

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to Romans 15:14. If you happen to be visiting with us today for the first time, this is an unusual type of message. I preach this message once a year. I call it the Annual State of the Church Message.

As you know, in a few days, our president will appear before both houses of Congress and our judicial branch and will bring what has been called the State of the Union Address. I understand health care reform and social security and federal budgets are important to us right now but I want you to think about it, because a thousand years from now, those things won't matter too much to you, will they? A thousand years from now, you won't be interested in the social security. But I want to say to you, what we do as the church of the Lord Jesus, a thousand years from now, ten thousand years from now, a million years from today is going to be vitally important.

It's interesting to watch when our president presents the State of the Union Address. It's such a divided congress, the Democrats who for this president will be applauding enthusiastically, and you'll have the Republicans who will give him a cool welcome. It's good to know we don't have that kind of divided audience today, because here we are brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope you share my excitement and my enthusiasm about what God has done and what he is going to do at Green Acres Baptist Church.

As I talk about our church today, I feel like a physician who is examining a very healthy person. When a physician conducts a physical examination, a person can be very healthy, but they never say you're perfect. They may say, you're doing great, but you probably need to drop your cholesterol a couple of points or lose a few pounds or exercise a bit more. They always have some words to encourage them to be healthier.

I want to say Green Acres Baptist Church is a healthy church. There's no such thing as a perfect church. If you're looking for a perfect church, you'll never find it. But we are a healthy church. And I've chosen as our text today the very next verse, as I'm preaching through Romans, because that's what Paul does. He addresses the church at Rome, and he says some very positive things about them.

Romans 15:14-16. "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

I. A POSITIVE COMPLIMENT

I want to say two things to you today as we think about Green Acres Baptist Church. First, I want to give what I call a positive compliment. If you'll look again at verse 14, Paul says about the church at Rome, I'm convinced you're full of goodness. I can say the same thing about Green

Acres. There are some great good things about Green Acres. I want to share some of them with you. The Lord Jesus wrote seven letters to seven churches in Revelation, and to the church at Thyatira, he wrote something I believe he would write to Green Acres today. Jesus said, "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you're now doing more than you did at the first." Unfortunately, there are some churches whose greatest days were in the past, but not so with Green Acres Baptist Church. Green Acres Baptist Church is a growing, thriving, healthy church, and our most promising days are even in the future.

I want to compliment this church today. I'm not bragging on us; I'm bragging on the church of the Lord Jesus. The Bible says the church is the bride of Christ. And if you say some good things about my bride, Cindy, I'm going to say, "Thanks a lot, I appreciate that." I don't mind you bragging on my bride whatsoever. Today, I want to brag on the bride of Christ, Green Acres Baptist Church, as I compliment you in five areas.

1. Committed leadership

I want to commend you because you have committed leadership in this church, which are committed to following Jesus Christ, who is our leader. The head of Green Acres Baptist Church is Jesus Christ. We are not a perfect church, but we follow a perfect head. I want to say to you that your staff, those men and women who have been called to serve the Lord here full-time, they are committed to Jesus and they are committed to following him. You may not realize this, because this is the only church you go to most of the time, but I really believe we have got the finest staff of any church in the United States of America. I could just go down the list, person after person after person, but they are all gifted, called, and excellent. All I have to do is travel around and talk to some of my preacher friends and look at some other churches and see some of the staff problems other churches have, and it causes me to thank God for the staff we have here. If you haven't told them lately, you need to tell them individually how much you appreciate them.

We also have a group of committed deacons, men who are committed to Jesus Christ. They understand a deacon is a true servant of Jesus. You probably noticed lately I've asked our deacons to wear some little nametags with their names and then ask the question, "How may I serve you?" Our staff wears those tags saying, "How may I serve you?" because we believe to be a leader, we must be servants to you. Leaders don't tell you what to do. We ask how can we serve you? One of our deacons was at Wednesday night supper the other night with his little "How may I serve you?" nametag on. He said, "Somebody told me they wanted two more cups of coffee, so I went and got it for them." It happened to be Ray Phillips. I said, "Ray, when you do that, you're doing exactly what the deacons in the New Testament did, wait on tables and serve people." So our staff and our deacons have made a commitment to be servant leaders.

