I many times. Through the last 25 years as we've lived up in Washington in the home where we've been many times, I would hear the crunch of gravel driving in our driveway, and I would know that's a certain young man. I can tell by the sound, by the way he pulled in.

That's a certain sister. I can tell by just by the way her her car sounds and the way she pulls in. She was just going to stop by and visit a while.

One of those girls doesn't have a mother, and God has brought her a stepmother, and she's a tremendous blessing, but she still stops in pretty often and talks to my wife and talks to me. Others of those young men and young ladies come from all different circumstances, but just making the effort a little bit bold, maybe sometimes at the risk of feeling like I'll be a bother. And sometimes it it only works to say, God bless you, brother.

I'm tied up right now. Come on in and sit on our couch and and do your devotions and read the Bible and have a cup of coffee while you're at it. But seek out discipleship, surround yourself with men and women of God.

I want to encourage you to do that so often. I think we have not because we ask not. I've heard of people who say, well, I don't have anyone to go to.

But are you seeking? And I realize you may there may be some here that are in a circumstance and just pray and ask God that he'll open up some doors for discipleship. Other brothers and sisters can help us learn to practice spiritual disciplines. The disciples came to Jesus said, Lord, teach us to pray.

As John also taught his disciples, if you were asked older brothers, would you teach me to pray? Have you ever done that? That's a blessing. A devoted sister that, you know, is a praying woman. You ever thought about asking her, would you teach me some things about prayer? Can I pray with you? We can learn spiritual disciplines, prayer.

How do you read? How do you fight sin and temptation? How did you deal with the struggle when you were young? Maybe you think, well, they probably never had that struggle. Don't count on it. They probably did.

How do you seek discernment? I'm facing this decision. Do you have any insight for me? It's direct discipleship. It's direct discipleship.

If you don't have it, I just want to say this. It's worth making some hard choices for this kind of relationship. I encourage you to be respectful of your parents.

But as you ponder and pray about your future, I encourage you, it's worth a long drive. It's worth a job change. It's worth a geographic move if necessary.

It's worth a sacrifice of my personal liberty to find myself in a context where I can experience some direct discipleship. You think about that and pray about it. Now, I want to talk about the other kind.

I said we talked about direct language learning and also immersion learning. That's two ways people learn language. I want to talk a little bit about immersion.

And when I talk about that, I'm talking about the blessing and the biblical calling to find yourself in the midst of a functioning local body of believers. The Church of Jesus Christ in local functioning bodies. Again, I realize I don't know you.

I know some of your circumstances are likely different. Perhaps you're in a home church or a home setting somewhere. God bless you.

I'm just holding up what I believe is the Bible standard. God can work with all kinds of circumstances. But you pray that God will lead you to his heart.

I want to say a couple of things about that in the book of Hebrews. I said we might look at several spots in Hebrews. But I'm just going to remind you of what Hebrews 10 says, I believe it is.

It speaks about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. Some people stop doing that. They just kind of become autonomous and separate.

He says the manner of some is that. But don't be like that. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.

But instead be in a context where you can exhort one another. And so much the more as you see the day approaching. Yes, that's a blessing.

And in a world of autonomy and independence, we need something bigger than just us. I need something bigger than just me and my family. I need to hear from others.

I want you to think about some scriptures here. First Timothy 3 15 speaks of the apostle speaks of the church as the pillar in the ground of the truth. And I realize we're talking about the universal church here.

But I'm going to also point out real quickly some scriptural very clear scriptural evidence of local functioning bodies of believers and the pillar in the ground of the truth. Any local functioning body of Christ should be a part of that pillar in that ground. Now, those words literally mean the prop and the support of the truth.

That's what they mean. A church functioning church that upholds and props up and supports the truth of Jesus Christ. Now, consider these few points.

I just want to quickly run through them. The church, I believe, should be a local functioning body. A believer should be a place for soul care.

A place for soul care. Having therefore, brethren, the Hebrew speaks boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he's consecrated for us through the veil. That is to say, his flesh and having a high priest over the house of God.

