

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Carl Jones

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Our Father and our God, Lord, we thank you for this gracious opportunity to come before your presence. We come praying for all of those, my Father God, the names that Sig has lifted up this morning, whether they're on the coast of Iraq or Iran or whether they are in Croatia, whether they are right here at home, my Father God, in our back yards. Lord, we lift them up to you, my Father God, because there's nothing like seeing pain, my Father God, and we're asking, Lord, that you go before us this morning. Holy Spirit teach us through your Word how to be better men, how to be mission minded men, how to be aggressive responders, how to be those, my Father God, that you've called us to be, looking past ethnicity, looking past race, looking past differences, and only seeing Christ. My Father God, we ask that you go into the hospital rooms. Be with our brother as he gets prepared for his mother's home going. But then, Lord, I'm asking that you come in this morning and use us, teach us, through your Word, that we might give you glory, honor and praise through our lives. Lord, we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake we pray. All the men said...Amen!

Why do we come out on Friday mornings? Some come out for the coffee. {LAUGHTER} Some come for the fellowship. Some come to hear Sig's comedy minute. {LAUGHTER} But after all the dust settles and after all the coffee has given us a wake-up call, there's one common thread that keeps us coming back, and that common thread is the Word of God. Whether it's being spoken through Tom or Don or Ted or the Bishop or Dr. Bickel, we come to see how we can grow more in our relationship, vertically, with Jesus Christ, and then also horizontally with our brothers in Christ.

This morning, I wanted to just stop by and talk thank you about church growth and church expansion as we continue to talk about the Formation and Function of the Church. I have to say that I, if I had remembered that tomorrow was St. Patrick's Day, I would have gotten sick last night and called Ted {LAUGHTER} because I know he could have talked about St. Patty's Day and St. Patrick all day long.

When we look at what growth is, if you've got a handout, what is growth? Webster's says that growth is the process of growing, a stage in the process of growing to full development. Maturity. Well, okay, well, what does it say about expansion? It says that expansion is the act of, or process of, expanding. People are always trying to expand companies so that they can get their products to a larger global market. Schools are always expanding. Every day now, even in the church, it's become a lot like the world they're more conscious on expanding the church through numbers than they are about growing the church through the Word of God. So what's behind the numbers? Well I'm glad you asked that question. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: What's behind the numbers?

Thank you. I appreciate that. There's a growing tendency within the Christian churches around the world where they concentrate on growing large churches. Some have reported memberships totaling 50,000 or more. The number of churches reporting memberships of about 10,000 has increased at an almost unbelievable rate. At this time in recorded history of the Christian church, we have to recognize that mega churches, of the total churches, have been at an all-time high.

What we have to recognize is that the sale of books and literature on church growth has reached all-time levels, and it is exceeding other types of Christian literature. Why? Well when we really continue to examine the truth of God's Word, when we look at why we are here, we have to recognize that this book, this book right here (the Bible), is the only true piece that we need for real, true church growth.

Church expansion deals with numbers. You heard Bruce talk about it on many occasions. Church expansion deals with numbers; whereas church growth deals with our levels of maturity—how we apply the attributes of God, how we apply the statutes of God, how we apply the ways of God to our lives. So many times, we get all messed up because we get caught up in searching for numbers rather than trying to grow people in the Kingdom.

When you get caught up in numbers...I always say that if you build your church on ice cream socials and chicken dinners, then your ministry is going to be just as dead as that chicken {LAUGHTER} and just as melted as that ice cream. Church growth really comes as a result of our maturity in Christ and our becoming Christ like. Proverbs 27:17 says these words, “Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friends.”

You see, now is the time to search God’s Word and become aggressive responders, or those M8’s, that we talk about becoming. Now is the time for us to get into the Word of God, studying the Word of God, recognizing that you never see color, you never see ethnicity, other than to point out the Israelites, because they were God’s chosen people. You never see it mentioned in the Word of God. So we’ve got to be aggressive responders. Listen, it doesn’t start out there. It really starts in here.

