

Being a Spiritual Family That Walks in God's Blessing

I. OUR PRIMARY CALLING

Each year in January, my wife and I go away and spend a few weeks in Florida together. During that time, it is a really good opportunity for me to have long conversations with the Lord about what am I doing and why am I doing what I am doing. I ask, "Lord, what are You doing? What are You doing here? What are You doing there?" So at that time—it happens to be the first of the year—I like to review and ask these questions again, the same questions of previous years.

So I want to ask you, what are you doing here? Why are you in Kansas City? Why are you a part of the Bible school or part of the IHOP staff? Why are you a part of this spiritual family here? What is the Holy Spirit doing here? What is the Holy Spirit doing in the earth? What is He emphasizing? What does He want you to focus on in this season of your life? What does He want you to be prepared to do? Those are very important questions.

In the most general sense, the answers are not confusing at all because two of the most well known passages in the Bible from the lips of Jesus give us the understanding and the information. Now these passages are very well known, but they are not always fully embraced and walked out. As a spiritual family I am saying, "Holy Spirit, help us to walk these things out in an intentional way with a focus, because we want to be doing what You are doing in our midst." While you are here in this city, and then when you are back home in another city, those of you that are students, ask the same question again.

- A. Jesus committed to build His church, and He exhorted us to make disciples (Mt. 16:18; 28:19). Thus, the **primary calling** for each ministry is to know God and to make Him known, as we work together with others to *build the Church* and *engage in the Great Commission*.

¹⁸***"I will build My church..." (Mt. 16:18)***

¹⁹***"Go...make disciples of all the nations..." (Mt. 28:19-20)***

There are two things Jesus said very clearly. He said, "I am building My Church." That is what He is doing. He is building a Church. Then He exhorted us to do something. Now in some ways we are building the Church with Him. He says, "No, no, I am doing it. I am inspiring people. I am aligning people. I am releasing different callings and assignments. I am building My Church. As for you"—though we are building it with Him in that secondary sense, yet in a very real way—"I want you to focus on making disciples."

Therefore the primary calling of every ministry is to work together with other believers. Not only with believers in our midst, we are to work together with all the born-again believers that the Lord helps us to connect with both locally and abroad. Together we build the Church in the geographic area where God has put us, and together we engage in the Great Commission, and we make disciples. Now one thing we can be sure of is that these two mandates are going to succeed.

- B. Jesus is returning for a mature, functioning Church that is filled with glory.

²⁷***...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church... (Eph. 5:27)***

Jesus is returning in the sky and fire, and He is returning to a fully mature, functioning Church. He is returning to a Church that has successfully made disciples of hundreds of millions of people in the nations of the earth. So the discipleship mandate will succeed, and the building of the Church will succeed.

Today when I look at the landscape of the Church, I say, "Lord, there is a lot of change that has to happen." Because we are not talking about building gatherings on Sunday morning where 10,000 or 20,000 people come.

That is not necessarily the same thing as Jesus building a Church. I am not talking about building a large gathering of people in a building. I am talking about Jesus building a New Testament Church that functions as a spiritual family.

II. COMMITMENT TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Jesus is committed to the Church, and Jesus is committed to discipleship. So as believers who love Him, we are committed to the Church, and we are committed to making disciples because He is. If He is, we are, because we love Him and we want to do what He is doing.

- A. Jesus' primary plan in this age is to build the Church, which functions as a spiritual family. One of Jesus' greatest prophecies is that He will build a Church that walks in victory over Satan and that is committed to the first and second commandments. The Church is God's idea.

¹⁸“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt. 16:18-19)

1. Jesus promised to release His authority through His Church to *bind* the works of the enemy and to *loose*, or release, the works of God.
2. The phrase, *gates of Hades*, speaks of Satan's authority. Jesus promised that the authority of hell would not prevail against His people. Imagine a people in whom the enemy has no inroads and where each is walking free of demonic influence in their life and family.
3. The fullness of God's promise of power is in relation to His people functioning as spiritual families (local churches), in which the strong uphold and care for the weak.

His primary plan is to build a Church that functions as a spiritual family. Now there are many implications to functioning as a spiritual family, and it is bigger than our context this evening to go into all of those details, but that is His plan. That is the primary thing that Jesus is doing in this age. He is building His Church that functions as true disciples functioning together as the family of God in every tribe and tongue of the earth.

It is your inheritance to be a part of the family of God, but it is more than just your inheritance and my inheritance. It is our responsibility to do our part in the local church. It is not only just a blessing and a promise, but it actually is a responsibility. The good news is, before the Lord returns, all of His Church worldwide will be embracing the mandate, the commitment to build the Church and to disciple individuals as well as the nations of the earth.

Matthew 16:18-19 is one of Jesus' greatest prophecies—that He is going to build a Church that walks in victory over Satan. He is going to build a Church that walks out the first and second great commandments—to love God and to love one another. The reason we know it will walk out the first and the second commandment is because the Church in the New Testament did that. The Church in the New Testament was a prototype of what He is going to do at the end of the age, but at the end of the age it is going to go far beyond what He did in the first century. The Church will be filled with glory, every tribe and tongue of the earth walking in the spirit of discipleship. The Church is going to walk in victory over Satan. What a powerful promise!

