

I'm going to take a very simple verse, and yes, brother, it's from Acts 2, just as simple as it can be. You all know it; a simpler passage does not exist. Acts 2:48, *And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house.* They took their food together with gladness and simplicity of heart. Something rings in this; something resonates. Now I'm going to tell you exactly what the subject is tonight, and then I'm going to tell you why I picked this very unusual title. I'm going to talk to you about the spiritual community of the believer. The spiritual community of the believer.

Now I am doing that for one purpose: to avoid the word "church". The word church is not a New Testament word. It came to us through German. The word ekklesia is almost untranslatable. It's not assembly. It's not an assemblage. Don't let Greek scholars play with that word with you. Don't kid yourself. We don't really know what that meant to a first-century believer. Probably more than anything else, it meant gathering. It meant the reassembling of a body: when all the saints came together, they were the assembled parts of the body of Christ. They were a gathering.

So, we don't have a good word. If I say church to you, you immediately think of a spiral, a pastor, a pew, a choir, a piano, an organ, a ritual. But something happened in your life and in mine that pressed us beyond that point, and when that happened, you joined a great passing parade, small in number yet a great witness that endures throughout the centuries. You didn't know you joined that assemblage. You may not know it yet, but you did. They are a particular people.

Now, I'm almost afraid to utter the words I just uttered, because unfortunately, you didn't get a good break, and I didn't either, in my lifetime. Now, I'm not speaking to all of you, but there's one of you out here I'm speaking to. This is the message you ought to have heard when you left the religious system, but instead, boy, forgive me, I have the feeling that most of you, when you stepped up or out or over or around or underneath or whatever you did, when you superannuated somewhere along the line, you got really hurt, probably in a Christian group. Will you raise your hand if that's true? Oh, come on. Don't be so timid. Raise your hand. Then the rest of you are amazingly blessed people. You've never been in a group that told you that you were it, huh? You were in the IT group. You've never been in a movement that told you it was the last movement of this age. You were never in a movement that said the hour is late and we should all be one. The body of Christ needs to come together, so come join us. You never were. Well, you're lucky.

You were never in a group that told you this is the end of the age, that this is the Laodicean church, that you're the Philadelphian church, and that you and I are the overcomers? Have you never had that happen to you? Dallas, Texas. You are living in a vacuum. Grand Prairie. Well, that's wonderful. I've never seen this crowd before. Usually, it's the walking wounded. People who really saw a vision and went out, but they got sold a bill of goods.

I want to come back to the simplicity that we see in this verse and say to you, there is a spiritual community of the believer, and she's been here in every age. She doesn't represent a doctrine. She's not part of a movement. Strangely enough, she represents no great overriding goal. G O A L. She is not pushed by some insistent motivation like evangelizing the world or restoring the gifts. Who

else can I insult tonight? Being endowed with power. And you people down here in Fort Worth and Dallas are just really bad about prosperity. Man, I tell you, you're the most materialistic Christians on this planet right here. Say amen. Dallas, Fort Worth, and Hong Kong. That's right. I've been over a large portion of this earth, and these three places take the cake.

All of these things are transcended by the spiritual community of the believer. I don't know whether it's a revelation. I don't know whether it's some sort of deep spiritual insight. I don't know whether it's a longing God gives. I don't know if it's a call. I don't know if it's an election. And frankly, I'm not concerned about that. It is not how you got there; it is the quality of what is present.

Go through the ages and listen to the words that have been given to this spiritual community of the believer. The world has given it to them, and they have given it to themselves. Now listen to these words. The body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the community of the believers, brethren, brothers and sisters, spiritual family, family of God, house of God. Can you help me? Do you know some others? I'm not talking about some movement. I am talking about those words that have reappeared again and again and again for the last 1700 years. These are the spontaneous labels given to these people. Oh, they got words like Quakers, Lollards, Huguenots, Moravians, not Mormons, Moravians. Brethren, Paulicians, Albigensians, but within their community, within their fellowship, within this thing Paul kept calling the *ekklesia* and the *koinonia*, there were these recurring words of *holy ones, brothers, sisters*.

Now, you step back from all of that, what do you see? An incredibly deep relationship that you cannot conjure up. Now, right here is where I'm going to depart and say, what kind of relationship? Well, it's not a relationship of doctrine or teaching. It's not a relationship of movement, all of those things. I'm going to say something else to you. It's not a relationship between one another, and if it's built there, it will fall, and with great pain. It's not a caring community. I don't know what it is, but I can tell you this: it's organic to your "innards." You crave this. Like the deer pants after the water, so pants your soul after this spiritual community. It comes up out of the soil at every age. It will come in the years and centuries to come. It has come in centuries past, and it will continue until the day the Lord comes. This organic, natural, if you please, this biological urge to be with one another and to know one another. Well, you're all looking at me really oddly right now. I don't know. I don't know if I'm communicating with you or what's going on here.

