

## Introduction

Good morning everyone; good to see you today. This morning, I'm excited. We're continuing on in our "Advance" series. One of the things that we're doing through this series is we've been talking about different mentoring and discipling relationships that are already happening within our church. Now, I'm trying to build this case that you need to be part of one these, but I want you to know that some of this stuff is already happening naturally by God's leadership within the church. Today, I'm pleased to introduce you to Jay Simms and Russell Gent. Russell has been part of a mentoring/discipling group among younger men for some time now. He has just started another meeting of these guys, and so they have been meeting for two weeks. Jay is a part of this latest iteration of that group, so I just wanted to hear from them today. I wanted to just start by asking you, Russell... tell us a little bit about how this started and what have been the "take-aways" for you, as you have been part of this.

Russell Gent: Okay, Steve; It started several years ago when our former pastor asked me and a lot of other men to disciple, for about six weeks, groups of men. From that, one of the other leaders of that and I combined and carried that forward with some discipleship books that we found that helped us all grow. For me, personally, I'd like to see men like Jay learn some things that took me a long time to learn, even though I became a believer at eight years old. Here are three quick examples. Clearly, when I was his age, my focus was job first, wife and family second, God third ... no question about it. That's just not the right order. It's God first, wife second, children and grandchildren next, and then the job has got to fit somewhere in behind.

Pastor Steve: I thought children went above grandchildren. Am I out on that?

Russell Gent: Well, it's really grandchildren then children, but you know... (Laughter) You know the saying... "If I knew how much fun they were, I would have had them first."

Pastor Steve: Exactly... I hear that.

Russell Gent: Another take-away is that, I'm ashamed to admit that it was in my mid-forties before I really understood how important it was, on a disciplined basis, to read and study the Word of God... Let's say in a year, over the course of a year, very carefully, from cover to cover.

Pastor Steve: So why is that important?

Russell Gent: What I came to understand through the Holy Spirit is that the Bible is the will of God for all of us collectively... all of us. So how am I going to understand what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to me individually if I don't understand what God said to all of us, collectively? It just took me too long to learn that, so hopefully they'll learn it through this earlier. Then another thing that has happened recently... Beverly and I believed that we were generous, but about seven years ago, we sold our business and some things happened, and God took us to another level of understanding generosity and Who is really in charge... That we're managers and it's really all His. That's something that hopefully, during the course of this, I can share.

Pastor Steve: Wow; those are some pretty great lessons to share. So, Jay; I mean, obviously you got a little sneak peek in there of some of the stuff that you're going to learn... whenever Russell approached you, or however that came about... why did you want to be part of this?

Jay Simms: Recently I decided to go back to school while still working full-time. In the process of doing all of that, my private life with God has kind of gotten pushed to the back burner a little bit, inch-by-inch, a little at a time. Recently one of my friends who has gone through this with Russell already, approached me and said that they were starting up a new session and wanted to know if I would be a part of it. I thought that a group setting would give me an accountability to make sure that I pushed God back up to the forefront of that idea so that, if there was an accountability of meeting with other men and talking about what it was we were doing and what it was that we were learning and how we were advancing our walk with God, that I would make sure to put that first and then push everything else back down the line.

Pastor Steve: Wow. Russell, I want to go a little bit off-script here. I didn't tell you I was going to ask you this but I just thought of this. When you were sharing the fact that God brought you these lessons that you said you were later in life before you realized those things... what was the moment... that conviction moment... where you said, "I've got to share this with other guys." Can you describe that a little bit or what God took you through for that?

Russell Gent: These things have just become very profound in my spiritual life and my walk. I would love to say the graph of my walk from eight years old to now was nice and smooth and upwardly trending but it's not. It has been very jagged with a lot of fall-offs and so forth. I don't think it was really an event, Steve; it's just a continuing of the Holy Spirit prompting me and saying, "Golly... I have let you understand these things are really important; why don't you try to share this with some other people, that they are important so they don't have to be getting to this point as late as you did?" I'm happy I got there; I'm really happy I got there. I just would have loved to have gotten to some of these places a lot earlier.

