

# Personal Discipleship: Spiritually Intentional Relationships

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I want to speak in this hour about what I'm calling personal ministry or spiritually intentional relationships. Let me begin by giving you just a little biography of my experience.

Soon after I was converted - and I'm grateful to God for the church that was influential in my conversion - I became somewhat disillusioned with some aspects of that local church. But I became attracted to a ministry conducted by the Christian organization the Navigators. Many of you are familiar with the Navigators. I was drawn to the fact that they were very much into discipleship. Man to man, woman to woman, which they called, "ma'am to ma'am" discipleship. That attracted me. They were doing more shepherding than I saw going on in the local church. And so through a contact I had, I became involved with the Navigators. I was able to be part of an attempted start-up Navigator ministry at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. That's what brought me to Pennsylvania where I've been ever since.

And I learned a lot in those couple of years about personal discipleship. But after two years, the Lord dealt with me, and I came to the conviction that the local church was the institution that Christ had established for the nurture of His people. And so I made a friendly departure from the Navigators to become involved in the local church. But I determined at that time to take some of those principles of personal discipleship and carry them into the local church. But unfortunately, I think I lost some of that vision and fell into a more traditional church-life schedule.

But in recent years, God has rekindled that vision for personal discipleship. Spiritually intentional relationships. I'm borrowing that phrase from a book by 9Marks' ministry entitled, "The Compelling Community."

Let me state my aim, then, in this hour. My aim is to convince you all of the value of connecting with fellow Christians, brother to brother, sister to sister, on a personal, one-on-one level to invest in another and to help one another to grow in grace. We might look at the life of the church in concentric circles. The outer circle would be the plenary meetings where everybody is expected to attend. This hour. The hour to come. Some churches have an evening service. You, I think, have a weeknight prayer meeting where the whole church is expected to come. We have those plenary meetings. Inside of that circle, we have small groups. In our church, we call them home groups. When you've had them here, I think you call them grace groups. They're called community groups, cell groups. I've even heard them called fight clubs. Not where people fight with one another, but where they prepare one another to help fight the fight of faith. Whatever you want to call it, they are small groups of various sorts. And I think that's a good idea. You can do things that you can't do in the broader fellowship. You can bear one another's burdens and equip one another and get into one another's lives in a way you can't in the larger gatherings. But within that circle, I would point you to a small circle where believers are meeting one on one with each other. It's often called discipleship. Discipling. I'm just calling it personal ministry, spiritually intentional relationships. I don't like to use buzz words that

Christians tend to adopt and fill with certain meaning, but aren't necessarily drawn from the Scriptures. So let's just call it personal ministry, spiritually intentional relationships.

And let's begin, if you all have an outline, or at least one per family, let's begin with some biblical basis for personal ministry. I want to try to convince you by several lines of biblical reasoning as to why it is good for you as a believer to be personally invested in another believer. Or more than one.

First of all, let's begin with the general call to love one another. I think you know that love is a huge construct in the Christian life, isn't it? In one sense, we can say that the whole Christian life is about love. Jesus reduces the entirety of the Christian life - true religion - to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. It is really all about love. You know what it teaches. You may speak with great eloquence, you may have great knowledge, prophetic knowledge, you may sacrifice your body to be burned as a martyr, but if you don't have love, you are nothing. Love is that important. Remember how John says in 1 John 4, if anybody says he loves God Whom he has not seen, but doesn't love his neighbor whom he has seen, he is what? A liar. And the truth is not in him. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you." Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:22 that we're to love one another with pure hearts fervently. There's to be some heat of affection in the love we have for one another. So love is hugely important. And one thing 1 Corinthians 13 tells us is that love does not seek its own. When you love, you are turning outward from yourself - from self love - to love others. And people are what matter. When you invest in people, you are making an eternal investment. The Navigators had a saying, instead of using people and loving things, we are to use things and love people. So, in encouraging you to invest in one another, I just begin with the large idea of love. We are called to love one another. It's what the Christian life is all about. But then consider the "one another" duties in Scripture. I'm sure you've been taught on the "one anothers." One word in the Greek: *allelon* You should look it up in your concordance. You have between 25 and 30 duties that we are to exercise toward one another.