If it starts in here, then we’ve got to recognize we’re the only Bible that some people will ever see. The question is what pages are they reading in our lives? 1 Corinthians 1:25 says these words, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” You can take Socrates, Aristotle, you can take Einstein and put them all together in one jar and shake them up, and they are still foolishness in the sight of God. You can take Samson and George Foreman and Mohamed Ali and Arnold Schwarzenegger and put them in a jar and shake them all up, but yet they’re still weaker than the strength of who God is.

We have to recognize that we serve a God that says, “You know what, it’s okay to have church expansion, as long as you’ve got church growth.” Church growth means that you’re growing from the inside out, not from the outside in. You see, 1 Corinthians 1, basically in verses 18-31, “We must recognize that all our wisdom comes from God’s Word.” When we base our purpose on committee meetings and worldly based surveys, because there’s a lot of churches who are basing growing their churches off what the world says, and when you grow your church off what the world says, it won’t be around long.

Too many of those types of methods and plans related to the present day church growth are focused on numerical growth. God is looking for our spiritual growth. When a church grows spiritually, the natural result is the increase in evangelism (number one), it’s an increase in discipleship (number two), and it’s an increase in true worship. Again, there’s an increase in evangelism, increase in discipleship and there’s an increase in true worship, which brings God praise and honor.

When we glorify his son, Jesus Christ, by taking God’s message to the lost, God is glorified. We must represent the whole truth of the Word of God because John 12:32 holds true, to those who are lost and in desperate need of a Savior. When we make it comfortable and pleasant for the lost, we are not being true to the Gospel of Christ.

As you heard Bruce say on the last couple of Fridays, if your church looks like MTV, if your church looks like some side show, if you’ve always got bells and whistles going to keep people coming in, you’re building the wrong type of church. You’re not growing a church off God’s Word; you’re growing a church off of entertainment, and people don’t need to be entertained. We need to grow in the Word of God.

Even now, you are seeing churches that have Starbuck's coffees. Don't get me wrong. Nothing against Starbuck's or their coffee, but you can't grow a church where it's become so laid back that we become so complacent to the Word of God, that we're not compliant with the Word of God. If we're not compliant and obedient to the Word of God, then I promise you, church growth will not happen, and those same 1,200 members you have come in will eventually walk away because they're going to go look for the next bell or the next whistle.

What we have to understand as men is that as we come out here on Friday mornings, this is our training ground. This is our basic training ground where we come in here on Friday morning, and every Friday morning, iron sharpens iron. All of us come together so that we can sharpen one another, so that we can go back out there and guess what...you might have walked in, in fear, but you walk out for faith. You might have walked in with lust, but you walk out with love. Because you recognize that we have men here that truly care about the well-being of the next person. What you have to understand is it's not about who you are or who we are; it's whose we are. As long as we are living in Christ, we're doing it his way and doing it for his purposes.

Matthew 6:33 says these words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all of his righteousness and all these blessings and favors, all these things will be added unto you." I need three men to help me real quick please. He represents Jesus, okay. {LAUGHTER} He kind of looks like him, too. These guys represent finances in the world and materials in the world. Most of the time, what happens is, in our lives, we tend to start following finances in the church and materials in the church (go ahead and start walking that way), and we start following these things, but what about Jesus?

See, Jesus is still right where he is, and Jesus doesn't follow anybody. So once we get it right in here, and in here, and we start to follow Jesus...he said, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." Isn't that what the Word says? Watch this. And then all these blessings and favors will start to follow Jesus. See because you can't have finance without faith. You can't have materials without a Master. What you've got to recognize is if you put the Master first, all these other things will be added unto you. Can I get a witness?

Audience Members: Amen.

