

## The Parable of the Fig Tree – Part 2

### Introduction

Before we start, I want to begin with this. Last week, I said something that was wrong, scripturally wrong. I said that Jesus laid His deity aside. Jesus never laid His deity aside. He did not stop being who He was. He was God. He was God the Son, and He is ever God incarnate. What I should have said was that He laid aside His glory and that He laid aside His right to act as God and submitted Himself to being a servant.

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we want to thank You for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Lord, we thank You that we live in the light of that. That is the truth. Not just that He died for us, the truth also is that He rose for You and for us, and now is seated at Your right hand forever, until all nations and all things come His feet and bow down to Him. He is rightfully the King, and we bless You for Him. Now, Father, as we come to You, we ask that You open the Word to us and speak to us from the Word. We pray, Lord, that You would build up Your people through Your Word and by the Holy Spirit. We give Your Word to You. We give You this time. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Let us read a few verses this morning.

First, I want to read the parable that we were in last time. In Luke 13:6-9, “He also spoke this parable; “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and found none. Cut it down; why does it take up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”

And then in Psalm 16:10, again this is the verse that foretells the resurrection of Christ. It is used by Peter in a sermon, in Acts 2:27. Psalm 16:10, the first part, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol.”

And then I would like us to turn to John 14:16-17, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

### Figs on His Fig Tree

Now, last time in looking at this parable, we focused on the owner and what he was looking for. We were looking at that. He was looking for fruit. He was looking for figs on his fig tree. And we put it as being the Lord Himself, who has implanted in us the seed of life, the life of Christ Jesus Himself in our hearts. He has implanted that into us. Everyone who is born again, everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is born again, receives that life into them.

And the fruit that the Lord is looking for, in our lives as individuals, in our lives collectively as an assembly, in the life of the church itself, is that He wants to see the life of His Son in us; the very divine nature that was in His Son, not the divinity, the divine nature as it talks about in II Peter 1. And He wants to see that produced and manifested in and through us as His fig tree.

And we also talked about that since He planted it, He expects it to be exactly what He planted. For example, I do not know how many of you are gardeners. I do not claim to be a gardener, but I do some gardening. But if you buy, for example, something you are going to plant, like tomatoes. You get a package of tomato seeds, and on that package is a picture of a tomato. It shows you what it is supposed to look like. You are laughing at what it is supposed to look like. Yes, because some of you have been gardening, and what you plant just does not come out looking that way. But the point is, the Lord has implanted into us the life of Christ, and He expects the life of Christ in us to be manifested.

And there is a consequence for that not to be manifest, for that not to grow into the full fruit. There is a consequence for it. We talk about it being a serious thing, not the loss of salvation, but the loss of maybe vocation, of place in the kingdom. And then finally when He said, "Let us cut it down," we had the intervention of the vinedresser who came in and said, "Look, let me work with this for a while before you cut it down." And so that is where we ended.

### **The Further Grace of the Vinedresser**

We talked about that being a further grace, not a new grace, but it is grace magnified to a bigger extent. A lot of times we think just of the grace of the Lord as being the blood of Christ for us. But we worshiped this morning around the resurrected Christ. And the resurrected Christ also dispenses more and more grace, bringing us into a fuller, not knowledge, but a fuller experience of what that grace is.

And one of the ways He does it, is as High Priest He intercedes for us, and brings us into where we find ourselves not measuring up, and He prays. He prays for us, and He prays the will of God for us. That is the whole key. He is ever praying for us the will of God be done in our lives, in our assembly, in His church. And so that is where we left off last time.

### **The Vinedresser and His Works**

This morning, I want to focus on the vinedresser and what He does. We talked about an intercessor. Do you know what our Lord Jesus' first prayer was when He ascended and took His place as High Priest before the throne of God? Do you know what His first prayer was? "Send them a Helper. Lord, send them a Helper who will be not just with them, but in them." That is His first prayer. That is the prayer which is an eternal prayer.