It has in the past been likened to a wheel. I think the Quakers started this. Let me illustrate it. I want you to understand where its engine comes from and its origins. Can you imagine a wagon wheel? And here's a hub. Now the hub of the center is Christ. Then there are these large spokes coming into the center, and the closer they get to the center, the closer they get to one another. Do you understand? Say, "Praise of the Lord." Alright, that's better now. Here it is. A fellowship of believers in which Christ is the center. It is not you that's the center. It is not the brothers and sisters that are the center. You cannot be drawn close to one another except in the common denomination of Jesus Christ, and that's not adequate. When I say "Jesus Christ," I don't know what goes through your mind, because, again, we stand on the edge of a doctrine here. The doctrine of Christ, the

belief in Christ, the this of Christ, the that of Christ. That is not what I am speaking to you about. Here again, I am faced with the incredible gimmicks that the church of Jesus Christ has had to deal with over the last 200 years, which have kept Christ from being the center. Even when we are told it's Christ that is the center.

You and I have a task today, as did this spiritual community in all generations: to come back to Christ as the center. I have watched this happen again and again and again and again, and forgive me, but there's always a gimmick in there somewhere. Now say amen. I know most of you know that. This gets me right down to you and to me. I'm not speaking to you now, praise. I'm not speaking to you of worship. I'm not speaking to you of miracles. I am not speaking to you of prophecy. I'm not speaking to you about gifts. I am sure not talking to you about prosperity. I am not talking to you about Bible study or intellectual attainment of understanding. I'm not talking to you about archaeology. I'm not talking to you about New Testament understanding or teachings. I'm not talking to you about prayer. I am not bluffing, and I don't want you to bluff with me. I'm not talking about visions and revelations. *I'm talking to you about a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.* This is what brings the spokes close together.

Every age has its fight, its battle to discover ways of knowing the Lord. Let me be radical for a minute. Can I be radical? Can you permit me...but will you open my hate mail and read it? Someone said if Gandhi were alive, he'd write hate mail to you. Boy, Gene, don't say this. The Bible's not going to draw you to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will draw you to the Bible, and if you'll remember your early conversion experience, you know that's the absolute truth. He was the beginning of your Christian life.

We got billions of dollars tied up in seminaries. We've got tens of billions of dollars tied up in church buildings. But when it comes down to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, the lack in every age, not our age, but in every age, is enormous. That is really what creates the spiritual community of the believer: the heart hungering to know Him. That is the one identifying quality among us all. That heart search and belief that we can really, truly know Him, personally embrace Him, personally encounter Him, personally know Him, and experience Him. Not only hear Him or talk to Him, but also have an encounter with Him.

Saints, we don't know the community. We don't know the spiritual community of the believer. We don't know about ekklesia until we have collided, spirit-to-spirit. The proverbial snowflake stands a better chance in hell than does a group of Christians who have not laid hold of some means of constantly knowing Him. The spiritual community of the believer is not tied together by doctrine. It is not tied together by the debt of a church building. It is not tied together by strong things that will hold her together. When those rituals and doctrines and forms are removed, and you've got nothing but a people, there stands little hope of continuing outside of a burning relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one common element of the spiritual community of the believer.

She's never been large. She's always been made up of hungry people. In the last couple of hundred years, she's been hurt a lot more than she ever was in the past. It seems to be very specific that

from about 386 AD to 1820 AD, her persecution and suffering were by the formal church, the world, and secular governments, when religious freedom spread throughout the world, and was not there. Her pain and suffering have been from gimmicks. I wonder if you understand what I'm saying. Do you understand gimmicks? What are you talking about, Gene? Well, let me say to you what the gimmicks are. Okay, well, whatever they are, we ought to quit. But I'll tell you why we don't quit. Because if we don't, if we don't give up the gimmicks, we're naked again, and we have discovered that even outside the church, the formal church is seeking but not finding. Okay, I'm going to tell you right quick, so you'll be warned. I've already told you I didn't know about it.

There has always been the spiritual community of the believer throughout the ages. She's always had identifying marks. She's always been made up of hungry-hearted people. The French Revolution scared the pants off the British. British people are very strange. They're an island nation, and they're very egotistical and self-centered. Now, the reason I know that is that we are one of her children. Boy, I'll tell you, if there is an earthquake in China, that's sad. If there is a famine in Ethiopia, that's terrible. But if there's a recession in Great Britain, the Lord is coming. If there's a drought in West Texas, the world is coming to an end. Do you follow me? Doesn't care about the poor people in South America, but boy, if it happens here, that's a sign for sure the Lord's coming. Inflation, God's coming back.

Well, when the French Revolution started, it scared the British, and a whole lot of new doctrines sprang up on that day, and they were taken over by Christians outside the formal church, and every one of them has been panhandled in this country. I've already told you what they are, and they're still around. The Overcomer. The Lord's coming. We ought to be one; that sounds beautiful, but it's a gimmick. We're the Philadelphian church in the middle of the Laodicean age. We're it. This is the group. You want to hear another one? I'll warn you of this one if you haven't seen it. If you belong to our group and leave, God will never bless your life again. It started in 1830 in Plymouth, England, and it's been preached every decade since then as though it had just happened and was meant for your group alone.