Thank you, guys. I appreciate it. You've got to recognize that we've got to follow Christ in all that we do. Well, if you really want true church growth, you've got to have Jesus first. No matter what. See this one verse is key to real growth. God is more concerned with our spiritual growth than with numbers, of members we can count in our congregation. Please understand that God is not interested in...he's interested in adding new believers, but he wants to do it on his terms. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says these words, "For this is god and acceptable in the sight of our God our Savior who desires all men..." Say all men.

Audience Members: All men.

"to be saved and to come to the knowledge of his truth." Peter's first sermon at Pentecost is the perfect example of the message sinners need to hear. This was not a seeker friendly service; although all through the New Testament we do not find a soft sell on salvation. The sinner must know that he needs a Savior before he can accept Christ as a Savior. We are only cleansed from our sins by the blood of Christ. There's nothing that can cleanse you from your sin but the blood of Christ. He said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." Our job as aggressive responders is not to talk to them about who we are, but to talk to them about who Jesus is. Our job is not to talk to them about what we can do because we can't do nothing. Our job is to talk about what Christ can do in their lives. See, because you've got to recognize, as I said earlier, we're the only Bible that a lot of people are going to see. If they don't see the Christ in you, they certainly will not want to follow the Christ you say you follow.

Think about this for a second. Nothing else written, said or performed will cleanse us from our sin but the blood of Christ. The message of the cross has disappeared from many of our churches. We no longer are interested in talking about the cross of Calvary. We're no longer interested in talking about the death or the resurrection of Christ.

Well, what we're supposed to do here, as we are learning here on Friday mornings, is to take what we learn here, take it back to our churches, apply it there. Amen. And don't get me wrong, you don't go and overshadow the pastor, but you make sure that you start to live the life that's in line with who God is. Before long, people will start to see your walk, and they will ask you, "Wait a minute. There's something different about you."

Have you ever been in an airport? Or have you ever been in a grocery store? And somebody says, "There's something different about you." Especially you, I know you look like Jesus. {LAUGHTER} He said always. We have to recognize, we have to recognize that there's something different about us when we have the spirit of God living in us. There's a light that shines that men see. A lot of them don't want to identify with it, but they see it.

So the question is, is God really interested in church growth? Let me say it this way. God is not interested in church growth that is building large congregations or large super churches. His plan is to birth people into his family all over the earth, and to enable them to grow into maturity in union with him. He is not limited to buildings or facilities in which to house himself and develop what we call a congregation or the church today. He will not make a building his home on earth. He did that only in the old covenant.

Now you and I, we have to recognize we're under a new covenant. Therefore, God has made his home in our hearts. Since he's now dwelling in us, and we're dwelling in him, he is now abiding in us and we abide in him, as we abide in him, then church growth can only happen when we start to live the life of Christ that's living in us. When men see us and they see us growing and walking in Christ, then they will start to want to see and note your change. And they will want to change themselves.

Many of us, the only...and I'm going to say it again...the only Bible that some people will see is you. They won't read. They won't study. They won't come in contact with any of the 1188 books. They won't come in contact with any of the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. But they're going to see them in your life. If they seem them in your life, if they see love emanating from you, if they see peace emanating from you, then they're going to want to know who your Lord is.

You see, when we spend time, efforts and energies inside a building we call the church, we fundamentally lose our influence on those who do not know Jesus. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. See, you can't...if a person is hungry, if a person is hungry, you've got to recognize until you meet that need first, you cannot possibly speak the Word to them. What am I saying? Remember when Jesus fed the 5,000? He first met the need of the hunger. Then he gave them the Word.

So many times we try to give them the Word and we're not trying to give them anything else. No, you've got to meet the need, what's hurting them right now. Once you take care of that, then you can impart the Word. See, it's easy, if you'll notice, a lot of people don't understand that everything that God did was on purpose in the Canon of the Scripture. Even the Lord's Supper. Have you ever noticed that when we look at the Lord's Supper, have you ever noticed that when you invite somebody to your house, the first place you invite them to is where? The kitchen. Think about it. When your friends come over to visit, you don't tell them, "Have a seat in the living room. I'll be right back." You say, "Come on

into the kitchen, man.” Because food represents a common ground. When you can partake of something edible, you can now, that person now becomes pliable. Don’t ask me why it works, but it works. {LAUGHTER} It’s amazing.