Pastor Steve: So Jay; for somebody that's maybe in a similar situation as you.. you would say, "You know, I'm at a place now where I need someone to speak into my life spiritually. What would be the advice that you would give to them? What would you say to someone that has been going through a similar struggle that you described?"

Jay Simms: Just reach out and find somebody. There are plenty of people around this church... Russell, your Life Group leader probably knows somebody... If you just walk up to the greeters' desk and ask them, there's somebody out there willing to talk to you about how to get closer to God and how to better understand what it means to be a Christian and to find a closer walk with Him.

Pastor Steve: Praise God for that. Men... thank you so much for sharing today; I appreciate it. (Clapping)

If you have your Bible, I want to invite you to open it with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. We are continuing on in our series, through "Advance" today, talking about what it means to be disciple-makers and asking God to raise up an army of disciples. Before we jump into that, I just want to pray and ask God to speak through His Word today.

"Lord, we love You. We want to hear from You today. God, I am often afraid to just really step out into obedience... God, to go to places that You want me to go. Father, I pray that You would take that hindrance away from me. Lord, I bet that if I'm scared to do that sometimes, there are other people in this room that are scared of that. So, Lord, I pray that You would bring a spirit of openness to this place for obedience. Lord, I ask that if there is any person who is here today that has yet to say 'Yes' to You, that today would be their day. Father, I pray that You have been drawing people unto Yourself; I pray that

today You would pull more in to the family of faith. Lord, I love You, and I pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

1 Thessalonians chapter 2, starting in verse 1: *"For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God..."* I want to read that again: *"...we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.*

*"For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God. You were witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory.*

*"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea."*

A few years ago, I needed a new suit. I no longer could fit properly into the one that I had. We were also in that great position of being young, in love, married, and broke. So I didn't have the funds to buy a suit. I found myself one day in a thrift store with my wife, looking at suits. I don't know if you've ever purchased a suit from a thrift store, but there I was looking at this. I don't remember if I had to do a funeral, a wedding, or what it was. I was back there at the back of this thrift store kind of looking at this, and I found this suit. I mean... it was a nice one. We're talking, if you would have found this in the store, hundreds of dollars. There it was... the price tag, I grabbed it... fifteen bucks. That's exactly right, "Yee haw" was exactly the way I felt. Now, when I opened it up to see the size, guess what? It was even in my size. Man... I got excited. So, I put this suit on; tried it on. You know, if this makes sense... the cloth covered my body, but you wouldn't say particularly that it fit. The word "potato sack" might have come to mind in that moment. It was just kind of hanging there. But for fifteen bucks I bought it and I want to tell you why... because we lived right down the street from a tailor. You know, that guy is like a magician. I took this suit in there that kind of was hanging on me, and he took the material and gathered it and pinned it and put chalk lines on me and was making marks all over this thing. I went back a week later, I picked up to suit; I put it on. You know, I ain't bragging... but I looked pretty good when I put that thing on... (Laughter) ... with I was like, "Wow!" The transformation was outstanding.

Why am I bringing that up? I think that sometimes what happens in corporate worship can feel a lot like off-the-rack clothing. It will do but it doesn't always speak precisely to the needs that are happening within your heart. This is the thing... Every week I'm going to be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ from this platform. That is what God has charged me to do. I can't believe that I get paid to do this. But at

the same time, there is no doubt that sometimes the truths that I speak, while God may apply them directly to your heart, you will often leave here with specific questions, specific needs, wondering "How does that truth of the Gospel apply directly to me?" This is the thing. I can't get to every person in this room and preach the sermon specifically that you need to hear. Thank God, through the power of His Word and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God uses the Word... it doesn't return void... and it speaks directly to people's hearts. But the truth of the matter is this: It is that there are times whenever you leave here, having heard the Word of God, and you then need someone to take that off-the-rack sort of the sermon and help tailor it to the spiritual struggles that you are having.

I want to ask you. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2... would you believe that I think that that's actually about the tailor-made discipleship process? You see, this is the thing: I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ is not just intended to preach the Gospel, as it has been tailored for the heart of humanity. I also think that the Church of Jesus Christ is intended to engage one another at a high enough level so that we might personally express the spiritual power of the Gospel directly to the needs of your heart. In other words, I think that what happens in here is great. I think that what happens in Life Groups is great, but you need someone, at some time, to get with you individually in a smaller group, one or two or three or four people together, where you can share your heart and say, "This is where I need the power of the Gospel to impact me. Can you help me?" We need spiritual tailors, and that's what the Church is supposed to be.