To some people the Church has gone out of style. They are saying, “Well, you know, the last ten or twenty years, people are not really into the Church anymore.” I have good news for you. The King of kings is really into the Church. He has not set it aside. It is His building plan in this age. He has allowed certain things to happen, but He is going to correct them. At the end of the story it is going to be a testimony of the glory of God,

how He is going to bring a great reversal in the Church. Again the people of God will be committed to the Church, and they will be committed to discipleship.

Let's read this amazing prophecy. It says in verse 18, "I will build My Church"—this is a prophecy—"and the gates of Hades"—the gates of Hell, and the gates speak of authority. The authority of hell—"will not prevail against My people." They will operate in the authority of Jesus. They will walk in victory over Satan's temptations to lust, over Satan's attacks of sickness, all kinds of things. The Church will actually walk in victory, and the gates of hell will not prevail over the Church.

Then in verse 19, He talks about prayer. He says, "I am going to give you"—He is talking to Peter and through Peter He is talking to the whole Church, not only to Peter—"I am going to give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and with those keys you are going to be able to open and shut doors of blessing." He goes on to describe the keys. "With these keys, Peter, you will bind the works of darkness, and you will loose or you will release the works of God." That is what He is talking about here in this context.

The point I want you to grasp is that the great promise of verse 19—to bind the works of darkness and to release or loose the works of God, and we often talk about the glory of that promise—it is in context to verse 18. It is not just a random promise that independent, isolated believers are going to operate in power. He said, "I am building My Church, and **in that context** My authority will be manifest in the greatest measure." Jesus will manifest His authority most in the context where the people not only enjoy the family of God, but they are committed to it. They build it and give themselves to it because He is building it, not because man is building it.

Now can you imagine a spiritual family—and I believe this will happen all over the earth, I mean all over Asia and Africa and Europe and the islands of the earth—can you imagine a people in whom the enemy has no inroads? I mean imagine a church family, a spiritual family, whether it is 200 or 300, 2,000 or 3,000, 10,000 or 20,000, it does not matter, in which Satan has no inroads into that spiritual family, where the people are walking free from demonic influence. Imagine all the children walking with God, marriages obeying the Lord and operating under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. That does not mean all their circumstances will be easy. Can you imagine a church context in which the gates of hell does not have inroads in oppression and breaking lives and families in the midst of that family?

Well, Jesus was stirring up our holy imagination and our faith saying, "That is where I am going, this is where the Church is going, and this is where the prayer movement is going." The prayer movement and the Church is one reality in His heart because Jesus is coming back for a Church that has a culture of prayer in it. We are not talking about 24/7 prayer rooms in every congregation; that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about a billion, two billion people dwelling in spiritual families all over the earth in which a culture of prayer is normative.

Now today it is not normative. Today commitment to discipleship is not normative, but beloved, there is going to be a great reversal. Undoubtedly there will be some difficulty in that reversal, but there will be a lot of blessing in it as well. As for me and my house, I am saying, "Lord, I am in all the way. I want to be a part of the process that transforms my life, and I want to be part of the answer, not a part of the problem. I want to be committed to Your Church and committed to discipleship, not resisting Your Church and not resisting discipleship. I want to go all the way, and I want to see the glory of Jesus in the midst of people all over the earth where Satan and his strongholds have been driven out and people are walking free."

- B. The Lord desires all His people to have a sense of belonging to a spiritual family and to take responsibility to do their part in serving, supporting, and building up that family. Every believer is called to participate in strengthening the family of God in a local congregation, as well as honoring and relating to the Body of Christ in other congregations and denominations, etc.

Jesus desires that all of His people have a sense of belonging to a spiritual family. There are many implications to this sense of belonging. Whether you are in our midst for a few months or a few years as a student or an intern and then you are in another city, you want to enter into the vision that God has and what He is building. I do not mean what men are building, but what He is building. I can assure you what He is building—He is building His Church, and He is raising up people that make disciples. That is what He is doing. He has made it very clear.

One reason that He wants all of His people—every believer—to have a sense of belonging is because that is their place of safety and of spiritual success. You take a believer, no matter how fervent they are, and they do not have a sense of being connected with and belonging to other believers—and I do not mean just a little group of four or five over on the side, but I mean a diverse people of young and old, different races, different ages, different styles. I mean the diversity of the Body of Christ. It does not take thousands to have that diversity. I am talking about the diverse expressions of the grace of God in a people that are different educationally, economically, ethnically, different passions, different likes and dislikes, but by the grace of God they have a sense of belonging to one another and belonging to the vision God has for that geographic area.

Because all over the earth, well, let's just take our own city because what is happening here is happening in many cities of the earth, hundreds and thousands of cities. There are about a thousand congregations—I do not really know the number, but somebody said more than a thousand—I will just say a thousand. Those thousand congregations are all very precious and valuable to the Lord.

Every one of those congregations is to operate as a spiritual family with a sense of belonging among their members, but even then having a sense of some connectivity with other congregations. Now a thousand congregations cannot all feel connected to a thousand congregations because no one has enough time for that, but God wants congregations to have deep connections to other ones across cities and regions.

When some people hear the idea that God wants everyone to have a sense of belonging to a spiritual family, it is very normal for us as humans to think, “Yeah, I have a right to belong. Yeah, what about me?”