Many of you will leave here this morning and you will go out and have breakfast together. The one thing you will end up talking about is the Word of God and how we live and how we’re to do and how we do things in this world, how we deal with the cares and the strife of this world.

Well, just as Bruce is teaching us, we have to recognize that as aggressive responders, we have to understand that the church that Jesus said he would build does not need Sunday morning meetings does not need Sunday night meetings or mid-week meetings, does not need youth ministries or children’s ministries or men’s or women’s ministries or great singing or great speeches to the same people week after week. These types of activities do not create church growth—not the church growth Jesus wants.

What God wants is for us to obey the 58 one another commands. As we obey the 58 one another commands that he gave us in the Scripture, as Dr. Bickel is teaching us on right now, see, when we learn how to relate to one another, when I learn how to relate to Sig and Sig learns how to relate to Dick and Dick learns how to relate to Dean and we learn how to relate to one another, when we learn how to receive one another, when we learn how to respond to one another in love, when we learn how to restore one another when we’ve fallen, then and then only will you start to see growth taking place, because we’ve understood the one another commands and that which is now placed in us is now coming out of us, not only through our walk, but through our talk.

Sig: *I always get a little concerned...when you commented I’m the Bible that people, or maybe only certain people here, they may see you in an airport or in a grocery store, and then you go into what you’re saying now, which gives me a little more comfort, that yeah, we talk together or we hang out in my kitchen together, that can be a lot different. The only thing, I mean, I guess I wanted, if you could, comment on that subtlety, because my life, if I’m walking down the street, they may just think I’m silly and smiling too much, and they may not really know that it’s Christ. You know what I mean. There’s just a fine line between what I really reflect in my appearance or in the way I carry myself as opposed to, I mean, it’s hard to love my brother. But if I can reflect Christ or talk to people about Christ, and he’s the testimony, not me, I guess...do you see that as a decision somehow we need to make? I’m not the one worth looking into. My life isn’t going to be that dramatic or that profound that someone is going to stop me and say, “What’s the difference? Something is different about you.”*

Anybody want to comment on that before I...? Yes sir.

Audience Member: *I would think that it’s important that you focus on Christ and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.*

Amen.

Audience Member: *Honestly, my own experience is that I look at what got me where I’m at is I saw my wife, I saw some people in this church, [UNCLEAR] same thing. I looked at them and I said there is something different about them. There was progression for me to put myself around those people, frankly. I mean, it was just like you said. You’re sitting here with other people and thinking, “This is a mess. I’m tired of this.” Right? But I did recognize them. My wife had a key part and [UNCLEAR] people in the church, I just look at them. You can tell the difference. It’s all there is to it. It’s really a question do you want to put yourself next to those people or not. So Sig, I just [UNCLEAR] and it didn’t, I didn’t look at it like you’re smiling, you know, they’re just high on life or something. It’s really because I was here that you could feel it. That’s all there is to it.*