I want to say to you your committees in this church are committed individuals who love Jesus and want the best for this church. Some of the finest individuals anywhere serve this church by leading us on committees. I could talk about all the different committees. I don't have time. But one in particular, I want to share with you your Finance Committee is full of men and women who love Jesus Christ. We have a financial policy requiring every member of the Finance Committee be a confirmed tither. You know why, don't you? Because we don't want somebody

who is robbing from God, talking about how God's money is going to be spent. So these are totally committed people.

In fact, one area, as you have been giving money to Discover the Joy over the last 18 months, you know what they have done? They've taken that money and they have invested it in what they call tiered investments, and they're so much smarter than I am. So they can invest the money until we actually have to pay it on the building. During these 18 months, they have earned for you almost \$700,000 of just interest during that time. That was pretty tough, because they didn't invest in junk bonds or Internet IPOs or anything like that. They had to maintain the integrity of the money. I just want you to feel good about the leaders of our church who are following Jesus Christ. Today, the one reason we can compliment this church is you've got committed leadership.

There's a verse I want to read to you, I should have put it on the outline, but just write the reference down. It's Hebrews 13:7. It says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Now, our staff and our deacons understand our number one role is to be a model to you. I need to model to you how the Christian husband lives, how a Christian father lives, how a Christian lives. So do our deacons. We understand that's the best thing we can do for you is to be a good Christian example. We do that by being servant leaders.

2. Amazing generosity

Here's the second area I want to compliment our church on. Our church demonstrates amazing generosity. Not every church is that way. Some are so stingy, but not this church, this is a generous church. I heard about back in the days of circuit riding preachers, an old preacher who went to a little church, got off his horse and went in and they only had one deacon. And the deacon said to the preacher, "Now preacher, this is what we'll do. After you preach, we'll let you pass your hat, and whatever offering you get, that's your offering for today." So the circuit rider preached his heart out and did the best job he thought he could. The deacon took his hat and passed the preacher's hat up and down every aisle of the church. The preacher got it back and looked in there. It was totally empty. He even turned it upside down. There wasn't a nickel, dollar or penny in the hat. The preacher said, "Folks, let's bow our heads and thank God for this offering." They wondered, "What is he going to thank God for?" He said, "Dear Lord, knowing this congregation the way I do, I want to thank you for giving me my hat back."

There are some churches like that, but not Green Acres Baptist Church. You guys are so generous. You give and you give and you give. Let me give you some numbers. You have already given to Discover the Joy, the building of this new building, over \$13 million. It's going to take \$23, \$24 million to complete the project, and I'm convinced money is going to come in one way or another.

One year ago, I stood right here for our State of the Church Address, and I told you when it came to our church budget, we were behind. At the time, we were behind over \$300,000. Thank God we made it up through the end of the year and we caught up. But this year, one year later, we're meeting our budget. Our giving this year from you is up nine and a half percent. I just want to

thank you, and I want to thank God that you're such a generous, giving people. If you're sitting right there saying, "You know what, our church is doing so well financially I don't have to give anymore," or "I don't have to give as much." If you even thought that, I want to tell you right now that your attitude is wrong. Because if you're thinking that, you're either giving to the wrong place or you're giving for the wrong reason, because can I remind you that you don't give to our church. You give to God. And you don't give your money because the church needs it, because I've got news for you: God doesn't need your money. He doesn't need my money. I need to give it to God and you need to give it to God than God needs it. A good steward realizes everything I own belongs to God, and because I love God, I give back a portion of that to God. I don't know about you, but every month when I write my budget check and my Discover the Joy check, I just say, "Lord, I just want to tell you I love you, I thank you for blessing me and my family. I thank you for letting me be a part of Green Acres Baptist Church." I commend you; I compliment you, because you're such a generous church.

3. A leader in missions

The third area of compliment; you are a leader in missions. You are a leader in world missions. Now, once again for the sixth straight year, Green Acres Baptist Church is number one in all the churches in Texas in giving to missions through the Cooperative Program. Green Acres Baptist Church is number two in the entire Southern Baptist Convention, 46,000 churches, in giving to missions through the Cooperative Program. That's what you've done. The number one church is First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida. Here you are, second in the entire Southern Baptist Convention. Last year, we had 1,300 of our people volunteering in some kind of mission project. Just this past month in the periodical, *SBC Today*, which is like *USA Today*, goes into all the Southern Baptist churches; Green Acres was honored with a full-page ad commending you on your giving to missions through the Cooperative Program. This is a missions church. Every month when we have our new member dinner, we talk about Green Acres Baptist Church. Often, Elizabeth Barbee, one of our charter members is there, and I ask her to say a few words. Elizabeth generally says the same thing, and I love to hear her say it. She says, "One reason God has blessed Green Acres Baptist Church is because from the very start, we are a mission-minded church," and I thank God you are.

4. Willingness to innovate

Here's the fourth area I want to compliment you in. You possess a willingness to innovate, to be different, to change. When I moved to East Texas, I had some friends in Alabama who said, "East Texas is a terrible place to live, because people there are not open to change, they're not open to innovation. They're just kind of backwards there." I haven't found that to be true, really, I'm serious. That may be the case somewhere out in the sticks. But here at Green Acres Baptist Church, this church is wonderful, because you guys will try anything. I think if I say we're going to attack hell tomorrow with water pistols, you would say, "Where do I fill up?" You're ready to do it.

For instance, did you know in the 1960s, Green Acres Baptist Church was one of the first churches anywhere to take a group of volunteers and go overseas and help missionaries in Spain, Brazil, later in Belize and Mexico. Nobody had done anything like that before. They just sent

their money, they just prayed for missionaries, but nobody had gone. Did you know today, churches everywhere send out mission teams and Green Acres was one of the first to do it.

In the early 1970s Green Acres, "Let's build a gymnasium, a family life center. We'll even put a pool table in the thing, if it will reach people for Jesus Christ," and people said, "No, never done that before." But I thank God you are willing to do that and now you around the country, and just about every church on every corner has got a Family Life Center. I'm glad you're willing to try anything.

Remember, Mike, a few years ago, we tried Saturday night worship. It grew from 300 to 100 people in about nine months. We said, "Hey, we tried it." I'm glad you're willing to try things like that. Now, our latest innovation is, we merged with a little church, Oakwood Baptist Church, ten miles south of the loop. They are Green Acres Baptist Church South. You say, what's going to happen there? I have no idea. Let's just see what God is going to do there. But I do know they're not a separate church. They are Green Acres Baptist Church. A congregation meets there, we meet here, but we are one church. And it could be some of you, because you live in that area or perhaps some of you like a little smaller crowd experience or maybe you like parking right at the front door walking in you may want to serve the Lord down there. If you do, that's great. You're not leaving Green Acres Baptist Church. You're still a part of the Green Acres Baptist Church. You're giving your money to Green Acres; you're giving your ministry to Green Acres. It's different. Nobody's done it that way before. I thank God you're willing to innovate.

Somebody has said the only person who truly likes change is a baby with a wet diaper, and even he squalls about it. You know what I have found? I have found Green Acres has been so open to change and doing things differently. I want to compliment you on that. There's one other area.

5. Continuing growth

I want to compliment you, because you've been experiencing continuing growth through the years. I know you can make statistics say anything. For instance, did you know it's been proven 42.6 of all statistics are made up on the spot? I just made that up by the way.

You can make statistics say anything, but let me give you some hard numbers, because when you measure something, you can only do numbers. In the decade of the 70's, Green Acres Baptist Church added 2,600 new members. In the decade of the 80's, Green Acres added 2,300 new members. In the decade of the 90's, we've added 2,800 new members, until now, if you want to write this down, our total membership here now is 9,620. That means, at our current rate of growth, sometime within the next twelve months, we're going to add our 10,000th member. When some people hear that, maybe you're thinking this. They say, "Wow, that is just *too* big. God never intended a church to be that big."

Well, could I ask you to think about that statement for a moment? What is our standard? It's the Bible. When you go to the book of Acts, the very first Christian church was the church in Jerusalem, and they started out with 120 members. Chapter 2 of Acts said there were 3,000 added on the day of Pentecost. Chapter four of Acts said the church had grown until there were 5,000 men, not counting women and children. Then you come to Acts 21 toward the end of the

book, the last reference to the church at Jerusalem said they had a "myriad." The King James says "multitudes." Myriad means 10,000. Here's a church that went from 120, 3,000, 5,000 men, to 10,000. So if you try to think God doesn't like big churches, you've got to say the church in the book of Acts wasn't God's plan. When we reach 10,000 members, we're going to be like the church in the book of Acts. You've got to understand growth is good. God has always blessed healthy organisms with growth. I thank God we've grown through the years. Look at the list of things God has blessed us by. I don't know about you, but I get so excited about that, I want to shout.