The Lord is saying, “Well, that is good, but let's make that question number two. First what about you? Are you doing the sort of the thing that helps other people to belong?” This glorious reality of people having a sense of belonging is not an entitlement. It is actually a responsibility for us to create an environment where others feel pursued, connected, cared for, and valued. Not others who are just like us, who like what we like, who do what we do, but people who are different from us.

I tell you, it requires spiritual vitality to be connected to people who do not like everything you like. Most folks say, “You know I will get with ten or fifteen people who like the same music, like the sports, like the same recreation, we are all about the same age, we all connect together.” That is cool. There is nothing wrong with that, but the Lord is talking about something more than hanging out with cool people who are like you. What about non-cool people who are not like you? I am grateful there is no definition for what cool is, so I will just leave that out in the open.

As a spiritual father, I am looking at our congregation, and I am not wanting you to be thinking, "Hey, I am entitled to belong." I want you to be thinking, "I am going to do my part so other people feel like they belong." It is good for yourself to feel like you belong as well, but I want to take a different approach to this.

- C. Jesus revealed the transcendent God of Israel as the Father—He thinks, feels, and acts like a father. He desires to express His heart as a father through spiritual families that care for one another. He wants each member of His family to experience and express His love to others.

³⁵***"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (Jn. 13:35)**

Jesus revealed the God of Israel, the Transcendent God of Israel. He revealed the God who was in Israel's mindset this glorious, majestic, all-powerful, distant God. Transcendent means really powerful, really mighty, really amazing, infinitely superior. Jesus said, "Let Me talk to you about Him. He is a Father. He is not just a King; He is not just powerful. He is actually a Father, and He has a deep desire for a family. Not just for a family, but He desires a family that functions as a family, that cares for others. Who do not care only about their place in the family, but they care for the place of others in the family." Jesus said, "That is what My Father is like."

He thinks like a father, He feels like a father, and He acts like a father. What He desires is to express His fatherhood through the Body of Christ in the geographic area where each local family is. Like here in south Kansas City, He wants us—there are 100 congregations in Kansas City or more; I do not know the number—He wants all of us in our spiritual families, in our congregations in a very specific way, with some reaching out and connecting one to another.

I have many pastor friends in this city. I have been friends with them for thirty years, many of them. I interact with them and meet with them. We share stories and celebrate what is happening in each other's congregations and each other's ministries. That is a glorious reality! A lot of our different leaders have that connection.

I was talking to some of our leaders by email and even verbally the other day, and we were calculating the number of leaders that in fifteen years at IHOP we have interacted with in a one-on-one way or a one-on-two way. I mean whom we have had a meal with or we have had a couple hours of heart-to-heart dialogue and fellowship. By the number of leaders that visit us every week and the number of leaders that we have out ministering—I do not know the number but somebody said that we probably have ten or fifteen leaders, worship leaders, preachers out every single week somewhere in the nation in another church gathering—we added up the numbers, and I got different numbers from different folks, but it was several thousand leaders with whom one or another of us has had a one-on-one leadership connection and have talked for several hours together. We have had this amazing blessing of connective-ness. Some say as few as 2,000, 3,000, or 4,000 individual, different leaders. Some say 5,000 to 10,000. I do not know. I really do not care what the number is. I know this, there is remarkable blessing God has given us in being able to interact and celebrate with the Body of Christ far outside the boundaries of this place. I love the Body of Christ! I love the Church, different denominations, different focuses, and different emphases.

This idea that we only want to be with the folks that are like us—I tell you the Body of Christ is so big, so different. I think of leaders that I have met in other nations of the earth; I have been in their homes and their pulpits and met with them here. We are so radically different, but it is beautiful. A lot of different theological points of emphasis, but we all share in common the main and the plain realities of who Jesus is and the authority of His Word.

I tell you it is a glorious way to live, building the family of God in your midst and connecting with the larger family of God in your city and in the nations of the earth in as much as God gives you the opportunity. Some of you say, "I do not really know any others," but you will. Give it time. You will have plenty of opportunities as the years unfold.

*Here is the point I want to make. God wants our spiritual family to reflect His fatherhood to unbelievers who are watching us. He wants that same thing in a thousand other congregations in our city. He wants those congregations to be able to reflect His fatherhood by the way that we care for one another, the way we connect with one another. They will look at us and say, "Surely there is a Father who is motivating them. Look at the way they enjoy one another, the way they value one another. Surely the God who inspires them is not only a King, He must be a Father. He **must** be a Father."*

Jesus made it clear in John 13 that people are going to know we are His disciples by the way that we connect with one another. Again, this is not believers connecting only with believers who like the same movies, who like the same sports, who like the same music. We are talking about something far beyond that. Because of His graciousness to us as individuals, we see the value of the human spirit to God.

It may be the most down-and-out guy living under a bridge, who has no resources, no ability to help you in any way, but he is human, and you see that he is human. Therefore he is indescribably valuable to God. You look at him and say, "I do not like the music you like. I do not like the place you sleep. I do not want to spend the night with you under the bridge. I do not like the place you eat. I do not want to eat dinner where you eat dinner—at the trash bin. But you know what? I see how valuable you are, and I want to hear your story. I want to care about who you are. I care about your pains, your sorrows, your hopes, your dreams." I tell you that homeless man under the bridge has dreams like you do, exactly like you do.