### **1. Begins With Speaking The Truth. (vv. 3-4)**

Now this is the thing that I want you to hear: When you read 1 Thessalonians 2, you're going to see some things immediately that jump out. I think that Paul is reminiscing, writing back to the Church. He is writing this letter and he's saying, "These are some things that will make a difference whenever it's time for us to get together and to think about the power that's there." We can start off immediately, right there at the beginning of the chapter, verses 3 and 4; he says, *"...our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."* Listen; the truth of God... Jesus Himself said that He was *"the way, the truth, and the life."* The truth of God is not logical to people who are only logical people; it is a spiritual truth. There are people who will hear the Word of God, and they'll say, "That does not make sense. It doesn't make sense that God would become flesh in Jesus Christ. It doesn't make sense that God would give His Son Jesus Christ as a sin sacrifice on the cross. It does not make sense that God would allow His Son Jesus Christ to be resurrected and to do so to demonstrate the firstborn among many of those who would be resurrected." But God does it anyway. So we faithfully proclaim that illogical message because we believe that the Word of God comes from God and not from men. So we faithfully proclaim that. But how do we choose what truths to speak?

This is the thing: That truth applies to everyone, but there are different areas of the human heart that the truth comes in. Sometimes we have to know when to be soft. One time I heard in a preaching class that the goal of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. (Laughter) I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what I heard. You know what? I think that the thing is that I've noticed that in my own spiritual life, that whenever I am discipling and mentoring in speaking to someone, I have to assess, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, "Does this person need a hard truth from the Lord today or do they need the gentleness of the Lord today?"

A few weeks ago I was preaching a funeral. The vast majority of the people who came to that funeral were not believers. There was about thirty or forty people there. We were gathered together at the cemetery, and

it was time for me to speak. I just sensed the Holy Spirit, as I was looking around and praying, saying, "Lord, what do You want me to say today?" The Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, "They need to hear the soft truth that I extend grace to them through Jesus Christ." That's not always the thing that I would preach at a funeral; I can be honest with you but I walked forward. I didn't really have any notes, and I just said this: "God has loved and received you in Jesus Christ." I had a sentence in there. I don't remember precisely what it was, but I said something like this: "God doesn't care if you haven't been to church in a decade. He wants you to know this: He is chasing you in Jesus. He has received you in Jesus. His Son Jesus died for you, and He wants you to know that He loves you just the way you are, if you'll turn to Him in faith." Now, whenever I said that... Do you know what's funny? We say that kind of stuff in church all the time, but do you know what? There were people there who had not been to church, maybe ever. After the funeral was over, this man walked up to me. It looked like he hadn't slept much the night before. His eyes were pretty bloodshot; they were drooping. His face was unshaven. He looked like he was about sixty years old. He grabbed my hand and he said, "I've never heard that before." Now, why do we need to sometimes share the soft truth? ...Because there are people who haven't heard that.

Other times, we have to be a little more confrontational, don't we? We have to share a little bit of the hard truth of the Gospel. I had an opportunity one time to counsel with a man who confessed to me that he had cheated on his wife... that he had had an affair... and that she was then walking out and leaving him. He looked at me and he said, "I just don't understand how God would do this to me... how God would allow this to happen." I had to say to him, "God isn't doing this." And he said, "What do you mean; how could you say that?" I said, "Hey... you cheated on your wife, and that's a consequence of that." That's not an easy thing to always say... right? You see, this is the thing: There are truths that come from the Word of God that we have to assess in the moment, from the leadership of the Holy Spirit, what we ought to say. This is the thing that I want you to hear. If you are not in close enough proximity with someone where you can hear their heart and share the truths that they need to hear, you're not close enough to some people. You need to be in a place where you can speak the truths of God openly and freely into their life.