Audience Member: *If I may, I found that if you stay full of the Word, like my brother said, let the Holy Spirit, then there comes a recognition of uniqueness there because...I'm a retired truck driver. If you see a tanker truck out here with a red sticker and the number 1993, that tells you something, that there's something in there. You begin to recognize there's something in there and the Holy Spirit will let the world know there's some... I'll give you a personal testimony. I happened to be, one night, 2004, in April of 2004. I was driving. I was coming from Georgia. I wanted to stop outside of Charleston, WV. I was tired. I was driving, and the Lord said, "You can't go to this truck stop; you've got to go to Jackson, Ohio." It's another hour and a half up the road. Right. [UNCLEAR] At this truck stop in Jackson, I knew it, it was up on US Route 35. At this place, I always got full, so I'm pulling in. I have 15 minutes to go on my log book [UNCLEAR]. [UNCLEAR] GPS, right up, down at the end of a line, I pulled up, I was right in front of the [UNCLEAR]. I said, "Good lord. A parking spot." I pulled right into it. I went in and I ate dinner and relaxed. I'm not much of a TV goer, but I went to this little TV room. It was smaller than that room. There were three guys in there. There was a guy that, well read, but the wrong stuff. Something on TV, I just wanted to relax. We got into a discussion. I was telling him what he was studying was wrong. We had a great time. There was a fella sitting in the chair, and I don't know where he went, he left. This fella says to me, "Oh my god. It's midnight. I've got to leave." I said, "I've got to go to bed." I saw this other fella sitting there and I said, all I said was, "Hi. How you doing?" He said, "No good. God's kept me in this truck stop for three days to meet somebody, and you're that man!" I'm telling you what, I wanted to dump it all right there. I said, "Stay right there! I ran to the bathroom," right at the urinal and said, "Holy Spirit, I don't know what I'm doing. I need your help." We were there til 4:30 in the morning. Another Christian brother come in. This guy had a new Bible from his mother who is a Christian and backslidden, had a letter, and we're talking, and he's telling me what's on his mind. I said what do I do, where do I get the answer? I said, "Do you have any Scripture in mind. He said, "No," and I thought the Psalms. Psalms are always comforting, right? I said, "Open to the Psalms." He flips open to Psalm 35 and it answered every question. We were there til 4:30 in the morning. I went out to my truck and I cried and I said, "Lord, thank you," because I didn't have to...I had 200 miles to go and I had til midnight to get there, and I said, "Whoa! What a day this will be." I'm telling you, I found then, God said, "Keep reading. Keep seeking. And don't worry about it. Just fill it up. Let it flow out like Christ at Canaan." They fill those water jars to the brim; if you fill to the brim, one more drop, it'll flow out. That's it.*

Amen.

Don: *Carl, I'd like you to elaborate exactly what you were talking about or what you mean when you said this, that Jesus isn't interested in Sunday morning meetings, Sunday evening meetings, etc., as opposed to the 58 one another commands. I think he is interested. We're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves [UNCLEAR], we are to worship Christ corporately.*

Absolutely.

Don: *What were you getting at?*

Well Don has been studying my notes. What I was basically getting at... {LAUGHTER}... basically what I was doing is I was setting you up because what I basically boils down to is this. We're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves so much the more as we see that day coming. But that meeting, when we're meeting with ourselves, what I'm saying is this, is that when we come together here on Friday morning, that's when iron sharpens iron. When we come together here on Friday morning, it's easy to be spiritual when we're here on Friday mornings. But when you go out into the world, that's when you start to Christ that lives in us.

Every time Don comes in contact somebody, I promise you that he touches somebody's life. For a man to be as well versed in the Word as he is, that person, and then they find out that he's blind. And to know that, you wouldn't know that if you hear him talking about the Word, would you? He's talked to us on many occasions. What I'm saying is, is that no, we're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves, but that's not where we stop. That's not where God stops. We're to take it from the pulpit to the pews and from the pews to the pavement.

***Audience Member:** It seems to me the whole thing comes down to motive. If we're in line with the Gospel, we're going to have both growth and expansion. I can't interact with my brothers without promoting growth. I can't live up to the great commission without promoting expansion. The comment about God doesn't care, or Christ doesn't care about the Sunday morning, he cares about the assembly of the brothers, but the motive is to worship him, not because I'm competing with every other church in the area for the Wednesday youth group so I'll start mine a half hour earlier and I'll put in the bling and do all this stuff. It's all motive.*

I thank God for the Holy Spirit, because all these guys have been reading my notes. Amen.
{LAUGHTER}

***Bill:** Carl, I think what we have to do, and I have to do it for myself, is to stop sometime and try to understand why did Christ die. He didn't die for our meetings. He died for a relationship we have with God because of his death, and the relationships we have, or should have, with one another should be greatly affected by his death.*