And I know this is a large group and a little bit difficult to interact, but let me ask you for a moment to give me some of the "one anothers." The things we're to do toward one another. Love one another is the great canopy. What else are we to do toward one another? Raise your hand. Edify one another. Build one another up. Romans 14 Yeah, brother? Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3. David? Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6) and so fulfill the law of Christ. Yes? Forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Yes, Kevin? Confess your sins to one another. James 5 Yes? Encourage one another. Pastor Tim? Comfort one another. Your departed relatives are not lost. Jesus is going to bring them with Him. Comfort one another. You know, there's one word, *parakaleo*, which is sometimes translated "exhort," sometimes "encourage," sometimes "comfort" according to the context. Anything else? Pray for one another. James 5 Go ahead, sister. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other. Yeah, in the back? Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12 And we could go on and on. of these "one another" duties.

Now, this morning as we gather for several hours, you're going to do some of those things. But those duties are so vast, so expansive, you can't do all of those things in the large public gatherings, right? And to some degree, you can't even do those things in the small

groups. So, meeting one-on-one with another believer is another opportunity for you to carry out those "one another" duties. Not only that, but we're called to use our gifts for one another. says as each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of the literally multi-colored grace of God. Right? Every church truly is a charismatic community, right? No matter what you believe about the continuation of the gifts, every believer is gifted and the word for gift is *karis*, so in a true sense, every congregation is a charismatic community, right? You have gifts. Now, we can list those gifts. There are gifts of preaching, teaching, serving, showing mercy, knowledge, wisdom, organization, leading, exhortation, encouraging, counseling, comforting, faith, discernment... very few of those gifts are exercised publicly, right? Your pastors, those who teach, exercise a public gift, but very few of them are public. Most of them need to be exercised privately. That again points us in the direction of personal ministry. You have a gift. And it needs to be used. Yes, it will be used somewhat in the general meetings, but it will be used more fully as you more personally interact with your fellow believers.

Let's consider also the example of the ministry of Jesus. In Mark 3:14, we are told that Jesus appointed 12. Why did He appoint them? Somebody raise their hand. He appointed 12 that they might be...? With Him. And that He might send them out to preach. First thing is, Jesus appointed men to be with Him, so that He could impart His life to them. And for three years, He invested Himself personally in these 12 men. Now, to be sure, Jesus was unique. He was training apostles. He was training generals in the church. They were unique. They laid the foundation for the church. But we're called to be like Jesus, to walk as He walked. Isn't there something there? That Jesus invested personally in men that points us to the need to invest personally in one another. No, we're not training apostles, and most of you won't be training pastors, although those who are existing pastors will be investing in individuals to prepare them. Paul says to Timothy, the things you've learned from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Jesus made for the perpetuation of leadership in the church by existing pastors training other men who are able and gifted, so that they in turn might teach others. It certainly applies to pastors.

But I think there's a principle there for all Christians. And then look at the example of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. I turn you to Acts 16 where Paul first recruited young Timothy. Acts 16:1-3 "Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra, and a disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. But his father was a Greek. And he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." That's where Paul recruited Timothy. He was well spoken of. He had a good reputation. Paul said I want that young man to go with me in order to mentor him, disciple him, equip him... And what do we read in Philippians 2? Where Paul wants to send somebody to Philippi. He can't go himself. He says I have no one else of kindred spirit besides Timothy who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. Why was Timothy of kindred spirit with Paul? Because Paul had invested in him. He had trained him. And Timothy was a reflection of Paul. And the next best thing to Paul going himself was to send Timothy, because Paul had disciplined Timothy.

And we know that Paul did that with other men as well. Titus and Silas and Luke. Paul says to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, "Having thus a fond affection for you, we

were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." Paul, even in a pastoral setting or position, didn't just come as a word machine, he invested himself personally in people. Acts 20, as he's talking to the Ephesian elders having been in Ephesus, he says remember how I used to admonish each one of you with tears. I ministered to you publicly and from house to house. Acts 20:20 Somebody says that's 20/20 vision for ministry. It's not only public, but it's private and personal in the homes. And so we see the place where personal ministry, even for pastors, not only to publicly minister, but to minister personally. So we have the example of the ministry of Paul, investing in individuals.

Then, take the principle of imitation. You know that that's a biblical principle, isn't it? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." We see this principle of imitation negatively, and I cited this at the men's retreat, where we were talking about emotions, and the emotion of anger. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways and find a snare for yourself." If you hang out with an angry man, if you grow up in an angry home, you will become angry, because you will imitate what you have been exposed to. Well, that works in a good direction. You walk with wise men, you hang out with wise men, you listen to wise men, you watch wise men, wise women, you will become wise. You can't imitate what you don't see. How are younger believers going to imitate older believers who are better imitating Christ, unless there's some time spent together. Unless you're exposed to them personally. Frequently. So, imitation is a biblical principle. You need to spend time with each other to see what you're supposed to imitate. "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good."

And then, turn with me to Titus 2, where as many of you know, there is an explicit call to older women to invest in younger women. Titus 2:3-5 "Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the Word of God will not be dishonored." You older women, and I'm not going to presume to tell you what is an older woman, but if you're older than another woman, you're an older woman. You are given explicit command to invest in, to train, to make sober (as the original has) these younger women to teach them the domestic life - how to love their husbands, how to love their children. You have a direct command, older women, to do that. And I would presume by inference older men are as responsible to do that as well. And, older women, it's very obvious that younger women desperately need your investment. We are living in a godless age where we are far removed from the Bible and biblical norms. Women are being raised in dysfunctional, broken homes. They don't have a clue as to what it means to be a godly wife. They don't have a clue as to what it means to be a godly mother. You seasoned, older women, you are desperately needed to invest in these young women and teach these things - things they're not going to learn from the culture. They need to learn them from you in the church.

Now, I'm not making personal discipleship to the exclusion of the broader discipling of the body. One of the things that drew me away from the Navigators is they were so focused on one-on-one, that they were neglecting the body. There's a sense in which the whole body

disciples us, right? So it's not either/or. Please understand. I think the Navigators were imbalanced. One man investing in one other man, maybe some cross-training. There's a sense in which the whole body disciples us. One brother was saying I'm also disciplined by books. One brother was saying, George Whitefield has been discipling me, because I've been reading his biography and journals.

So there's a sense in which you come into the church and you see multiple examples of good family life that you didn't see growing up. But there's also value in an older woman investing personally, more intensely, in a younger woman. So the explicit call to older women to train younger women. And then, finally, and I'm trying to bring these various lines of argument to convince you that you need to be personally invested in other Christians.

Finally, we have that principle of Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." That iron needs to come in contact with iron. It needs to rub against one another in order for that sharpening to take place. Right? And that too points us to more personal involvement, personal investment, in the lives of others, to knock off the dullness and to sharpen the edge of one another.

So, I hope that's convincing. Do you see the paramount need to love your brothers and sisters not merely in word and tongue, but in deed and truth? Do you see the need for you to carry out those many one another responsibilities? Do you see the fact that you have a spiritual gift and you need to exercise that spiritual gift toward the body? And very few of you have a public gift. Do you see the examples of Jesus and Paul in investing personally in the lives of other men as an example to us to do personal ministry? Do you see the principle of imitation? The younger, less mature, are to imitate the older, more mature. How are they going to do that unless they have some window on your life? Unless there's some exposure, frequent contact with you? Do you see older women, your express duty to invest in younger women? And do you want to experience the reality of iron sharpening iron? You're going to need to be involved and invested in one another.

Now, let me give you some suggested approaches to personal ministry. I want to be very practical. If you're convinced of the need, how's this going to happen? Well, first of all, fellowship generally with the brothers and sisters in the church. You are not at all likely to invest intensely and personally in another believer, unless you're involved in the general fellowship of the church. Don't be one who comes to church and then just bolts out the door afterwards. Mix it up with the brothers and sisters generally. If you have no fellowship at all, you're not going to go from that to more intense fellowship. So let it begin with just general interaction and fellowship with the body in your larger gatherings. That's the place to start.