## **The Holy Spirit**

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit**

You think about this. He did not say, "Let the Holy Spirit fall upon them for this time that they need." He said, "No, let Him come and dwell in them." This is His prayer for us. And so, we want to look this morning at the vinedresser as a picture of the Holy Spirit to us. He gives us another Helper to be with us, to dwell in us. So, it is the Holy Spirit who was sent to do the digging and the dunging. Now, notice I said dunging; the reason is because Kenny always uses alliteration, so I thought I would use alliteration. We have two Ds there.

When we think about this, it is the Holy Spirit who is working in us to work out that life of Christ in us and through us. And He does this by working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. I remember as a young Christian, as a Catholic, I grew up with the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Ghost. But I remember being a young Christian for a long while. You just think you are on your own. Jesus has shed His blood for you. Now you go and you make do as best you can. You try to please God. And I remember reading books then that started to talk about the Holy Spirit.

And I remember I called my younger brother, who was reading the same book. We called the guy who led us to the Lord and asked, "What is this? What is the Holy Spirit?" And he came over, and he shared with us. It was almost like those disciples that were coming to Ephesus and met Paul. He asked, "Well, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" "We did not even know there was a Holy Spirit." Well, I knew there was a Holy Spirit, but who knows what it is?

And we have been reading a book by Ray Stedman talking about having a car. A car has an engine in it. But a lot of us, it is as if we drive a car without using the engine. For those of us older ones, remember the Flintstones? Remember their car? It was run by foot power. Well, a lot of us, that is how we live our Christian life. We live it under our own power, our own power to do things. And we do not even know there is another way. You open the hood, you say, "Oh, what the heck is that?" It is an engine. What do you do? Well, you turn on the key, and it goes. The whole thing is, there is another power that is not just your power. But I am not here just to talk about power.

### **The Working of the Holy Spirit**

We want to talk about the working in us to will and to do. So, the thing about this is there are so many ways we think of what the Holy Spirit does, and our thoughts are wrong. We think of Him as an influence. He is not an influence, He is the third part of the Trinity, He is God, the Holy Spirit. As much as Jesus is God, as much as the Father is God, He is God. He is equal. And He is not sent to us to just make suggestions like someone who retires and becomes a consultant. "Well, if you do this, things will work out right." He is not a consultant just to guide you on your way. "You pick this up and I will see you in another three months to see how it is going." That is not it.

But when the Lord prayed, “Send them another Helper,” like I said, He did not send Him as an influencer or a consultant. He sent Him into us to be Lord. He is to be Lord of the whole redemption of our souls and our bodies. He is the one who is leading it, and He must be Lord. He is to have complete sway over us. Just like the gardener when he says, “I am going to dig and dung.” He has complete sway over that fig tree. It is his work that is going to revive it.

I remember as a young Christian growing up in Southern California, the “Jesus Movement.” I do not remember if you are familiar with Jack Hayford. Jack Hayford was a very popular pastor at The Church On the Way in Van Nuys, California, and he did a series on Nehemiah. And when he was doing the series on Nehemiah, he likened Nehemiah to the Holy Spirit. Nehemiah is the Holy Spirit. He is sent to rebuild Jerusalem, to rebuild the wall. So, this is the Holy Spirit's work. And, you know, the thing is, Nehemiah goes in there with his eyes wide open. The Holy Spirit knows everything that is going on.

### **The Work of Nehemiah**

Nehemiah went down with his eyes wide open; he surveyed everything. And if you look in chapter two, he is talking about what he does secretly. He goes through and he is looking at all these places at night. And then in the morning, in verses 17 and 18, he says, “Look, I know the condition, I know your condition.” And he does not give them a lot of woe. But he says something to this end, “I have been commissioned by God and even the king of Persia, who has given me everything that is needed to do this job. And what I am asking you to do is cooperate with me. Cooperate with me in doing this because I am here to do this. I have been sent to do this.”

The Lord, the Holy Spirit, comes into us and He wants the cooperation of us in His work, God's king, His wealth and power all at His fingertips, so to speak. But He is saying, “You need to cooperate with Me. I will not force this work. You need to cooperate.” And so, when we look at the ministry, then, of the Holy Spirit, as seen in the vinedresser of Luke's parable, He says, “Let Me dig around it.” And then He says, “And let Me spread dung.” That is the King James version.

### **Digging and Dinging**

We want to look at these two things, digging and dinging. Now we talk about digging. He is not talking about digging a hole. He is really talking about cultivating. “I am going to cultivate around here.” And so, what I want to do, I am going to cultivate in order to encourage and nurture and maintain growth in the plant so that it produces fruit. This is what I am going to do.

And it is not just fruit; it is mature fruit. It is fruit all the way to its rightful end, so it looks like that thing on the package. I want to draw an analogy here. A gardener has his tools. Now, I am not talking about a guy who has a lawn business. I am talking about just us regular guys who go into our garage and once in a while we go out and we putter around in the yard. Again, I am not talking about taking care of your lawn. I am not talking about

trimming the hedges. For years. My wife wanted a garden. And I am not a finesse guy, but I said, "Okay."

And so, what I did was I cleared a little plot right down the driveway about a foot wide and went all the way down the driveway. And then we planted some plants. But the whole point is, I use certain tools when I tend that little garden. And the tools I use, I want to liken to the Holy Spirit. Because what the Holy Spirit most often uses, when He is redeeming us, when He is saving our soul, He uses the Word of God to instruct us, to convict us, to direct us, to warn us, to encourage us.

He uses the Word of God as almost His main tool, but He also uses people. And it could be our family members, mother and father, could be sisters and brothers. He uses the assembly - brothers and sisters in the assembly. He uses them to speak into our lives. They have something because they have this relationship with us; they are able to speak into our lives. Like in the Old Testament times, the people had the law, and if the law did not get to them, then the Lord sent prophets. He sent people, He sent prophets. They were not special in any sense except that the Lord spoke through them. That was what made them special.

And then sometimes when other things do not seem to work, He uses circumstances. And He uses circumstances to shake things up so we get our mind away from ourselves to realize, "Oh, God is trying to talk to me." And so, He uses our circumstances. We want to look at this. How does this relate to gardening and gardening tools?

## Digging

Well, I want to talk about three tools that I use when I am gardening. One, I have a cultivating rake. It is a regular rake, but much shorter. And at the end, it has four prongs, about as long as my index finger, about three inches each of those. And then I use a weed trowel, which is like a shovel. The shovel starts out about as wide as my four fingers here, and then it tapers down into a point. It is about seven and a half inches long, so it is longer than the cultivating rake. And it has a handle, which makes it look bigger, but the trowel itself is only about seven and a half inches long. And then I have a pitchfork or a shovel, to use if I need to do something drastic to those plants.

I need these things. These tools are interchangeable with the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit uses all these tools too, in the same way. Sometimes He uses the Word as a cultivating rake, sometimes He uses the Word as a weed trowel. Sometimes He uses circumstances, really, as a pitchfork or a shovel. And sometimes He uses the weed trowel in the same way, it could be people; it could be the world. However the Lord is dealing with us, He uses whatever is best.

## The Cultivating Rake

Let us look at the cultivating rake. My cultivating rake, which is only about three inches long, is usually for the topsoil. It does not go very deep since it is only three inches. But when you lay topsoil, what happens after a week or so of watering, it starts to crust

over on the top. And sometimes, you see weeds starting to pop up through the topsoil. So, you take that cultivating rake and you turn the soil over. You go around the plant, and you are raking here and there. And that does a couple of things.

First, it loosens up the soil itself. Sometimes when that soil starts to get clotted up, nutrients do not come out of it. By loosening the soil, it makes things flow better. Also, if you are putting a hose up at one end and letting water just trickle down to let everything get watered that way, it is slow watering. Well, loosening the soil takes away anything that is in the path of that water getting to the other plants. You cultivate it away.

And then all those little weeds that have started to grow, their root system is not very deep. The cultivating rake loosens up those roots, and brings them to the surface, and you pick them right up. It is not a drastic thing, but you just pick them up. And then it turns the soil so that the soil that has been underneath can now get the air and the sunlight which reactivates those nutrients in the soil that your plant needs to grow.

The Lord uses the Word and other Christians to point things out in us that are causing us not to be fruitful, not to be in the position where our lives are being transformed. He might point out habits we have that need to be changed. But these are toward the surface and they are readily seen. And sometimes you notice them and think, "Man, the Lord is showing me this. It needs to be taken care of." They are habits that are problems and He is doing preemptive strikes on things that are like these little weeds. If you let them grow, they will entangle with the roots of your plant and then choke off the life so it does not bear any fruit to maturity. That is from the Parable of the Sower in Luke. And the Lord says, "Do not be entangled with certain things. Do not be entangled with the world and such."

