

“The Rights”

Holiness

John Bishop

Various Scriptures

August 21, 2015

John: Well, good morning.

Men: Good morning.

John: It is a real pleasure and delight for me to be here because of the man who stands here every week. It’s hard for me as a 53-year friend of Bruce not to feel some fairly significant emotions to be here, to be with you men because I have heard over the years about the tremendous things that are going on in this group—what Jesus is doing in the lives of many of you individually and collectively. It speaks incredibly of the power of the gospel, the power of friendship, and of the power of being devoted to each other in Jesus. And so it’s a real delight and a real privilege for me to be here.

Bruce and I met in his plebe year at the Academy and became instant friends, and now are lifelong friends. And we’ve journeyed together through some pretty difficult circumstances of life. But we’re still together. We still love each other and still care about each other, still wanting to finish well and finish strong. And hopefully with a little bit of what I share with you this morning, I think you’ll go away saying, “You know, I thought I heard a little of Bruce this morning.” (*Laughter.*) Because we talk, we share. Sometimes he starts the sentence and I finish it. Sometimes I start it and he finishes it. We are sort of learning how to think alike after all these years. (*Laughter.*)

In the past—and I don’t know how far back in the past—but Bruce has told me that he covered a bunch of rights—about being the right man, the right position, the right qualifications, the right time, the right reason. He’s given us this list of rights. So I wanted to pick up on these. And I’ve got a couple of other rights that I’d like to add to the list and to give you some things to think about in that process. And in order to set the stage for the rights that I would like to give you, I need to kind of tell you a little bit about my story, about where I’m coming from and what the journey is that I’ve been on.

My father went over with a heart attack when I was seventeen years old, a senior in high school. This was January of 1960. And we were probably at best in those days considered a pretty low income family. They didn’t have all the support for the poor then that they do now. We’d have probably been on food stamps or something like that.

So college was always iffy. And when he died it completely evaporated. It just went away. So this was 1960 and fifteen years out of World War II. And like a lot of young men in that era, we went into the service. We went in to serve. That was part of our culture, that time for young men to give back to the country and serve. But it was also that which gave me access to the GI Bill.

So in June of 1960 I enlisted in the Navy, took off for San Diego and started the process of going through boot camp.

A couple of very significant things happened at boot camp. First, back in those days chapel was mandatory. So every Sunday morning we had four thousand recruits who would march us over to this big auditorium and we heard the gospel. Now I would not

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have been able to say it this way at that time. But all the Navy chaplains who conducted these services were evangelicals. And so there was a clear presentation of the gospel every Sunday morning to these four thousand recruits.

But there was also an invitation, a voluntary service in the evenings. And so I was attracted to what I was hearing in the morning. There was something there. And so I decided to go one Sunday evening over to the voluntary service. And that’s where I probably heard the gospel the clearest. And when this line officer presented it and finished, I said, “That’s for me.” I got out of the pew and headed down the aisle.

And the guy that grabbed me and ushered me into the kingdom, introducing me to Jesus, was a guy by the name of Otto Helwig. Otto was class of ’58 from the Naval Academy. He’d only been out a couple of years. He was on an LST out of Long Beach. But he’d come down on Sundays to help the chaplains. And so my journey with Jesus began at boot camp in 1960.

The second thing that happened—and it’s a much longer story and maybe this will be an appetizer for me to come back sometime and tell the rest of the story—but I had a W-4 warrant officer. Those who have been in the military know that a W-4 is a pretty crusty guy. He has been around for a while, a seasoned boatswain’s maid, a World War II veteran. All of a sudden, he takes this one young kid from Kansas under his wing and says to me one day, “Bishop, I think you need to go to the Naval Academy.”

And the long and short of it is that God used that man to step into my life and direct the program through all the military channels to get me to the point where I could in fact make an application for the Naval Academy, which I did. And as a result of that, the Navy sent me to Bainbridge, Md. For prep school. And then I competed with all the other guys in my district at that height, and fortunately was able to place first. And so I entered the Academy in the summer of 1961.