To hitchhike on that, that's the reason why we have to recognize that as he said in Luke 19:10, he came to seek and save that which is lost. So if he came to seek and to save that which is lost, how is he doing it? He's doing it through us. Amen! Because he's already ascended back to the Father. He's at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us on a daily basis. So now we've got to recognize that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. What treasure is that? It's the Excellency of the power of God which is in us that comes out of us when somebody approaches us, as in my brother's case, in a truck stop that he didn't even think about he was going to meet somebody, and all of a sudden, and Sig, to your point, it's the subtlety, it's those subtle things. You've got to recognize that we've all, we're always on purpose for God. No matter what arena you are in. It's not about starting a Bible study or a youth ministry 30 minutes before your brother trying to get more kinds to come. It's not about coming to church on Sunday morning and trying to make sure we've got numbers so we want to make sure we're giving out bags to everybody so that they can come back next week. No, it's about lifting up Jesus. If we lift up Jesus, then he'll take care of the growth, and he will take of the expansion.

See listen. God has a plan for reaching and redeeming all people on the planet. The amazing fact is that we, that if we would do it God's way, it could be done in less than a generation. The problem is most people, believe it or not, do you realize that most people are afraid to talk about Christ. There are even men who are in here on Fridays that are afraid to talk about Christ when they go outside that door. I know we find that hard to believe. I know you do, but they are. If this statement is true, when why hasn't it already been done? Let's start looking and see if we can answer that question.

In addition to the definition I gave you earlier concerning church growth, we have to recognize there are two other ways that a church grows. First, it's growing in numbers in the congregation, but also it's growing through, again, through the Word of God and how we apply the Word of God and how we live the Word of God and how we interact with the Word of God. That's the reason why if you ever come to my church, you're going to find, if you ever come to our church in Greensburg, and by no means is this a PSA, but I want you to understand that what I pray for is a church that looks like heaven. I pray for a church that looks like heaven. When we go to heaven, it's not going to be just white men or just black

mean or just brown men or just orange men. It's going to be all men because Christ said he's coming back for one church. If he's coming back for one church, that means it's not any one denomination; it's all denominations. That means it's all people. He wants to see...he came to seek and to save that which was lost, which is all men. Not just some men, or this one, this one, this one, not him. This one, this one, this one, not him. He came to save all men.

Audience Member: What about election?

What do you mean?

Audience Member: Well, you're not talking about universalism are you?

No.

Audience Member: Okay. Alright.

Audience Member: All kinds of men.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] every single individual.

Our primary emphasis that I have to recognize is that the church...I have seen in the church for over 35 years, when you're talking about growth, and it has been, how do we get more members in the congregation? We talk about growing spiritually, but the real emphasis in our churches seem to be on getting numbers. So how do we do that? How do we do it?

If this is the primary emphasis for church growth, then we need to examine the motives, as one of my brothers just said a few minutes ago, we need to examine the motives behind that quest. But more importantly, let's skip down to the next one. Is God's view of church growth different from ours? Absolutely it is. To understand God's view of growth, we first need to understand what is the church as far as he's concerned.

What is the ecclesia? Who are the called out ones? We are. We are the called out ones. That's the reason why when you hear Bruce tell the story about, I believe it was the Vietnamese guy, I think it was a Japanese guy that he met and the guy says, "You Christian?" And he says, "Me Christian, too," he didn't care about ethnicity. He got out and hugged him because they both serve the same Father. They both relate to each other. They both have the same Father in heaven. When you identify with another, it should break every barrier that should stand between you. It should break every barrier.

You see, what are the main functions of the church from God's point of view? Write these down. Number one is lift. Number two is love. Number three is live. First and foremost, we need to lift up Jesus because John 12:32 tell us, "If I be lifted up, I'll draw all men unto me."