So, what happens is, as the Lord is going through, He is pointing these things out. A brother might point it out; a sister might point it out. You are in school, and your dad or mom might point something out. "Hey, you are doing too much of this, and you are not doing other things." And suddenly you get a conviction in your heart, and that is the Lord working in you. The Lord has that little cultivator work going on, and He is not nitpicking. Especially, when we are young, we think, "I cannot do this, and I cannot do that." It is not this kind of nitpicking. "You should not do that. You are a Christian. You should not do this."

But there are things about which the Lord is saying, "I am making a way into your life. I am not just picking on this or any other thing. But if you look at this, this is putting a wedge between you and Me. And We want to get that out of here." And we need to be able to see that. And so, the turning over that soil in our lives is a way of doing this. And this is one way that He begins to renew us. In turning over that soil, He renews us back to the spiritual and the heavenly things. And it reawakens us.

A lot of times this is what happens at conferences, especially youth conferences. These are times when the Lord takes that cultivator rake and He just starts turning things over and exposing things. And suddenly we realize, "Oh, wow. Yes Lord, I see that, I agree

with You, it needs to be taken out. This is coming in the way. Oh, Lord, I am so glad You opened me up. I had forgotten what heaven is like. I have forgotten to look up to heaven. I have not seen You in Your Word, and I have been wondering why. It is because of this." And so, all these things, this is the cultivator rake.

### The Weed Trowel

Now, the weed trowel. The weed trowel is longer, and so it goes deeper. And not only that, but when I am using the cultivator rake, I am standing up here, I am far away from the plants. I am doing my stuff. The weed trowel, you have got to get down on your knees and you get close to those darling plants that you are taking care of, and you start to go beneath the topsoil, and you start to go down into the inner court. Even to, what could we say, our holiest place, our heart of hearts. Because there might be things in there that are blocking the way to you becoming fruitful.

This weed trowel is really an intimate tool. I looked up intimate and it said intimate is a close, friendly relationship. Now, friendly, a friend and friendly. A friend is not necessarily always friendly. Because Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." I found another translation (NIV) that said, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted." That is a good translation. The wounds of a friend can be trusted. But the point is you have somebody who is faithful, and a friend is somebody who cares about you.

Men have few friends. Women, they have no problem. I covet that relational thing that you ladies have that us brothers do not. We are solitary men. We do not want to share things. And I am not saying we are going around having a sharing time and sharing ourselves. I am not talking about that. But we do not share the things that are in our heart. And I have used this story before. I remember that when I first got married, I would talk to Jerry, who lived in San Diego, Jerry Linenberg. And I would talk to him, like every week. I would call him up and talk to him. And one day I am talking to him in the kitchen, and I look around and there is Barb sitting right around the wall. She is listening. "What are you doing?" She said, "This is the only time I get to know what is really on your heart." That is the way men are.

And so, the Lord says, "I want to be intimate with you." We men, we have those intimacy problems with relationships, even with one another. Even if it is more than just talking sports, really letting somebody know what is going on with you. It is almost like a sign of weakness. But here the Lord says, "You know, I am intimate with you, and I want to touch those things that are deep, that have to be dealt with."

And there is a scary thing about that. "Oh, no, these are going to be revealed." If it is intimate, it is private and personal. It is meant for you and your friend. And last week's opening talked about Jesus being our friend. He is a friend and He is coming as a friend. And that trowel is used to get down to the root of the weed, to the root, because if you just pull off the top, you have the cosmetic fix. And brothers and sisters, how many of us when we come to meetings or come to gatherings wherever saints are, we make sure we have our cosmetic fix.