I spent four years there. After a cruise on a submarine and a cruise on a destroyer, getting terribly seasick on both, (*laughter*), I decided that the life of a sailor wasn’t the life for me and I opted to take my commission in the wrinkle

I graduated in June of ’65 and landed in Da Nang in April of ’66. So I was in the war less than a year after graduation. I spent a year out there with the Third Marine Division. I came back to the headquarters of the Marine Corps, which was another one of these God things because I was a first lieutenant. Headquarters was majors, lieutenant colonels and generals. This first lieutenant shows up and I’m way out of my element. But that’s where I was supposed to be because as a result of that, I met all the folks involved with a thing now called The National Prayer Breakfast. And I got to know those folks, got involved, got engaged. And the long and short of it is that I stayed on active duty until 1972 when I resigned my commission and went full time with the Prayer Breakfast for a little over four years before heading off into business.

I want to share that because in life your early experiences mark you, whether it’s in your natural life or your spiritual life.

Participant: Amen.

John: In my early journey with Jesus I began learning about war, then training for war, going into war, recovering from war and getting ready to go into war again. The

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first twelve years of my journey with Jesus was all about warfare. And I developed a set of lenses based on all those experiences of how to look through the Scriptures, how to see, in effect, this thing that’s called life. And it’s a warfare.

Well, I left the Marine Corps in 1972 to go to work full time with the Prayer Breakfast. For those of you old enough to remember, in the early- to mid-‘70s, the anti-war movement was getting pretty hostile and violent at Kent State. And being with the Prayer Breakfast, which was trying to focus on reconciliation and love and encouraging people and bringing people together and not seeing people get divided, being a Viet Nam veteran was not a positive thing. And particularly being a Marine Corps Viet Nam veteran was not a positive thing. So at the Prayer Breakfast at that time, trying to fit in—a little humor here, I hope!—I was a bachelor and there were a lot of beautiful young ladies running around this prayer breakfast. (*Laughter.*) And I wanted to fit in. I wanted to date. You know, I was thinking about marriage. And being a Viet Nam veteran was a show stopper for most of them.

So I jettisoned, I got rid of anything I could do to de-militarize myself to try to fit in. I quit wearing my class ring. I didn’t wear a lapel pin. I really didn’t bring the subject up of where I’d been or what I’d done. And that kind of went on for forty years.

Participant: Wow!

John: And then in 2007, Bruce and I together went back to Viet Nam. And some of you may have heard the story of going back to Hue City and his finding that orphanage that he participated in when he was stationed over there. We traveled together from the delta of Saigon all the way north to Hanoi. And that picture that came out, I think the one that Sig put out, is Bruce and I standing in front of Ho Chi Minh’s mausoleum in Hanoi. So we traveled together.

Well, as you can imagine, that time was pretty sobering.

Participant: Amen.

John: Riding from the bus from Dong Ha, the village where I spent most of my time, over to Kai San, which had been the bloodiest part of the war for the Marine Corps was a pretty sobering time just to think about things, remembering things I actually hadn’t thought about for forty years—guys who had died, circumstances, situations that had developed, surviving, this kind of stuff.

And when I was on that bus, I realized there were a lot of things that I had not ever really said, “Thank You” to the Lord for—for setting me with that warrant officer and doing what happened to get me into the process that got me into the Academy. That was the hand of God. There’s just no other way to understand that. And so I had time on this bus to say “thank You,” to reflect.

And as I was doing that, I started thinking about the Academy, the Marine Corps, those twelve years—how this all got started. And I said, “Lord, You know, those early years in the Academy, those are not insignificant experiences. Not every young man gets that kind of an opportunity, to use the opportunity before they waste it, because I jettisoned those for forty years. What was that all about? I need help.”

And men, I feel like the Lord on that bus said to me, “Those days were for these days.”

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Participant: Yes. Good one.