But then look to establish spiritually intentional relationships along three possible lines. Mentor to mentee. And that means that you older men and women or more mature doesn't always mean chronological age; sometimes it's a matter of greater maturity. Look out among yourselves for those younger men and women, man to man, woman to woman, that you can invest in and be a mentor to. But let me say, it's never a one way street. You never come at someone with I've got everything to teach you and nothing to learn. It is never that way. The Apostle Paul, when he's planning to come to Rome, he says I want to be encouraged with you. We want to be mutually encouraged by one another's faith. He's an apostle, but he says, I need you to encourage me.

Don't ever be a know-it-all mentor. Your mentoring is not going to last very long. No. When you come, you may have a lot to give - hopefully more to give than to receive, but you come with a teachable heart, and say I need to learn something from this young believer as well. But older men and women, more mature, look to younger ones to whom you could be a mentor. Younger believers - young in the faith, new in the faith, you need to be mentored. You need to find role models for you to imitate. You especially, look out among the congregation. If you're a young man, find an older man, or young woman, find an older woman and say I respect that person. I've been watching that person. I like the way he relates to his wife. I like the way she relates to her husband. I see the fruit in their family. I can learn some things from this older person. And sidle up to them. And ask, hey, can we get together for coffee? For whatever? I want to connect with you. I think there's some things I can learn from you. In our church, as we're trying to build this culture, mentoring, spiritually intentional relationships, we're really putting a lot of the burden on the younger ones, because we don't want to impose ourselves on these young ones. But I'm saying to the young believers, look out among yourselves. Is there a woman or man you respect? You go up to them. And if they're not willing to meet with you, talk to me, because I'll talk to them, because they need to be willing to invest in you.

And if there's nobody in the church mature enough that you respect enough to invest in you, you're in the wrong place. Go to a church where you can find people that you respect. I usually say that tongue-in-cheek because I know there are people in our church that are worthy of imitation. So, mentor to mentee. Mentee to mentor. Is mentee a new word to you? My word processor doesn't like that word. I have to go back and correct it, but it is a word. It's the one who is on the receiving end of mentorship.

And then peer-to-peer relationships. There's a place for that as well. Where you're meeting with somebody who's kind of in the same station of life. So, those are some suggested approaches. And then, initiate relationships. And you can do that based on a number of reasons. You're an older believer and you see a younger believer that you would like to encourage in the Lord. Come up alongside that person. You're a young believer, like I said, and you see an older believer that you respect, come up alongside that person, and ask to get together. You may see a peer in a similar situation to you, and you think you could help one another. Maybe you've got a shared struggle. A lot of you young men struggle with sexual lust and pornography. Maybe to come alongside and to hold one another accountable in that area where men are being destroyed all over the place. Maybe you have a shared spiritual burden or concern. Maybe you share an interest in a similar ministry and want to come alongside and do that ministry.

Maybe you see an acute need in a brother or sister's life. At times, there's a crisis that shows up in one of our lives. There are crises going on right now in the lives of your brothers and sisters. Are you aware of them? They especially need men and women to come up alongside and walk them through that. That's another occasion to connect and get together. It could be just a desire to get to know a believer you don't know. In an assembly this large, you don't know everybody. You certainly don't know everybody well. And maybe just for the sake of getting to know somebody - you know they're a member, but you've not engaged with them. I want to get to know them. Somebody coming new into the congregation. I envision for our church, and for every healthy church, the church becoming a culture that approximates a net.

Now, I love to fish. And when a fish gets in my net, it usually doesn't bode well for that fish. But I'm not talking about a net that you're going to destroy people by, but a good net. A church being a net in terms of a network of relationships. So you see the church on a Sunday morning, all these people, but behind the scenes, there's all this interconnectedness. This brother meeting with that brother, and this sister meeting with this sister. And there's a web, there's a network of relationships going on that's really binding the church together, so they're not just showing up on Sunday morning and departing, but throughout the week, they're connecting. Isn't that a good vision? Isn't that a good picture? People are less likely to fall through the cracks.

