

Bible Text: Matthew 9:35-38
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Well, let's take our Bibles and let's go to Matthew 9 as the foundation stone for this series that, Lord willing, we will complete this morning. We're talking about local churches in unity, that's essential, don't skip over that word, and cooperation. Uh, the denomination we used to connect to, the Southern Baptist Convention, had a lot of emphasis on cooperation but there was very little emphasis on true, biblical, spiritual unity which is the only way you can have true, biblical, spiritual cooperation.

Matthew 9, the Lord tells us in verse 35, or rather the text narrative tells us and then the Lord speaks, 9:35,

35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. [Now focus in on 38,] 38 Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Are you doing that? Am I doing that? Are we as a local church family saying, "Lord, we want to get in on this. Would You use us as an instrument in Your hands to indeed be thrusting out laborers into this harvest?" Or perhaps the Lord would say this, "If you're not prepared to train the laborers, why would I give you the laborers?" And I would say that's a good question. Well, that's why we are where we are in developing our Pastors Training Institute. Once again, it's not something brand new. We've been mentoring and training men for years, it's just we've never really structured it and organized it like it needs to be to be as efficient and effective as it ought to be, and that's where we are now, putting that final beam, if you will, in the structure of our missions arm and that's, um, what we're gonna talk about.

Now real quick. I'll not spend long here but we talked about the Creator of local church unity and cooperation is Jesus Christ. Now I've changed the wording a little bit because I wanted to get "local church" in here, so the reason why we are, are so intentional about us having unity and oneness is because our Lord desires that chiefly. We'll not go through all the text again but it is so thorough in our Lord's teaching that he is one shepherd with

one flock. There is this unity God's ordained for the people of God and among God's local churches, alright?

Now II. We talked about, well, we are talking about the essential pillars of our unity and our cooperation. Uh, this, this is where it begins to break down and it has, and it's done this generation after generation after generation. There has to be an active intentional policing, if you will, if you're gonna avoid your unity and your cooperation falling into some sort of a secular worldly concept versus having the high and true unity and cooperation of a thoroughly biblical concept. So we are talking about true doctrine to be lived by the true Spirit and walking in true discipleship. The only way we could unite with and the only way we can fellowship with other local churches to get God's work of church planting and missions accomplished is if those churches are genuinely striving after these truths. If they're not genuinely committed to sound doctrine and we're not talking about, uh, non-essential doctrines that we can all disagree on, we, you've been around long enough, we're balanced in that way, if they're not showing that they are striving to build the church – listen to me now – by the power of the true Spirit of God. In other words, their church should not be able to be explained by, "We're clever. We're creative. Our music program just brings them in," etc. etc. Well, our music program is strong enough to bring them in but we choose not to build our church on the music program. Uh, perhaps I could put on enough creative shenanigans from the pulpit to, uh, incite the carnal desires of men and bring them in, but we choose not to do those things. What I'm pointing to you is that we can not unite with a church that puts on something of a, of a honky-tonk or rock concert as their worship service or who has all kinds of creative gimmicks they use to keep people interested and involved. It's just impossible.

So we're talking about these three essential pillars. Now we've already talked about the pillar of, uh, grounded in true doctrine, and we've talked about being empowered by the true Spirit, and I'd just like to add a second note to that and that is that the hallmark characteristic of the Spirit's empowerment is – now listen to me – genuine conversions which leads to a regenerate church membership. Not just people who jump through a hoop, not just people who took a class, not just people who observe the ordinance of baptism, but people who manifest and show a good biblical evidence in their heart and life that they are born of the Spirit, therefore God has added them to the church, not men. You understand, when we add people to the church, we're just identifying those God has added. Are you with me? It's not about us adding or building anything, it's about us identifying who he is adding.

Now we come to the third pillar, essential pillar in unity and cooperation among individual local churches and that is, a striving to walk in true discipleship. I use the word discipleship, you could say true methods, uh, true polity, you could use a lot of words but I like the word discipleship and even though I'm defining it differently because here I'm not talking about necessarily the discipleship of the individual believers, though that's included. I'm talking about the corporate discipleship or the corporate walk of each local church, are they functioning in, in biblical methods and biblical practices.