John: And so I have put that on my warfare list. I’ve put my lapel pin back on. I’ve put my ring back on. I want people to know that I’m a Marine. I’m a veteran of the Viet Nam war. I served. I experienced this. But they were for a reason. And that reason, I believe, is to help me see the reality of this thing we often call spiritual warfare and what the implications are in the world in which we live, the world in which we are existing right now.

So I kind of want to walk you through some thoughts that I’ve developed about this issue of spiritual warfare. And the idea is to help equip you to give you something when you leave here today that will enable you to more effectively and more powerfully get engaged in the fight.

The two rights that I want to add to Bruce’s list are these. I want to add *right perspective*. Men, perspective is the ability to keep the big picture in focus, never losing sight of the big picture. And so when you step back and you look at this world in which we live, I don’t think it’s hard to conclude that we’re at war. We are really, truly at war. In many ways most of us don’t realize what that means. How does that play out? We can just talk about spiritual warfare, or, you know, that we’ve got the devil here, or the devil there. We don’t really engage and integrate it in such a way that we understand exactly what’s happening. And so that’s what I’d like to do today—to help you have a perspective, the big picture, of this thing called spiritual warfare.

I want to propose for the theologians in the room—and this may be a little off the reservation from their perspective; that’s okay—I want to propose that this warfare did not start in the Garden. I want to propose that this war started long before creation. And my basis, my theological basis for that, is that in the garden, in Genesis 2 8 and 9, it talks about God going into the garden. And in the garden He planted the tree of life and He planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And I want to propose that it’s not possible to have knowledge of something that doesn’t exist.

Participant: Right.

John: If it’s not there, if it doesn’t exist, then you can’t know about it. So evil existed at the moment He put that tree in the garden, and that precedes creation.

This comes from the eruption of this rebellion of Satan, of Lucifer, in the heavenlies, where this war erupted. And so it was here. Creation took place in the middle of this warfare. And from a military point of view I look at creation as the establishment of a forward operating base.

Participant: Amen.

John: I think that when Adam and Eve and the garden were created, I think that God was establishing a forward operating base by saying, “I’m going to retake the territory that belongs to Me. I have a process. I have a procedure. I have a way that I’m going to do this. But I’m establishing a forward operating base. In other words, I’m going to war.”

There was war before the Garden. In the garden He says, “I will put enmity between your seed and her seed.” One of the translations says, “I am declaring war.” So there’s

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war in the Garden and there has been war ever since the Garden. And we are involved in warfare.

And I believe that one of our purposes as men is to be warriors. We're to be engaged in this combat, this battle, this spiritual warfare that's taking place around us.

So perspective is the ability to keep the big picture in mind. I want to try to illustrate a little bit how much of this we're missing, okay? How many of you are familiar with the passage where Jesus says, “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly?”

All right, now. We've got to be honest here, okay, everybody? That's the second half of John 10:10. Without saying it, just silently, raise your right hand if you can tell me the first half. One. Anybody else? Two? All right. Tell me what it is.

Participant: The Good Shepherd.

Second Participant: “The thief comes to kill and to destroy.”

John: That's right. John 10:10 says, “The thief comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.”

Now for the theologians and teachers in this room, I want to point something out to you. John 10:10 is the most bifurcated verse in Scripture. You watch it, you listen to it, you hear it being spoken, you read it. We focus on the *life* part. We skip the *thief* part. And I want to propose to you that the abundant life that Jesus is talking about, what He is really after, the abundant life comes from getting in the battle to keep the thief from stealing, killing and destroying.

Now I want to underscore the issue of the thief's agenda—to steal, kill and destroy. You look at Aurora, Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, Charleston—you pick them. They're in the paper every day. We tend to look at those events as isolated and disconnected events. But gentlemen, you keep perspective and you have perspective. And you step back and you look at this thing of warfare. Those are not separate, disconnected, isolated events. All they are are places and times where the thief has found a willing ally to help him carry out his agenda to steal, kill and destroy. This is a coordinated agenda that's taking place all over the world because that's his agenda—to steal, kill and destroy. And we're living in that. We're seeing it more as evil is on the rise. You're going to see more of the things that I've just talked about.