Let's draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies were washed with pure water. Let's hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised and let us consider one another. I mentioned that scripture already to provoke unto love and good works.

Hebrews 13 goes on, speaks about remembering them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God. Who are those? Who are those that he's talking about? Two times in Hebrews 13. He speaks of those.

He says, remember them and obey them that have the rule over you. That sounds a little bit authoritative, doesn't it? And my heart is very much for a shepherd model of pastoral leadership, where there's a good relationship and love and mutual exchange. But never make no mistake about it.

The word does speak of those who have a degree of authority and rule, and it's a blessing and it's an evidence that there is a functioning local body of believers. Are you consciously, deliberately placing yourself in a place where you can have that blessing? That's immersion discipleship. Paul told Timothy, though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers.

Just a couple more real quick. I'm thinking about reminding you, because I know sometimes some of us and I went through this myself. I went through quite a wrestling myself.

Lord, what did you have in mind for your church? What what is this whole thing supposed to be like? And I think sometimes probably some of you have went through stresses or difficulties or divisions or disillusionment with the way churches work. I just want to encourage you. Some of the blast and most beautiful experiences in my life have come in the context of the church of Jesus Christ and a local functioning body of believers, not perfect.

No, it's sure not. We're still learning, still growing, make mistakes. But it's such a blessing.

And I'm trying to point out to you that the Bible anticipates that that will happen. Just consider this one. Matthew 18 speaks about if there's been a fence or a trespass to go and talk to the person between you and you and him alone.

And if there's not a reconciliation to take one or two more. And if that doesn't work, what's it say? Tell it unto the church. Well, the church is the body of Christ.

I believe the Bible says there's one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is above all and in all in you all and through you all. There's one. I know that Christ knows that.

But he anticipates local functioning body of believers. Who will we tell if the church is just the universal body of Christ? There's got to be someone to go tell. Tell it unto the church, he says.

Another point in Acts again and again, we read that those of that number and the number of the disciples, it anticipates that there was a functioning number. There was people know knew who was of the number and who wasn't a local functioning body of believers. Point number four.

Again, in Scripture, we find words like this. Brethren, look you out among you. Look you out among you.

Who's among you? Should I be looking in the universal body of Christ for men of honest report to come? No, it's obvious it's so evident that, of course, there's one church and we need to foster non sectarian

attitudes and a respect and a love. I love to mingle with God's people. I love to come in church contexts that are different than my background.

I learned so much, but I also love to go home and be a part of a local functioning body of believers. And that is what the Lord in the New Testament anticipates. Look out among you.

There has to be a context for that among you to choose men that are going to lead and serve in the church. I'm just trying to equip you young people as you think about discipleship here a little bit. Here's an interesting one in Romans 16, one of my favorite chapters.

It just talks about people, but it starts out and Paul says this. He says, I commend them to you. Phoebe, a servant of the church at Centuria, a servant of the church.

Isn't that interesting? Phoebe, this is a sister, a servant. That word is actually dichotomy. It's the same word as deacon.

She's like a deaconess. She's a serving woman within the church, but at a particular church. It says a servant of the church at Centuria.

Come on, Paul, are you being sectarian? Why didn't you say she's a servant of the body of Christ? No, he said she's a servant of the church at Centuria. She belongs to a particular local church, and I want you to send her my greetings. That's what Paul said.

Yes, the word of God anticipates functioning local bodies of believers. What about a path for us? I think in the book of Philippians, the apostle says a path for us as he writes to the Philippian church, a path for us, which is one of you, one of you. Well, what about you, Paul? Are you isolating a path for us from you? No, a path for us is one of you.

A path for us is from Philippi. He's one of your brethren. He wasn't being sectarian.

He was just acknowledging that that he had established at Philippi a local functioning church, and he wrote to that church the letter of the Philippians to the church of Philippi with the bishops and the deacons. He established that church. It started out with Lydia.