Now, here's the thing: It won't always make them happy. Paul himself said that, didn't he? He said, "We do it to please God not to please men." There are some times when you will speak the truth, and people will not like to hear it. That doesn't mean that we go in there looking to make people angry, but we go in there looking to speak the truth in love. If you are not truthful with someone, guess what? You are not being loving to them. So we need to speak the truth, but to do so in a way that is loving, that they can hear truth particularly applied to them.

## 2. Is Strengthened With Transparency. (v. 8)

Now look at the next thing that Paul does. Once he talks about speaking the truth and he says, 'NOT to please men but to please God...' Then he goes and he says this in verse 7: *"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children."* As I'm reading that, I think, "That is an odd image for a grown man to choose when he is describing his relationship to the Church. Why would he choose that?" Then look at the next word choice: *"... we are affectionately desirous of you..."* Guys, when was the last time that you told anyone that you were affectionately desirous of them? You're like, "I didn't even know that was a phrase." Right? Then he says after that, *"... we shared with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves."*

One of the images that Paul uses here is an image that actually was given to us by Jesus Christ. Jesus one day was teaching at a house and some people came and said, "Hey, your mom and your brothers are

outside." And He said, "Who are my mother and my brothers? I tell you the truth, whoever does the will of My Father in heaven are my sister and my mother and my brothers." In other words, He said, "Family relationship is determined by obedience to the Father." What He was trying to do was this: It was to say, "The ones who have said 'Yes' to God's will together are collective, and they called one another 'brother and sister.'" Paul was just using that same imagery, that the Word of God brings together people as in a family. Now, it's interesting that they choose family. It doesn't communicate as much for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States. The reason that it doesn't communicate as much is because families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States are oftentimes disposable, broken, and thrown away. But... in the Middle Eastern culture within which Paul wrote, family was thick. You lived together for generations. You did business together for generations. You would talk about one another being brother or sister. That's more than just a platitude that was extended. That meant something... that you were brother and sister. Paul says, "It is like a relationship between a nursing mother and a child. The relationship that I have with the Church." I want you to think of that image. That is a very vulnerable, intimate sort of position. Why does that matter? ...Because family is one of those things you have to receive them even when they're really messed up. Right? We've all got family members... you know... the holidays are coming. (Laughter) Why are you laughing? I just said, "The holidays are coming." I know why you're laughing. ...Because we all have those family members that whenever we see them we're like, "Oh man... here they come." Right? But why are they there? They are there because (whispering) they're your family. Yeah... they are in your family. Whenever Paul chooses "brother, sister, nursing mother..." Those kinds of terms, that sort of language is used because he wants you to understand, "This is not a friendship relationship." Right? Friends, you know; they kind of come and go. Family... you're stuck with them. That's why the Church is a family. It's a family of faith saying this: "No matter what, I will be with you." So what does that mean? It means this: Paul says, "We didn't just share the Gospel of God with you, but we also shared our very selves." Paul was open; he was transparent about who he was.

Listen to me; the Word of God is powerful in and of itself. You can do nothing to limit the Word of God. I completely believe that. However, I want to say this: If you want to bolster the effectiveness and the powerfulness of the Word of God, do you know what you can do? You can be transparent along with the Word of God. Let me explain. If I only tell you about all of the "happy, happy... joy, joy" in my life and I don't ever share with you the struggles and the brokenness that I have... God's Word can still be effective in your life but when I'm honest and open with you about the struggles that I have and then tell you how the Word of God helped me overcome that, do you know what happens? You say, "Maybe God can do that in me too." You see, there's something powerful in our testimony which is why the Book of Revelation tells us that we will overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, because in sharing the way that God's grace helps us to overcome our own struggles, then people begin to say, "Maybe that can happen with me as well." The relationships that you have, that proximity where you're called to speak truthfully into people's lives... guess what? You're not just supposed to share Scripture with them, although that's powerful... it does not return void. You're also supposed to share your very selves, to be open with your own struggles, and to be transparent.

You know, I've stood up here before and I've said, "whenever I was a newly-wed... I had a powerful struggle with lust, and it was breaking down the intimacy between me and my wife, and it was causing all kinds of problems. I had to reach a point where I was willing to confess that to my wife so that by the grace of God that might be shattered and our relationship might be restored." What's funny is that I will share that story sometimes and people will come up to me afterwards and they'll say, "I can't believe that you would share that." Do you know what I want to say to you? You need to believe that because if you don't

think that I would share it, that tells me that you won't share it either. If you're not ready to share the worst broken place in your heart, you're not ready yet to experience the healing that God wants to bring you through His grace. And not only that... Whenever you express that brokenness, do you know what happens? Not only do you begin to get healed but also then it's contagious. It's this virus that moves from person to person and they go, "Wow; if God can heal that messed up guy then maybe God can heal me." That's the thing that's powerful in that moment. It's that the confession... the transparency... allows and creates a space where God's Spirit can come in and His Word can address it (claps once)... just like that.

Last week we talked about idolatry, but it's not just idolatry. It's any sort of sin struggle... any kind of brokenness... any kind of need that we have. Whenever we're open with that, it creates a space. I want to encourage you, Church.... you don't have to air your dirty laundry in front of hundreds of people... only I'm dumb enough to do that... but this is what you could do. You could find one or two or three people that you trust and you say, "I want to share with you, as you're walking in this place, how God helped me overcome something." Or if you say, "I've never experienced that before," do you know what you can do? You can go and you can say, "I have a struggle. If I share this with you, will you pray with me?" You'll be amazed at the sort of openness that will happen in that relationship and you'll be amazed... The Bible tells us to confess sin because it is the first step toward healing. Jesus talks about everything in the dark that's been brought out into the light. It's oftentimes been said that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Why is that? ...Because whenever we bring those things out into the open, God is able to address those hidden concerns of our heart. So I want to encourage you to do that.

### **3. Requires The Investment of Time. (v. 9, 12)**

So then Paul moves on. After he talks about these sorts of things, he said that it's not only about transparency and confession, but it's also then taking the Word of God and faithfully applying it to your lives. We talked last week about the application of grace and idolatry. If you didn't grab one of those booklets, I want to encourage you to do that on your way out today, at one of the kiosks. Now, from there then Paul goes on and he says, "But it's not just about the Word of God and being transparent, then it's also something that's a little bit harder." Then you say, "What's harder than confessing the brokenness in your heart?" Well, I'm glad you asked. Verse 9: *"For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you..."* Why does that matter?

Paul had another job; that was what he was trying to say. Acts chapter 18 tells us that Paul had the same profession as Priscilla and Aquila... they were a tentmakers. Now there's kind of a big debate out there. Does that mean they made actual tents that people camped in or lived in, or is that another word that was used for the prayer shawl in the Jewish community? I don't know, but I can tell you this. Paul had a job and he did that job so that he could earn money. Listen to the phrase that he says here in verse 9: *"...we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you..."* You see what was happening was that Paul was travelling from city to city; whenever he showed up, he didn't want to be a freeloader. He didn't just want to ask people to give him money, so he said, "Look, you've already got elders in your church that you're supporting. I'm not going to ask additionally for more funds. When I come in, all that I'm here to do in this moment is to preach God's Word effectively, so I'm going to work in addition to that." Why does that matter?

Whenever Joy and I were church planters, we started a church in our living room. Some people say that's the hard way; other people say it's the dumb way. Whatever... same thing. This is the thing: It was that I was bi-vocational. Let me tell you what that looked like. I would get up in the morning, and I would go to

work. I was a school teacher; I was a high school teacher. I would get up about six or so, then I would be at the school by 7:30; I would leave the school at 4:30. I would come home; I would be with my kids... help them with their homework, and then we would have dinner and all that kind of stuff... So the kids would go to bed then at 8:00 or 8:30, something like that. By the time they would go to bed, then was the first moment of the day that I would start to work on Church. I mean, it doesn't take a genius to go, "Man, that seems like it would be really hard." Yeah... it was. It was tough. I was having one of those days where it was kind of wearing me down and I was getting tired... even though we were seeing fruit and God was growing our church, I was getting kind of frustrated. I was praying and I said, "Lord, this is really hard; working all day long and then trying to do stuff for You..." I don't know if you've ever had these moments where it feels kind of like God reaches down and He grabs you by your shirt and He kind of lifts you up a little bit, and then He kind of punches you, just to kind of wake you up... I had one of those and He said, "Yes, you're right; it is hard... now guess what? Every person in the world who is not a pastor does this every week." I went, "Ohh... got it... right."