Then he says we're to love. John 13:34 says, "And this new commandment I give you that you love your brothers as I have loved you. Love one another." He's letting us know that we are to love one another. Well what's new about the commandment? As I have loved you.

And then we're to live. Well what are we living? We're living with Jesus in our lives and we're living with the love of Christ in our hearts, and so therefore, we shouldn't have a problem living out what we have in us. Well what do you mean? The Word of Jesus in our lives because you might be, as I said earlier, you might be the only Bible that some people ever see, and I want to continue to say that because, believe it or not, there are 66 books in this Canon of Scripture, but you're writing the 67th. The

question is how many people are you affecting with the 67th book of your Bible?

We have to let them see the light of Jesus shining in us. If they see the light of Jesus shining in us, and then they recognize if we are truly the salt of the earth, salt, anything it touches, changes the flavor, doesn't it. Can I go here? But if you ever notice, when you sprinkle salt on something, it doesn't remain it's normal color. It changes to the color of what's around it, but all the time it's changing it at the same time. What we have to recognize is that we are salt and we are light. If we are salt, then we're to change the flavor. If we're light, we're to let our light so shine among men. If we let our light so shine among men, then Acts 2:47 comes to bear and we live it. Well what are you saying? When the church was performing those three functions of lift, love and live, the Lord was adding to the church, daily, those who would be saved. As a matter of fact, it says when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls came to Christ. Not because Peter was lifting up Peter, but because of the Christ who was in him. What we have to understand is, in other words, when the church was doing what it was supposed to do, it grows, because the Lord God is adding people to it in his designed way.

The followers of Jesus are enthusiastically enjoying a life relationship. Each and every one of us have a life relationship with Christ. Every day that you walk it out, every day that you live it out, every day that you're on your job, every day that you're at the ball game, every day that you're at your child's ballet session, every day that you're down at the Freud and Lewis play, every day that you're driving down the highway, every time you go to a Steeler game, every time, everywhere you go, you are representative of Christ. We are representatives of Christ.

At the end of the day, we have to keep in the back of our mind, no on the frontlets of our eyes, that we're mission minded men on a mission for God, not for ourselves. If we walk with that power and we walk with the salt and light that he has given us, I promise you that you will not only have church growth, but you'll have church expansion. Amen!

***Audience Members:** Amen.*

I know you receive that this morning. Praise God. Can we give God a hand clap of praise?

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

Amen! I want to thank you that I was able to come before you this morning, and amen. Hopefully next time, it won't be... Don just reminded me it was January of last year, and believe it or not, January of last year, we didn't have heat in here {LAUGHTER} and I almost froze to death. This year, thank God, he said...they're going to have you teach, but I'm going to make it's 70 degrees outside in the winter time. {LAUGHTER} I want to thank you for your attention this morning. Are there any questions or comments before we pray out?

***Audience Member:** What do we do to bring men back to the church?*

What do we do to bring men back to the church? Well we start with prayer. We start with prayer. And then you've got to recognize that if we live the life of Christ before them, those men will start to come back. But they'll come as a result of the life they see you live, and the character of God that they see in you.

***Ted:** So church growth really depends on me.*

Absolutely.

Ted: That's where I have a problem because we say...you're the 67th book of the Bible. The Word of God is pure, unadulterated, from Romans 7. I can't be the 67th book of the Bible.

Well here's why you can be. Because the Christ is the Christ that lives in you.

Ted: That's correct.

It's the Christ that lives in you.

Ted: I believe that. But I'm just saying, having said that, I'm still grossly contaminated while the Bible is not.

Audience Member: I don't think it's what you do; it's what Christ does through you.

Does through you. Amen.

Audience Member: What Christ has already done!

Ted: I just get a little nervous when we talk a lot about how if we just go out there and do better, things will happen.