Psalms 47:1 says, "Clap your hands all you people, shout unto God with a voice of triumph." I know sometimes that's not very baptistic, but I want to shout sometimes when I think about how good God has been to us.

Maybe you heard the story about the old farmer who went to the State Fair years ago. And there was a barnstorming pilot who had his open cockpit airplane. He was selling rides for \$50. The farmer couldn't afford that. He said, "Me and my wife really want to ride, but we're poor and we don't have any money." The pilot said, "I tell you what old farmer. I'll make a deal with you. You and your wife can ride free in my airplane, if during the entire ride neither one of you says a single word." So the farmer goes over there and talks to his wife and says, "Now, mama, listen to me. We've got a chance to fly in an airplane, but you've got to keep your mouth shut. You can't say one thing. So mama, we're going to try it, but you remember to be quiet." They hopped in the airplane. The pilot took off. He performed all kinds of loop-the-loops and barrel rolls, anything to make them say something. Finally, he landed and turned to the farmer and said, "Sir, I've got to tell you, you're the bravest man I've ever flown with, because I even scared myself. I can't believe you didn't shout anytime on the flight." The farmer, who was a little bit dizzy, said, "Well there was one time I almost hollered." The pilot said, when was that? The farmer said, "When mama fell out."

Well, the point I want to try to make with that story is this: If there's ever been a time you wanted to shout about what God's been doing in our church, there is the time. I want you to join me by saying "Hallelujah! Amen," real loud. You ready? "Hallelujah! Amen." Doesn't that feel good? Thank God for what he's done in our church.

II. A PRACTICAL CHALLENGE

Look at the other side, because I want to issue to you a practical challenge. If you'll look there again at verse 15, he talks about admonishing one another. That means to challenge. He talks about how I spoke bold words to you or wrote bold words to you. I want to give you a bold challenge. I believe if Jesus were talking to our church, he would also say what he said in the church at Philadelphia in Revelations 3. "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." I think what Jesus is saying to Green Acres is, "I placed before you an open door that few churches on the globe have." I'm serious when I say that. This church is unique. It's different than any other church anywhere.

1. We must understand how a large church functions

That really leads me into my first challenge. I'm going to challenge you that we must do a better job as we understand how a large church functions. We've got to understand how a large church functions.

You might want to write some numbers down. I told you there are 46,000 Southern Baptist churches. You know what the average size church is in the Southern Baptist Convention? 200 members. There are only about 14 or 15 congregations with over 3,000 in attendance every Sunday. We're one of those 14 or 15. But you know what makes our church totally different? Of those 14 or 15 churches with over 3,000 in attendance, we're the only one located in a medium-sized city like Tyler. All the others are in metropolitan areas. You know why? That's why we're the biggest small town church anywhere. That's why we can maintain a small-town friendliness in a big church. We're different than any other church. You've got to understand how a big church functions. Most of the people in this room, at one time or another, you might have been a part of a small church, whether it was this church or some other church somewhere else. Big churches don't function like small churches.

For instance, the church I served right out of seminary was in central Alabama. We had about 200 members and ran about 100 in Sunday School. I was the only full-time staff member. In that church, we only had six deacons. Everybody knew everything going on in everybody's life. Everybody knew everything taking place at the church. For instance, we decided one day we wanted to get a riding lawn mower for the church, and it just became a big issue in the church, whether or not we ought to get a riding lawn mower. So we had a big business meeting to decide whether or not to have a riding lawn mower. There were folks who stood up and said why they were "fer" it, and some said why they were "agin" it. Finally, we took a vote and voted to buy a riding lawn mower, praise God! I was pretty excited about it until I found out they expected me to ride that riding lawn mower as part of my job.