In this warfare, one of the things that I really want to help guys understand is that every one of us are wounded men—every one of us. We're wounded in the Fall for sure. Many of us are wounded from the sins and the abuse of others. And we're wounded from our own folly and sin.

And so how I illustrate this is that I have a purple heart medal. I don't know how many of you know this, but Bruce earned a couple of these. He was shot down twice in Viet Nam. Some of the injuries that he's dealing with today are left over from the war. And what I do is that I want to pass this around. I'd like every man to actually touch this with your hand. And in that moment that you touch it, I want this medal to speak to you of your wounds. We've all got 'em, guys. I don't care how well you mask them. I don't care how hard you deny them. I don't care what you've done to medicate them. Every one of us are wounded people.

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But it’s in that reality, once you embrace that, once you say, “Okay,” that’s where I think I can give you some hope, okay? But let me just pass this around. I’ll give you a second. Let your wound identify with that medal, because you’ve earned it in the spiritual warfare. By the way, Jesus has one of those.

Participant: Yes. Mm-hmm.

John: “He was wounded for our transgressions.”

Participant: Amen.

John: His power of wounding is necessary for us to move into the process of becoming like Jesus. You do not get conformed into the likeness of Jesus apart from suffering, okay?

Let me tell you where I think there’s hope in this thing. First of all, we’re all wounded people. We’re wounded before we ever come to Jesus. A lot of us were wounded when we were children. We’re wounded. In battle—in Viet Nam or in the Middle East or in World War II—there was a thing known as the million-dollar wound. Have you ever heard of that term?

Participant: No.

John: The million-dollar wound was bad enough to get you out of the battle, sent home, but not bad enough to disfigure or disable you. That was the million-dollar wound.

Well, guys, all of us have already received the million-dollar wound. We’ve already got it, because, in Jesus, everything in Jesus is just the opposite of our natural inclinations. In Jesus we live by what?

Men: Faith.

John: No, we live by dying. How do you get? By giving. How do you lead? By serving. You become first by being last. You get exalted by being humbled. Everything in Jesus, men, is just the opposite of our natural inclinations.

So in this idea of wounded-ness, the natural inclination is to get out of that, to go home. But in Jesus the way to get healing is to get in the battle. That’s the mystery of this, men. When we came to faith in Christ and we began to follow Him, Jesus knows that His army is already wounded. They’re all bruised and battered and banged up and hurt. They’re all wounded. But He knows the way to heal, to restore life, to restore wholeness, to restore health. It’s to get in the fight, to get off the sidelines and on the front lines. That’s how we get healed.

So how do we do that? Well, first of all, I want to propose that in order to do this you’ve got to understand that in warfare, the critical issue is targets. If you can’t identify, acquire and put your resources on the right targets, you’re not going to win. That’s why intelligence and all the stuff that we do to try to identify the right targets is so critical to the conduct of the war. That’s why it is so difficult in the Middle East. Now ISIS is starting to help us, but we’re not taking advantage of it.

Participant: Yeah.

John: Because they’re wearing uniforms, the black flags. They’re painting their trucks. They’re starting to create targets and we’re just not taking advantage of them. But up until then, it was hard to identify the enemy because they didn’t wear badges or

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uniforms with special caps. They looked like everybody else. And when you did acquire them, when you did find them, they were in a mosque or a school, so typically our gazillion-dollar weapon systems were useless.

So that’s a real issue. How do we identify the enemy? How do we find out how we’ve been identified, how we’ve been targeted? And I want to propose—and I have a whole list of these things, but I’m only going to focus on one—I want to propose that one of Satan’s most strategic targets for each of us is what I’m calling *the true self*—who you really are.

Now let me explain that. At the moment of your conception, at that moment, the creative Genius of the universe was expressing Himself. He was creating someone who was going to be looking like Him, created in His image. And because He’s an infinite Being He created an infinite number of people, all of whom look like Him and none of whom look like each other. So at the moment of your conception, the creative Genius was expressing Himself in who you are—how He designed you and how He created you. You are a unique, marvelous, special, wonderful creative expression of the living God.

