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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

July 6, 2014

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-6

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you for the day that this is today. Again, we just thank you, Lord, that we are able to once a month, take some time and focus on you, on the cross, on your table, on what it is you've done for us. Father, we just praise you and thank you for the ultimate gift of your son. And we pray this morning as we again focus our attention on what you've done and the gift of your son, we pray that your Holy Spirit would guide us, that you'd accompany us, that you'd give us the ability to understand your word in a way that makes it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the Sunday that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with the disciples for one last Passover meal, and *Matthew 26:26* describes that, it says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it*

to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to drink the cup and eat the bread in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call the Lord's table. Now, we celebrate it once a month, and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, we ask God's Holy Spirit to come into our hearts and to convict us of sins, we confess our sins, and then we participate in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Now, we've been following the life of Jesus and we've worked our way so far to the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Now, if you remember where we were the last time, Jesus is once again having yet another confrontation with the religious rulers. This one's over the healing of a man born blind. Jesus had just had this conversation with what we call mere believers who started out with

him offering them freedom and had ended up with them picking up rocks to stone him. Well, shortly thereafter he meets a man who was born blind, and he heals him and it provokes once again the wrath of the Pharisees. And so these repeated clashes that Jesus has with these religious leaders leads Jesus to a discourse about religious leaders and the people that they lead, and it starts out with a double amen or the phrase "truly, truly," which Jesus reserved only for the most solemn of his statements. This is the scripture we're looking at this morning. This is *John 10:1-6*:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

There was no one more qualified to talk about sheep, shepherds, and sheep herding than Jesus Christ, because after all, he was the good shepherd. You all have heard this description of him in Psalm 23, it says: *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me*

lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

This was the good shepherd. And the good shepherd is continuing his confrontation with bad shepherds. This is all part of this continuing battle that Jesus was engaged in going all the way back to the old testament and the treatment or I should say mistreatment that the sheep of old received from false shepherds. Jesus has repeatedly been doing battle with these very people who were the worst kind of shepherds. These were the kind that God spoke of in Ezekiel 34:1-6. This is what he said: *The word of the LORD came to me: Son of Man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not*

sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd. And they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

See, the Pharisees were the present day shepherds of Israel who perfectly fit this description of false shepherds that God gives in Ezekiel, and they deeply resented the intrusion of Jesus into their marketplace, the marketplace they had created for themselves. You see, instead of protecting and leading the sheep, they exploited them, they used them, they abused them for their own selfish purposes, and Jesus was about to expose them. These are the Pharisees that wanted to stone the woman taken in adultery; these are the very same people who threw out the man born blind; these are the very same ones who, when Jesus offered them freedom, later picked up rocks to stone him with; these were folks who were expert at using fear and intimidation and the culture itself to climb over the walls to put themselves right in the middle of the sheepfold. And they were outraged that Jesus would make any claim to spiritual authority over the sheep. That's absurd. It is a profound absurdity that these false shepherds, they are arguing and they are contending with God himself. They're arguing with God in the flesh

about the very nature of who God is and how he wants his sheep cared for. Well, Jesus fires the first round in *John 10:1*, he says this: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheep fold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."*

So Jesus says there's only one legitimate way to enter the sheepfold and that is through the door. Now, Jesus had plenty of experience being around sheepfolds because there were all kinds of them around Jerusalem and they were there basically selling sheep for the sacrifices. Now, they usually consisted of a stone wall enclosure that had a gated opening, and sometimes they were built into the side of a building, sometimes they were just stone wall enclosures in an open field with a gate. And the gate was always maintained by a gatekeeper whose job it was to protect the sheep in the absence of the shepherd. Typically the gatekeeper's job was to be a night watchman as it were over the flock. And in the morning the shepherd would come in, he would go in through the gate, call out to the sheep by name and lead them. But in order to do that, he always had to enter through the doorway by way of the gatekeeper. So there was only one legitimate way of entering the sheepfold. That was through the doorway. Well, Jesus states categorically in *John 10* that he is that doorway. In *John 10:9*, he says: *"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved*

and will go in and out and find pasture." See, Jesus is categorically stating that there is only one way to find salvation, and that is through him.