Now let's back up for just a second. It's taken us 40 years to get where we are so we have a lot of grace and understanding on the brothers who are out there pastoring, who their churches haven't even started well but this is where they want to go. So if they're headed in the right direction and show, show sincerity in that, then we're for them, amen? We want to come alongside them and say, "Hey, look, let us help you and you may not have to make all the mistakes we've made in this 40 decade journey." And that's, that's the reason why Anchored in Truth missions exists, to help folks along this path if they're striving to be glory of God focused, Christ honoring, and Bible saturated in local church life. So we're talking about a walking in corporate discipleship as a local church.

Now we've been building off the teachings of and concerning unity out of Ephesians 4 and we won't go back there and read it again, but in Ephesians 4 the apostle lays out this great treatise of wonderful truth that establishes how we function in unity. Now in the context, he's talking about the unity in one local church, the church at Ephesus, but it applies to any Christian unity and it certainly applies to individual local churches who are in unity together. In Ephesians 4:5, for example, he says we have, "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism," in other words, we all are united in that, we all have, you don't have one Lord and you have another one, we all have one Lord. You didn't have one baptism and you had another different kind. No, we had one baptism, alright? Um, one has one, one faith and a different faith. No, we all have one faith. And then he continues in Ephesians 4:4 and says we are "called in one hope of your calling." So he says it's, it's absolutely impossible for you – now listen to me – it's impossible for you to be a true child of God walking in the truth and in the power of the Spirit and not have unity with other brothers and sisters who are doing the same, okay? So it should be therefore understood local churches as, who as corporate units are striving to walk in the true discipleship should find themselves automatically in unity with other local churches.

Boy, I do not have time but I could tell you a testimony after testimony after testimony after testimony of local church pastors, sometimes it's, it's just men who are leaders in the church, who stumble upon our ministry and immediately they're drawn to it. Uh, we had a dear couple visit us from, um, Middle Tennessee a couple, three weeks ago. I don't know if they're here today or not. They've been coming some, and, uh, he's been, uh, the man who's been quite prominent in Christian music for years, and, uh, I may have told you this, and they said, "We found your ministry by Googling the name Beth Moore and you came up." I'm not sure how that works. And then she said, "We began listening to your preaching and we're just drawn to this. This is, this is where we want to be." And we find that, that's happened thousands and thousands of times through the years.

What am I saying? There's just a connection, there's a spiritual connection and that's how Anchored in Truth missions has grown. We have not sought out, well, that's not 100% true, but our primary growth is not us seeking those to join us, it's those who find us and say, "Can we join you? We need to be with somebody else. It's lonely out here by ourselves." And so that connection, that unity is growing and these are people who want to be striving in true discipleship in their local churches.

Now, I'm trying to skip some notes here. Romans 16:19 is a good cross reference here. Paul writes to the local church at Rome and he says, "the report of your obedience has reached to all." Who is the "all" there? What he means is, "Local church at Rome, your obedience," and you could translate that if you want to amplify it out in Jeff Noblit terminology, "your true discipleship has now been heard abroad in the other local churches." He says, "Church at Rome, you're finding a unity and a connection with the other local churches who likewise are seeking to walk in true discipleship." Now notice the point there. He didn't just say, "your confession of Jesus." You could say that but, no, particularly, "It's your obedience. The fact that you are striving to live out the truth is marking you out and connecting you to other local churches." Folks, we are living that reality and we want to keep growing and living it more and more and more.

Um, so we make the point that churches walking in true discipleship should find each other, should unite together, should cooperate together for missions. Now when we talk about true discipleship as a, in, in a corporate local church setting, we mean that is a church that is developing and striving to maintain true biblical methods, sometimes I say methodology. Um, and to have true biblical methods and I've sort of coined this title, if you will, I haven't found it in any church literature ever, but you need to have what I'm going to call structures of grace. In other words, God's grace saved us, God's grace put us in a local church, God's grace gives us truth from the word of God and wisdom and the power to walk in that wisdom, but God in his grace also said, "I'm gonna give you the organizational structures or methods you need." And after all these decades of studying and laying it out, I have found no reason to change these three structures of grace that churches striving in true discipleship must be living out.

1. Congregational worship centered on the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. Let me say it again, congregational worship, what we're doing this morning, centered on, centered in preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. The other structure, the one we're not doing right now, well, we're doing it but we don't have our formal weekly meeting, every member ministry through small groups, and I want to ride this horse just a little bit. Over the last 2-3 decades, Baptist in specific, Evangelicals in general, have all but lost small groups. We always called it Sunday school and that's fine, I understand that, the name doesn't matter to me, I don't think it matters to God a whole lot, to be honest. We changed it to small groups some time ago because we wanted to accomplish more out of that organization than just meeting on Sunday and having a little Bible study and spending most of the time talking about the football game yesterday. We wanted it to have more of a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week connection of a small group so that real biblical, spiritual body life can be taking place among those people. If I throw all of you out there and I say, "Okay, y'all take care of one another. Y'all meet one another's needs," 75-80% of you are gonna be dropped through the cracks. Can't do that. But the Bible, don't have time to go in there, but the Bible gives us thorough teaching on the churches of God organizing themselves into smaller units so that truly effective body life can be accomplished, and then – are you listening to me, church – and then as the community and the world sees God's church meeting together, caring for one another, encouraging one another, discipling one another, correcting one another, holding one another up, etc. etc., then the world says, "That's not normal. They have something we

don't have." As Jesus said, "Then all men will know you're My disciples because of the love you have one for another."

So we would require if a church is going to be in fellowship with us and do and cooperate for us in missions, that they be striving toward developing an every member ministry through small groups part of their overall approach to church life. So congregational worship was number 1, centered on preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. Number 2 was every member ministry through small groups. And number 3, personalized strategic world missions. That is where the church does not just institutionally throw money out at an institution that's a mission's institution and says, "That's our missions work." That's not necessarily wrong or evil, it's just not primary and foundational to how God wants us to function and the New Testament local churches took ownership of being a part of the cooperative effort to get missions done, and so that's why we use the words first, personalized and strategic.

Now if you're doing those three right, you don't have time for hardly anything else. Amen. If you're really doing those three right, you don't have time for and that's what bugs me about churches. They'll say, "Well, well, Brother Jeff, don't you think you can do this and this and this and this?" And I say, "Well, that's not necessarily wrong but we must do these first three, and when you get those done well, then we'll get to those other seven things you, you are interested in." You know what? It's been 40 years now, you know what I found? Nobody's gotten through with the first three yet. They've got, and that's the thing, look, you've got to keep the main thing the main thing. And I'm telling you, Satan is thrilled when he gets us off on secondary things that are not necessarily evil but they're not primary to the task of the church, and I think that's one of the, the wisdoms maybe God has given us to keep it centered on what is thoroughly biblical and stay with it and do it well, and then multiply it for the glory of God.

Now these three structures of grace are there – now listen – and out of these three structures of grace flow all the means of grace that God has given us. That's a phrase theologians use to talk about the means of grace, the means that God's grace uses to build his church and build up his church like preaching the word, Christians in fellowship together, praying and Bible study, evangelism, genuine conversion, church discipline, meaningful membership, uh, the proper observance of church ordinances. Different theologians would list different things but these means functions out of those structures and then you have the totality of God, of what God wants us to be doing and what I'm calling walking in true discipleship.

Now so we're saying to brothers out there and churches out there, if this cranks your tractor, if this stirs you, if that's where God has you, then consider partnering with us and be, being, become a part of the Anchored in Truth, uh, family fellowship of churches and church plants for the glory of God. Now as I, as I summarize this section up and bring it to a completion and this will be on the screen, let's remind ourselves that God often brings unity out of division. God sometimes, now what you'll find is in a, in a particular local church setting, this happens a lot, as a church matures, it doesn't really happen much at all except in, in maybe tiny ways. Thank God for that. There's nothing worse than

disunity and divisions in the church. But you know, as you study this truth, you find that it's actually not God bringing unity through division, it's actually God separating off that was, that which was never a part of what he was about and what he was doing.

Now here's an important verse, 1 Corinthians 11:17-19. 1 Corinthians 11:17-19, Paul writes to this church at Corinth and he says, "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions," it's, it's the Greek word that we get "schisms" from, uh, it means a rent, a tear, a separating apart. "I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions," now this is a different Greek word. There, now notice he said this, "there must be." Did you hear that, church? Not that there might be. This, now this is an immature church, the church at Corinth, church just trying to get going and he's saying in that context, there must be factions among you. Now the word "factions" at the end of verse 19 is the word we get the, uh, uh, the English word "heresy" from. It's, it's, it's like a storming of a city. It's a, it's a group saying, "We're storming the compound and we're taking some with us." Paul says to the immature church at Corinth trying to get going, "there must be some arise among you to storm the complex and try to take people away with them." Wow.