It started out with a lady possessed with the spirit of divination, and then it went on to the Philippian jailer and his family. It was a church, but it became a local functioning body of believers, and that's what the Bible anticipates, and that's what I'm calling immersion discipleship tonight. The church is a place to deal lovingly and redemptively with sin.

First Corinthians five anticipates a body of believers. It says this. Paul said it's reported commonly that there's fornication among you, and such fornication is not so much as named among the Gentiles, but one should have his father's wife, and he goes on and says, therefore, I want you to come together with my spirit and deal redemptively with this one.

So that his spirit can be saved. Deal redemptively and lovingly with this one. It takes a functioning body for that to happen when you come together.

First Corinthians 14 speaks of when you come in the assembly, let the prophet speak two or three and let the rest judge something be revealed to one who sits by. It's anticipating a local functioning body of believers. I think it's a place to celebrate the ordinances.

First Corinthians 11 uses that term several times in that chapter. When you come together. You come together to eat the Lord's Supper.

Somehow that's groups of believers that have a relationship that have a common understanding and a common bond in Jesus Christ who operate together in a local area who come together. And so just recognize that the word of God does anticipate that it's a place for common sharing for house to house hospitality and discipleship. Enough of that big ditches of discipleship individually with relationships, especially find older people in your life or godly brothers and sisters and also by immersion by finding yourself in a context of a functioning body of believers.

Does it mean I'll have to submit sometimes? Probably will they be perfect? No, I'm sure not. There will be some problems. But if you learn to do that, if you can learn to function in that, you'll find some of the richest blessings this side of eternity.

Point number three, I'm going to be just as quick as I can here. Dig some fresh ditches of discernment. We just had five ditches here.

This is number three. Dig fresh ditches of discernment. The first chapter of Philippians.

Can you turn there, please? Quickly. First chapter of Philippians says this apostles writing to that church we were just talking about. And I love this whole book, but I'm just going to break in at the ninth verse.

Eighth verse, Paul says, God is my record. How greatly I long after you all. He loved this church.

He loved these people. He said, I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. But he had something more.

He said this. I pray notice that your love, your Christian love. Oh, don't we love the love of Christ? I want to be in a church where there is the love of Christ.

But he said your love may abound in knowledge and in all judgment, that you may approve things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Jesus Christ being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ under the glory and praise of God. Now, I want you to notice something. Approve things that are excellent, he says.

My prayer, Paul says, is that you would have such a love among yourselves that it would actually abound in knowledge and in judgment. Knowledge is understanding things. It's taking in.

It's taking in truth and learning and understanding God's will judgment. In my understanding is some decision making that comes out of that. It's making judgments.

It's saying yes to something and no to something that's judgment. And Paul said, I want your love to abound in knowledge and in judgment and furthermore, that you would approve things that are excellent. You thought about that.

You right now today, this week, you approved and you disapprove some things. You're doing it all the time. So am I. I go to McDonald's and I approve some things on the menu and I disapprove some others.

I make choice. I make a choice. That's a very simple illustration.

But in much bigger ways in life, you're approving and disapproving all day long. And the apostle says that you may approve things that are excellent. And that word carries the connotation of things that differ, things that are different.

And it means that are not just run of the mill or average or so-so or mediocre. I want to encourage you, young men and young women in 2017 in America today, such as it is. May God bless you as you make choices that are not just OK, not just something I can get by with, not just something that I think it'll do, but rather that are excellent, better than the norm, not run of the mill.

Approve things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. Life has options and not all things are excellent. Not all things are excellent.

The Word of God will help do that. Men and women of God will help us with that. Experience and prayer will help with that.

Approve things that are excellent. It's digging some fresh ditches of discernment. I want to emphasize a fresh ditch.

You know, if you've been a bit dry, I want to invite you to dig a fresh ditch of discernment and ask the Lord to send some fresh water down your discernment ditch and see if you can find a greater pursuit of excellence for the glory of Christ. Not to look down on someone else. Not at all.

I don't like that. I don't like that kind of self-righteous spirit that I make this decision. Everybody else is wrong.

No, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about you approving things that are excellent, or as you function together with your local brothers, that you would be a part of approving excellent things to be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. I must go on.

Let's consider the fourth ditch here. I call this digging some fresh ditches of direction and vision. Digging fresh ditches of direction and vision.

We've talked about digging ditches of devotion, a ditch of discipleship, a ditch of discernment. Now we want to talk about a ditch of direction and vision. Would you turn with me quickly in the word of God to the prophet Habakkuk? Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Look at Habakkuk chapter two. Very interesting passage. Don't have time to talk about the whole context of this minor prophet Habakkuk, but it's very interesting, or Habakkuk, depending on how you pronounce it.

Look at chapter two. I want to borrow some thoughts that Habakkuk is sharing here. He says, I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower and will watch to see what he shall answer me and what I shall say when I am approved, when I am reproved.

And the Lord answered me. Habakkuk said, I'm going to get up on a tower and I'm going to be watching. I've been asking God some questions and I'm going to see what he has to say back.

And here's what God said back. Verse two. And the Lord answered me and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon the tables that he may run that readeth it.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie, though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come. It will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith.

We could talk more about that context of Habakkuk, but we're talking about a vision. Digging a fresh ditch of direction and vision that talks about what's ahead of me. We talked about when we go somewhere, our focus isn't on what we're leaving, but it's on where we're going.

And I think in our Christian lives, brothers and sisters, if you've been dry, I want to tell you, I don't know what will bring more fresh water than a fresh vision of why you're here and of the Lord Jesus Christ and of walking and serving him. I think it's OK to write down your vision. I've done that several years ago.

I wrote down a vision for our family. I've written down personal visions. I think it's all right to do that.

That's what God told Habakkuk to do. He said, write the vision and make it plain. I think it's OK to make a few things plain.

I have some private things that I wrote down. In fact, several years ago when I saw some upheaval coming in my life, I, ahead of time, wrote down some convictions, some choices, some resolves in prayer with God. I don't think I shared them with anyone.

You know how many times I've referred back to those? It's been such a blessing to me. It's still my heart today, many years later. But it's been a good bearing to go back to a vision that was written.

So you might consider that, writing out vision. Make sure it's biblical. But a fresh ditch of vision and direction.

You know, the blessing of having some direction. And I don't want to just leave you hanging with this. I want to mention a couple more things about it.

But the blessing of that is it gives us course. So many places in Scripture we read about the path or the walk or so forth. You know, there's a disease in trout, in fish.

I've seen signs a few times in Washington where I live in the northwest. They talk about a certain disease in trout and it's called whirling disease. Maybe some of you have heard of that.

But there's something that happens, I think it's a genetically transferred problem in a trout that causes them to swim in circles. They just go around and around and around in circles. And they're not very productive.

And I don't think they grow. They probably even die. I don't know all about that.

But I do know it's called whirling disease. But brothers and sisters, do any of you have whirling disease? Just swimming in circles, not really going anywhere, same old thing, same old cycle around and around again, I'm here to tell you that a fresh vision and direction of serving Jesus Christ can help spin you out of that whirling disease, the excitement of Paul. I love his excitement in Philippians chapter three, where he says, Yea, doubtless.

I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. And I do count them, but done that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of

the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. And he goes on that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Now notice, he says, not as though I had already attained, either already perfect, but I follow after if that I may apprehend. That means grab a hold of, apprehend, grasp that for which I have been grasped or apprehended of Christ.

Christ has grasped each one of you. How would you like to grasp? Why? Have you ever wondered that? Lord, why did you redeem me? What do you want out of me? I want to encourage you to do like Paul and follow after and apprehend that for which you have been apprehended of Christ. Then he goes on and says, Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do for getting those things which are behind and reaching forth into those things which are before.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That's not mediocrity. That's excellence.