I will tell you a new one. Prosperity. I'm picking on you, Dallas. I'm picking on you. Not you. I'm picking on Dallas, but you understand me. What are some of the others? This whole matter of a movement orientation, worldwide movement, Jesus is coming back. We've got to do something, even evangelism. This whole idea we find in organized interdenominational organizations: saving the world in one generation. That's nothing in the world but monument building to a man. The spiritual community of the believer has never been driven by things. She has been driven by a passion for Him and a knowledge and an experience of Him. No gimmicks. She has never been sectarian. She has never denominated. She has always been wide open, even to her persecutors, but since the 1830s, these things have become part of the witness of the spiritual community. I would like to say to about a hundred people here tonight, let's drop these toys, movements, boundaries, sects, denominating from one another. She has never been that way. That's not her way. She's not like that. Let me tell you just a few more things about her. May I? She doesn't really exist outside of an incredible knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I was aware of that when

I was 30 years old, in Tyler, Texas, at 1620 South Sneed. I laid down the ministry, and no, I did not start selling used cars. I stepped up, and I didn't even know it. I became part of that witness to Him and to Him alone. I have never forgotten that it was Christ and only Christ, but I didn't know how to know Him.

Do you have any idea of God's viewpoint about her? His feelings toward her? Do you grasp the depth of His passion for her? How everything else in His eyes pale in the presence of this girl? Can you possibly contrast that with our mindset today? And not today, but in every age. It is when we come out of this trivial mindset to grasp His passion and become one with His revelation that we begin to see what she really is. How can I begin to explain to you the centrality of the community of the believers? How can I tell you that God created this very creation for her? That's all for her. That He never died for you and that He never loved you. He died for her, and He loved her, and you just happened to be part of her. That's how you got in on the love and the redemption. She is the very heartbeat of...you want a verse of scripture? Christ died for the church. Where is that? It's Ephesians, isn't it? Thank you, brother.

How incredibly difficult through all the ages, including this age, it has been for screwballs and nuts and radicals like me to drive home to you that it is a body of believers, a fellowship, a community, and not an individual in whom lies His passion. That the New Testament is not for you. I'm going to take two words: individuality and individualism. One of those you have got to keep, and one of those we really need to take to the cross. Keep your individuality. You're a little strange. Covet that. That's the uniqueness that God made you. Praise the Lord. Individualism. I'm a Barry Goldwater Republican. (laughter) I know that's about 20 years late, but nobody is going to tell me what to do. Boy, is it in America, and boy, is it in Texas. A little of that, just a tiny little bit of that, has got to go within this community of believers.

Look, I write books on spiritual things, and I get letters. I get lots of letters, but one of the outstanding features of those letters is the individualistic nature of them all. I wish to know Jesus Christ better. I wish to know Jesus Christ better. It is a reflection of a spiritual miser. Give me spiritual blessing. Let *me* know Jesus. Now I come to the point: perhaps her most outstanding quality is that her spiritual nature and experience are plural, not singular. Her spiritual experience is plural, not singular; one reason, a little reason, but a reason, the Christian life does not work is that it is singular. It's preached singular. Even from the pulpit within the building, it is spoken to you without the revelation of the spiritual community of the believer. It is preached to you individually. For shame; this is one of the biggest barriers to getting through the Christian life, which was not meant for you. It was meant for a community. I want you all to know that, whether you realize it or not, somewhere deep down in the deepest bowels of your being, you know that; your spirit will cry out and tell you that. If you don't know it, you will know it. It is a community.

I don't like that word. I don't know which word I would like to use tonight, but I am going to use the word "community." Listen to me and look at me. I'll tell you where I came from. I was immaculately conceived, dropped down out of heaven. I have never sinned. I am pious beyond all

piety. Now that is the impression I sometimes get from people when they meet me. Oh, you're Gene Edwards. I feel so funny, strange when you treat me that way. Gosh, you can't understand. So, I'm going to tell you a little bit about me. My daddy was a bootlegger. The other day, my brother was given...which just happened a few days ago. When my mother was dying, she began writing. She was an incredible writer. I got this biologically. She began telling the story from the time she got married until the day before my birth. Then my mother died, and she left that little story beautifully written with somebody. My mother's been dead for about 15 years now, and about two months ago, it was given to my brother on his 60th birthday.

Mama tells the story of Daddy, whose name was Blackie, bootlegging out in the East Texas oil fields because he couldn't get a job. Doggone if everybody else didn't think, well, that's a brilliant idea, and they drove him out of business with other people making bathtub booze. My mama got left by my daddy. He couldn't write or read. He was a Cajun. Mother was in, I don't know where, Atlanta, Commerce, or she might have been in Dallas for all I can recall. Daddy was somewhere out in Gladewater, and she wrote the police and said I haven't heard from my husband in a couple of months; is he dead? I'm telling you that story to tell you. She gave a perfect description of him, and they saw a man on the street who matched it, but their information was a little confused. She was afraid he was dead. They thought the woman, my mother, was saying he was a bigamist, and they found this man. They caught him, and they jailed him for bigamy. He was scared silly, but it wasn't my dad. This man was scared silly because his car was filled with stuff he had stolen right there in the Gladewater area.

Now, the reason I'm telling you is that it was my uncle. Uncle Steve was a bank robber, and Daddy and Steve were the two best people in our family. My mama's side was even worse. I really don't want to tell you all that. I grew up in a family out of deep poverty and incredible ignorance. My granddaddy didn't want anybody to know he couldn't read, so he'd pick up the Bible, and he'd hold that thing sometimes for an hour or two upside down. Ignorant poor people. I grew up in the oil fields. I'm in East Texas, a roughneck. Everybody I knew smoked, cussed, drank, spat tobacco, and usually had two or three fingers missing. Everybody had a strange name. Mope, Runt, Blackie, Tars, Mama. Guy was about 68 and about that wide. Little brother. These were the names. Nobody had a real name; everybody had a nickname. The only female in my whole life was my dear mother. That's the only one.