And you know, the scripture's not at all shy about declaring that as a fact. In *Acts 4:12* it says: *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* I think we all know that's not a very popular viewpoint today. In fact, it is considered to be extraordinarily arrogant, to make the claim that you have the only way to salvation. You know, there's a story that is often told about the six blind men and the elephant, and as the story goes, six blind men come upon an elephant and their attempts to describe and illustrate the supposed absurdity of claiming that you have the one right way to God. These six men approach the elephant and one feels the trunk and he says, "I know what this is, this is a snake." Another one feels the side of the animal, and he says, "No, you're wrong, this is a wall." A third one feels the tusk and he says, "No, you're both wrong, it's a spear." Another one grabs the tail and he says, "No, you're all wrong. It's a rope." Another one grabs the leg, and he says, "No, you're wrong, it's a tree." And finally another one grabs the ear and says, "All of you are wrong. It's a fan." Well, of course they're all terribly wrong. And the idea is that an elephant, just like God, is so huge

to be incomprehensible to a single person, a single blind person as all of us are in this world. And so each one comes away from his experience of God with this incorrect assumption based on his limited understanding. As one 19th century poet put it, he said: "And so these men of Indostan disputed loud and long, each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong, though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!" You see, the story decries the arrogance of assuming that your way is the only way. And in so doing, just like the Pharisees always do, the story misses its own stunning arrogance. You see, the story teller just assumes that he's the only one who sees the whole elephant. He assumes he's the only one who isn't actually blind, and of course, only he can see that it's really just an elephant. And only he knows that anyone making a claim about God is operating from the same level of blindness that these six blind men are. But you know, he doesn't even realize he's doing exactly what the blind men are doing. He's staking out, making his own claim about God. Just so happens that his God is so big and so unknowable, he's virtually un-understandable. His god is a god that no one could ever get ahold of. You might get a piece, you might get a tusk, you might get an ear, you might get a tail, but no one, no one gets the whole elephant. He's just the god-like figure who explains to us how ignorant we are about the real God. Well, I think you know, this is a story that the culture has been telling us constantly. Our

culture tells us no one can make the claim to know who God is. Only religious fanatics do that. Our present day Pharisees use scorn and derision to make the very same power play all the time, and faith, in their view, is something to be mocked. Jesus had much to say about that kind of blind arrogance. He said this in *John 9:39: Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say 'we see,' your guilt remains.*

Jesus had very little tolerance for anyone who was going after his sheep. And the most basic attack there is on the sheep is to deny the only door that leads them to life. That door is Jesus Christ. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."* Jesus knew thieves and he knew robbers. He understood exactly how a sheepfold worked, who it was who was going after the sheep and what his motive was. See, a thief is someone who takes things by stealth. A thief is somebody who sneaks in and then steals. A robber is somebody who takes things by force and by intimidation. He confronts and steals. Well, the enemy in our culture primarily is a thief. He loves to sneak into lives and

hearts and affections, and his primary method is through media. You know, music and movies and TV and the Internet, they all contain armies of false shepherds, and they're all climbing over the fence. They're all ignoring the only door that works and they're all bent on leading the sheep to destruction. And Jesus says in *John 10:10*: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."*

See, the hard part of dealing with a thief is really knowing who you're dealing with. You see, the enemy's not going to present himself with horns and a tail. Stealth is his byword. Instead he's going to appear as the reasonable one. He's going to suggest to you that you are the intolerant, unloving, Jesus-only bigot. *2 Corinthians 11* says: *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.* You see, Jesus says the thief wants nothing more than to steal your life, kill your hope, and destroy any chance you have of sharing that life with anybody else, and the hard part is he is a master disguiser and he's very easy to miss. We know well that in other countries, he's no longer the thief, he's the robber. He uses violence and threats of violence and intimidation to attack the sheep. And we see this now all over the world, particularly in the Middle East, in Sudan and

Nigeria and all of these different places where we pray and every week we pray for a different part of the world that is under the attack of the enemy as robber. We are aware that thieves usually become robbers. And again, I would just point to you this week the reaction of the Hobby Lobby decision by the Supreme Court. You see an awful lot of hysteria. You see an awful lot of anger on the losing side. That's part of another discussion, but this is just a hint of what is potentially coming down the road as thieves become robbers. You see, the enemy loves to use persuasive deception, but when that runs out, he is not at all averse to using threats, intimidation, and violence. Just ask our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. See, this is a very sobering lesson that Jesus is giving his disciples, and we get a hint of that because he introduces his teaching by saying, *"Truly, truly, I say to you."*