The high calling. Don't be satisfied with the so-so calling. It's the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

And Paul said, I press toward the mark. Now, Melanie, when we got here to Pennsylvania, when we got up to Brother Moses house down in the trailer where we're staying, she went up and went to the basement of Brother Moses home where they have an iron that we could use. And she ironed my shirts and ironed some dresses.

And there's something about ironing shirts. You can't do it very good without much pressure and with a cold iron. It takes some heat and pressure.

And that's what I think of whenever I see the apostle saying I press toward the mark. I think about some heat and I think about some pressure, something that is not just slack. It's serious.

And I encourage you to dig a fresh ditch of direction and vision and press toward the mark. In first Corinthians nine, the apostle talks about an athletic contest. He said, don't you know that they which run in a race run all but one receiveth the prize in earthly contests? Only one guy wins.

But he says so run that you may obtain. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, he says, not as uncertainly.

So fight I not as one that beat at the air. I'm not just shadow boxing, playing games. He says, I'm going for real.

I'm not just beating the air. But he says, but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection less by any means. After I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.

So run that you may obtain as though only one were going to win. Now, praise God, you can all win. But he says, so run run as though with that kind of desperation like an athlete.

It's digging a fresh ditch of vision. And as you do that, I want to go to this last point real quick. But one more comment before I leave digging fresh ditches of direction and vision.

I want to speak about the desire to excel. You know, as young people, many times we want to excel. You know, I think in some regards, that's partly a God given desire.

It can be warped very quickly. We want to do well. But the apostle, I just want to leave this with you.

As you think about fresh vision. The apostle says in 1 Corinthians, I believe it's chapter 12 or 14. I can't remember right now which one.

He says, brothers, for as much as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, God has gifted each one of you differently. I'd love to get to know each one of you. I wish I could.

It'd take 210 days or however many of you are here. But I'd like to have a day with each one of you and just get acquainted. It would be so enjoyable.

It'd be so interesting. Be so beautiful to see how God has gifted you to see how he's redeemed you. We're all different.

But as much as you're zealous of spiritual gifts, he says, seek that you may excel. Excel in my gift. What's he say? Seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church.

Seek that you may excel. Use whatever God has put in your hand to be a church builder. To build up the church of Jesus Christ, to build up the context where God has placed you to invest for the blessing and building of the church of Jesus Christ.

Excel, brothers, run fresh vision and direction. Excel to the edifying of the church. What a blessing.

As you do that, do it with an excellent spirit. Proverbs 1727 says he that has knowledge spares his words and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Do a study of excellent spirit.

I think it's very powerful and I think it's being cultivated this week, but I want to encourage you to have an excellent spirit. The Bible says of Daniel, somebody mentioned Daniel in the preaching already. It says of Daniel that there was an excellent spirit found in him.

It says that more than once in the book of Daniel. As much as there was an excellent spirit found in him. And Paul wrote to Timothy and he said, he said, let no man despise thy youth, but you be an example of the believers in word and conversation and charity, in spirit, in faith and in purity, in spirit.

What's that spirit? I think it's your attitude. That's what I think it means. It's your attitude.

It's your fervency, your disposition, your heart that has been redeemed by Christ to change that spirit into a good spirit, a blessing, a spirit that's a blessing many times. And I think of particular brothers when I think of this. I think of particular sisters.

I can think of them right now. I could shoot out names right now in our local congregation that I think, you know, they just have an excellent spirit. There's such a blessing to work with an excellent spirit.

Well, fresh ditches of direction and vision. The last one. It's time to close.

Dig fresh ditches of delight in God's love and acceptance. Fresh ditches of delight. I feel overwhelmed.

There's several things I so wanted to share in this. I'll try to just share a couple things quickly because I know it's time to close. Dig fresh ditches of delight in God's love and acceptance.

I want to talk to you just a moment about barrenness. Can we do a three minute quick draw through the Scripture here as we talk about barrenness? I want to. I think it's very important.