What I envision is that visitors come in and they get caught in that net. Because it's just what we do, we connect with people, so no visitor comes in and falls through the cracks and comes week after week and is neglected without some brother, some sister, coming up and saying, hey, it's been good to see you, can we connect? Can we get together for coffee or something? And they get caught in the net. Whether they're believers or unbelievers, you don't know. Meet them where they are. But they're people. They have a need. Either to grow in Christ or to come to Christ. I see that as a beautiful picture. We want to be a net. A healthy net that catches people in the body of Christ. Invite, then, the brother or sister to get together informally. Hey, let's get together for coffee. Let's get together for breakfast, for lunch... maybe at your home.

And then consider committing to meeting on some regular basis with a spiritually intentional goal. That's what I'm talking about when I talk about spiritually intentional relationships. Not just a one off meeting. Although sometimes it will not go beyond that. But consider meeting on some regular basis. Hey, can we get together every other week? Every week? Every month? And do so with some spiritually intentional goal. Perhaps mutual accountability. Perhaps you as an older believer mentoring that younger one. Sharpening one another as peers. Maybe studying a book of the Bible together or taking some Christian book that you read together. Sometimes just doing fun things together. Relating socially. You know, sometimes we can be hyper-spiritual and we're only and always relating spiritually.

We have a home group we go to in Maryland, because I live in Pennsylvania, and a few weeks ago it was still warm and I invited them up to our place. And we had a cookout and kids played badminton and we just hung out together just to socialize together. Sometimes to have a game night. Just to get to know one another in another dimension of life. You get to know a lot about people sometimes... My wife and I play a form of scrabble every night. We kind of wind down. She's in one part of the house, I'm in the other part. We meet at the kitchen table and we play banana grams. It's a fast paced Scrabble game. I was telling somebody, we're coming up to a thousand games that we've played. And we're only five games apart. She's won five more than me. But you learn something about people, you know how competitive are they, and things like that, by just doing fun things together. So don't leave that out. Get in one another's homes. You learn a lot about a person when you see them in their native habitat, right? Let those younger believers see you relating to your wife, relating to your children.

My wife was converted out of a very pagan background. She had never seen in her neighborhood a loving family. She tells me about the time she's in Tenth Presbyterian Church, and she's sitting there before the service, and in front of her was a man and his wife - I happen

to know the man, I had gone to seminary with him - and he is holding his wife's hand bowing quietly before the service began. It blew her away. She had never seen anything close to that. A man holding his wife's hand bowing in prayer? Nothing close. But at that point, she said that's what I want. A little thing goes a long way. You take it for granted. You're speaking kindly to your wife. Wives, you're being respectful to your husbands. People in the world know nothing of that. And it goes a long way. So, let them be in your home to see you.

Now, some worthy goals for personal ministry. If you're going to have these spiritually intentional relationships, what are some worthy goals to aim for? I'm an alliteration guy, so I've got six C's here. But they all fit.

First of all, conviction. We need to know doctrine. They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. A young believer needs to know doctrine. He needs to know the truth of God's Word. And maybe you want to invest in a younger believer to help them with their convictions. Start with their devotional life. Get them off the ground with a devotional life. Help them to read their Bible. The SPACES acronym has been helpful for me to help people. You can read your Bible and look for a sin to avoid, a promise to claim, a thought about God, a command to obey, an example to follow, and I used to say, something to pray about or act on, but I like how my son improved it, he said, "Show me Christ." Show me Christ from the Bible. Help a young believer get into the Bible in a devotional life. Teach them how to pray: The ACTS acronym. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Get them off the ground if they're a young believer in a devotional life. And then maybe study a book that will teach them various doctrines of the faith. That may be the need. Character. Don't be drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. We want to help young believers develop in their godly character. Maybe you want to study something relative to a character quality of Christ. Conduct. Conduct yourself with wisdom toward outsiders, says Paul in Colossians 4. Peter says let your behavior be excellent among the Gentiles.

Maybe there's an area of conduct that the younger believer needs help with. Learning to be a husband, a wife, a parent... how to be a Christian in the workplace. Some area of conduct. Community. Every young believer needs to get attached to the body. And you might want to help this young believer not to be a lone ranger, but to draw them into the body and encourage them to come to the various meetings of the church, so they become part of the body. Encourage community. Competence. We talked about spiritual gifts. When I'm working with a young believer, I want to ask what is this person's spiritual gift that I can encourage? Because they're going to use that gift in the body. How can I nurture that spiritual gift?

Now, I'm a pastor, so I especially target men that I think may have a gift for teaching and pastoring. And so we study books, like there's a dear brother with his wife and baby - in two days, they'll head off to China. And for the last year and a half, I've had the privilege of mentoring him. I probably will never go to China, unless it's for his ordination out there, but I feel as though I've made a contribution to China. And we've gone through books like "Biblical Eldership" by Strauch or "The Shepherd Leader" by Tim Witmer, a man from our area. Because he's going to be an elder. He's going to be a teacher so I'm trying to help him be an elder, to learn how to preach. That's his gift. So you might want to help someone in the area of their competence. Their area of gift. That's another basis on which to connect to someone. If you



have a particular gift, you might want to get with somebody who has a similar gift, a younger person. Because you know how to exercise that gift in a mature way and you can help them develop their gift.

And then, conflict. Conflict begins with the Christian life. Acts 14:22, Paul told those new believers, through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom. The tribulation begins right away. I've been privileged to work with Amish. And when they come to Christ, they get shunned radically from their families and their community. There's a lot of conflict right up front in the Christian life. And a big part of discipling them is helping them with how to relate to this community that has cut them off. How to navigate that conflict. And so maybe the unbeliever has some conflict and needs to learn principles of conflict resolution. So these are some areas where we want to help one another, especially older believers working with young believers. What are some possible hindrances to personal ministry? I'm going to mention these. Some of these I don't think you're tempted to. But some churches are. One is pastors do all the work. Pastors do all the ministry. There are some church settings where that's the mindset. We're the pastors and everybody else is the congregation.

I might have told you some years ago I saw a cartoon years ago about a congregation listening to a man preach and after he preaches, they're holding up score cards, like Olympic judges. How did he do? 7.6 It's a spectator mindset. They're doing all the work and we're there just judging. I know that's not the mindset you have. Hopefully it's a mindset to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Your pastors do ministry that nobody else does. They're called to herald the Word, and feed you with the Word.

In the last 12 years especially, God has impressed upon me that one of my chief roles is to equip the saints, so that everybody is doing ministry. So I don't think you have that mindset that pastors do all the work. That's what we pay them to do. Some churches do. Another hindrance is too much time given to unfruitful church activities. A couple of men wrote a book "The Trellis and the Vine." How many of you have read that book? The trellis is the structure. The vine is the living thing. And the point of that book is that some churches get choked with organizational structure, and they neglect the vine. Some structure is needed, but the living thing is the vine. Investing in people.

I know that's not a problem you have. You don't have all these structures, all these programs. I think you are all about ministering to people, but some churches, they're so busy with committees and busy-work, they're not investing in the vine, the living thing - people. Another reason for not doing personal ministry is a lack of spiritual vitality in your own life. You know, I'm just not spiritually healthy. I'm just not spiritually alive. And therefore, I'm not motivated to give anything to anybody else. If that's the problem, brother, sister, repent. Repent. Life is passing you by. You've got to give account for the life you've lived. You're to live for others and not for yourself. Repent! Seek God's grace to overcome that besetting sin that is crippling you so that you can be unleashed to begin to use your gifts to serve others. Don't stay in that state of spiritual ill health. Another reason is a lack of love for others. We can be too consumed with selfish pursuits. Love does not seek its own. You know, you're wondering what to do on a particular evening, and yeah, there's a brother who has needs, but I'm a little tired and I think I'll just curl up on the sofa... a lack of love will keep us from investing in others. And investing in others is a selfless thing. Love does not seek its own.

We need to ask God, give me more love for my brothers and sisters to make me willing to make the sacrifices to invest in them. Another is false humility. We found with some of our older men and women, maybe they don't have a teaching gift, and they say, oh, I don't have anything to give to younger women. And I say, wait a minute, you've lived with a man for 45 years. You've lived with a woman for 50 years. Don't tell me you don't have anything to give to younger believers. No, you may not be an articulate teacher, but you've hung in there in a godly marriage for nearly half a century. We were coming home from church one morning, and I was a little frustrated at the slow process of getting this discipleship as part of our culture, and my wife wisely reminded me - she said, Chuck, you know a lot of these dear older ladies, they were raised with a church culture where to be a good churchmen, you showed up Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening for prayer meeting, and you showed hospitality in your home. This whole idea of investing in younger women is new to them. It's a totally different view of churchmanship. So, be patient. That was helpful.

Now, a lot of those things are good. I'm looking at the older generation and saying, you know what, they've got discipline and commitment that the millennials don't have. It's good that it's Sunday morning, we're going to church. It's Sunday evening, it's Wednesday, we're going to prayer meeting because that's what we do. And we've done it for months and years and decades. Now, if that's mechanical, that's not so good, but the fact that it's just what we do, because we're committed, that's something the older generation is good at. You millennials, born 1982 or after, you don't know a lot of that commitment. You kind of go with the flow. You need to learn from the older generation commitment. But the older generation needs to learn some things. The old dogs need to learn some new tricks.

And get off this false humility. What do you mean you don't have anything to give? You've got more than you know. Laziness will keep us from this. The absence of hunger to grow. If you're a young believer, the Bible says as newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow. If you're a young, new believer, you ought to have a hunger to grow. And a hunger and a desire to have older believers invest in you. If you don't, something's wrong. Have you really been converted? Or has some sin waylaid you, so that you're not hungering to grow and to seek help from older believers? A prideful lack of teachableness. I, again, appeal to young believers. Proverbs 18:1 says, "He who separates himself seeks his own desire and quarrels against all sound wisdom." You don't think you have anything to learn? You have everything to learn. And you need to quietly sit at the feet of not only your pastors, but perhaps an older believer.

Don't be a know-it-all as a baby Christian. You don't know as much as you think you know. And be willing to be teachable. The Navigators had an acronym as to the men they invested in. They were looking for "fat" people. Faithful, Available, Teachable. And I know personally, if I find out a man's not teachable, I'm not wasting my time. Because I can't benefit him. You need to be teachable. And then, not seeing the value of this and making informal discipling a priority. I hope you're convinced that it is. So, brothers and sisters, I hope I've done something to convince you of the value of this ministry of personal investment in one another.

We live in a very impersonal age, don't we? Communication has exploded, but it's so impersonal. It's email and texting and Instagram and Facebook and facetime. But even in the primitive age of the first century, John saw the value of personal ministry. John, "I have many

things to write to you, but I am not willing to write to you with pen and ink, but I hope to see you shortly and we shall speak face to face." And that wasn't face time. So even in a primitive age, John says there's nothing like face to face. Being with you. How much more in our day where there's very vast, but shallow communication. Get with another brother, another sister, face to face, to personally invest in them, be invested in, and I'm not saying that's the be all and end all of the life of the church. But it is an important dimension to be added to the small group fellowship and the large meetings where you are to come under the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. I think all of our churches will be much more healthy if that dynamic comes into play and it becomes the very culture of the church. And it takes time for that to build. We're on the way, but we're not there yet. We want it to become something that we do. It's just what we do. We show up on Sunday morning, and of course, we invest in other believers. It's just something we do. It's a way of life. Let's pray.

Our Father, we pray that to the degree that I have represented Your Word, Your mind and Your heart accurately, press the truth home to our minds and consciences. And I pray for this church, so healthy, so strong, in so many ways, that this aspect of the life of the church might be strengthened as well to make them all the more healthy, all the more useful to You and Your Kingdom and Your glory. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.