Participant: Amen.

John: But that’s a target for the devil. Do you know why? Because when you function out of your true self, that’s when you give glory to the Lord. If you start functioning out of a false self, something other than how He wired you and how He designed you, just a false self, that doesn’t give glory to the Lord.

Participant: Amen.

John: So Satan does everything he can possibly do to get us to move away from our true self into some kind of false self. Now there are lots of reasons for that, lots of ways that happens. I’m going to be very candid here.

Number 1. *Parents*. I know parent after parent after parent who lays on his or her children their expectations. And I’m pretty hard, kind of a drill sergeant almost, on parents, saying, “Stop that!” Your first responsibility as a parent, and maybe now as a grandparent, is to observe, observe, observe, observe, observe, until you discern how God has wired that kid. And then your responsibility shifts to bless. Bless how that child has been designed. Bless the way God has put that kid together, whether or not it’s consistent with your expectations. That’s the hardest thing for parents—to get their expectations off the table and really understand how God has wired that kid.

Second is *the school system*. The school system has to have a one size fits all. They don’t care about this unique individual in their classroom. They’ve got to teach to the test, and that’s a problem. We really don’t understand how to educate kids because we don’t know how to treat them individually.

And the third big area—and this might get more of the heights tight here—is *the church*. The church really hurts children, and that’s hard for people to understand. But we create expectations inside the church. If you’re going to be a real true follower of Jesus, you’ve got to go to the mission field. You’re going to be a full time worker. We create these false expectations about what really counts when it comes to being a follower of Jesus.

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Now when Jesus steps in and redeems a person, at the moment of redemption, He is redeeming the true self. He doesn't redeem the false self. There is no redemption for the false self. He redeems the true self. And when He begins the process of conforming a man to His likeness, to His image, restoring Him to the image in which he was originally created, He is doing that with the true self. He is not going to conform the false self to His image.

So we're in a real tension for a lot of us, that we've been given expectations—all kinds of things that have pushed us away—

Participant: A question over here, John.

John: Yes sir?

Second Participant: What do you mean by the false self?

John: Well, the false self is probably this. You'll probably get your own best illustration if you think about people you know who are phonies.

Participant: Yeah.

John: I mean, I see lots of them. They drive the fancy cars. They buy these big houses. They want big titles, trophy wives. There are all these kinds of things that guys do to create an image of who they are. But those aren't who they are. And you know people. You've been around them. You've seen them—the bravado, lots of different things. Guys have a million different ways to wrestle with this issue of becoming something other than the way God wired them. Okay?

Participant: And so in the Old Testament Jacob, as he goes forth, is the false self and when he is wrestling at Jabbok, his true self is revealed as Israel. He gets his new name.

John: Yep. That's a good illustration.

Participant: Amen. Good point.

John: I'm probably throwing some stuff out here, guys, that might be a little new, and you haven't processed it this way before. But at the end of the day, I'm redefining *calling*. Calling is always to our true self. I think this is why so many men struggle with the issue of calling because there is no calling for the false self. It's only as we operate out of how God wired us, how He put us together. When He was looking down at that moment of our conception, saying, “This is who I want Jack to be.” And He's committed to seeing that person of Jack conformed to the likeness of His Son. He made him in that image. That's who he reflects to begin with. And He is going to restore him in that likeness.

Now let me illustrate this, asking you to use your imagination. What I've discovered is that most men's imaginations are somewhat stunted. They're stunted because of television, the Internet and the fact that you don't read. That may not be true for everybody, but—and I'm on a campaign here—men, for whatever reason, are not readers. And reading, as you remember as children, stimulates the imagination. So I want to try to stimulate your imagination and to do it this way.