Well, I'm glad it doesn't end there, the text goes on. Verse 19, 1 Corinthians 11, "there must be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you." Now who are the "approved"? He says, "This is a way God shows the true spiritual people in the church, who those are who are approved of God versus those who are not approved of God." That's, look, I'm not saying this, this is what the text is saying. Now the word "approved" is an interesting word. In the day our Bible was written, men were paid in weight. A coin would weigh a certain amount and so that amount of weight had a certain amount of value. So if you paid with five coins, it was because those five coins equaled a certain weight. That's not true with our currency today but it was true then. But unscrupulous moneychangers would take those coins and shave some metal off the top and some around the edge so you really couldn't tell it. So when he gave you five coins, he was really only giving you the value of about 4 ½ coins. He was unscrupulous and you know what they used for him? They used this same Greek word for "approved" up here but in the negative, he is unapproved. He's not true. He's not the real thing. He's shaven off some stuff that ought to be there. But then there were honorable, scrupulous moneychangers who would never do such a thing and they would say, "Go to Joe down there on the corner. He's a good moneychanger because he's approved. He's the real thing. He won't," um, maybe you've heard the phrase, "He won't shortchange you." Well, that's the word here and that's the background of the word.

So, uh, there'll be some pictures on the screen here. Notice this, this block of steel and my illustration in that block of steel represents those in a church, or you could say those local churches corporately speaking, who are the approved of God, alright?

Now the next screen. Those are metal shavings. There's not much to this bunch. There's not a lot of weight to them. Notice the difference between them and the block. That

represents those in a local church or corporate local churches out there, who they're not approved of God.

And then in the third screen. This, you can't tell it but that's a big magnet. That represents one of these factions that Paul said must come through because when that faction comes through, it separates out those that are God's and those that are not God's.

Here's the way it works in the video. Here comes the factious man or the factious group and he tries to pull the approved of God away, and notice he's having no effect. They just won't follow him. That busted finger is mine, by the way. But you take that factious man or factious group to the unapproved of God, they stick right to him and they follow him away. And what does God do? He leaves behind a purer church. He takes out from the fellowship of local churches some local churches and leaves a purer fellowship of local churches. That's part of God's method. I wish somebody had taught me this 40 years ago because I kept thinking I was the problem, and then I found out I was part of the problem because I needed to grow and mature, and we all do, but this is not talking about removing those that are immature, it's talking about removing those who don't have the approval of God, they're not born again, they're not truly God's.

So here's what I'm saying to you, and by the way, you've lived, if you've been in Grace Life Church half as long as I have, you've watched this happen, we've lived this reality, so this isn't news to you. But for those brothers out there and I talk to them every week, Brother Steve's talked to them every week, and Brother Matt and various staff members talk to them every week, they go through some of these things and they think the world's falling apart and it's great for us to tell them, "Look, time out. Sometimes the unity you're striving toward has to, has to happen through what the world will call division or a faction," alright?

Now let's go to III and I'm going to blitz through here some biblical examples now of local churches in unity and cooperation. Actually, when I first studied this, I was blown away by it. It's so thoroughly taught in Scripture and though there's no command that church, churches who are alike in doctrine, in spirit, and in practice should unify and cooperate, it's so clearly understood that it's as if there was no command necessary. I mean, you don't even really have to be commanded because it's so understood in the text.

A. The earliest days of Acts illustrate this so true and so powerfully. In, um, Acts 8, for example, we see the empowered church goes forth from Pentecost and they go forth with a spiritual doctrinal unity and a cooperation among them. The believers are scattered around, especially after, after the martyrdom of Stephen, and Philip, the Bible says, went down to Samaria and preached and many were converted there, Acts 8:14. Now don't worry about getting this down because this is going to be like getting a drink out of a fire hydrant, alright? Get the point, alright?

Now after Philip goes and preaches in Samaria, the Bible tells us the local church in Jerusalem, I call it the mother church, sends Peter and John down to Samaria where Philip went and some people were saved, to begin mentoring that local church and

overseeing that new local church plant in Samaria. So immediately, immediately as the New Testament unfolds and, uh, at least as far as the book of Acts forward goes, what do we find? We find an older and more established church mentoring and overseeing the planting of a new church, this time in Samaria, and we're just barely getting started.

And then to further show the unity and cooperation among local churches, we find that in Acts 11 the local church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to the local church at Antioch who had also had some people get converted, and we know that they came there and they worked among that church and built them up. Acts 11 also records that the local church in Antioch sends a love gift back to the mother church in Jerusalem for famine relief. So here we had this reciprocal back and forth. The local church at Jerusalem is primarily giving spiritual, biblical guidance and oversight for these new churches that are getting going, but the new church is some of them were in a pretty good financial situation, they send money back to the local church in Jerusalem, the mother church, to help them with their financial needs. On and on it goes.

Acts 15 reveals that there were some rogue, self-appointed men from the church at Jerusalem and they came down to Antioch, the local church at Antioch, and they began teaching in the local church at Antioch that you had to add circumcision to the gospel if you really want to be God's child. So the local church at Antioch said, "Well, what are you gonna do? There's a real division here. Some say it's Jesus only. Some say it's Jesus plus circumcision." What did they do? They send Paul and Barnabas and some other brethren back to the mother church at Jerusalem and there the doctrinal issue was resolved and their conclusion was spread among the other Gentile churches so that they would know how to handle the issue also.

Hey, look, here's what I want you to notice. I'm not against mission boards or mission agencies per se. They didn't go find a mission agency president and say, "Fix this," they went to the mother church, the local church and said, "Help us fix this." Are you picking up on this, church? Are you understanding that God can do all he wants to do in the world through churches? All the other institutions may not be wrong but if the churches are right, they are unnecessary.

Alright, let's go, let's move on to Paul's commissioning. The Apostle Paul, you know, is converted, Acts 9, and then we see the Apostle Paul receiving the blessing of the local church at Antioch before he is sent out to do his missions work, and then in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, we see Paul also setting forth that he additionally sought the blessing of the local church in Jerusalem, "the mother church," and therefore all men should honor his ministry. Were all men to honor his ministry because he was sent out by a mission board or a mission agency? No. All men should honor the Apostle Paul's ministry because the local church at Antioch and the mother and local church at Jerusalem gave their stamp of approval to his work. Are you with me? It all came out of the local church.

It was Paul's entire... I'm sorry, let's go to C. The complete New Testament record. We will not cover all of these. We'll just skip here and there. But let's take the Apostle Paul again to note that Paul's entire ministry was marked by leading local churches to unity

and a cooperative spirit together. Paul traveled, Paul preached, souls were saved, then local churches were established. He tried to disciple those local churches. He trained leaders and then he led them to cooperate for the mutual edification, support in planting of still more local churches, and we find this repeated all through the balance of the New Testament.

In Acts, uh, I'm sorry, in Romans 15, we find, um, that the Macedonia and Achaia churches were pleased to make a, a, a offering to the suffering saints in Jerusalem so here, here's what Paul's doing, he's holding up the model – are you listening to me – he's holding up the model of two local churches so that other local churches will learn to do better by their model. Churches helping churches.

In Romans 16:16, Paul says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss, and all the churches of Christ greet you." Now if you take the context of Romans 16 – listen to this now – he mentions the local church at Rome, he mentions the local churches of the Macedonia region, he mentions the local churches of the Achaia region, he mentions the mother local church in Jerusalem, and then he mentions "all the local churches," and what is he pointing out? He's pointing out as chronologically time goes on, this group, this, this cooperative uniting fellowship of local churches grows and grows and grows.

Now we don't have time to point it out, but there were a lot that fell by the wayside also. Some didn't make it the long haul. That's because God sometimes continues the unity by dividing off those that don't belong, and that's never bothered us. Brother Steve can probably tell you the number of people we've had fellowship with in cooperation with in Anchored in Truth missions, and as time went on either they separated from us or we told them we can't work with you anymore because either the doctrine, Spirit empowerment, or true discipleship was blatantly neglected. Not that they were striving and just not there yet. We'll always welcome brothers in churches like that, but they refused to try in those areas.

1 Corinthians, um, 16, we see the local churches of Galatia and Asia and the local church at Aquila and Priscilla's house in a united, cooperative effort. 1 Thessalonians 1, he commends the church at Thessalonica because they were a good example to the local churches in Achaia and Macedonia. In Romans 16, again when he tells them, "A report of your obedience has gone out to all," what does he mean? You're impacting all these other local churches.

Time does not allow me to deal with 1 Corinthians 14, 2 Corinthians 8, 2 Corinthians 8 again, Philippians 4, