

What I want to talk to you about is growth, growth in numbers. If you don't grow, someday you get a little inverted. So I'm going to talk to you about what we will be doing in one church, and I would admonish the rest of you to do the same in all the churches. In fact, this isn't even up for debate. If you want to innovate, fine, but we're going to do this. We're even going to do this in Stade, England, and we're going to do it in New Amsterdam, and we're going to do it everywhere else.

I think the last time I talked to the brothers and sisters in this room, I talked to them about what kind of church you want to have, what kind of a church do you wish to be. So I'm opening this particular session with more than that, and that is for anyone who writes to us and says, "We would sure like to have a house church. Would you like to help us?" This is what I want to say to you on a practical basis, but as an introduction, I am going to speak again to the people in this room about the follies of the house church movement.

It started about 15 years ago, and today it is dead and no longer exists. I'm sure two or three people have survived in it, and the only reason is that you've got some particular leader who loves to teach the Bible or the New Testament. I'll speak frankly: you don't know the New Testament. You just know some verses that somebody told you. You think you know the New Testament. None of us do. I'm a seminary graduate and much, much more. I know that what has been taught as the Bible is, in fact, a study in verses. I will tell you again: you will run out of things to say, and you'll probably begin blaming God's people for not doing what they should do because you were taught that if you teach God's people the Word of God, it will transform their lives. The reason that will not work is point number two: the evangelical Christian faith is void of spiritual depth.

A church gets somebody to preach, somebody sits in the congregation, and somebody goes home. A guest comes in and speaks, everybody gets revived and says, "wow," and then they all go home. I don't know of a preacher in America, or in the English-speaking world, who could step down from his pulpit and begin talking to God's people about how they could walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. I will tell you exactly what he will teach. He will teach them to pray, and teaching you to pray is not a spiritual walk with Christ. Furthermore, most of what I ever heard about prayer was very discouraging and very dry.

So I say to every group of Christians in the world who are trying to have an informal type of church, you cannot succeed. So I ask this question: what kind of church do you want? Do you want to be a group of Christians who come together, sing a few pitiful songs out of some hymnal that probably had songs that died a hundred years ago, and some murmuring little pathetic prayers, and then a little teaching from someone. He will still be teaching 10, 15, 20 years from now, and everybody will sit there nodding and thinking, uh-huh, and you have not changed the world? The house church movement does not reach out. You have to start somewhere else.

Almost every day, I think one simple statement: we have to throw everything out and start at ground zero. You have to start all over again. Throw out everything that you consider to be what ought to be. The first need is not a teaching of the Bible. It is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second thing needed is for those people gathered there to encounter Christ. That is the second thing that's needed. Your functioning will die if you do not have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It will become pathetic. What's that word when they put you in right before you die in the hospital? What's that word? Intensive care. You will live in intensive care with a pitiful little Bible teaching that is centered on the Bible, that is not centered on Christ, and your people will not know how to function. You don't know how to tell them to function or how they can function because you never function other than in your imagination, and you are not equipped to do this. Now this is where we are right this minute.

I'll tell you something real and true, and even I hate to admit it, and that is God's people will not hang around with you very long if you're dead. They will come to your meeting, and they'll never return if you're dead. So you better not be dead. You'd better be alive. Now the only way a small group of Christians can be alive is for everybody to come in here to fight a living, breathing battle. I mean a battle. For a meeting of God's people is a demonstration and a display of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that cannot be done without a battle.

Christ is not displayed easily or for very long without a battle. After 1800 years, God's people have almost no idea how to come into a meeting and take that meeting over, and that's really hard to do when you're 8 or 10 or 15 people. You have to do it anyway. There should be, in your heart, the desire to see 20 people, 30 people, 40 people, 50 people. After that, then you enter into a whole new stage. I can guarantee you, when you get up about that high, you're going to be screaming for help from somebody who's been further down this road than you have in a world that you know nothing of.

Now, where do we begin? Well, if you are ten people, there are a lot of things you need to do ahead of time that would take most of this meeting to address, even in the simplest terms. All I can do right now in this introductory meeting is give you an introduction. One of them is that you're going to have to learn how to sing. You're going to have to learn to sing things that have never been heard by people before. And you'll have to do it with vigor. You'll have to do it loud. You're going to have to do it well. You're going to have to do it in a coordinated way. And quite frankly, you're going to have to do it practiced. Won't we practice? God won't like that. Look, I'm worried. Practice is not just what you're supposed to do. You practice whether you want to or not. And practicing catches fire. You do it right two or three or four times, and soon you realize that what you're doing is what your heart wants to do. You're breaking the bounds, the chains of the quiet functioning, or even the dead functioning, or the non-functioning. So there's a lot that has to be taken care of right here in the gathering, a great deal of work and a great deal of preparation. I'll not touch on that any further except to say that if you're 10, you're 15, you're 20,

you're 30, you've got much to do. You will live or die upon whether or not you are interested enough to learn the answer to that question: how, together, as 10 or 15 or 20 people, in life.

Now I'm talking here in a living room with a group of people so small I'm afraid to count how few there are. We live in an electronic world, so take advantage of it. You watch people's habits. We no longer have a marketplace as in the first century, a marketplace where people gathered and lolled around all day and picked up the latest news and listened to anybody of any interest who came into their forum or their square and listened to them. What an advantage those who burned for Christ had. You can do that if you want to downtown in a park, but mostly you will get stares. They've got two television sets, both in color, with the latest gadgets that go with them, and they have an entire city given over to their entertainment. And you are a nitwit. No, you're just a halfwit.

How do people do? How are they reached today? I hate to admit it, but I can only tell you what I watch: people turn on their computers to see what they can find. A single man wants to get married. He types something into a computer to find out where young, unmarried couples meet. The surfers find the surfers. The polo players, the hockey players, the race car drivers, the boat people, the hiking people, and the exercise people all look wherever.

But Christians also get curious and turn on their computer to find Christians. So for every one of you except Athens, you're going to have to create the absolutely most wonderful, glorious website. Now you're going to have to do this, and you better do it better than anybody else has. You'd better throw away your thoughts of how it's going to be or what it's going to do. That's one thing you're going to have to do.

You'll have to win the trust of the people in your neighborhood. You only have one thing going for you: they're all hurting. They are all hurting. And the fact of the matter is that we could take a poll right here in this room of some very honest, open people, and we would probably find that most of us are hurting. We have one another. We have the Lord. They don't have anybody. They've got a neighborhood they know who's got more problems than they have. They don't have anything else in the world, but what the world can give them on a television set, or a boat, or a sailboat, or Friday night entertainment, or drugs, or anything in the long, long, long list of entertainment.

When I was young, I heard a minister speaking of the fact that they had one of these huge ceiling fans, 48-inch fans that went around that sucked all the air through the house and out (poor air conditioning). And he said, I thought, you know, that's the most wonderful thing in this world. We'll never need anything again. And then air conditioning had just come out, and he said, and now we've got air conditioning. He said, I predict that we won't be satisfied with that. We're going to attempt to air-condition the entire planet so we can always be cool. Now the list goes on and on, and there are new inventions every day, and none of it can fill the void.

There's a song like that woman at the well. We're thirsty and cannot be satisfied. Then the Lord said, " Drink of me, and you will never thirst again." And that is your community. So that's the next thing I want to say: you've got to start with your neighborhood. The purpose of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to reach an entire city. Start where you are and go out from there. God have mercy on you if you lead a lot of people to the Lord. Every person you lead to the Lord, there are two or three things you can absolutely know for certain. One of them is that they're psychopathic. The second is that they have no idea what you're doing. They will want to take their mind, put it in this room, and try to make everything change so it fits their understanding, because what they're about to meet doesn't fit their understanding. Then there is, of course, the "clutcher". Finally, we find somebody who can meet our needs, and we clutch on them.

People come in; they talk too much; they don't talk enough. They talk about themselves. They talk about something else. They have no idea what the spirit, their own spirit, is, although they are saved. They want to teach the Bible because they've learned that if the Bible is the Bible and nothing else, we don't have anything against the Bible. After all, it lifts up Jesus. That's where we must be. And the only reason you men out there who are teaching the Bible is because you don't know how to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ with your Scripture. Take a look, mister. What's coming out of your mouth first? Word of God, Bible, teachers, doctrine. How often is it Jesus? Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. So you're going to have to turn your head around backward.

Alright, to every one of you who are listening to my voice. We will be the first ones in. We'll send you ours, and we'll show you what we did. Then we're going to go toward the door until the people are going to walk up on their front doorstep. They're going to see what's hanging on their doorknob. And they'll say, " Oh, it's those Christians again." And we're going to leave little notes for them. We're going to let them know when we're meeting or why we're meeting, and when we have a guest speaker. Maybe we're going to bring a doctor in one night, and he's going to speak to us about health. Let's hope we can find a Christian doctor who has a different view of how to get well. We're going to look for any and every opportunity we can to hang something on people's doors.

And everyone else, one other thing you're going to have to do back home, which I failed to mention: you're going to have to learn how not only to sing, but announce songs. There's nothing more bothersome to the soul or the spirit than when you finish a song—tick, tick, tick, tick, tick—and finally somebody says, can we sing number 227, please? This must not be—a lot of practice. If we can get any empty free space in this town, I believe we have something called The Gathering. Is that right? It's sort of a city-wide place board for everybody. Yeah, but what's it got a name, doesn't it? Meetup. Every one of you hearing my voice now knows that you've got a city poster board.

I told you the other night, you have to do things people don't do anymore. All sorts of things. I've done an awful lot of door knocking in my day. Sometimes you meet someone. If you approach

them properly, you can see they need help. Then you ask: if it's a woman, could some of the women in the church come by and say hello, and see if they can help? It's not quite as easy to do that with men, but you do it anyway. Every once in a while, you will come across the desperate, and you'll be able to lead them to the Lord.

Now let me tell you something else you're going to do. You're going to baptize them. But they don't know what baptism is; therefore, you're going to teach them what baptism is. You've got ten people, and then you're going to have to get someone in the fellowship who can articulate, with all meaning and passion, what baptism is. You're going to have to explain to them the full meaning of it and what they're getting into when they go into that water and come out. Some of you are going to have to learn how to baptize people, brothers and sisters. We usually have swimming pools because we don't have a home big enough to put a baptistry in it yet.

Now, I gingerly approach this, but I mean this with all my heart and soul. The church has been very negligent in the subject of healing. I will begin with physical healing. In the early 1900s, a kind of method of healing emerged. As Wesleyans, Methodists had people come forth on the mourner's bench. They still do this; even in the deadest Methodist churches, people come forward and kneel.

Well, that was a hundred years ago when the sinner's bench and the mourner's bench were mourning because he's lost. They'd come forward, and somebody would talk to him and lead him to the Lord. That's back in the frontier days. Then the Pentecostal movement took this over and made a very dramatic thing out of personal healing. Oil, people getting healed instantly. Everybody rejoices. They throw their crutches away. That is now dying out. But it had one flaw: some of those people didn't get healed. Well, every minister can come up with an explanation for just about anything. So that explanation: you weren't healed because you didn't have enough faith. Too bad about you. Same if you don't speak in tongues; something's wrong with your life.

I will define healing for you all once more. There should be a healer in the church who prays for the sick. Then we will believe he will be healed. If he is not healed, then we will keep on staying with him until he gets well. We do that with all the information we have of things that might help them. I'm going to tell you something. I'll tell you all and warn you now. Many people would love to be healed by the laying on of hands, but they don't want to be messed with anywhere else. Now there are people out here dying of malnutrition and don't know it. Some of them weigh 300 pounds, and they're dying of malnutrition, and they don't want to be touched. There's only one way any of us ever gets help at all: when we admit we have a need and are willing to go along with meeting it. That's for everybody in the world.

When we go to a doctor, we admit we have a need. But doctors also are limited. God, give us people with the compassion to pray for and heal the sick, and then to stick with those who do not get healed until they are. So we have healing to add to these things. Low-key, not making a hoopla out of it. Interestingly, Jesus Christ healed the multitudes outside, but any time he got in a

house, he said, "Tell no one when they were healed." It is something beautiful to be able not to tell people to broadcast this. Remember that the world will knock at your door and knock the door down if they think you can get them healed and take no more responsibility. This is the church.

So I would like for every one of you, whatever church you're in, is there anyone among you who can do that without shaking all over? If you have someone within your body who can knock on the door, say, Hi, my name is so-and-so, and somehow get in that door and can lead somebody to the Lord, you have what is called a first-century New Testament biblical evangelist among you. Put him to work. There are even those who are extreme enough to walk up, knock on the door, say, Hi, my name is so-and-so. If you died today, you'd go to hell. I love those kinds. If you've got one of those, you have a treasure indeed. I'm not going to go any further.

For those of you who might be sitting in the seminary, listening to your computer talk, or some of you who write in and say, we'd like to learn more, or we'd like to be helped, or we'd like to have a church: if you really mean to fulfill all that a church is supposed to do and practice, then you can't do that by a few people getting in a room pitifully singing, a few people pitifully praying, and one man pitifully teaching a Bible of which he probably knows very little of anything.

Now, I don't mean that he doesn't know what's in it as far as doctrine. I mean, and I will say this with all emphasis, we were taught the New Testament by chapters and verses. There is another way to learn the New Testament: start at the beginning and go to the end, and don't leave out a single page. That's something that's never happened to Christianity in the last 1,800 years, and you might, when you are finished, discover what the church really is. If they do it starting in the beginning and going to the end in the order in which the events took place, most Christians don't even know, including Bible teachers, what that even means. But whatever you do, and if you think you really can teach the Bible, then you can make the Lord Jesus Christ the center of all things and then show people how to experience him without simply saying, "This is the way we pray." People have got to walk out of that room with a handle. They need to know what to do. It's somebody's responsibility to give us the spiritual and the practical. Let's start here.

For those of you who hear this, and it's going to all the churches. It is now available to anyone who wants it in this marvelous computer age, where somebody can tell you how you can do something with your computer and press a button or two or three and actually hear what was said here this night. We do not speak of that which we theorize. We speak of that which we know, we have experienced, and what we have done and what we do.