We see each other through the lens of how the Father sees us, and we connect with each other that way. Jesus said, "You do that, not just with the folks who like the same music and the same stuff you like. Go beyond that. You put time and energy into those who are different, and unbelievers will say that the God who inspires you must be a Father. He must be." They will see that the believers do not get anything out of those to whom they are relating in the natural. Meaning they do not get more money. They do not get an open door for opportunity. Their profile is not enhanced in anyway, but they care for that guy even though that guy cannot give them anything in the natural. They are grateful as redeemed human beings, and they see the value of other human beings.

- D. When unbelievers see believers in local churches consistently expressing love to the weak, the needy, and the lost, they will know that it is God, our Father, who inspires such love. Together, we have an assignment to reveal the Father to believers and to the lost (Mt. 5:16). He wants each of us to play our part in expressing His heart to those in the area in which we live.
- E. The command to love one another extends beyond loving only the people who enjoy the same things that we enjoy. Spiritually strong believers are to actively love weaker believers out of a genuine heart of compassion, rather than hoping for any kind of gain (resources, reputation, etc.)
¹²**"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 15:12)**
- F. God ordained that each believer be a "joint of supply" that reveals His love to others.
¹⁶**...the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body... (Eph. 4:16)**

- G. We are not to forsake gathering together. Many embrace a “churchless Christianity.” Much is lost in our spiritual life and in the life of family and children, if we forsake assembling together. God has ordained the local church as a place of our greatest blessing, joy, and safety.

²⁵...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

In Hebrews 10:25, we are told not to forsake the assembly of ourselves together as is the manner of some. It is popular today to forsake the gathering together as the family of God because everyone in the gathering is not interesting to everybody else. “I am not interested in them. They are not interesting to me. I do not need to bother with it.”

The writer of Hebrews said, “Do not forsake the gathering”—the regular family gatherings—“of the people of God.” I tell you, there is always a group of people with whom you have no connection in natural. By natural likes and dislikes, they are not the same as you at all.

The writer of Hebrews said, “I exhort you to exhort one another, to encourage one another.” I like the translation that says to encourage one another; this says to exhort. Do you know what to encourage one another means? It means to put courage in their heart by what you say. We are called not to just enjoy each other, though I love that part of fellowship. We are called to put courage into people's hearts. I do not mean just courage that life will get better, but courage to be true in their walk in God, true to righteousness and obedience. We give them courage to say no to temptation and despair. We give them courage to sacrifice their resources for the sake of others in the kingdom. We give them courage by the Word, by our stories, by prophesying to them, by loving on them, and by hearing their heart. We put courage into them.

The writer of Hebrews said to do this all the more. Do it more and more the closer you get to the coming of the Lord. It will be more relevant because the environment of society will be more hostile to the people of God the closer we get to the coming of the Lord. There will be greater hostility, greater immorality, greater reproach, greater attack, and greater betrayal. The closer we get, the more hostile it becomes, and therefore the family of God needs to gather together regularly, valuing people besides just their four or five buddies, and saying yes to the pastoral grace.

Did you know there is a pastoral grace on every one of our lives, some of you more than others? Every one of us, by virtue of being called to function in the Body and to make disciples, actually has a pastoral mandate. We all have a mandate in a certain measure to care for other people; that is a pastoral mandate.

Some folks only think about their own happiness, having four or five friends, and what they need to do to get ahead. There is nothing wrong with that, but there is more to think about than that. When you are in this room, one of your questions should be, “Lord, who in this gathering”—I do not mean just tonight—“can I sow into, that would be a blessing to Your heart, though it will not necessarily give me anything?”

Now if somebody comes up to you tonight and gives you a hug, don't say, “Oh, so you think I cannot give you anything? Am I one of those guys you are having mercy on? Is that what is going on here?” Do not go there!

III. COMMITMENT TO DISCIPLESHIP

- A. Jesus' final exhortation to His people is to make disciples of individuals and the nations. The command to “go” includes taking initiative to make disciples.

¹⁸“**All authority has been given to Me...**”¹⁹**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...**
²⁰**teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you**
always [His manifest presence], even to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:18-20)

The commitment to make disciples is the final exhortation Jesus gave to His people as a whole. Matthew 28:18-20 is after the resurrection. Jesus has come back fully God, fully man, raised from the dead with a physical resurrected body. He says, “I have good news for you. All authority has been given to Me. I have all authority in heaven and earth. In other words, I have the authority to back up what I am going to tell you to do next.” That is what He meant. He is saying, in effect, “I can back up what I am telling you to do. I have all authority in the spirit realm in heaven, and I have all authority in earth, the earthly realm. I could command angels and demons alike. So here is what I want you do, knowing how much authority I have and that victory is certain. I want you to go make disciples.” It is interesting that Jesus connects His position of authority with His exhortation for us to make disciples.

Jesus said to make disciples of the nations. We disciple individuals. We also disciple cities or nations by impacting the different spheres of society with the influence of the kingdom. So a man or a woman who is in the marketplace or in the educational system or in the military or in the media, in as much as they are proclaiming the ways of God and doing the will of God in that sphere of society, is actually involved in the discipleship of that city in that sphere, in that little way, but what they are doing really matters.