Not do better.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] you talk about growth and maturity and the numbers that follow. If you have an atheist, and you have a Christian, [UNCLEAR]...if you have an atheist and a Christian, and you're in the middle and you have a need, whether it be you need to get finances straightened around or you're having difficulty with your wife, whatever it could be, and this atheist teaches you how to meet your need or the Christian influences you or teaches you how to meet it, "You've got a financial need," a financial planner, to use that as an example, who's this guy going to follow? Who am I going to follow? Whoever met my need. That's why it's important for us as Christians. A lot of times, like I work in youth ministry, a lot of times, I'll leave God out of the picture. If I can help I can help a kid with something, and he says, "Well man, you give me some good solid advice," the picture is now what's he basing it on. Is he basing his life on Christ or what the world says, because then that, eventually that's what that kid's going to follow or that's what that man's going to follow. That's why it's important for us to live as you said.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...look at what we do as influencing others, I think that's [UNCLEAR] because that's when our ego starts to manifest [UNCLEAR]. I think the idea is that, I don't want this came to me, but I was thinking, it's simple but it's not easy. Go out and [UNCLEAR]. When the people see you doing that, they will look [UNCLEAR]. I think it's very important [UNCLEAR] God out of it.

Audience Member: Thank you for being here today. If I'm going to take three steps knowing who I am and what I can do, I've got to take the steps knowing the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be made acceptable because [UNCLEAR]...

Amen.

Audience Member: Deuteronomy 28 where God laid it out to the children of Israel a month prior to going into Canaan, the blessings and the curses, and Deuteronomy [UNCLEAR] obedience to God.

Amen.

Audience Member: He said, "Follow my commandments," and then I could just paraphrase, but I won't [UNCLEAR] there's more cursings for not following God, especially verse 58 only. But before that, the blessings and that ties into Matthew 6:33. It's obedience to God, his will, his way and his Word and put the rest of this junk aside and just get on your knees and say, "Lord, what would you have me do today that you have and will continue to enable me," and throw the rest of the junk in the garbage, and watch what happens.

Amen. At the end of the day, it has nothing to do with me; it has to do with God in me. That's what it's all about.

Sig: I'd like to respond to Ken's thought because my thinking is I'm having trouble with my finances right now, and I'm having trouble with my wife, so the best thing I can do with another man, Christian or non-Christian, is to be honest and real with him about my struggle so that I'm not separating myself or elevating myself and saying, "Well I've got that figured out. Let me help you," but "let me tell you about Christ in the midst of my struggle." I think that's some of what Ted's getting at is...the most powerful thing to me is when another man is real with me. I think the challenge we have is being honest with other men, and vulnerable with other men, that we aren't together; we don't have it figured out. But we do know who Jesus is, and we point to Christ, and we reflect Christ.

At the end of the day, it's all about Christ. It has nothing to do with you and me because we're nothing more than filthy rags. Okay. But it's Christ who lives in us and works through us to affect other men.

Audience Member: That container there with that water, does that plastic refresh you? Or does the water inside the plastic...?

It's the water inside.

Audience Member: It's the water inside.

Amen. Amen.

Audience Member: We were talking about what you see in other Christians. I was one of these lost souls. I went somewhere not even expecting to meet Jesus. What I saw in these men was I just wrote down a couple of things. I saw peace. I saw hope in them. I saw serenity. I saw confidence. I saw freedom. Freedom. I knew that they had something that I wanted, [UNCLEAR] something I had been searching for my whole life. They took the time to sit down and share with me.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Can we just pray? Our Father and our God, Lord, we thank you for this gracious opportunity to come before your presence. We thank you for all the Brave Men here in this place. We thank you for letting us come together, gather together, as this gathering, my Father God, to study your Word, to let you impart your Word unto us. We thank you Holy Spirit for guiding us into all truth. Now Lord go with us, lead us and guide us. Let us be found in the favor of your eyesight, and in the favor of the eyesight of those around us. Go with us, lead us in all that we will do. My Father God, we bless you Lord for who you are, and we ask all these blessings and favors in the pure, priceless, precious name of Jesus we pray. And all of God's Brave Men said...Amen!! God bless you!