You see, here's the thing: Bi-vocational living is actually not the call just for Paul; it's the call for every one of us... that you get up and you go to work every single day, but at the same time you're still supposed to make disciples. That was the thing... Man, when I heard that, it was like God just opened this up for me. I will never, ever, ever take for granted those of you who come and you serve at the church. You lead a class... you come and you greet... you serve on our worship team... you hold babies... you show up and you help pass out flyers... You work at Operation Backpack. I will never, ever, ever take that for granted because I have been someone as well who has worked a full-time job and then attempted to do ministry beyond that. I understand the sacrifice that takes. I tell you that story for this reason: So you will hear the spirit within which I say this: "It's not an excuse though to not make disciples just because you're busy... because everybody here is busy." You know, I'm still waiting to meet the person when they say, "I'm just not busy at all. I've got nothing going on. I'm just kind of hanging out; just looking for something to do." Nobody ever says that. This is the thing, when I talk to people all the time. This is kind of the way that they think about life. "I've got to get through school and then I've got to get a job and then I've got to find somebody to marry and then I've got to have those kids and then I've got to raise those kids and then I've got to make more money to pay for those kids. Then I've got to get those kids out of the house, and I've got to help those kids a job and get those kids married off... After that, I've got to make more money so that I can retire and then I can enjoy the rest of my life before I finally die." This is the thing: That's kind of the way that people think about life. The funny thing about that is this: It's that oftentimes we're so consumed with the particular stage of life that we're in, we're trying to get to that next stage... "If I could just get there... if I could just get my kids out of the house or if I could just get my kids raised... or I could just get retired..." or whatever. We think and we tell ourselves, "When I get to that place... then I'll take the time to disciple people." False... false. That's why the Great Commission is, "As you are going, make disciples." ...Because Jesus already knew that we would be running around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off anyway. So since you're already going to be running around, place to place, busy all the time... then while you are doing that, would you please tell some people about Me while you're out there?" Because here's the thing... your life is always changing. You're going from phase to phase. You're going from that phase of being in school to getting married to raising kids then going and trying to work as hard as you can... all that kind of stuff. As those seasons and those phases change, guess what? That's not an accident. God does that in you so that the people you are with and you have a relationship with, that you can be faithful to share with them who His Son Jesus is and to disciple them to follow and obey Him. That is intentional.

Billy Graham once famously said, "Love is spelled T-I-M-E." If you want to show someone that you love them, give them time because that is the greatest gift that you can give them. Listen; I'm certainly not advocating that you don't care about your family... that you don't care about your job. This is what I want you to hear: "You will always be busy... always." I will always be busy. Nevertheless, we are commanded to make disciples anyway. Would we say, "God, let me look at the place where You have put me, and let me be faithful to disciple-making, no matter where it is that You've put me."

#### 4. In Order To Begin Transformation (v.13)

So once Paul says that, he says... "Now look... this is what I want you to understand. We're going to speak the truth, we're going to be transparent and open about our struggles, and then we're going to take the time... it's going to be hard... we're working... it's never easy. It's always a sacrifice, but we're still going to take the time to proclaim the truth." Now, when Paul says all of those things, he gets to the end of this chapter and then in verse 13 and 14, he begins to explain what happens. He then says, "When we did that..." he's reminiscing, remember... he's looking back. He says, "Okay... I preached the truth, I was transparent, I gave the time... when I did all of those things... we now thank God *"...that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God..."* You received it. In other words, you were changed. He then says, *"...you... became imitators of the churches..."* that we're there.