A lot of folks talk about making disciples. But here is the critical phrase that He says in verse 20. He says, “When you make disciples, teach them to obey everything I commanded you to obey.” He said, “I want you to teach them to obey everything.” Now the clearest summary of Jesus’ teachings that we are to obey is the Sermon on Mount, in the eight Beatitudes.

He is saying that in the marketplace, in the educational system, in the military, in the media, wherever you are in society as well as your home and the one-on-one people that you are discipling or the one-on-two or one-on-five—whatever the number is—it is not enough just to befriend them. That is very important to befriend them, but it is more than them feeling that you like them and they like you. That is foundational, but that is only the beginning. He is saying that there is more involved than them liking you and them feeling like you like them. He said, “I want you to teach them what I put in the Bible.”

“Well, how much of it?”

*“I want you to teach them to obey **all** the things, **all of them.**” Again the clearest place of reference, or point of reference, is the Sermon on the Mount.*

In the Sermon on the Mount He gives eight Beatitudes that we are to be committed to and promote in our relationships. That is Matthew 5. Then He identifies six negatives that we are to resist. Anger, immorality, not keeping our word, things like that. He identifies six. Resist the temptation to retaliate when someone mistreats you. He identifies six things in Matthew 5. Then Matthew 6 He identifies five things we are to do actively: serve, give money, fast, pray, forgive, bless our enemies, etc. So Matthew 5-6 really lays it out quite clearly.

Some people have thought of discipleship as mostly communicating to other people that I like you and I want you to like me. Beloved, there is more to discipleship than that, though that is very important. I do not minimize that all. But we are not making disciples if we are not taking a stand for the details of the Sermon on the Mount. I don't mean that every time you meet someone you give them a sermon. That will wear out real quickly.

I mean that, with sensitivity in the Spirit, you share your own journey, your own failure, your own steps forward and steps backward as you are trying to keep those eight Beatitudes in your life. In doing that, you actually are

teaching others as well. So it's not that you gather, you pull out your Bible, you point your finger at them, and you start saying, "Well, let me tell you what you need to know." I am not talking about that. Tell them your failure and your struggles, and you will be teaching them.

I look at that Sermon on the Mount, and I think, "Jesus, most of the stuff in the Sermon on Mount is politically incorrect in a major way in society today. Those eight Beatitudes—blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those that mourn, blessed are those that are meek, that hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those that endure persecution without retaliating—nobody in their flesh wants to do those eight things."

So I want to warn you—of course you already know because you are smart people—all of these things of verse 20 are politically incorrect things. They make people go "bah-humbug" in various ways. Or "How dare you insinuate..."

We feel like, "Jesus, could we dial this down a little bit?"

He would say, "No, all of My commands are born in love, and all My commands will help them enter into the fullness of their destiny. If you love them, you teach them what I commanded you to teach them."

Don't worry about it, thinking, "Ugh, I just got them to think I like them, and I do like them, and they just like me. We are going to ruin the whole thing now if I bring Bible verses into the conversation." Don't think that!

- B. A disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus in character, message, and activities. Jesus' disciples are those who do and say the things that He did and said. For example, He showed mercy, helped the needy, healed the sick, as He taught people what God was like.

A disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus; that is what a disciple is. We are devoted, though that does not mean our follow-through is great. The setting of our heart is real; it is sincere. My follow-through has come up short so much in forty years, but the reason I have confidence that I am a disciple is that, when I fail, I like to call it failure and sign back up to give myself to do that thing I failed do. That character trait, that attitude where I failed. We are devoted followers of Jesus in our character, in the message, and in our activities.

I find the most difficult is to be a devoted follower of Jesus in sharing the message. I can privately walk out the eight Beatitudes without bothering somebody else with them, and they will think I am amazing because I am easy to get along with. It is when I start calling them to the eight Beatitudes that we have a problem.

We do the activities of Jesus. In other words, the disciples they did the things Jesus did, and they said the things Jesus said.

- C. We are to make *disciples* of Jesus, rather than making "our disciples," who follow us.

I want to see us develop a strong culture of discipleship, a strong culture, because you cannot build the church without making disciples. If you make disciples—by the definition of following Jesus—a disciple is a disciplined one. It is a believer who accepts the disciplines of their master, and the master is Jesus. Discipline sounds like a negative word, but discipline seen through the lens of the grace of God is a very positive, liberating reality.

I want to see us go from a prayer culture—we have a prayer culture, and, by the way, our prayer culture is not that strong. I tell that to some leaders, and they say, "What? That sounds like heresy, you guys."

I say, "No, actually we struggle. I mean we sit in prayer meetings, but that is not the same thing as praying." I tell leaders, "Hey, I am not saying that negatively; I really am not. I am blessed by our community. I love the sincerity, but I am not overwhelmed at our progress. I think in our progress we are going forward. I mean we

have gone from a full blast 'one' to a full blast 'two.' We have doubled our growth in the spirit of prayer. I love it, I love growing, I feel like we are going forward, but I do not think we have arrived at all."