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I would like us to take a few minutes to just focus on just what Jesus is warning about in this passage. I'm not a big fan of bumper stickers, but there's one bumper sticker I particularly like, and I'm sure you've all seen it, it says "No Jesus, No Peace. Know Jesus, know peace" and it says N-O Jesus and N-O peace and then there's a pause, K-N-O-W Jesus, K-N-O-W peace. There is no way to peace without Jesus Christ. There is nothing but warfare without Jesus Christ. He is the only door to life. Hence, of all the discussions that the

culture has, the only ones that they really, really care about are those ones that center on who is the door. Those are the ones that we have to be very careful about.

I'd like us also as the bread is being distributed consider the warning that God gives about communion itself. *1 Corinthians 11:28* says this: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* This warning I give every time we come to communion. I say communion is extremely serious business, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. I said, if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother and sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on, don't partake in them. I say it every time, no one's going to look at you or think you strange; they may well think you wise. But on the other hand, the opposite side, you can also make the mistake of thinking that unless we are spotlessly perfect, we are unworthy to receive communion, and that, too, is a mistake. You see, being a

child of the King doesn't mean that we do not sin and that we don't fail. It means we recognize that salvation is a gift that no one, no one is ever capable of earning by being good. As Dane Ortland puts it: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." See, we are saved and kept by grace alone, and that means that when we do fail, we are made aware by grace that we have sinned because God's spirit is within us convicting us, and so we grieve and we grieve as children who know that we have a father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. And God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin, it means that when we sin, we understand we have an advocate with the Father, someone in heaven who is speaking out on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the righteous one.* And so because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. He lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So take some time right now, ask God's Holy Spirit what

lies of the thieves and the robbers have I been believing?

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, 23rd verse says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* Take and eat.

I want to repeat our scripture for today. It's *John 10:1-6*:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Now, Jesus frequently made statements that didn't seem to make any sense whatsoever to his hearers, and this was one of those times: *"but they did not understand what he was saying to them."* You know, often times Jesus would speak through parables or stories

that his disciples were completely mystified by. And now we know that Jesus was the most wise, the most insightful human that ever walked the planet, so when he speaks in a way that his hearers cannot understand, we understand that he is speaking to a time beyond their understanding. He's speaking to an understanding that they will get some time in the future. And he is also speaking to those who will encounter these words 2,000 years in the future, and that's us. For example, Jesus once said in *John 2:18*, he said: "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" No one including his disciples had any idea what he was talking about. They didn't get it until after his death and resurrection. *John 2:20* says: *The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.* Jesus went on to explain to his disciples that after he departed, he would send the Holy Spirit to help them put all of these thoughts together. In *John 15:26* he said: "*But when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*"

See, the words that Jesus was saying to the disciples would also

one day make sense, but for now they didn't make a lot of sense. For now what it sounded like is just a simple lecture about caring for sheep and watching out for false shepherds. But it's here that we find the good news not just for them but the good news 2,000 years later for us, and it has to do with understanding how the good shepherd leads. Again, let me read from verse 2: *"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."* Now once again, to fully appreciate this scripture you have to understand some of the profound differences between shepherding in the Middle East and shepherding in the west that we're a lot more familiar with. Shepherding in the west is done completely different than in the east. In the west, the sheep are driven from behind by the shepherd often times with the accompaniment of sheep dogs. They're literally driven forward. Well, the east does it in a completely opposite way. See, in the east, the shepherd doesn't lead the drive, what he does is he walks ahead of them, and they follow him. This requires a very different relationship between sheep and shepherd. Just imagine what it takes to get an animal as dumb and as skittish as a sheep to collectively follow you. Just

picture -- picture somebody going up to a whole herd of sheep saying, "Come on, let's go, let's go." You know you're going to take a step and what are they going to do? It's like herding cats. It's just an impossibility almost. The thing is, sheep will not follow you unless they know you, unless they recognize you, unless they trust you.

Now, I read you at the beginning of this message the passage from Ezekiel 34, God's condemnation of bad shepherds. But there's another part to Ezekiel 34. It's a wonderful part. It's God's description of who the good shepherd is going to lead. As the elders begin distributing the cup, let me read to you from Ezekiel 34. God says: *As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down,*

declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

See, here's the good news. The good news of what the shepherd is doing is that we have been gathered by the good Shepherd. Let me just repeat what he said. He says: *I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land.* The good news is that we are not here by chance or by intelligence or by a native wisdom. We are here because of the sovereign hand of the One who chose us before the foundations of the world were even laid. Now, did Jesus say many things that were confounding, many things that were confusing, many things that were completely beyond his disciple's ability to understand? The answer's absolutely yes. But there's reason why that didn't matter, and it goes back to the shepherd and the sheep. Let me read to you again from verse 2: *"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."* See, if you are one of his sheep, it's not because you were clever or intelligent or you have some kind of native wisdom, it's because by

sheer grace, God has given you the ability to hear the Shepherd.

Verse 4: *"When he has brought out all of his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

So here's the question: Do you know the voice of the Shepherd? I mean, if you do, do you realize how blessed you are? Can you agree with Jesus when he told the disciples in Matthew 13: *"For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."*

Now how many times have you tried to share the good news with somebody only to have their eyes kind of glaze over and their ears grow hard of hearing and their hearts grow dull and hard? Now, I would guess the amount of people that I have shared the gospel with that I've seen that reaction is somewhere in the hundreds. And you wonder why? Why is it that sometimes you just prepare and you pray and you seek this opportunity and you sit down with somebody and you present the gospel to him and they're just bored. Their eyes are glazed, they're looking elsewhere, they're wondering, "How can

I get out of this." And then sometimes in the most casual of circumstances, you just happen to share with somebody the good news of the gospel and they're hanging on every single word. Sometimes the simplest gospel: "You're a sinner. You need Christ." That's all you need. Why is that? Well, Jesus tells us why. In *John 10:25* it says this: *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock."* There's your answer. Now the question is why didn't that happen to you? I mean, why did the gospel at some point make sense to you when it didn't make sense to lots and lots of people right outside that door, and you all know that. See, it all comes down to not who you are, but whose you are. Again, Jesus tells us: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* You see, you are the recipient of the greatest privilege a human being can ever receive, something far greater than wealth or fame or power. 100,000 years from now, you will still be ruling and reigning the universe as a co-heir with Christ. You've been given the gift of salvation. Or not. If you are not one of his sheep, then dull eyes and dull ears make the greatest gift in the universe seem like an imposition.

You don't regret turning down the gospel because you don't see its value at all. And you're quite content to walk away from life itself forever, because the door to that life, Jesus Christ, makes little sense to you. You don't hear the voice of the Shepherd because you are not one of his flock.

Now, if you don't hear the voice of the Shepherd and you find yourself wanting to, that's the grace of God beckoning to you. And let me again repeat, the only qualification in the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify. And the only thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do. Jesus says in *John 10*: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* See, by God's power and God's grace we've seen the thief's defeat at the hand of the good Shepherd. So take a moment to praise God for his good deeds.

1 Corinthians, the 11 chapter, the 25th verse says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* Take and drink.

This is the part of the service that we call head, hands, and feet, it's the part where we try to draw some practical application as to

what it really means to be remembering Jesus Christ. I just wanted to at this point just do a little bit of an ad for a new book. I've got five copies of these, they're downstairs. The title of this book is *Proof, Finding Freedom Through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace*. This basically is taking the message that I gave this morning and expanding on it, showing us that God's ability to communicate comes because he's given us the ability to hear his voice, and I just wanted to just share with you one or two comments about this particular book. This is Sam Storms, one of my favorite authors. He says this, he says: "If predestination has often felt stodgy and stifling, this book is for you. *Proof* is not your standard portrayal of reformed theology. It's unlike anything I've ever come across before. The style is engaging, the stories are captivating, the logic is compelling, and best of all the theology is rock solid and biblically faithful. Trust me, you'll love this book even if you don't agree with it." Another one says: "*Proof* paints a powerful picture that the gospel is not a cheap bucket of grace that sits at the foot of the cross. Rather the gospel is an ever-flowing, deep river of irresistible grace that flows from the foot of the cross." *Proof* is actually a new acrostic. These fellows are determined to get rid of TULIP as an acrostic and they're substituting the term "proof," so I would highly recommend this new book.

And then the other thing I wanted to speak about just briefly is just kind of an update about prayer and where we're coming from in terms of prayer. As I mentioned last time, last month, the elders spent some time in prayer and fasting, trying to understand where God wants us to be and where he wants us to go, and we saw some immediate responses to that as you well know Sylvia Butzgy's physical therapist was led to Christ that week. That's an amazing thing. She went home and told her husband, and Sylvia told me that her husband came to Christ as well. And so we need to be praying for Karen and her family, that's Sylvia's physical therapist. But we met last week and we were just trying to decide, okay, we also did some fasting and praying again, and we're trying to decide what it is that God wants for us, and it's all centering around the facility that we have here. If we -- we've moved four times. The very first place we started was in Gary and Kathy Spears' house, and God moved us after that, to move out, we went to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, God moved us from that. We went from there to the Center, and then moved us from there to here about 13 years ago. And we love this place, it's a wonderful place, it's a wonderful facility that God has given to us. We went through a period of time for a couple of years that we just whined and whined that it wasn't bigger. And God convicted us of our sin of whining about that and making us realize what a blessing this building actually is. But there's some real shortcomings. We have a

problem with space. If you know, if you're 80 percent full, you're basically full, people are not going to want to come into a church were they have a really hard time finding a seat. That's one. The other is a bigger issue, is classrooms. The Sunday school folks downstairs do an incredible job and people are jammed into classrooms, we have the upstairs trying to do two different adult classes, Jack and Teresa have lent us their house for classes. We just don't have the space for what we want to do. And what has really been a growing conviction for myself is, you know, my son Ben has adopted four special needs kids, and he is -- he and his wife are involved in a ministry to handicapped kids, and they've really opened up my eyes to what this says, having a church that doesn't have a ramp. They basically say if you don't have any kind of accommodation for the handicapped, you're not just saying we don't have that, we're saying you're not wanted, go somewhere else. And so we spent a lot of time looking how can we do this? How can we get a ramp? It's not hard getting a ramp into this building. The problem is getting the ability to service anybody that comes in who is handicapped. That requires having bathrooms that can accommodate them, which our bathrooms are downstairs, you'd have to have bathrooms up here. We have just an impossible array of issues that we'd have to deal with to try to make this building accessible, like we want it to be to the handicapped. I mean, Sylvia is one of our prayer warriors, she can't even come here

'cause she's in a wheelchair. Annie Weaver, you see how hard it is for her to get in here. And let me tell you, all of us are approaching that time when we're going to be in situations like that as well. What happens to us when we can't come to our church because it has no access? And so the big glaring thing in all of this seems to be pointing to we need a different place, we need some place where we can have this access because we've looked at a dozen different ways to Sunday as to how to make this building compliant and it would cost an enormous amount of money for what seems to be a very small return in terms of what it cost compared to looking for another place. And we know that God has in the past, in the four different times that we've moved, God has first begun to stir folks up to pray, and he starts with us. And he stirred us up to pray and to fast, and he's starting to stir us up to pray about what he's going to do about our facility. And so my main practical application for us today is to ask you if you would be willing to make this an issue in your life. Are you willing to pray that God would move in our congregation one way or another to let us know whether this is the place that we are to stay, or to make another place available. If you're willing to do that, would you just raise your hands? Good. Great. Let's pray.

Father God, we just thank you for what a mighty God you are, we thank you for what a gift salvation is. Lord, none of us deserve

it. Absolutely none of us. None of us had the wisdom or the smarts to suddenly say, oh, this adds up, this makes sense, I'll buy this gospel. We bought the gospel because you opened our eyes, because you gave us this gift. And Father, we want to come before you this morning asking for another one. Father, we want to ask you to move in our congregation in a way that is absolutely certain that you are moving so that we would know what your will is for us. It is our heart's desire to be able to accommodate handicapped folks, it is our heart's desire to be able to open this door, the doors of this church wider to people who have been denied that access just by virtue of their handicap. So Lord, whether it's here, whether it's any place else, we want to be open to whatever it is you want to do, but we pray that you would give us the wisdom to pursue you and to do that with open hearts willing to hear whatever it is you have to say to us. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.