I'd like you to imagine standing on this high cliff, a couple thousand feet, overlooking this magnificent, beautiful valley. But right next to you is a bald eagle. And you're watching the bald eagle. You're watching him as he surveys his kingdom. And you see the thermals, the winds start to come up and the feathers start to ruffle. And you just

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watch him as he stands (*unclear.*) And then you watch him effortlessly spread his wings and launch off that cliff and begin to soar across that valley.

Now what I want you to try to imagine is what must that feel like? What would it feel like to lift off that cliff and begin to soar up and up? What are some words? What are some adjectives that come to mind?

First Participant: How about exhilarating?

John: Exhilarating.

Second Participant: Freeing.

John: Free. Freedom. Freeing. Absolutely.

Third Participant: Peace.

John: Peace.

Fourth Participant: Power.

John: Power.

Fifth Participant: Fulfillment.

John: Fulfillment. All these. I can find no negative adjectives to describe that experience—none. But what I have found is that, as that eagle is soaring through the valley, there’s one thought, one thing that comes to mind that trumps all of those, every one of them—free air fare. (*Laughter.*) The one thing that trumps everything else is that the eagle is soaring and he says, “I was made to do this.”

Participant: Yes.

John: I was made to do this. So when the hunting is harsh and the winters are bad and life is difficult, the eagle doesn’t go through an identity crisis and say, “Gee, life is tough. I think I’ll go and be a pigeon. Or maybe I’ll go and be a seagull.” In fact, the harshness of life makes it a better eagle.

Participant: Yeah.

John: Men, every man in this room, every man you know, I believe God intends for each of us to have this sense that I was made to do this.

Participant: Amen.

John: That’s where this idea of being designed in His image, created in His image—unique, absolutely unique—I was made to do this. And so part of the challenge is to kind of put an antenna, to put some kind of receptor up there for you to process the experiences of life, where you’ll start picking up signals beaming in on that part of your heart and your soul so that God will begin to communicate to you. I was made to do this.

Now let me tell you why it’s a warfare issue. When we look up and see that eagle soaring, I think all of us are constrained to give some glory to that eagle’s Creator because it is a majestic thing to see, when you see a bald eagle, a large bird like that, do what he’s designed to do.

Very few people stop and think about the Creator’s response when He looks down on that eagle. And men, I think that when the Lord looks down on that eagle soaring across the valley, I think the Lord goes, “Whew!” (*Laughter.*) “Look at that! I designed that! I created that! And it’s functioning the way I designed it and meant for it to function. And therefore it glorifies me.”

Participant: Yes.

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John: He gets glory from His creation when His creation functions the way He designed it to function.

Participant: Here, here.

John: It is warfare and Satan can't stand that. Satan wants the glory and he sure doesn't want the Lord to have it. So he wants that eagle in a zoo, a cage, a coop. He wants it constrained, restricted in some way so that it can't function the way that God intended for it to function. It's a warfare issue.

So as you process your journey and you begin to think about these things, I want to encourage you to put a little antenna, just a little receptor, in your own mind and heart and soul, as these experiences of life come, maybe from memory, where you begin to process and recognize that I was made to do this. And gentlemen, I do not care how old you are. I don't care how retired you are. I don't care. God has a vested interest in your glorifying Him, as He designed.

Participant: Amen.

John: So it is never, never, never too late in life to discover that I was made to do this.

Now we have a lot of other stuff. I want to switch to something else because I want to help you walk out of here with a little additional equipment to get in this fight. Paul says in 2 Corinthians that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty for the pulling down of strongholds.” In that passage he is clearly indicating that we're at war and we have weapons. So besides right perspective, we want to have the right weapons.

Now the first thing I need to do is that I need to define weapons. I would venture to say that most of you in this room really, truly do not know what a weapon is.

Okay, let me illustrate that. When you hear the word *weapon*, you're thinking shotgun, 30 or 6, .45. You're thinking, right? When that shotgun, men, is pointed at a goose, it's a shotgun. But when I change the light of sight on that shotgun, if somebody is trying to rape my wife, now it becomes a weapon, because the definition of a weapon is that a weapon is anything you can use that destroys your enemy's ability to wage war against you. That's a weapon. Every weapon in the Department of Defense arsenal has that as its singular purpose.

We're not a conquering nation or an enslaving nation, so we don't have weapons to do that. Our weapon systems are all designed to destroy our enemies' ability to conduct war. To take this definition further, anything you can use that destroys our enemy's ability to wage war against you, moving it into the spiritual warfare, here are some weapons from my arsenal that I want to put into yours.

The first one is *forgiveness*. Men, when we forgive, we destroy Satan's ability to wage war against us through bitterness, anger, alienation, revenge, hostility. Ninety-nine per cent of the things that screw up relationships can be resolved by forgiveness.

And Jesus is really clear about this, guys. He is very clear. The Lord's Prayer —“forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Right below that, in the fourteenth verse, he says that if you don't forgive, I won't forgive. And in Matthew 18, with the unfaithful servant, He strictly says, (*paraphrase*), “If you do not forgive from your heart, neither will my Father forgive you.” Men, un-forgiveness is one

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of the most dangerous grounds you can walk on. In my opinion, it puts your soul at some risk to bear an unforgiving spirit toward someone.

So as you process the history of your life and your experiences, one of the things I would encourage you to do is to really ask the Spirit of God to move in and shine a light and help you see if there are people in your past, people in your present, that you need to forgive. It may be a grandfather who is dead, a father who is dead. I don't care. Forgiveness is across ties. But we need to be people who forgive.

The second weapon is *generosity*. When we're generous, we destroy Satan's ability to wage war against us through the love of money and the deceitfulness of riches. We'll destroy them. Now men, tithing is an act of obedience. Generosity is an act of gratitude.

Participant: Amen. Right.

John: And Barna, in their study, if their study is right—and I have no reason to doubt that it is—says that less than ten per cent of believing people in this country give ten per cent of their money.

So I'm going to take Barna's report and turn that around. What Barna's report is saying is that ninety per cent of the people sitting in the pews in this country are disobedient and ungrateful. I don't know how else to analyze it. So how do you get the living God to bless disobedient and ungrateful people?

Maybe this is a clue as to why the church has become so ineffective in a culture that is unraveling right around us. It's certainly worth thinking about, right? But when we're generous, we destroy Satan's ability to wage war against us through the love of money and the deceitfulness of riches.

Now I've picked those two in my arsenal basically because these are two cornerstones to the love of God. God's love gives—“for God so loved .. He *gave*”,--and God's love forgives. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” So if we're not givers and forgivers, we're not lovers. I don't know what we are—snake oil salesmen; I'm not sure—but it's clear to me that if you're not giving and forgiving, you're not loving, at least not according to love as I understand it from the Scriptures. So I want to challenge you on those two things, to really work through your own heart and your own soul before the living God. Ask Him. Is there someone, anyone out there, anywhere, any time, that I need to forgive? And how do I respond to Your generosity towards me in Your grace? What is this we came in? The embassy of grace?

Participant: Yes.

John: How do I respond to the grace that You give me towards other people? Generosity.

And men, one of the areas of generosity, one of the critical areas of generosity, is not money. One of the most critical areas of generosity where we can give is our acceptance of other people. There are a lot of lonely people out there, a lot of people who don't have friends. We can be accepting, generous, with our acceptance.

Okay. So those are two weapons I started with because they represent the two cornerstones of God's love. The third weapon is *a clear conscience*. Paul says, “I strive always to maintain a clear conscience.”

“The Rights”

We maintain a clear conscience by seeking forgiveness, confession, walking with the Lord. But a clear conscience destroys Satan’s ability to wage war against us through guilt, shame, fear, embarrassment, humiliation. You’re taking the fight to the enemy when you do this. You’re just flat out taking the fight to him.

Those three, okay? Now in the Marine Corps, those would be what we would call individual weapons--45, M-16, hand grenade—those are individual weapons we carry. But we also had a thing called unit weapons, or cruise serve weapons—primarily machine guns and mortars, where it took a team to operate.