Listen, I got saved out of desperation. I didn't get saved because I was spiritually inclined. I want you to know that whatever I may know of the Lord Jesus Christ tonight or today is because I was driven there out of desperation. I did not get there by inclination. I am not spiritually inclined. Now, what I want to tell you is I owe everything to the body of Christ. What I have learned, what I know, what I have experienced has been within her walls, within this spiritual community of the believer. Not as an individual miser sitting at home reading Christian deep, spiritual, profound books. No, but from the body, from that spiritual community that has been in existence for 2,000 years. Say, "Praise the Lord." She is your hope of knowing Him here and now in a real way.

I'll tell you again. If you won't confess this, I'm going to confess it for you. The first book I ever wrote was entitled *Here's How to Win Souls*. It was written by a 25-year-old kid. Very zealous. I reasoned that I was as zealous as I was told to be zealous. Little verses of scripture picked it all up and pulled it together, and I was told to go out and take the whole world for Christ. The church was a building, and I couldn't stand it. I don't mind telling you that. I don't like to go to church. Hey, listen. Look at me. Listen to me. Confess my St. Augustine-like sins. I can't stand going to church on Sunday morning. It's the most boring thing in the world. I'd rather go home, turn on my dryer, fold my clothes in there, get a chair, and sit down to watch my clothes spin—hot dog. There's my sock. I wondered where that handkerchief was. Now that's exciting compared to going to church.

I was in Thailand during the fall of Vietnam, and I was invited to speak at a church. I think it was a CMA church. I don't know what it was. Those people had been in a hypnotic trance from the day they had been saved, and Sunday morning was this. They gave me this, and I stepped down out of the pulpit, down on the floor, and I began talking to those people. The translator had to follow me around, and I talked to those folks, and they had to stay out of their hypnotic trance. Those people were offended, literally offended, because they didn't get their nap that morning. There is a hypnotic trance that we get into on Sunday morning. You know what I'm talking about. I know you've been there. That is what the world thinks the church of the living God is. The church of the living God is a 24-hour day experience with brothers and sisters. It is a place of caring and love. It is a place of profound spiritual experience. It is a place where JESUS CHRIST IS DAILY KNOWN by people who are utterly enamored with one another because they have known, encountered, felt, and experienced the love of God. It's poured out of their hearts to one another. That is the church.

I don't like to go to church. I've been to church twice in the last 25 years. What do you think about that? Haven't been to Sunday school yet. Well, I'm going to tell you something else. I don't like to read the Bible. Well, that's not true, but I'm going to say it. You like to read the Bible. Then why are you not reading it? I don't like to pray. You know why I don't like to pray? Because it's boring, that's why. I'll tell you something else. It makes me feel guilty, because when I come to pray, I don't have anything to say or do.

Now then, brothers and sisters, I'm not taking everything away from you. I want to replace it with something more profound. I don't know what prayer means in the New Testament. I don't know what it means to you today. I know that I see nothing today that I would call something I'd like to get involved in for the rest of my life. I want you to know that there's something better than what we understand prayer to be, and that is fellowshiping with Him, and fellowshiping with Him with others. It's there, and it's real.

Now, let me come back to the Bible. I'm going to take the New Testament away from you right now. I'm going to take the books in order. I'm going to try to chip away at the individuality in your concepts. You know the oldest book in the New Testament. What's the oldest book in the New

Testament? You haven't the foggiest idea. Oh, I tell you, lady, the fact you don't know is one of the greatest problems we have in the church. The New Testament is in its present arrangement not because God and the Archangel Gabriel came down and put it in that arrangement, but because Martin Luther taught doctrine at the University of Wittenberg and arranged the New Testament according to his syllabus; it is an absolute chaotic mess. I mean Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that's fine, but after that, it is doctrinally arranged, and you never get the story of the spiritual community of the believers because they are messed up.

The oldest Christian writing ever penned is probably the book of Galatians. James probably came along about the same time, before Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John were ever conceived. Now, have you ever been blessed by the book of Galatians? Well, you should not have been blessed by the book of Galatians. The book of Galatians was not written for you, and the sentences in it are not written for you. We call them verses now, but the book of Galatians was written to four churches. Churches. Churches. It is not for you. It is for a body of believers who were knit together, who loved one another and cared for one another daily. They lived in one another's pockets. They understood and knew what ekklesia meant. They were a spiritual body committed to one another in harmony and unity, and a loving relationship in Christ, in Him the center. Take away the book of Galatians. It isn't yours. It belongs to the spiritual community of the believers. Praise the Lord. Well, good. Let's go to the second- and third-oldest books in the New Testament.

We come to First and Second Thessalonians. Oh, there was a verse of scripture in First Thessalonians that just changed my life. Well, it shouldn't have, and there's not a promise in it. There's not a verse in it. There's not a word in it that was written for you. Reread the opening passages of both of them to the ekklesia in Thessalonica, to the holy ones of God. It was written to a body of believers who were knowing and encountering the Lord. Doesn't belong to you. Belongs to the eternal church. Okay, let me think real fast. Oh yeah, First and Second Corinthians. You Pentecostals love that book. Oh, you know that's so funny what you do with some of those verses, and you make them individual. Even in your church, you make them individual. Brothers and sisters, I'm sorry, whatever blessing you got out of First and Second Corinthians...and I know I'm being extreme here...I know somebody's going to go home and say, "Gene said I shouldn't have anything to do with all those books in the Bible because they were written to churches and I don't have a Bible anymore."

Well, I'm really simply trying to make a point. First and Second Corinthians were written to the church in Corinth, but you don't approach it from that viewpoint, do you? You get down and read that thing and start looking for little goodies that'll help you get a nice, great big automobile, or out of the present mess you are in. Or as one sister who just got married... my wife was having breakfast with her one morning when they started to pray. The woman bowed her head and said, "God, make John stop being mean to me." It's that kind of "search in the scripture." God, make people stop being mean to me. Alright, what's the next book? The next book's probably Romans. I'm sorry. *For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things past, nor things to come, nor anything created can separate you and me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus...that*

was not written to you. Go read chapter 16 of Romans and see who it was written to. Their names are inscribed there. They were the saints who gathered in the city of Rome. It was written to a community of believers. Ephesians was written to a bunch of churches in Asia Minor. Colossians was written to a brand-new church in Colosse. You can't have either one of those. They don't belong to you. They belong to the church. You can't have Philippians because Philippians was written to the church in Philippi.

Okay, we're down to Titus and Timothy. 1st Timothy, praise the Lord. Maybe here's a book for you. Let me ask you a question. Is your name Timothy? Now, let me tell you to whom the book of Timothy was written. It was written to a man who plants churches, and if you ever read it again, remember that; it was written to a man who plants churches. 2nd Timothy was written to a man who plants churches from a man who plants churches, and the book of Titus was written to a man who plants churches from a man who plants churches.

Now we have almost come to the end of Paul's writings, and praise the Lord, there is one book that Paul wrote, it's nine verses long. I think it's the book of Philemon, it's written to an individual. The problem is that it's about slavery. I don't know how much it'll help you, but it's yours if you want. 1st and 2nd Peter were written to the churches that were dispersed into the Gentile world. You can have first, second, and third John if you wish, but they were written to individuals within the church.

Well, Gene, we can have Revelation. I can have Revelation - to the churches, to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Right? You can't have Revelation. Sister, you've got a heart for the Lord. I want the Lord. I'm never going to know Him according to His focus, according to His view, until I know Him within this eternal community. That's what my spirit is longing for, and that's what my spirit wants. I can't say anymore.

I'm going to close by telling you a story. You got anything you really need to say? I'm opening it up. If you really need to ask or tell me something, don't go home with one of these crazy ideas in your head. I'm speaking radically, but it's to make space for Christ in your life. I'm going to tell you why I'm here. Now, you're going to find out. It is because of an experience I recently had, and I think, as I'm starting to tell you this, the only thing I'm afraid of is that I'm afraid you will think you understand what I'm talking about. I promise you, unless it is an extraordinary thing, you haven't the foggiest idea what I'm talking about.

I am in the business... well, first of all, I'm not in much of any kind of business. Most of my life is spent lying down. I'm not lazy. I just can't get up. My health has slightly improved recently, which is why I'm daring this little trip I'm taking right now. I'm doing it because of what I'm about to say to you. I have known since I was 30 years old that Christ was the center, and I have sought to make Him the center. No gimmicks, no games, no tricks, no nothing. If I cannot motivate people to Christ as by Christ, I have no reason for preaching. And by the way, she's a flimsy, frail church when she's built on nothing but Christ. It is incredible. Give me a good old doctrine. Give me something to hate. Give me something to believe. Give me a goal. You know, you can hold

anything together. Give me a building. Give me a movement, but boy, when you got nothing but Christ, she's fragile. She is just as fragile as she can be, because of our innate need to chase something else. My business is the Lord and His house, but I'm still learning the depths of what that means. I'm getting old now; you wouldn't know that just looking at me, would you? I've always known you started with Christ, and you worked out from there. You didn't have anything if you didn't start with Christ: the experience, the embracing, the encounter, the knowing of Him.

It's just been driven home to me in the last few months that as I met with a group of Christians and we began, let's say we just began raw beginning. We began by meeting, singing, praising, and worshiping. Now, that sounds so reasonable, but I've had to step back and look at that, even the very basics of Christian fellowship, and realize that I made a mistake. That worship does not draw me to Christ. Christ draws me to worship. Singing and praising do not draw me to Christ. Christ draws me to singing and praising. And you know that has come to me more or less as a shock, because I just never thought about that. I never realized it. I'll tell you now where it came from. It didn't work. Now I'm going to tell you why it didn't work, and my particular situation is very unusual.

People read my books, and they sell their homes. No, I don't think anybody ever sold...I don't know... maybe they did, but they get in their cars and leave California, where it's always 72 degrees, and they cross the great desert. They come across the Continental Divide. They cross the Mississippi. They go through the tulip fields of Georgia. They pass on the great monuments of Washington. They go up past the great cities of Boston and New York, and they come to a place that Eskimos stick their nose up at. They come to Maine. They step out of the car and say to me, "Work magic." And here is what I've discovered about you people. Every one of those people who step out of that car has got an agenda. Do you understand what I just said?