I tell other leaders, "Do not think we have got this thing down. I do not think there is anything more challenging than developing a culture of prayer, because it takes your whole being to be involved in that. I mean you can **go** to a prayer meeting, but you are not going to have a spirit of prayer in your life **if** you check into a prayer meeting, sit around, and then have a different lifestyle outside the prayer meeting. When you do that, the prayer meeting is miserable. I know. I have done it both ways. It has been a while, but I have. I remember trying to grow in prayer in my early days, and no, it did not work."

A culture of discipleship is just normative for a New Testament church. I mean this is not some radical word. And, we are talking about making disciples of Jesus, not disciples of ourselves. In some groups that focus on discipleship, they say, "Well I have got three or four disciples." I do not want to make a big point if someone said that, but I do not want **us** to say that kind of stuff. I do not want to say, "Well, I have four disciples, my disciples." If they are **my** disciples, it is already broken. They have to be disciples **of Him**, loyal to Him, not loyal to me. They are not my disciples; **I am making disciples that follow Him.**

- D. There are many different approaches to making disciples and many contributing aspects to discipleship; we only contribute "in part" to the process of helping a person become a disciple.

I am not giving any big discipleship overview here. There are many approaches to making disciples, many different installments in the process of making a disciple. Meaning, there is discipleship in the classroom, like right now I am contributing to discipleship. Discipleship is not only one-on-one meetings; that is the most effective, but it is not the only way.

There is a little bit of discipling going on right now. There was a little bit of discipling going on when Ryan was leading worship, a little bit. The people on the team and some of you are being disciplined a little bit by what he is doing and the songs he is choosing. There is discipling in praying for one another, in fellowship times, and in one-on-one gatherings. Even through social media you can be engaged in discipleship. There are all kinds of ways, so do not only think of discipleship as one guy meets with one guy. That is highly effective, if you are teaching them the Bible. But some people do the one-on-one thing and teach how to follow themselves, not how to follow Jesus.

Another thing about making disciples is that we only contribute a little part in the discipleship process of another person. Meaning if we have Tom over here, hypothetically, I can make an impact, contribute some, and then another guy contributes some, then another guy, and another relationship, another setting. It is not like one guy disciplines Tom; there is a multitude of installments, if you will. That is not the best word, but I am speaking of interactions with other believers. The discipleship process is the culmination of a bunch of things happening, not only one guy discipling.

So I am talking about you taking some false responsibility where you think you are going to make this guy the "ultimate disciple." That is not what we are talking about. We are saying there are many approaches, and that is not my point here today. We are talking about intentionally learning how you are to participate in the disciple-making process in this season of your life, the next season of your life, the following season of your life because it will look differently in different seasons.

What I am calling you to tonight is to say, "I want to be committed to what Jesus is committed to. I want to make disciples. I want to build His Church. I want to do this. I do not know how to do it all, but I am going to say **yes** to the concept."

- E. Jesus is raising up a Church that makes disciples, not just a people that socialize together. Socializing is an important element of fellowship. Biblical fellowship involves socializing in the spirit of discipleship. The result of spending time together is to strengthen each other to be disciples of Jesus. Believers who merely socialize together—rather than committing to grow as disciples—can spend time together in a way that results in weakening each other spiritually.
- F. Every believer is to participate in strengthening the family of God in a local congregation, to commit to being a disciple, and to invest time and resources to help others be disciples.

IV. FIVE SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENTS

- A. Jesus gives most individuals and ministries specific assignments in the context of building the Church and engaging in the Great Commission. IHOPKC/FCF's five specific assignments are to keep a *24/7 sanctuary of worship with prayer*, to call people to walk out the *first commandment* as they are empowered by seeing Jesus as their *Bridegroom God*, to train *forerunner messengers*, to serve God's purpose for *Israel*, and to strengthen the *praying Church*.

There are two primary callings that every believer has. I know what your primary calling is: to build the Church and make disciples. Then, in context to building the Church and making disciples, there are specific assignments. It is all a part of building the Church; it is not the opposite of building the Church. Now God gives most individuals—probably all individuals, I do not know. All is a big word, but He gives most individuals—specific assignments at various seasons of their life that help them to build the Church and to make disciples.

He not only gives individuals specific assignments, He also gives congregations and ministries specific assignments. Now when He gives a specific assignment, it is not optional, because He is the head of the Church. So as an individual He calls you. For example, some individuals are really locked into counseling. Others are locked into making an impact among the mothers in their neighborhoods. Others are touching the people in the marketplace. Everyone has different assignments. And again, ministries also have specific assignments within the context of their two primary callings.

Now those assignments are individual and unique; they are diverse. Not one of you has the same assignment, exactly. Now many of you have the same assignment in a general sense, but it will be diverse in the outworking. The same is true of a ministry. There are thousands of ministries called to have a specific assignment in the area of developing a prayer ministry, thousands of them. The prayer ministries in the earth are exploding, but every one of them looks different from the others.

So the diversity is not about superiority. You are not superior because your assignment as an individual is different. You are not inferior or superior. You just want to be faithful. The same is true with ministries. I am assuming every ministry has several specific assignments. I have our assignments here. This is what we have been called to do by the Lord: build a twenty-four hour prayer, sanctuary of prayer. We are specifically called to call people to the first commandment.