Why does that matter? We talk a lot about the Kingdom of God. People say, "Well, what is the Kingdom of God?" Do you know what it's not? It's not what happens after you die. It's not even what happens whenever Jesus returns... although those are parts of the Kingdom. Going to heaven? Yes; the Kingdom of God is there. Jesus returning? Certainly the Kingdom of God will be instituted. But the Kingdom of God, we know, is more than that. Jesus preaches His first sermon and He says, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is ...at hand." Oh... it's not way out there. It's right here. Oh... "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done... on earth as it is in heaven" ...right here, right now. Huh! Jesus, standing before His disciples one day says, "I tell you the truth, some of you will not taste death before you experience and see the Kingdom of God coming in power. Well, all those people are now dead, so now this is the question: Either A) Mark lied when he wrote that down... B) Jesus lied when He said that. Or if you don't believe it, we're not going to go, "Gosh, I don't want to say that Mark the apostle lied, and I don't think I want to say that Jesus lied... What's the other option?" Well, then the Kingdom of God has already been experienced in power. That's the other final option. Well, how would that happen? It happens because the Kingdom of God is when someone lives and receives the reality of the Kingdom of Jesus, right here and right now. Well, how does that happen? It happens when we receive by faith the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whenever you receive the Gospel, you get to live and taste just a little bit of heaven this side of death, and that is the Kingdom of God. Every time that you get to live and walk in the power through the Holy Spirit, live in freedom, walk in freedom... all of that this side of death, guess what? All of that comes through the Kingdom of God by God's Gospel.

Why am I telling that to you? I'm glad you asked. Look... He says this, *"...not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers."* Verse 14: *"You, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus."* If you want to see transformation happen in your business, your office, your city, your family, your loved ones... if you want to see that, the entrance point to the Kingdom of God is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no other entrance point. You have to receive the Word of God as it is... The Word of God. You have to hear... really, ultimately, it does come back to that truth about Jesus Christ. So Paul does this big circle. He stops and he says, we're going to share the truth

and we're going to do so by being transparent and being open about how the Word of God addresses our lives. Then we're going to take the time that it takes to be with people, and then we're going to see transformation. How did that transformation come about? Oh yeah... because we took the time to speak the truth of the Gospel in the first place.

This is my exhortation to you today. If you want to see something supernatural happen in our lifetime in this city, it will only happen when every person in this room gets committed to the concept that "I'm going to multiply disciples who will multiply disciples who will multiply disciples so that this city can be transformed." The way that that happens is because you and I believe that the entrance point to the Kingdom of God is not philosophy or feeling or feel good but is instead only one thing: The Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Clapping)

So this is what I want us to do today. Would we commit, right now ...wherever we are, wherever God takes us... to plant the seed of the Kingdom? The seed of the Kingdom is Jesus and His Gospel. That is the way transformation comes. If you have yet to say "Yes" to Jesus and you want to taste the Kingdom, a little bit of heaven this side of death... there's only one way: Saying "Yes" to Jesus Christ. If you want to be someone who has the power to make disciples in your workplace and experience the Kingdom in that place, there's only one way to do that... sharing the Gospel and those spiritual truths and taking the time to be transparent through Jesus Christ.

You see, there's really only one of two places that you could be today: either not a believer... and if you're not a believer and you can come into the Kingdom of God by saying "Yes" to Jesus Christ... or you're already a believer, and the thing for you to do is to take the Kingdom and go wherever it is that God wants you to go. The way that you carry the Kingdom is by carrying the Gospel because that's the entrance point that God has designed from before the foundations of the earth. So today, Church, the question is this: "What do we do?" Is it time for you to say "Yes" to the Gospel? If so, come forward and receive Christ. If you've already received Christ, what do you do? Maybe you come and you pray and you say, "I want to say, 'Lord, show me who it is that I need to disciple.'" Or if you already know, you just walk out these doors and you look and you pray and you say, "Lord, show me places where I can carry the Kingdom because I want to be used for Your glory and the transformation of this city."

Let's pray. "Lord, we love You. God, we thank You for the fact that You have brought us to this place today. God, we thank You for the fact that You, for whatever reason, have decided to set us apart as Your disciples in this city. God, we can't understand why it was that You picked us, but God we know this: That Your truth, be it hard or soft, is intended to speak directly to our hearts. God, I pray that You would show us how we can make disciples wherever You have us... Lord, that You want us, whether that's coworkers, whether that's friends, whether that's family... You want us to speak the truths that need to be heard so that people can reflect You, so that the Kingdom might grow. God, I pray, 'Use us to be Your instruments in this city.' God, we ask it in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."