Get back in the book of Genesis. I want to talk to you about barrenness real quickly, because I think it's critical for this point. God had promised something in the Bible when man fell through sin in the Garden of Eden.

You remember, God made a promise. He said there's going to come a seed. It's going to be a seed of the woman and it's going to bruise the serpent's head.

It's a promise. It was a promise that I believe men and women of God remembered and hung on to. But notice something with me.

I want you to notice real quickly. We're thinking about this promise and then barrenness is their hope for our banished, sinful, desolate condition. What about this? This utter emptiness? Take a look with me real quick at Genesis chapter 15, verse two.

God said to Abraham, Lord God, what wilt thou give me? Remember, God had called Abraham out of her of the Caldes, and he said, I'm going to make of you a great nation. This is that promise, the solution for sin. There's going to be a seed.

And here God tells Abraham asked the question, what am I going to? What are you going to give me? Seeing I go childless and the steward of my house is this Eleazar of Damascus. What are we going to do about that? He says, jump over to chapter 16. Look at verse one.

Now, Sarah, I, Abram's wife, bear him no children. We've got a promise for a seed, but we've got a problem. Barrenness.

Anyone here tonight that feels barren, this is for you. I'm talking to you. If you feel empty, if you feel fruitless, if you feel purposeless, I want you to see the promise of God.

God promised Christ. He promised a seed. He promised a solution for the same problem.

He promised fruitfulness in the future. But so far, all we're experiencing is barrenness, barrenness. Jump over at 17.

Look at verse 17. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed. God had said, you're still going to have a seed and said in his heart, shall a child be born to him that is 100 years old and shall Sarah, that is 90 years old, bear barrenness? That's all we've got.

Look at chapter 18, verse 11. Now, Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age that ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Barrenness.

No hope. We've got a woman here that is desolate. We've got a man without without the promise.

God, how's this going to work? I see a theme here. Jump over now to Genesis 24, Genesis 24, verse 58. Abraham had sent his servant to get a. To get a wife for his son, Isaac, this is many years later, but I see a

theme here, verse 58, and they called Rebekah and said unto her, will thou go with this man? And she said, I will go and take a look now at 25.

Verse 20. Chapter 25, verse 20. And Abram was 40 years old or Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah, the wife, the daughter of Bethuel, the Syrian of Paternarum, the sister to Laban, the Syrian and Isaac and treated the Lord for his wife because she was barren.

I see a theme here. Sarah was barren. Rebekah was barren.

Turn over one more time. Genesis 30, verse one and two. And when Rachel saw that she bared Jacob, no children, Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob, give me children or else I die.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel. And he said, am I in God's stead with we withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? I see a theme here. There's been a promise seed, but generation after generation, it seems like we're struggling with barrenness.

And I just want to say, if there's anyone here tonight that feels barren, you know, this theme continued on one more place. You must look Luke one, Luke one. We're still thinking about that promise seed and we're just about done here.

Luke one. Verse 30, you can do this study more thoroughly yourself in the future. The angel said unto her, fear not, Mary, for thou has found favor with God.

And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus. Look at verse thirty four. Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be saying I know not a man ultimate barrenness? God, you promised these things, Sarah.

Lord, you promised I'm barren, Rebekah. There's supposed to be a promise seed, but I'm barren. Rachel, there's supposed to be a promise, give me children or I'll die barren.

Generations later, Christ is going to be born, but I'm barren. I don't even have a husband. God, here's what I want to tell you tonight.

God loves to fulfill his promises. I don't care how barren you feel. There is nothing outside the scope of God's possibility.

If you feel void or feel barren or God's promise of blessing seems far from you, my brother or sister, dig some fresh ditches of delight in God's acceptance and his provision. God loves you. God so loves you.

God does care about you. Keep praying. Realize that you've been accepted by him if you've come to God by him.