Now everybody in one sense is to call people to the first commandment, but the Lord made a point out of it to us in the supernatural way He confirmed it. I want this people to lock into that assignment and do it and not think, "Well, Lord, everyone else will do it." Many ministries have this assignment by the way, thousands, maybe millions. I do not know how many, but thousands do at least.

We have an assignment to raise up forerunner messengers. We have an assignment related to God's purpose in Israel, and we have an assignment related to the praying Church. Now again, thousands of ministries have each

of these specific assignments, but they will all look different. Just like thousands of people have a calling like yours, but your walking it out will look different.

I tell in our prophetic history how the Lord supernaturally confirmed our assignment. The reason I tell our prophetic history is not so that people feel special. Some new people feel special because they have not done it yet. The supernatural dimension is because you need the supernatural confirmation because the assignment is hard. It is hard. It is difficult! The temptation to quit will be intense. So when the Lord gives a supernatural confirmation, it does not mean, "Wow, am I not amazing?"

What it means is, "Wow, it is going to be hard! You better not quit because the Lord made a point of telling you this is important to Him."

I have had people say, "Man, I wish I had this experience or that."

I say, "Well, then you would have the twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty-year mandate to walk in it. You get a five-minute encounter and a fifty-year assignment."

Because part of discipleship is walking out the assignments, individually and even collectively as families, another reason God gives supernatural confirmation is because the assignment is politically incorrect. I look at a few of the things the Lord has called us to do, and I mention them to the Lord, "They are politically incorrect!"

*I have not heard anything from Him, but I think the Lord would say something like, "I know but you said, 'I love You, Lord. I will do **anything**.' Okay, I want you to do this."*

"Lord, I will do anything." Many of you have that same spirit. Millions do worldwide. "Lord, I will do anything."

He responds, "Well, in that case, I want you to do this. And not only this, but I want this to be an expression of building the Church and making disciples."

*I see it as a great privilege to do something that is dear to God's heart, even though it is resisted by men. It is dear to God. What a privilege to give your strength, no matter what kind of resistance there is, if it is dear to the Lord. He went—and this is not the right way to say it, but—He went out of His way to tell you it was dear to Him by supernaturally confirming it. God never **really** goes out of His way; that is just a figure of speech.*

B. We are to **keep a 24/7 sanctuary of worship with prayer** in the spirit of the tabernacle of David.

¹⁵**The priests...who kept charge of My sanctuary...shall come near Me to minister to Me. (Ezek. 44:15)**

1. We *minister to God* by declaring His worth in an unceasing way on earth as a witness to how He is ministered to continually in heaven (Mt. 6:10).
2. We *labor in prayer* with the worldwide Body of Christ to partner with Jesus by asking Him to release a greater measure of power to win the lost, revive the Church, and impact society.
3. We *grow in intimacy with God* by encountering the majestic beauty of God as Father and Jesus as the Bridegroom, King, and Judge. Thus, we are empowered to love and obey God.
4. We *grow in understanding of the Word* by gaining insight into His will, ways, and salvation.

We will just take another minute or two. Our first specific assignment is to keep a twenty-four hour prayer sanctuary. Jesus knows He is returning to a Church with a culture of prayer. The Church today across the

earth—there is going to be great change before the Church has a culture of prayer in it. I say, “Lord, You are coming back, and the whole Church will have a culture of prayer. So how are You going to fix that?”

Part of the answer is the Lord is going to give a specific assignment to thousands of ministries to focus on prayer, thousands. Here is the most remarkable fact that I was told by some pretty smart guys who do the numbers. In 1984, thirty years ago, a group of guys really committed to prayer searched out all the prayer ministries in the world they could locate that had 24/7 prayer ministries. I am talking about a person in a prayer room for an hour, and every hour a new guy comes in and takes it for an hour, then another guy comes in.

They searched the world. I am sure they missed a few. In 1984 they found twenty-five ministries, and they were totally encouraged. Mind blowing! Twenty-five twenty-four-hour prayer rooms they could identify in the earth. Thirty years later, there are over 10,000 twenty-four hour prayer rooms in the earth. Now they do not all have worship teams. That is not my point. Many of the worship elements are happening all over the earth. The Lord says, “There are 10,000 to whom I have given that assignment to raise up a twenty-four-hour prayer room.” He may give it to a 100,000, but He wants to touch a billion. He said, “Will you bear that?”

I remember when we announced this fifteen years ago. “Why would you stand in a prayer room in all of that wasted time?” I mean just a backlash of energy of “How could you? Why would you? How dare you? How everything you?” It just went on and on.

I said, “Lord?”

He said, as it were, “Hey, I am leading the prayer movement. I made it clear to you that I want you to do this. Now will you do it? You said you would do anything.”

Again, it is the same thing with all of you. It does not have to be this assignment. It could be another one. “Yes,” He says, “Well, just do it.”

Yeah, but they say how about? How about? How dare? What about?

He says, “Yeah, but I am the One who told you to do it. You and I will talk at the end. They will not be a part of that conversation. We talk at the end, you are fine, so just do it.”

I think, “That is politically incorrect! It bugs a lot of people.” How many of you know the prayer mandate bugs people? How many of you know of anybody bugged by the prayer mandate? Raise your hand. A lot of people are bugged by it.

- C. We call people to walk out the **first commandment** empowered by encountering Jesus as our **Bridegroom King**. Grace-based holiness flows from cultivating intimacy with God and seeking to obey Him by walking out a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle (Mt. 5-7).