Well, in this spiritual warfare, *fellowship* is a team. Fellowship is a weapon because God never intends for any of us to navigate life solo. The life in Jesus is not a solo life. We’re to be journeying together as part of a band of brothers. Jesus said that if two or three get together, (*paraphrase*), “I’ll be there.” “He sent them out two by two.” He thinks in terms of a team.

In the military every aviator has a wingman. Every ranger has a ranger buddy. Every seal has a swim buddy. Every soldier has a foxhole buddy. Every Marine has a bar keeper. We do not send men into battle by themselves. It’s just not done.

So I want to challenge you, as part of this larger group—and I’m sure that somewhere along the line Bruce has talked about this—to begin to form little groups—twos and threes and fours. Not big groups, just a handful. I like four. Four is a big number in Scripture

But here is what is to be achieved as part of this fellowship. Number 1. *You get together in Jesus’ name*. You don’t get together in the name of the church or some fund raising program, or anything else. You get together in Jesus’ name because Jesus said, (*paraphrase*), “If two or three get together in My name, I’ll be there.” There is power in the name. So you get together in His name. You pray. “Lord, we’re here. We’re here in Your name. This is Your idea,” and, however else you want to say it, “we expect you to show up.” It’s your idea. Have little poles.

Now when you get together, the agenda is to read the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Those are almost lost books today. We get so much of our thinking and theology out of the Epistles and some out of the Old Testament. The Gospels seem to be a little bit lost. Read them fresh. Just say, “Jesus, what do You mean by this? Let us in this twenty-first century get a feel of what You had in mind for those guys who heard it the first time in the first century.” Read the Gospels.

And then tell your stories. Every man has a story. Every man’s story is worth the telling, and every man’s story is worth the hearing.

And the way you heal all of this wounded-ness that we have, is that all of us have a broken story. Everybody’s story has brokenness. And the way you fix a broken story is that you embed it in a greater story. And we take our stories together into the greatest story that has ever been told. So we find healing, we find fellowship. And we find the things that we’re looking for that are of Jesus, as we take our stories together into His story, into the great story, the great story of redemption, the great story of restoration.

Those are just a couple of things—right perspective, right weapons to enable you to get into the battle, to get off the sidelines and into the front lines.

“The Rights”

So I want to close by quoting Thomas Brooks. Thomas Brooks said that there are only war veterans in heaven, those who fought the good fight in the kingdom of God.

Participant: Amen.

John: So when you leave here today, guys, I want you to re up on the battle. In the battle, take the challenge to get in the fight for the kingdom of God. And when you walk out of here, I want you to walk humbly, knowing before Whom someday, we’re all going to have to stand. But while you walk humbly, I want you to walk tall, because you’re a friend of the King.

Let us pray. O Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your mercies which are new this morning, and fresh. And, oh God, we are so grateful that they will be new and fresh tomorrow, whether we succeed or fail today. Let us be men who live and walk in grace—grace towards others, strangers, those closest to us. Let us be ambassadors of this place, of this embassy of grace, knowing that tomorrow Your mercies will be new again. Help us to become good warriors, Lord—good warriors, skilled warriors at these weapons—forgiveness, generosity, a clear conscience, banding together in little groups of fellowship, getting to know You and to be more like You. And to the degree that we’ve been off chasing things that are really not us, kind of a false self—it takes a lot of courage, Lord, it takes a lot of courage to let some of that go and to begin to restore our true self. And courage comes many times from encouragement that comes from others. That’s why this little group is so important, that we don’t do this by ourselves. That’s just now how You designed it. So don’t let guys get off by themselves. Don’t let them hear the lure, the siren of the devil, because he loves to divide, he loves to isolate and he loves to destroy. We thank You for this day. We just want to pray Your great blessing on Bruce and his ministry at the camp, that today he would find a special sense of anointing, a special sense of clarity and power, as he seeks to present the gospel of Jesus to the folks there. We thank You for this day, this time together. We thank You for it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Men: Amen! (*Applause.*)