And Jesus said this, he that cometh unto me, he said, all that the father gives me shall come unto me and he that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. Rest in the acceptance and beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not talking about reckless theology tonight, but I'm saying that sometimes we can feel barren and empty and lonely and alone and we need to dig a fresh ditch of joy and acceptance and blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fresh ditches of delight in God's love and acceptance. Well, beloved, tonight, if anyone has been dry or discouraged or lonely, I want to invite you tonight by the word of God. Jesus has water, water of life.

He's ready to pour out. Let's make our Christian life full of ditches. Dig some fresh ditches of devotion, of discipleship, of discernment, of direction and of delight.

May God bless you. I will turn the meeting over to our brother. When I was young, I was probably I don't know how old I was.

If I'd been 12 or 13 years old, my father taught me something that I've never forgotten. I'd like to teach it to you this evening. There's a principle that you can learn as Brother Joe's been talking about.

I'd like to teach you that my father taught me. He taught me how to plant a straight row of corn. It was important when we planted corn that we planted straight rows because you had a four row corn planter, you had a four row header on your on your combine.

If you got too crooked that you'd knock the row over when you went down and pick the corn and harvest. So you want a straight row of corn. Besides that, the neighbors looked at your corn rows and saw how straight or crooked they were.

OK. Young people, what Brother Joe's been telling you tonight is how to plant straight rows of corn. How many of us, I wonder, how many of us older ones live with regret? I suppose probably most every one of us older ones could say could raise their hand and say, I have regrets.

There's also those of us as we've lived a few years, we've learned a few things. In some ways, we don't have regrets because we planted our rows straight. I'll tell you something else.

I suppose probably in this room, there's a lot of people that feel dry. Why is that? You wonder. Brother Joe's been telling us why that is.

We need to dig some ditches. How many of you struggle in your quiet time? How much time do you spend? I don't have the statistics in front of me right now, but each one of you sent an application in and I asked you on that application, how much time do you spend reading the Bible and other good books? I only know statistically. Well, I know what you said individually, but I know statistically.

There's probably some dry young people here, but that's not the end of the story. This other principle I want to teach you this evening. You can see something that you don't like in your life and you can look at that thing and run from it.

It's like a little boy or a child learning to ride a bike. I've seen it happen before. You tell them now you set them on their course, you set them on their bike, you give them a little push and they soon learn to keep going a little while and all the time they're looking at that tree in the yard because they don't want to run into the tree.

And you know what happens? They run into the tree. That's because they're trying to stay away from something. Young people don't run from something, run towards something.

These things, brother has been telling us, he said, run toward these things, go for them. You can regret all day long and get nowhere. But if you say, if you turn from that regret and say, I'm going to take this thing, I see what it is.

Where do I want to go? I want to go there, run there. Three thirty in the morning seems pretty early, doesn't it? And it is. And I don't suppose that we're going to advocate you all get up at three thirty every

morning.

The point is you make an effort to go towards something. You get up and you do something about your dryness. I was talking to brother yesterday and he said, brother, he said, pray for the burden of God.

The burden that God has for you and young men, if you have your burdens, you need to care. Young ladies, you have yours. They're not the same in some ways.

Some ways they are, but some ways they're not. You'll never stand and preach a sermon, probably. I hope you don't.

Literally. But you will preach a sermon by your life, run towards that thing. Where do you want to be 10 years from now? Set your goals.

Go there. You've got to you've got to run towards it. I didn't tell you how to plant a straight row of corn.

What you do is you look right down, right over the hood of the tractor, right down in front of the tractor, right? No, you look out there, you set a vision, you set a goal out there, you set a tree, a weed or whatever it is out there in the fence row and you and you drive straight towards that and you don't take your eye off of it either. That's how you plant a straight row of corn. That's how you will live this life of devotion.

You'll have this life of discipleship. You'll have this life of discernment, direction and vision and delight in God's love. And when you get the end, that delight will be you ended up and you look back.

Straight row. Nobody was led astray. You went straight towards something.

Thank you, young people, for listening. Thank you, Brother Joe, for your labors in the word. Thank you, Lord, for speaking to us.

Amen. 1-7-5-2-2. You are welcome to copy this message for free distribution.

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