"I want relationships." "I want caring." "I want evangelism." "I want prayer." "I want to see that this is for real." "We want to pray and see every human being in Portland, Maine, converted to Christ in a great revival." By the way, just for the record, so you'll all know everywhere I've been, you should know this: in every city I've been on this earth where I've met Christians, someone in that city has prophesied that there's going to be a great worldwide revival, and it will begin in that city. That's going to be quite a trick.

So, there are those who come with this agenda: Portland, Maine. God told us that it's going to begin in Portland, Maine, and Gene, you've come, and we know you're the answer to this prayer. The agenda just goes on and on and on. I don't know enough about God in the Bible, the Old Testament, the New Testament, Greek, and Hebrew to keep up with the different things people can come up with in their agenda. Have you ever read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*? Has anybody here ever read that? Thank you, brother. You gave me the book. Yes, you've read it. He makes this incredible statement...thank you, John. I'm in debt to you...He states that when people come into this community, every one of them comes with a "dream wish", and that dream wish is literally the destruction of that fellowship. The very first thing you have to do is lay down that

dream wish. I had to absolutely stop in Portland, Maine. Too many agendas, too many dream wishes, too many demands. It wasn't going to work. I'm never going to do it again.

Well, you know, crises have a way of teaching you lessons that later become the most valuable thing in the world to you. So, I said I was going to start over, and this is what I'm starting over with. I'm going to meet with whoever wants to meet with me on Tuesday night. Now, if you have 10 kids and you both can't come, we have no way to take care of them. I'm going to meet with you on Wednesday night. So, the husband can come one night, the wife the other. That's all. Tuesday night and Wednesday night. That's it. I sat down with those Christians. No singing, no worship, no praise, nothing. None of the outward things, nothing. I sat down with those people and said, "I am going to show you how." And this is what I'm afraid you think you'll understand. I'm going to show you how to know Christ. I'm going to show you how to know Him, not in this realm, but to meet Him and encounter Him and know Him in the other realm. You're going there to know Him, not here.

And that was all—nothing more, but nothing less. I sat down on the floor, leaned up against the sofa, and met with those brothers and sisters. I'll tell you what I talked to him about in the first week: how religious they were. Watch. Come into the room; everybody's chatting, having fun. They see me, and everybody gets holy. I clear my throat, start speaking, and everybody's whispering. That's why I talked to them the first week. They came back the next week, and now they talk all the time; it's just an incredible difference, just how truly informal it is. We go through this phase of being humans, and then we are suddenly church. I met with some dear brothers and sisters who decided they were going to start meeting, and they dared not call it a meeting. So, they had lunch together, and they said, "This is so wonderful. Next week, let's have a reunion of everybody who is here this week. We'll have a reunion." They've been calling it a reunion, and they start with a meal, a picnic, or something to keep the religion out.

Now, trying to get the religious out and the spiritual in, especially something of this depth, proportion, and magnitude, is no simple trick. Forgive me, but it isn't easy. Then I began to talk to them about knowing Him. I asked for only one commitment, and this was it—that one morning a week, they would get up. Each one of them would get up alone with the Lord. One morning a week, they would get up with one other person with the Lord, and sometimes another meeting, either to share or to get up in the early morning with someone, and then come to the meeting. I was in, and that was all I was asking of anyone.

Now, before this weekend is out, I hope to touch on what happened and try to express it to you. But I want you to know that whatever it was, my subject is the spiritual community of the believer—this business of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, out of these awkward circumstances came, for me, a new experience with brothers and sisters. We had no singing, no praising, no worship, no nothing. We went in there with nothing but to know the Lord in ways that most Christians never even knew existed. Some of you know that every summer we have held a week-long conference on the deeper Christian life in Portland, Maine. When I met with Christians

there that week, I tried to share ways of really getting to know the Lord Jesus. I will not, I do not, never have, and never will share any of this in an individual setting. If I can't do it corporately, I won't do it. Because to me, that would be giving up my franchise. You won't find it on any tapes I preach. You won't find it in any books I've written. It will be communicated human-to-human and within a corporate setting. I will not do it any other way because it was not given to me that way, nor was it given to the spiritual community of the believers for the last 2,000 years any other way. That's the way of the Lord.

In other settings, I had taken two years to do this because it was a true community "church life" setting, but we were doing all these other things. We were worshiping the Lord, singing and praising Him, preaching and teaching, and all this. This time, it was just Him. Nothing but Him. I remember that about the third week, I had given them something to do. They have to get up early in the morning. Boy, do you know the difference between ignorant and ignorant? Have you gotten too far away from your roots? Do you have a country mother and daddy? Do you know the difference between ignorant and ignorant? Ignorant here. Ignorant is down here. These people were so spiritually ignorant that they were ignorant of their ignorance. I never saw anybody who knew less of the Lord, and boy, they would come back from their mornings and say, "I don't understand what's going on, nothing's happening." Nothing.

About the fifth week, something began to happen. I left there to start this trip in about the 10th, 11th, or 12th week. I want to take just a moment to try to describe what those meetings are like or were like when I left. We got maybe 30 people, about 20 one night and 15 the other night. It shifts back and forth. Probably 25 to 30 people. No more than 30 people. I'm trying to tell you what they're not. One night, forgive me, I usually pick on Baptists. Tonight, I'm picking on Pentecostals. I don't know why. I never pick on a fundamentalist; they kill. Baptists and Pentecostals will take almost anything. They really will. God love them, they really will take almost anything. A group of Pentecostals came into the meeting one night. They were from Great Britain. They came in with, excuse me, with their little song and dance. May I say it? They came in and they told us about this vision they've had and about this prophecy they had and about these miracles they were having and the call they had and the thing that they were doing and why God was doing it and sort of a big broad hint they'd love to pass the offering plate, and wouldn't we like to join and help them in this great thing God was doing.

And by the way, we did that. We were not sectarian; we just sat there and did everything they wanted us to do, and we helped them. But finally, they sat down in this great spiritual thing. Now I want you to know that I am proud to tell you the rest of this. I am boasting. Forgive me. I am boasting. We had our meeting. Our guest went home to be with the people they were spending the night with. They had sat through that meeting, listened, and gone home. Now they were starting a Bible school. They were Bible teachers. These people are supposed to know everything. They got back to the home where they were spending the night, and they said, "What on earth were those people talking about?" They did not understand one thing they heard. Praise the Lord.

Have you ever been troubled by New Testament vocabulary that you never hear in our day? Has that ever bugged you? Has it ever entered your mind? Do you know what I'm talking about? How they throw around terms like *being in God*, and *being in Christ*, and *being in Spirit*, and *walking in Spirit*, and *living in Spirit*, and have what? The Baptist does that. Oh, is it just Baptists who do that? Oh, I never heard any Baptist talk about being in God. Have you? Jack wrote a book on it. I have a friend over in Fort Worth who is a very well-known minister, whom I'm making fun of right now. We're very close friends. We can insult one another.

There is a New Testament vocabulary that we never seem to hear. If you don't understand what I mean, go home and read Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1 and ask yourself, can you experientially identify with those chapters? They are so far out into other places. Here was a group of brothers and sisters sitting in a room. I don't know how to describe what's going on in that room, but these kinds of words come to my mind as I sit there and listen to brothers and sisters come back and report in, and one word is "awe". Just plain "awe". Another one is a profound sense of the holy, not that I need to be whole, I don't mean that kind, but that something awesome, something holy has been seen and known and experienced. I sit there and listen to them, and I try to hear anybody say, 'I, me, my' or even the Lord showed 'me' or what 'I learned' was; it's not there. The only thing that I hear is Jesus Christ. I'm not talking about something learned. I'm talking about something seen, deep within, known, laid hold of Him. And I've learned a lesson. I have seen something happen that I've never seen happen before. I have never...in the business of seeing people's lives changed...I have never seen anything this radical happen before.

Now listen to those saints when they first came into the meeting. It was "Lord, we thank you Lord, that you Lord are so good Lord, to us Lord to be with us Lord tonight, Lord, and we thank you Lord that we can be together Lord in Your name Lord. Amen, Lord." Do you understand what I'm saying? And vegetables all over the place. "Let us, Lord, let us, Lord, let us, Lord. And help us, Lord. Help us, Lord. Help us, Lord." And so centered on themselves and praying a mile a minute, afraid somebody's going to catch them or something. Now, to listen to those brothers and sisters speak as though they were temporary visitors in this realm. That their heritage, their experience, their knowledge, their knowing, their conversation is in another realm. I hear that ancient Christian vocabulary is naturally used to express an experience.

Brother Joe, Brother Jim, I'm going to tell you what I'm doing, and this is why I'd like for you to come back. We get into a rut. You know, as an evangelist, we came into town and preached and got out. We have a week-long conference, and everybody goes home. Or a church gets together, and you have to move all the way to Portland, Maine, for a foundation. I want to do what I've just done. I want to do it again. I want to meet one night a week for 10 weeks with some Christians whose tongues are hanging out to know the Lord. I want to move from the abstract to the concrete. I want to get out of the ectoplasm and into this real, practical reality. One night a week with some heart-hungry people. I have no doctrines to promulgate. I have no interest in you. I'm too old and too puny to be trying to start anything. I'm like Charles de Gaulle. He said, he said, "I am too old

for any of the things that you're afraid I might do." I am too old. I want to do this again. I want to watch it happen again.

I want to meet with some heart-hungry Christians one night a week who will rise with the dawn, one morning alone, and one morning with someone else, and then report in one night a week. I want to meet with those Christians, gutsy, brave Christians. As I said, with your tongues hanging out to know Him and know Him better and to know Him as well as He can be known. There is a knowing Him as well as He can be known. It is beyond all other knowledge, and that's when you are in Him. I want to meet with 15 or 20 people one night a week for 10 weeks. I want to do that about five nights a week. I'm like the Marines. I'm looking for a few good men or women. I want to sit down without singing, without worship, without praise, without Bible study, nothing but to come together to know Him and see how far you can go in 10 weeks.

I spoke in Houston. I told people exactly what I'm telling you. I didn't bring this message, but I told them this at some point. I did this with some brothers in Belmont, now I'm in Grand Prairie, and I'm headed for Paris, Texas. I'm prepared to come back to this state when it's snowing. I'm dead serious. I couldn't possibly do this in the summer. I'm looking for a few good men and women who want to know the Lord. I want to do this again and leave something hopefully deposited in you that will stay with you forever. We'll take you to a place in Christ you've never been, and hope and pray that it will become your very life, and that after I'm dead and gone, out of the riches of Christ, you'll pass it on. But I will not do it except in a community of believers. I'm not going to do it for any individual. I want to see you together become like those spokes on the wheel who come closer and closer and closer to one another as you come to Him.

Now you have every right to ask questions about anything. Doesn't matter. Come on. Yes, brother. Oh, you had a question way back when. Yes, sir. That's the word (ecclesia) I've heard. I don't like it. Don't think that's what its meaning was to the Christians. That's etymology. That's how that word began. But I don't believe that's what it meant to the first-century Christians. That word began five 600 years before the Christians ever came around: the called-out into a square; baloney. 500 years later, it couldn't have possibly meant that; that meant the gathering. Yes, ma'am.

Audience: I missed one little thing you said. Maybe more, but this particular one, you said you asked the group to get up one morning early, the second morning with another person, and then you said to come together, then you said you asked them to get up again, then come in and report to ask them to do something, but I didn't...

Okay, sometimes I ask them to get all together early in the morning, not often, but we always get together one night a week and share, and then I tell them what to do the next week.

Audience: That's what I do not understand. What did you ask them to do? What do I tell them to do? *Nathaniel, come and see.* (smile)

Okay, can I stop there? I think I can answer. There is no form of the first century. I want you to look at my nose. Do you have any idea how hard I labored to get that nose? This is one of the great

projects of my life. My mother and father, when I was born, got around my crib and prayed every day that a nose would come out on the front of my face. You understand? It didn't happen. It was organic to my species. And this is where this New Testament church business does not work. We're not dealing with an organization, a concept, a theory, or a theology. We are dealing with a form of life, a biological classification of life. There is something within you that is organically, naturally, biologically drawing you to a spiritual community of believers to know Him together. It is a drawing of the divine.

I am very burdened to pursue this, that you might understand the divine nature of the church. Let me try to illustrate this. I was on a 10-hour flight to Japan. I don't fly to Japan all the time. I only did this once. This is not one of those stories to impress you, but it happened on my way to Japan. I'm sitting there with a Life magazine in my hand, reading about how they would travel to other parts of the universe in space because man dies getting there if he can't go faster than light. So, they were going to manufacture these great machines, put embryos in them, and then, after millions and millions of years, the machines would be timed to start working, let the embryos begin to grow, and then have machines there to take care of them, and they'd grow up.

I put the article down and fell into a discussion with the man next to me. The question asked in the article was, "What would man be like if he had been mothered by machines on the other side of the universe?" It turns out this gentleman was the dean of the sociology department at Yale. And he said, "Those people would naturally be monogamous, and they would fall into a family community. They would fall into their family and community because it is biologically innate to our species." Just like it is biologically innate for wolves to be monogamous. What else is monogamous? Elephants. Are they monogamous? Eagles are monogamous. Several birds. Doves. Hawks.

It's in your genetic makeup to desire ekklesia. It is in your genetic makeup to go house to house praising God in simplicity, full of grace. It is your genetic nature to be drawn to a living room...and dislike the pew. (laughter) It is your genetic nature to wish to live with the brothers and sisters and love and care as long as it is the species of God, His nature in you that is being fed and growing. This is her expression. There's no New Testament church. There's only the record of a biological, innate, organic drive to be this people. Our job, as part of this community of believers, is not so much to do many things; it's to drop so many things, and then she comes up out of the soil in her simplicity, her beauty. Her engine, her one and only engine, is Him. It's not fasting. It's not prayer. It's not...it's not being nice. It's not stopping sinning. It's Him. Then she just naturally expresses herself in the way that I have touched on tonight. I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, if you open the pages of history, she's always there. She's the witness to the bride of Christ, and she's always been basically the same in her expression.

Now, I know you do not often hear things like this. I know you don't often hear things like this. For some of you, it may be very foreign to your ears, but I want you to know something: a first-century believer was obsessed with two things - Christ and the community of the believers. You

couldn't have sold her an interdenominational movement, Bibles to Russia, or a prosperity gospel. You could have sold her all these trinkets. She was possessed with Him and with this community, and it was the magnetism of this community and this girl that so radically changed the world.

Well, we're going to stand up and sing. Some of us will come back here tomorrow night. Yes, brother Mike. **Audience:** I don't know whether it's a question or what the Lord has shown me that you're saying that the organic nature that was within us, particularly that was birthed in us when we come to receive Him, is the organic nature of our Father.

It is his own biological... **Audience:** His spiritual biology. Our heavenly Father. It's not human. The universe is to have a family. The church does not belong to the human race. The human race is lost. The church belongs to a different species.

Now, if you can understand this, Jesus Christ was not the same species as a lost man. If you would...if you could understand this, He had organs inside of Him that lost man didn't have. He was biologically different, as is an eel and an electric eel, if you could understand that. He naturally gathered people around Him. Did you notice it's the organic nature of God to be in community? And when they got saved at Pentecost, what came out of it was not an organization. It was a spontaneous expression of 3,000 people who had divine life in them, different from this world.