I was saved the day before my 17th birthday. Although I came out of the religious system, I can remember when the Lord first began depositing depth in me of any measure, if there is any in me at all. That was when I was 29 years old; that's a long way from my 17th birthday. That's 12 years, and yet I was a seeker, a clawer, a kicker, a screamer, and a thirsty soul. I was 29 years old. I began to study the Bible and understand it. That's what began happening to me, although it wasn't study. I had a room in our home. We had a fairly large house, and I spent many, many hours in that room. Out of that room came the early church, and a lot of the experience and a lot of the things that I say to you today.

I got sick, and for a year, I was in bed. I've told you this: on the day I got out of bed, the first meeting I went to was an early…no, it was a Sunday meeting, and I spoke at it. It was a good talk; it was anointed…and so forth, and so forth, and so forth. But I remember, when I got through talking, one of the things I did was I corrected the church on something. I was very sensitive to that. You would not have even noticed it; I noticed it. It wasn't even a corrective word, but I was aware of it. I got home, and I said to myself, and I said to my wife, "I have been"—I'll put it in my own words tonight—"I've been in excruciating pain for one solid year. The Lord has thrown everything He's got on me, and at the end of 12 months, I am not one bit more broken than I was the day I got ill."

The Lord had made no progress. That is the truth, and that is not exaggerating. There is only one difference. I was very breakable. I could not walk four city blocks; I was incapable of that much activity. I was in bad shape. I was still under the Lord's hand. I lost all my physical energy. I was a very stoppable brother.

Two years later, I can even remember when it was. I was lying in bed on New York Drive in Altadena, California, and I spent almost all my time there. I began having a consistent experience with Jesus Christ that has been, more or less, unmovable since then. I don't know how old I was, but I wasn't young.

Now, how old are you? You have been handed some of the best stuff that man has ever heard, and that is a fact. How long is it going to take for that to become an unmovable experience in your life? The answer to that is…I do not know, but I know several things. It's going to take a little time, and if it's really, genuinely, honestly, truly real; if it is an actual experience between you and Jesus Christ, it will not be a copy of my experience. Did I say it's going to take a little time? It's going to take a little time. It won't be a copy of my experience. Well, that's all. It will be real. It will be

genuine, and it will be unique to you, and it's going to take a little time for you to find out how to personally live with Jesus Christ.

Let me explain what this forces me to do. It forces me to speak from my own experience and explain to you how to experience the Lord. When I say something to you, it's new. You never heard that before. It's glorious, and you like it, and the Spirit of the Lord bears witness to it. You go try it, and it works for three weeks gloriously.

Now, in the three weeks, one of two things is going to happen. You're going to become your own person, or you're going to become an imitator of an experience. I think you're following me up to now, are you not? I don't think I have said anything that anybody wants to get up and walk out on yet.

I'm going back to my first proposition to you three months ago; the first law of spiritual experience. Does anybody remember it? I'm so glad you still remember. That's part of why I'm talking tonight. I want to revert back a little bit.

How do you come to know the Lord? How do you touch Him? How do you feel Him? How do you hold Him? How do you know Him? How do you embrace Him? How? By accident; by accident over and over and over until something becomes real to you. Now, will you keep your mind while I go on? Because it's important.

In Isla Vista, California, a group of people has probably chosen the most difficult and most sensible way to come to Jesus Christ that anyone has ever tackled in modern times. It may not work, but I think it will. It would be so easy to rush through a wonderful experience with the Lord, patent it, and take it all over the earth, which is what just about everybody eventually does.

I'll tell you what I'd like to leave the brothers and sisters in this room: established so much in Jesus Christ, may your experience with Him be established under any and all circumstances, and it is peculiarly and uniquely yours alone. Now, you may not realize it, but that's heavy. In some way, it really throws an incredible burden on you. It throws a big one on me, but it throws a big one on you.

I have probably played a larger part in the meetings in Isla Vista in the last six months than I ever have or ever had dreamed of. Yet I want you to know, at the same time, I am not allowing you, as best I can, to become an imitator of someone else's experience or some sort of leader. Given

enough time, if we pursue this course, somebody is going to become established in Jesus Christ. I think tonight I'm simply reminding you of what it is we're seeking to accomplish.

I'm going to ask you to please not form any habits in your early morning meetings together. Don't stop now, wherever you are. You're not here to get habits; you're here to get Jesus Christ. Don't be satisfied with anything less than a personal embrace; a touching and a holding and a knowing of Him.

When I first started, I said that the one thing that has been a change in the character of what I have said and what I'm saying tonight, and what will be said, is, "I don't give two toots on a whistle what the Bible teaches about justification. I work to experience justification, and if I can experience justification, I will." If it's not something to be experienced, praise the Lord, it's just real neat. I praise God for it, but it's not important to me.

I want to tell you that you're going to get up to speak from time to time. I'm going to examine you, and the church is going to examine you, but two things I want out of you…two things the brothers and sisters want out of you: Christ, experience of it. Experience of it. You tell us what there is of Christ that can be experienced, and that's enough. You can sit down. We'll take that. Or how to experience Christ, based on personally acquired information drawn from experience.

So what else? Two things. A way to experience Christ, your experience of Him, and how to experience Him; how you experience Him. We would like to hear how to experience Jesus Christ.

I don't know if you realize what I just said—but I have taken tonight a stand for a radically new approach to the Christian experience. That's all I want out of you, brothers and sisters. Don't tell me I'm sanctified. If you can tell me how to be sanctified and tell me how you've been sanctified or how you're being sanctified, I'll accept it, but I am not interested in sanctification. I don't want you to tell me about anything except an aspect of Christ that can be experienced and how to experience Christ or how you experience Christ. Now, if you cheat and if you get off, we promise not to ride you out of here on the rail, but I want you to know that's all I want out of you. That's all I want.

I want to talk a little bit about what's in my heart. I want to talk about practical things. I want to be bold and say the first point can't be improved on. I never say that about anything else, but I'm going to be dogmatic and say this can't be improved on. I'm sure somebody will improve on it. I cannot comprehend how this can be improved on.

What's the first experience with Jesus Christ? Don't talk about being born again, repentance, or anything like that; I'm talking about it on a practical day-to-day basis. The first experience with Christ is waking up. I'm all the way back to there tonight, brothers. I'm just really going to be bull-headed this time; I'm not going to go very far away from the front door.

What's the first experience*? It's taking the first thought of the morning and bringing it into the captivity of Jesus Christ.* Before this year is out, I hope the principle behind that possesses you, drives you, and makes you something like what God has rarely ever had in all of history. *It is taking the first thought captive.* I don't know if you can improve on that, but I kind of doubt it.

Gene, do you take the first thought captive? A brother said to me here one night, "I don't know which one is the first thought, and I don't know when I'm waking up or if I'm just turning over." Sometimes we're in a half-world there, and you're thinking, and you're still asleep and thinking, and then you're kind of thinking, and then finally, it gets a little clearer, and you realize you spent the last ten minutes thinking. Then you're suddenly aware you didn't take the first thought captive. Okay, then take the second thought captive then. At that moment, you've got to make a choice. It's when you know you've got a choice to make: that's the first thought.

I know that you don't want to take that first thought captive. Do you know that's true? The first thought in the morning is when you think about all the worries you've got and what you're going to do today. It's a nice time to indulge in fleshly or soulish activities. Which are you going to choose - the Lord Jesus or the city dump? Is that not true? I believe that's the only choice you've got. You will choose the Lord Jesus or the city dump. Those are the only two choices you've got. Those are the only two I've ever found.

Well, Gene, I choose the Lord. Frankly, I think the next thing you're going to do is bury your pride because you're about to wake up your roommate or your wife or your husband. That's one possibility. Another is that you may have to choose between getting more rest and getting out of bed. One brother said to me, "Gene, I cannot lie there in bed and take that first thought captive. I've got to get out of bed to take the first thought captive." That's true of many others, and it's maybe true of all. I don't know. I'm not going to give anybody in this room leeway to stay in bed. I'm not going to comment; you are the only person who knows where you can take your first thought captive.

For the brother or sister who has to get up, then get up. If you can take your first thought captive and not go back to sleep, or keep the second thought captive too in bed, that's fine. Whatever you do, that's great, but it can be a very dangerous moment.

I think some of us are afraid that our roommate, or our wife or our husband, will call us religious if we start uttering some noises to the Lord. The hardest part about really taking that first thought captive…and I'll talk as a man because I'm sure the wife feels the same way, but I talk as a brother and confess…there's really only one person in the whole world who knows what I'm really like. You know who it is, don't you? My wife.

I wake up, and I think, there she is. I look at those big black curly locks; they're all buried up in the pillow. I look at her and think, now, if I were going to start offering myself to the Lord, just abiding here in His presence, she knows me well; she's already proven beyond any doubt that I'm the greatest hypocrite in the world. She's just going to lie there in bed and think, "Oh no, there's that hypocrite again."

The fact of the matter is that - and we'll come back to this again and again at other times – today, there's got to be an abandonment to the Lord. Forget the torpedoes…full speed ahead. I don't care what my wife thinks of me. I am going to take that first thought captive. Now, some of you are either bluffing or you're more gifted than I am, and I don't know which, and I'm not challenging you. I notice that some people seem to just be able to be in the Lord's presence without ever uttering a sound. There are times that I utter sounds and I don't make a bit of noise, but I can tell I'm uttering sounds. Maybe you can't tell, but I can tell.

Sometimes I have a sense there's a brother who's not uttering a sound that's neither vocal nor non-vocal, and I marvel at him. I think he is sitting there with a very, very fast brain, like a bunch of popcorn that just started popping. One thought's going (popping noises), and the next one's going, and the next one's going. I don't know, but I offer it to you for consideration.

I do not know how to suggest that you take the first thought captive, but I can tell you this: when you take that first thought captive, it's glory. I am not…and I'm referring back to a previous comment; I am not sure that everybody in the church knows, and frankly, at this moment I'm not too burdened about it, because we've got better days ahead. I am not sure that every brother and sister in this room is aware that you can take every thought captive. Do you know that it's possible to take every thought captive? Do you know how you can do it? Because the Bible says so.

Paul said we are taking every thought captive to the knowledge, to the experiential knowledge, of Jesus Christ. That's the first reason. The second reason is that there are men who testify, but there's a better reason than both of them. It's because I believe it, and that's where it really begins. It's really not always easy. I tell you, it will develop a sensitivity in you that you can hardly live with—a real sensitivity to the Lord and to everything around you.

Alright, we're still talking…we haven't gone anywhere…we're still talking about taking the first thought captive to Jesus Christ. You may have to take a long, long walk. I want to go back and say point one: I don't know how to tell you to take the first thought captive, but I will tell you how I take the first thought captive. It's by tenderly, very sensitively, very finely, very refinely uttering His name to Him.

Somewhere, I can't describe, and I've never attempted to, and I'm not going to tonight, even though I am quite sorely tempted to. Somewhere in me, I know when that mind has turned. Whether I utter His name first and turn or turn and then utter His name, I don't know, but I can sit right there and utter His name with my mind fixed on Jesus Christ. And the thought is captive. I have won a good hunk—not a good portion, but I've won a hunk of the day right there.

Battles that I used to fight, I will never have to fight that day. Some things are always behind me if the first thought is taken captive. I don't have to worry about them. My principal can't fire me and hurt me. Some things can't happen to me when that first thought is taken captive. Some things are now under my feet forever; for sure, that day.

What are you going to do when you get out of bed? You'll get dressed. You can do almost anything, but what will you do in relationship to Christ? Well, I don't know what you can do, but I know one thing you could do. You could sing. It's a possibility. There are two ways to sing, and it's very difficult to explain the difference between them. One of them is to the Lord, and the other is kind of to the Lord, but… I'm going to come back to this too. There is a song that is utterly offered to the Lord… and there is a song that is sung… and there is a world of difference. It's not a big world, but there is a difference.

This may be the difference between worship and praise, but I remember that worship is much more central to your spirit than praise is. Praise is on the outer edge of your spirit. That might not make a bit of sense to you. I didn't intend for it to, as long as you can get an impression. Worship is in the very center of your heart and being, but I tell you this: either one is better than nothing. A song of

worship wouldn't hurt, but be careful. Forty years from now, will you please not end up like the Chinese sisters in the Far East who pray very powerful prayers every time they pray?

Here is my point. Unless I'm in the flesh or in the soul, I'm going to make it. I, one brother in the church, am going to get out of that bed and make it. I may sing, I may praise, I may not utter a word, but I'm going to do something; I'm going to make it. Sometimes I don't make it, but I want to come back tonight and say, "I'm going to make it, brother. I am equipped to make it. I can make it." That's not a boast; I don't even understand what I mean by that, but some part of me says, at least…I can make it. I know I can make it. I am also aware that some of you aren't at that point yet, and all I can say to you is, "Get a stick horse and stay with the Lord until you know you don't have to depend upon a method brought by Gene Edwards to the church.

Somewhere along the line, Jesus Christ is going to have to get your heart, and there are just some things you're going to do. How do you make it? I don't have the vaguest idea. I suggest you sing, praise the Lord, or call on His name. You're going to have to find something that's real for you that'll last past the beginning. The beginning is always neat; the middle is always dead. The going on is always real, personal, and individual.

I want to speak to you about coming to the Lord alone, but I guess I'm not going to, because most of you don't come to the Lord alone in the morning; you come with a brother or sister. Let me talk a little bit about getting up with brothers and sisters in the mornings. One thing I really wish I could do is have the privilege of getting up with all of you. One thing I'd like to say is: here, have some variety. Most of you are getting up with a different person each day. That's good. One person for three days in a row is good too.

Okay, what are you doing? Same thing every morning? Whatever it is, stop. It may be that both of you need to be together, sitting together, just being in the Lord's presence. It may be you need to say, "You get over there, and I'm going to get over here. The fact that we got one another up this morning is good enough. I want to sit with the Lord for one and a half hours." And the very fact that he's over there and you're over here is enough. I want to give Christ to you. I really would. The mornings are for one thing: an embrace of Jesus Christ. So do not leave until you have laid hold of Him. By any means, fair or foul.

Now then, I said something recently, and one day I'm going to back out on it, but right now, I think it's very important, especially because you're young. I mean young in age. I said you're going to have to slow down to catch up to the Lord. Now I'm going to stick with that tonight. The day is

going to come when we can speed up and still seek the Lord, but you have to slow down to get ahold of Him the first time.

It is the nature of man to want to wrestle with God to get Him. When you're young, you want to wrestle with the Lord to get Him, and you just never get Him. They have been wrestling with God all over the earth; it lasts about two weeks, and they just don't make it. It's not real, and there's a strain. There's a strain between you and the Lord. You're going to have to slow down.

I want you to know the very first thing I do when I come to the Lord… sometimes I kneel; it's not very often, but I do. Sometimes I sit on the floor. I noticed everybody in the church has started sitting on the floor, so I want you to know that I've switched. I sit in chairs now.

The very first thing I do is utterly, totally, and completely relax my soul, because my soul is just like your soul. It's bent double; it pants after the Lord like a deer pants after the water brooks and never finds Him. The first thing I do is unwind. I want you to know that we're not going to stay right there forever. We're not going to be the world's most relaxed Christians. There are times when you've got to bend double; there are times when battles have to be fought, and we're going to be a people for all seasons.

I want to come back to that business of relaxing, and another thing I want to say is you can't struggle with the Lord. You just can't struggle with the Lord; not in His presence, in the soft, gentle way that we're speaking of. There are times to struggle with Him, but the knowledge, that precious sense of Himself, is rarely gained through struggle. There are times when that's not the case. Throw the books at the wall, kick the chair, or whatever you must do. Sometimes something in our lives needs to be taken out.

Your spirit can identify those times. Your spirit knows those times. Don't get stuck with a method that I am supposed to come into His presence relaxed. Your spirit knows. But I want you to know that other times, when your soul wants to get all bent double, and it's not your spirit, I realize there is a fine distinction between the two. I want you to know your spirit knows the difference. You've got to relax, generally speaking.

The reason I ask you to read Ros Rinker's book (*Prayer: Conversing With God*) is this. If you haven't read Ros Rinker's book yet, go read it. It may have a few little things in it that you will quickly identify as not quite all that proper, but Ros Rinker makes an excellent point. I would ask you to read the book. I implore you to stop using the Lord's name as punctuation marks. There's

tension between you and the Lord when you do that. Something inside has doubled up. Let me tell you what you can do.

I hope you don't mind my being so practical. The first thing you can do is slow down and choose every word you speak. Bring every word into captivity. Know what it's going to be before it's said, and say it in the face of Jesus Christ. If you're still punctuating your sentences with "Lord," then I would say drop everything else, go back, and start praying extremely slowly; bring your mind into captivity, bring your words into captivity, and say them in His presence. But know His presence, looking full in His face when you utter them.

Now I'm going to change the subject a little. I'm going to talk about something else. As for the sisters in Taiwan; the Little Sisters in the Far East; I can hear them right now. I can't imitate them, but I can hear them. (imitating Chinese sounds) I've seen 3,000 of them doing that, and it's the same thing every night. There's a whine in their voice. We've got one…it's like it's a violin with one string.

Now let me just give you two or three warnings. I know some of you must hate me. I'm unrelenting in this. I'm sorry. I apologize…and I'm going to go right on. I cry a lot, and sometimes when I pray, I cry. I can just see the whole church picking up the habit of praying with a tear in your voice. Well, let me warn you about another one: I was in Babylon a long, long time, and sometimes Gene Edwards breaks out in pious prayer. "Our Father, we thank Thee for those things that Thou…" Do you know what I mean? You switch your phrases around in your sentence in a way you'd never speak to any human being.

I'm not saying ordinary conversation is the only way to pray to the Lord, but I want you to know it needs to be the kind of prayer we engage in more often. It'll sure get you down off your high horse fast; it'll make you a human being. I would appreciate it. I'm not trying to start a fad of conversational prayer in the church either, but I would appreciate it sometimes when I don't know whether I'm talking to the church or to the Lord. I appreciate it. I don't know whether I'm supposed to look up or pray, and I don't care. I just really enjoy it. Ordinary conversational English. Just plain old everyday talk to the Lord. It's not the only prayer there is, but I sure do appreciate it.

Has everybody figured out what I'm trying to do tonight? I'm trying to get you off balance. I'm trying to force you into a position where you stand there, and you say, "Lord, I don't know what to do." Then you'll have to find out that you have to be you; that's who you have to be. And "you" will have to be different every day because the Lord is different every day.

I'm trying to make a point. Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” I'm sorry, but I can't be put into a bottle, and you shouldn’t be able to be put in a bottle either. The variety of Jesus Christ…His wife's got to really fight to keep up…to be such a variety-filled person. He really needs to be a person of infinite variety. I hope that the brothers and sisters in the church can learn so many different ways to present the Lord. We need to be a raging lion, and we need to be quiet. We need to be wound up, and we need to be unwound.

I want to tell you something. If I can keep the brothers and sisters in this room off balance for about four years, one of these days you're going to come out into a clearing, and we're going to have something on this earth nobody else can do. We're going to have a corporate body of people, every one of them looking different. I've never seen that in my whole life, and I don't think you have either. So you're just going to have to learn that every once in a while, we're going to do what we're doing tonight.

I don't know much more to say to you about coming to the Lord in those first three or four minutes, but I've got two more things I'd like to say. One of them: don't get too far away from being simple. Now, you're not where I am, and I'm not where you are, and you're not me, and I'm not you, so what's mine may never be yours. I want you to know that there are some things I can't wear out. I have never been able to wear out the Lord's name, although I often utter it only within my being. I sometimes utter it quickly, but rarely. Sometimes I take ten seconds to get the Lord…within me.

I also want you to know, and this seems to be something that doesn't work for a lot of people: I can sit down before the Lord, and I can spend 10 or 15 minutes that are real, saying, “Lord.” I do think that there is something you will need in your life before that is something real to you; that real, and that is an abandonment. An abandonment. We're going to talk about that some more, too. It's the one thing that I really admire about the Pentecostal people. I'm not speaking of their outward abandonment, although that's good too. The Pentecostal people come closer to worshiping the Lord than any people I know of…although they stand in great danger of making it ritual. They can forget everybody else in the room and just stand there and worship. I praise the Lord for that.

Do you know where they got it? I can tell you where they got it; it's a good place to get it. The Pentecostal way of worship has been greatly influenced—and I told you this once, but most of you didn't hear it—by a brother in Christ, and I believe he was a missionary, who made a study of everybody who had been brainwashed in the Korean War. They didn't do this in the Vietnam War, but our soldiers were brainwashed during the Korean War.

They went through horrible experiences of brainwashing, and there was only one group of people who consistently never cracked. It was the Christian black man, and that was all. Everybody else did; even the Christian white man did. The missionary wrote a book named *Brainwashing*. He said the way he could figure it was, if you've ever seen a southern black man, he can just turn the Lord on anywhere; forget social consciousness and be abandoned to the Lord. I'll tell you what it's like: it's like falling in love. Or it's like making love or being loved or whatever. It's when you give all you have; you utterly abandon yourself. Your body, your soul, and your spirit, you just cast on the Lord.

Well, is that worship? Is it adoration? Is it love? Is it all? Can I worship, adore, or love doing that? Can I? The answer is no, and some of us have a habit of coming to the Lord this way. I realize that this is in the Psalms, but if you're going to love the Lord with your soul and spirit, you're going to have to love Him on your face. The reason most of us don't is we just literally don't know how to do this. We just don't know how, because we're Americans, and Americans came from the British. We just literally don't know how to open our faces, face open to the Lord in adoration and love and admiration. Use your face to worship, adore, and love your Lord.