But there is a time when something happens, and the flesh is hit. Suddenly what is really in you comes out. There was an old story about a young pastor who was preaching a sermon. And up in the front row are these old Scottish Presbyters. And the preacher started talking. And one old presbyter is out there, and he cannot hear that well, so he is just talking to himself. As the preacher is talking, he says, "Oh, yes, that is McLaren. That is McLaren. That is who that is." And the preacher keeps talking and the old man says, "Oh, no. Yes, yes, yes. That is Spurgeon. That is Spurgeon." And the preacher keeps talking. He says, "Oh, that is Scroggy, Scroggy. That is Scroggy." And finally, the preacher gets mad. He says something to the old man who then says, "Oh, that is him." Well, those things happen. They are the roots that are down there.

### **The Holy Spirit's Search**

The Holy Spirit is the One who searches our hearts. He is the One who searches. Now, I want to make that very clear, because it is not us going in looking for stuff. The Holy Spirit goes and searches because He knows what He is looking for. He is going for the root of things. And He does not want to just pull off the top, He is going for the root. When you think about this, it is the Holy Spirit who searches. And sometimes He uses the Word to search us. Sometimes a brother or sister will do something or say something. It will bring that thing out. And suddenly, that is the Holy Spirit revealing it to you. "I want to deal with this in you." And it is not something of our choosing. We may think, "I want to choose my cross." No, you do not choose your cross. You are given your cross. Same thing here. When the Lord starts looking and dealing with you, He chooses the things He wants to deal with in His order. His order is the key to the things He is doing later, and He knows what He is doing.

The Holy Spirit searches our hearts and makes us aware of those things that are competing for our heart's affection, that are seeking a throne in our lives. The enemy wants us to compartmentalize our lives. This is my family time; this is my work time; this is my time for the Lord; this is my leisure time. And we have all our compartments, and they do not overlap. But of course, we can always squeeze the Lord's time out. "Oh, I get a little more leisure here, or I have more work to do."

But the point is, the enemy wants us to compartmentalize our lives. And he wants us to seek life from a different source. And so, the Holy Spirit is going for those roots and the things that capture your heart and your will to serve them. And the trowel probes, getting down to the roots of other things that are growing in order that we may recognize what they are so they can be removed. And they can only be removed with our permission.

We must always bow the knee. He does not grab it from us. And there are things in us, there are roots in us that are deep. We do not think of open sin; we think of hidden things. Like, for example, your whitewashed sepulchers on the front. But you are full of dead men's bones. Well, there are a lot of dead men's bones in me. And the Lord needs to dig them out. And some of those things, some of those roots that are in me, in the old man, we have roots of bitterness, unforgiveness, rebellion, deep-seated lust, ambition to



be somebody. Things where we do not agree with God that are sin. In other words, God says they are sin, but I say, “No, no, no, that is not sin.”

All these things the Lord is digging out with that trowel. He is getting down to the bottom of these things because He wants to remove them so that we are in harmony with Him. Other things need to be removed so the root of the plant is free to take the nourishment that it is meant to have so it can come to full fruit.

### **The Shovel**

Now the shovel or the pitchfork, I use it when I must replant something or dig it out and replace it. The only time I really see the Lord using this is when Israel went into exile. “I need to replant them. I need to plant them somewhere else and then I will bring them back.” In other words, it is like I need to bring them to the greenhouse, get them healthy again, and then I can replant them. So those are the tools of gardening.

### **The Value of Dung**

Now, the other action that He took was, it says that He spread dung. And we want to look at this dung, manure, fertilizer, however you want to call it. What is it? Not what is it in its makeup, but what is it? What is the value of the dung and of spreading dung? Well, dung is a source of food, of nutrients, and dung is also a source of warmth. That is really weird, isn't it? But let us explain these things. Again, the Holy Spirit feeds and brings an atmosphere for growth to the bearing of fruit through the Word of God and through His people.

Now, this is an important thing. He did not just throw dung on places. What happened in those days was that farmers would mix the dung with straw. So, it was all mixed up with something, and then they spread it around. And I was thinking, “Man, that is really weird.” And I have a neighbor that redid his lawn. He put on the topsoil, added some manure on top, and then he spread it with straw. And I thought, “that is so weird. That is never going to grow.” But I asked them, “Why do you put straw on this?” And he told me, and this is the landscaper who was doing it. He said, “Well, straw does a couple of things. First of all, it keeps the birds from getting the seeds. But as far as helping the plant, it helps retain moisture.” It helps keep that moisture, so that energy can be replenished, that life can be replenished. And the other thing it does, he says, “it allows things to breathe because the straw is spread out.” If you look at my fingers, I spread them out, there are holes in them. There is the breathing of air, because to live you need air. And so, this leaves pockets of air for things to breathe.