A little bit of time went by and He said, “Now I want you to call people in a really focused way to the first commandment, and I want you to reveal My tender heart towards them as a Bridegroom God. I want you to talk about it all the time, everywhere you go.” I mean, everyone does it in a general way, and again there are thousands of ministries doing it in a really focused way

So I thought it was pretty cool at first. Others asked, “What about the second commandment?” Well, of course if you do the first commandment, you will do the second. “What about? What about? How dare you?”

Oh my goodness, and I thought people would love that call. “Lord?”

He says, "Well, you know"—again I did not have this conversation, but you know it is in the Bible, this part—"in the generation I return, the nations are going to be filled with immorality. They are going to be filled with bitterness and despair. They need to know how I feel about them. Would you just make that point over and over and over? Tell them about My heart as a Bridegroom. Just do it. I know where society is going, and I love My people." There are thousands of people with that mandate.

Now I reminded the Lord that I was the son of a champion boxer; my dad was a boxer. I said, "I cannot do the Bride of Christ. I am a boxer." Now I did not do very well myself. I choose football, and my dad said, "Football? That is a wimpy sport." Anyway, that is another subject for another day.

The Lord says, "I want to fascinate My people with My heart, My tenderness, and My delight in them. I want to give them hope. I want to break off despair. Tell them this part, that I am not just a King with power. I am a Bridegroom with desire. Would you say that? Because I am giving this mandate to thousands, as society is going to need this."

- D. We are to raise up **forerunner messengers** who proclaim Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge, to spiritually prepare ourselves and others for the unique dynamics of God's end-time plan.

Then a few years go by, and He starts talking about the forerunner message. Now you know there are 150 chapters in the Bible, actually more, of which the primary subject is the end times. We have them listed on the website. Here is the reason: there is one generation of history where the dynamics are so intense, both positively and negatively, that the Bible talks more about that one generation than any other generation, in 150 chapters in the Bible.

The Lord makes it really clear and confirms it supernaturally so we cannot quit. That is the point. He does not confirm it so you feel special. He confirms it so you do not quit. Because the Lord would say, "Do you realize there are going to be so many offended people, so many confused people, so many deceived people, so many fearful people? But if you will make known what I have to say in these 150 chapters"—I do not mean just me, but He has given this mandate again to thousands of people around the world—"it will cause them to have peace instead of fear. Instead of being deceived they will have clarity. Instead of being offended they will trust Me. Will you do that?"

I do not know, and nobody knows when the Lord is returning. It is my opinion—it is not a prophecy, it is not a revelation. It is an opinion from the signs of the times from the lips of Jesus—it is my opinion that we are in the early days of that generation. Of course a biblical generation can be as short as forty years or as long as a hundred years. I do not even know if we are in that generation; it is an opinion. I look at the signs of the times, and most of them are together escalating on a global level for the first time in history.

I think, "Wow, things are picking up. We had better know those 150 chapters because people will be easily deceived, offended, fearful, and seduced without the knowledge of what You are doing, Lord." Now I do not know if I will see it in my lifetime. I really might not, but I do not even care. I do not care if it is my children, my grandchildren, or their grandchildren. The point is not when. The point is that we are approaching the season where the 150 chapters need to be made clear in the Body of Christ. Even if it is a couple of generations down the road, it is not too early to focus on those chapters.

When I was twenty years old, there was very little information on those chapters given to me by the fathers of the generation before me, almost nothing on the majority of them. I do not want to hand that to my children or their children or their grandchildren. It is time to lock into those chapters now. Even if it is for another

generation, two or three generations from now, you do well to start now. It is not too early to start getting clear with urgency.

I **think** things are picking up, but it is an opinion, not a prophecy. I have had people say that I am prophesying. No, it is not a prophecy at all. I am looking at the signs. They are all emerging, not all, but a lot of them at a global level for the first time in history. Jesus said in Matthew 24:33 that when you see these, you better understand I am coming soon. What does soon mean? I do not know, but it is not too early to lock into those 150 chapters and start learning them. They are about Jesus. They are not mostly about events. They are about a Man and His plan.

- E. We work with others to serve **God's purpose for Israel**, including a 24/7 worldwide prayer network that seeks to mobilize 100 million intercessors to pray for Israel's salvation, etc.

The most politically incorrect of all of our assignments is God's purpose for Israel. When He pointed that out, I felt, "Ugh, Lord I just want to be nice. I want to like people. I want people to like me. I want life fairly easy. I do not mind a trial here and there. Israel?" Now I mean Jesus' version of Israel, not the Israel version of Israel, because the Jesus version of what is going to happen to Israel does not make a lot of folks in Israel happy. Not the Arab version of Israel, nor the Western church version of Israel. Jesus'. I thought, "Ugh, that is the worst of all of them."

He said, "Well, you said you loved Me, and you would do anything. I just want you to just say things about this. Just stay with it. Do not worry about it. You are fine."

Anyway, let's stand. I am going to end with that.

- F. We strengthen the **praying Church**, which includes developing resources and helping others to plant churches and "house-of-prayer communities" (not under IHOPKC). The Lord will use many ministries working together to establish a culture of prayer in the Church in the nations.