That's kind of the way a small church works. Everybody knows everything that's going on. Just relax. Nobody knows everything that goes on in Green Acres Baptist Church. I don't know everything that goes on in this church. Thank God, I don't know everything that goes on in this church. There's no way I can. I don't see that as bad. I see that as wonderful. There are so many ministries happening that I don't know about. That's great. So because of that, it gets back to this idea of trusting your leadership. You trust your committees. You trust your deacon body. You trust your staff to do those things we think are the absolute best thing for our church. That's just part of being a part of a big church.

a. Celebration (worship) group

There are three C words I want to give you. If you want to make the best of a big church experience, you've got to have these three groups you relate to. Number one is a celebration group. That's worship, a celebration group, and here you are right now. In a celebration setting, the number of people may be 100 or it may be 10,000 plus. You don't have to know the people in a celebration group. You know why? Because the focus of a celebration group like we're in right now is not on the people in the pew. The focus of this celebration group is on God and on his word. We're focusing in on God and his word. We're not focusing in on each other.

Sometimes people say, "I don't want to go to a big church, because I don't know everybody on the other side of the room." Well, the glory about a celebration service is you don't have to know everybody around you. Now, if you sit in the same pew Sunday after Sunday, you know what I'm talking about, *your* pew, you probably do know the folks who sit in front of you and behind you and around you, because you get to know them before and after the service, and that's okay. Somebody said, "What are we going to do when we move in the new building?" Somebody asked me, "How am I going to claim my pew?" I said, "We're going to do it like the Oklahoma land rush. We're going to line everybody up one morning behind a line. We're going to fire a pistol, and everybody run in there and put their Bible down." "My pew!" Not really. There's not going to be a bad seat in the whole place. The truth of the matter is, in a worship service it doesn't matter so much who's next to you, behind you or in front of you, because your focus is on God. And you've got to have that celebration experience.

b. Congregation (know) group

Here's the second group. You've got to have your congregation group. That's where you do know everybody or you know most of the people there. Now, in a small church, obviously, that has 100 in attendance, your congregation is your celebration group, but for most of us at Green Acres Baptist Church, your congregation group is your Sunday School class. And that's why your Sunday School class may have 20 members or it may have 100 members. That's why in Sunday School classes we ask people to wear nametags. You know most of the people in your Sunday School class, and that's good. That's where you know their name and you know a lot about them. And that's why, you know, as a church, we can't have any fellowship activity, because it's just too big. That's why Sunday School classes have socials and parties and get-togethers, because you can fellowship.

If you're a person who came to this worship service and you're not a part of the Sunday School class in this church, you're missing out on that dynamic of your Christian life. You know what will happen? Because it's happened. You have a spiritual need in your life, and your family or somebody in your family dies, it could be this church will never even know about it. You know why? Because you don't have a group where people know you. But I guarantee you, if you're part of a faithful Sunday School class and something happens in your life or your family, boom! They're going to be there. I've seen Sunday School members in the waiting room of a hospital, over at somebody's house, bringing food when there's been a death, doing things like you wouldn't believe. That's where ministry takes place. If you're not part of a Sunday School class, you're missing out on it. I know there's nobody here in this room or they wouldn't be here, but if you know of anybody who only comes to Sunday School, and they don't have the celebration experience, they're missing out on the worship experience they need of focusing in on God.

c. Care (minister) group

There's one other group you've got to relate to, and I call this the care group, or some people call it the cell group. It means a smaller group you can minister to and minister with. It may be a group of 4 to 20. It may be a care group within your Sunday School class, it may be a discipleship group, it may be the team you serve down at Good Sam with or a group of children's Sunday School workers who teach the same age. It's your smaller group. The model I

use is one I'm familiar with, my wife's Sunday School class. She teaches a Sunday School class at 8:20. There were 87 people in this morning's class; she teaches young married couples. That's congregation. But within a class they have care groups. Each care group has a care group leader. They have special things for those. They came in here at 9:40, the last worship service for celebration. Look at those three groups, and if you want to make the most of a big church experience, you've got to have all three relationships.