### **Act Upon the Word of God**

Now, with that in mind, then we talk about the Lord using the Word. He does not use the Word alone, but He uses the Word with something. Now I know, oh, yes, we will read spiritual books. We will read some Watchman Nee. We will read some FB Meyer or something like that. But that is not really what the mixture is. It is not mixing it with other people's teachings. But it is like this. It is the Word mixed with faith. In other words, there

is a Word. When you look at the Word, a lot of times we look at the Word as being spiritual knowledge. And all we want is spiritual knowledge. And the Lord says, "Yes, spiritual knowledge is good. But there are some words I am speaking to you that you need to act upon. And those are things that I quicken to you, and I make known to you."

Or a brother or sister comes up and says, "You know, I got a word for you." Remember in the charismatic days, you would tell someone, "I got a word for you." But the point is, there is a word that calls for a response. And that is why it is so important, especially for younger Christians, to read the Word. Because as you start gathering up the Word, you might even not know you know something. But in a time of stress or something like that, suddenly a verse comes to you because you have been reading the Word, and then the Lord says, "This is the verse. Act on it."

And so, even with some things that are doctrine, we act on it. But the thing is, as we respond to the Word in this way, as the Word is spoken to us and it says, "I want you to respond to this," we grow in the knowledge of the Lord by experience. We experience Him fulfilling what He is saying. We experience Him leading us in a way. We experience His provision for us in certain times. And we experience this through taking steps of faith in obedience to that Word.

### **A Testimony of Responding in Faith**

Now, let me give you an example. One time when I was really messed up in my walk with the Lord, and I was thinking I could not get back, the Lord gave me a word. It was Revelation 3:8, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." And at that time, I was saying, "Lord, I cannot get back to You. I do not know how I am going to, just leave me for dead." And the Lord gave me that verse. Now, that is a wonderful verse. "Oh, so I take it home and I know that is just beautiful." No, He is saying, "Now, I want you to act on it. I have given you an open door. What are you going to do? Come to Me. Come to Me. I am letting you know the door is open to you. I have not shut the door on you. Come to Me."

In other words, there is the faith. And so, when I came to Him and said, "Oh, Lord," and came to the place of saying, "You accept me." Suddenly, I could get up. It is like that man who says, "I have all these things against me," in John chapter five, and "someone else is always going down." "There are all these things against me." And the Lord says, "Stand up and walk." Because He has that word, that word right to him that pierced right through all the things that were against him. And He said, "It is not about those things that are against you. It is about what I have said. The power is with Me. The grace is with Me. I want to give these things to you. Now the door is open. Respond."

So that is one example. And Lenny Amato talked one time about the Lord telling him to go to that young lady. He responded and he went to the young lady, and suddenly, the Lord was trying to do something. We are not just gatherers of spiritual knowledge; we are to be walking in the light of the Word. As He gives us that light, we are to walk. And it is not only that we want the light. As much as I want the light, the light does not do enough

for me. I need life, I need the life that is behind the light. And do you know what it says about Jesus? It says His life was the light of men. His life, and that is the whole thing that the Lord is after. What is the fruit? It is the life of His Son in us. And we get it as the Lord opens the Word to us.

Now, the Word is also mixed with the lives of your brothers and sisters. And I want to say it is not just that we go to a Bible study, and we share with each other. But there are times that we observe the life of Christ in our brothers and sisters. And it is unbeknownst to them, because if they knew it, they would be so proud, but they do not know it. But you see things, and you see somebody laying down their life. You see somebody suffering as Christ suffered.

And I will use an example I used before when I was on tour with the Trotters, that there was a guy who was psychologically, and I think spiritually, oppressed. And he was wearing me out, just wearing me out. They roomed me with him because as a Christian, I did not go out. And this was during disco times. I was not out there on the dance floor with the rest of the guys. But he was just wearing me out. And we got to Sydney, Australia, and he was dragging me around. You know, I kind of had to keep my eye on him for his own safety, because he was just doing weird stuff. And he dragged me, almost literally, and went in the door of this place that happened to be Teen Challenge. Remember, Teen Challenge was a street ministry that saved a lot of people from the streets, drugs, things like this. Who was Teen Challenge? David Wilkerson.

And so, I got in there, and there was a guy there who had a beard, he was not much older than me. I was twenty-two; he was about 28, 29. And he was from Belgium. His name was Karen Hermans. And he took George, and he gave me rest from George for that whole week. You do not think that was him washing my feet and refreshing me? Not just to have George off my plate, but also this brother encouraged me, encouraged me in the Lord. And so, when we left Sydney, I was strengthened and helped.

And so, we have brothers and sisters that the Lord uses to help us. When you are worn out, you are not much good at anything, and then here is this brother. I know he did not know what he was doing for me, but, boy, what a help.

### **The Warmth of Fellowship**

And then the other thing I wanted to say fertilizer does. And this is very important because this is what we skip over a lot of times. It produces warmth. Warmth comes through the communion of saints. Communion of the saints is where we communicate life to one another. Life is communicated. And it is not just the community at large. It is individuals that make up the community. That is where we get our warmth. Our warmth is not because we are here with all you people, because I can just be hiding in a crowd, and you can all be cold to me. But warmth, from the Lord's side, is intentional. It comes by relating to one another. And like I said, I think us men have the hardest time in doing that. Sisters, you are blessed that you relate easily for some reason; but as men, we do

not. There is a lack of warmth sometimes, for whatever reason, and I am not here to harp on that.

But I will say this. The way warmth comes, it is the Lord's affection for His people, and He uses this. It is the touch of connection. It is that you connect with another brother or another sister. Now, have you ever noticed a brick building? A brick building, if you look at the bottom, when they make a brick building, you have the bricks all lined up, and then the next row of bricks, they are staggered. So even at the bottom brick, what is happening? It has a brick on the left, a brick on the right, and two bricks on top so it touches four others. If you are in the middle of the building, then you have a brick on each side and two above you and two beneath you, so you are touching at least six.

But you are connected as you are being built together. You are being built together; you are being connected. And here is another thing. As you are up in that building, you are connected with people that are below you. You are connected with people who are your peers on level with you, and you are connected with people that are above you. This is what it is meant to be in the building of the house of God. There is supposed to be a connection between us. And again, it is intentional that you are connected and touching that person to whom you are reaching out. And I can tell this from experience, and you guys know it too, it communicates the reality of the body of Christ.

It is a real body. It communicates a relatedness. And here is the point. We are not just related in Christ, we are related in locality, we are related in needs. And then what happens is that it creates bonds. It creates bonds, bonds of love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And so, when we are looking at being put together, this opens doors. Especially I am thinking of reaching out. When we do youth work, a lot of these kids go to fellowships where they are the only kids. And so, you need to relate with all these old people. That is tough. But the thing is, when there is a brother, especially an older brother, that reaches out, it opens the door for the Lord. For the Lord to use you as a vessel to speak into another one's life. Whether it be a speaking of encouragement, whether it be a speaking of admonition, correction, whether it be a speaking of, "I see these things in you. Maybe you should be thinking about doing an opening," or something like that.

These younger brothers see that you are relatable. You are relatable. And there needs to be that in the body, especially among older and younger brothers. That is everywhere. I see it everywhere. Paul must be the hardest person that I would think to have a relationship with. He is so adamant, so zealous. I mean, he was so zealous, he said, "Mark, just go home. You hold me up." And yet what do we find? Years later, he is seeking out a young man. And then if we read the Epistles, he has a number of young men that he has reached out to. And then because of his reaching out and bringing them along, they realize they are being trained for ministry. What does he say to Timothy? "You know what my teaching is? You know my form of life? You know what it is because I have let you in and you have taken me up on that. I have opened the door, and you have come in."

So, we are to be connected to some. We are not asked to be related to everybody in the fellowship. My gosh, no. We are asked to be related to some. In other words, we are

talking about the Holy Spirit working. The Holy Spirit is bringing the whole assembly, the whole church, into this very thing, the warmth. And it is a warmth of affection. I am not talking about, "Oh, I just want to hug you," affection. But it is the affection of, "I care for you. I care for you." You know, my generation, when we grew up, did your dad hug you? No, my dad did not hug me. Maybe when I was a little kid, but, growing up as a teenager, my dad never hugged me. But the point is, it is not that kind of a thing. I knew my dad cared for me, so he provided for me. He provided me a place.

## Conclusion

### The Fig Tree Does Nothing?

So, concluding here. But what about the fig tree? Does the fig tree just do nothing? "That is what grace is, Jim. We do nothing." No, there is something, and I want to give you an example. I want to give you an example from my own garden. And you tell me what the fig tree does.

Barb's favorite flowers are peonies. And down by our mailbox, I had a big pot, and we had peonies in it. And they would start to bud, and just as they were about to open, they would turn black and die. This happened for years. That shows you what a good gardener I am. But we observed it. This is so weird. That is it. So, I said, "Well, you know, let us plant it somewhere else."

So, we did. We took it to the side of the house where there was more shade. I planted it, and I put potting soil in around so the roots could get out and spread and put some topsoil on top of it, vitamin B1 to stop the replant shock, and then water. And that year it bloomed. It had nine flowers, and they were about the size of the palm in my hand. You know, peonies are just so full and beautiful. Ours were white, and some of them were pink. But all of a sudden, it got to a new place. Boom. That was what it needed. Who would have thought?

Then on that little strip that I dug, I bought some tomatoes. And we got a gardenia from Groovin' Gourmet. They had it on the table and they gave it away. And so, Barb goes, "What if you plant it?" So, I planted it. Now, gardenia has such a fragrant smell. It is just a beautiful smell. But this plant never flowered. What is wrong with it? And our tomatoes grew, but never turned red. What is the matter? So, one day I was going to Lowe's to get some tools and some topsoil, and I saw Reyna Ford and she said something to me. I said, "You know why gardenia does not bloom?" And she said, "Just put some Miracle-Gro on it."

So I am in Lowe's, and I passed a little stand of Miracle-Gro. What? I got some and I used it every three days. When I watered it, I watered it with Miracle-Gro. What is Miracle-Gro, anyway? It is fertilizer. And lo and behold, the gardenia bloomed. And lo and behold, this year we ate some of our tomatoes.

## The Fig Tree Responds

Now, you tell me, what was the plant's role in all of this? I fertilized it. I replanted it. What did the plant do? It responded. Brothers and sisters, that is what the Lord asks us to do as He is working in our lives with these tools, with this fertilizing. All He is saying is, "Respond." All I am looking for is you to respond to Me. Because if you respond to Me, you will bloom. If you respond to Me, you will find the life that I have meant you to have, and it will go through you. And others will see the beauty. And they will say, "Who did this?" And my plants will say, "Oh, thank you, Jim, for replanting me. Oh, Jim, thank you for getting that Miracle-Gro."

In other words, people will see and they will give glory to God, and that is what God desires. He desires everybody to see His glory. And in seeing His glory in those plants. There is nothing like the glory of a peony. And yet the glory that we are going to have does not even compare.

So, brothers and sisters, the end is, the Lord is doing these things. He has commissioned Himself. He has commissioned the Holy Spirit to come in and work in us, to will and to work His good pleasure. Let us respond to His nudging us. Let us, like with Nehemiah when He says, "I have everything you need," let us cooperate. Let us cooperate with Him and bring our Heavenly Father and our glorious Lord Jesus, the glory due Their names.

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we are grateful that You do not leave us for dead. But You dig around us, and You spread dung. Oh Lord, how we thank You that just because You died You are not finished with us; You are working with us. Thank You, O Lord Jesus, that You pray the will of God for us to be done. Thank You that You asked the Father and You sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to will and to work Your good pleasure. Oh Lord, all we want to do is to cooperate with You. So, Lord, as we begin to realize You are working in our lives: You are pruning; You are raking; You are dunging; You are digging. Lord, help us then respond to You and go with You. We do not want to kick against the goads, but we want to go with You. And Lord, we ask that You help us in doing this. Give us that grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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