2. We must expand & upgrade our facilities

a. Large room for student ministry

Number two, we must expand and upgrade our facilities. Let me just mention three areas. First of all, we need to provide a large room for our student ministry. I love the student center. It's a first-class facility. It's great for Sunday School classes and dividing groups up, but our teenagers need a large room where they can gather about five or six or seven hundred of them to really worship together and learn things together. I'm convinced our new student minister is going to do a great job there. It doesn't have to be a fancy building. It just needs to be functional. It can be attached on the back of the student center. That's something we need to be thinking about.

b. First-class children's building

Number two, we need a first-class children's building. Our plans are, once we move into our new facility, is to take this building right behind me here where there are offices and the library and things and convert it into a first-class nursery or preschool and children's facility, expanded out of our current children's building. This next year, our renovation committee will be working with Steve Breed, our children's minister, to design something there. In a perfect world, in a perfect scenario, the day after we move out of this building into the new building is the day we're in here knocking walls down to get ready to renovate it so we can have a first-class children's facility.

c. More parking

The third thing, you won't have any trouble saying amen to this. We need more parking. Amen? It amazes me how far away some of you have to park. I think some of you park in Van Zandt County and still walk over to church, and I want to thank you for doing that. Years ago, I came over to Dallas from Samford University when I was a college student, a preacher boy. Three of us drove over to the "school of the prophets," First Baptist Dallas, to hear Dr. W. A. Criswell talk about being a pastor. I can remember Dr. Criswell saying, "Now, boys, there are three P's you need to do to have a good church." I had my pencil ready to write down these important factors to have a great church. "Number one," he said, "is preaching." You've got to have Bible preaching. I said amen to that, and I was writing down. He said, "The second P, and I thought he would say spiritual things like prayer, praise, something. He said, "The second thing is, you've got to have parking. You won't grow a church without parking." He said, "The third P is you've got to have preschool space." That's right. He said, "If you don't have preaching and parking and preschool space, you'll never with have a great church." I kind of thought when I heard that as a college student, I believe the first one, but I don't know about the other two. Did you know the nursery or preschool space is the handshake of a church? You only get one chance to make a first

impression for young families coming to your church with young children and preschoolers, and we need to make sure we keep on making a good first impression.

Now what about parking? Let me give you some numbers. This week, believe it or not, I counted all the parking places we have. Here on our campus, we have 973 parking places. I know it's hard to find one, but that's how many we have. Over in the Green Acres shopping center, we have 500 parking places available, 1,473 total. Now write down that number. Many studies have shown a church will not grow beyond the number of people you can park, and the rule of thumb is 2.1 people per parking place. Now if you want to multiply 2.1 times 1,473, it's 3,198. You know what our Sunday School attendance has been hitting the last two or three years? 3,200...3,200...3,200. It's just a fact of church growth until we provide some more parking, because people won't come or they won't come again if they can't find a parking place. I hear these horror stories more often than you want to hear, about people driving through the parking lot sometimes and driving off down the road. We've got to provide more parking. With our new facility we're going to be adding 300 new parking places. That will take us up to being able to hold about 4,000, but that's all, so we need to think about more parking in the future.

3. We must be intentional in saving marriages

We must be intentional in saving marriages. One of the things that breaks my heart more than anything else is when I learn of young couples in our church contemplating a divorce. It happens just about every week. I'm convinced Satan, realizing he cannot come in and destroy the unity of our church, is going to try to do it one couple at a time. When Satan divides a husband and wife, it devastates children and parents and totally destroys their relationship with a Sunday School class. It happens over and over again. I'm as mad as Hades at the devil, and I don't want to put up with it anymore. I don't know the answer. I think probably we need to consider sometime in the future adding a ministerial staff member who is a minister to marriage and family, who is trained to counsel and who is trained to lead enrichment to prevent marriages from breaking up. It is becoming an epidemic in our church and in our society, we need to say, how can we address it?

4. We must deepen our prayer life

We must deepen our prayer life. This past year, the greatest book I read all year long was *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, written by Jim Cymballa, who is the pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle church in New York. Let me read one paragraph that reached out and grabbed me.

"Does the Bible say anywhere from Genesis to Revelation, my house shall be called a house of preaching? Does it ever say, my house shall be a house of music? Of course not. The Bible does say, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer.'" Preaching, music, the reading of the word, these things are fine. I believe in and practice all of them. But they must never override prayer as the defining mark of God's dwelling. The honest truth is, I have seen God do more in people's lives during ten minutes of real prayer than in ten of my sermons."

I say amen to that. I know you're a praying people, but what we need to see happen is our church become a praying church. We need to see a prayer revival happen in our church, people get so burdened they pray every day individually and pray with prayer partners every day, that we pray corporately more than we do. That's what we need to do is deepen our prayer life. As a visionary, I'm casting this vision out to you. I don't know how fill in the details. I need to hear from you.

5. We must see more people saved and baptized

Number five, we must see more people saved and baptized. I told you about all the way our church has grown through the years. I'm not happy to tell you the way our church has mostly grown is by transfer growth, Christians transferring in. You want another rule of thumb that goes along with church growth? A healthy evangelistic church each year should baptize 10 percent of its Sunday School attendance. We averaged 3,200 in Sunday School attendance. Obviously, we ought to be baptizing 320 people a year, minimum. Our church has never in its history baptized over about 230 people. I'm saying we need to get more sensitive and more burdened for lost people around us.

I thank God Dennis and the other educational ministers are leading our Sunday School teachers in Life Training, which is a lifestyle evangelism process, so we'll be sensitive to our friends out there who need Jesus. We are in the greatest business, if you want to call it a business, in the world. We are offering hope; we're offering eternal life to a world that's lost and dying. There's never been a better time to be a part of the church of the Lord Jesus. I compliment you on the great things God has done. I challenge you. Let's walk through this open door of opportunity.

You remember a few weeks ago, I used Payne Stewart as a closing illustration, about how Payne Stewart when he won the United States Open, was wearing the little "What Would Jesus Do" bracelet. This past Friday, Cindy was kind enough to tape the entire memorial service at First Baptist Church, Orlando. I watched it Friday evening and cried like a baby when I heard what Paul Azinger had to say. I knew Paul Azinger was a Christian. Came to find out, when Paul Azinger was fighting cancer and he and Payne were friends, it was really Paul's testimony during that cancer treatment that led Payne to Christ. Paul Azinger said the thing he said to Payne Stewart that got his attention about eternal life was this. When Paul Azinger was fighting chemotherapy and didn't know whether he was going to live or die, he had such joy and peace that Payne said, "How can you have that kind of peace?" This is what Paul Azinger said. He said, "Payne, we aren't in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying, going to the land of the living."

Payne didn't understand that at the time. But what Paul Azinger was saying was Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Payne Stewart gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ. He was saved, he was born again, and everybody saw the difference. So when he died on that jet this week, he was just a few thousand feet closer to heaven, because he was in the arms of Jesus. That's the message we have to deliver to this community and to this world. We aren't in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying, going to the land of the living.

OUTLINE

I. A POSITIVE COMPLIMENT

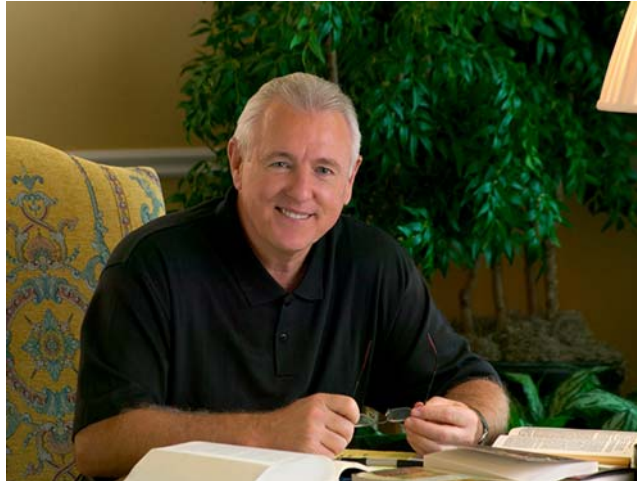
Jesus says: "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first." *Revelation 2:19*

1. Committed leadership
2. Amazing generosity
3. A leader in missions
4. Willingness to innovate
5. Continuing growth

II. A PRACTICAL CHALLENGE

We must:

1. Understand how a large church functions:
 - a. Celebration (worship) group
 - b. Congregation (know) group
 - c. Care (minister) group
2. Expand and upgrade our facilities
 - a. Large room for student ministry
 - b. First class children's building
 - c. More parking
3. Be intentional in saving marriages
4. Deepen our prayer life
5. See more people saved and baptized



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes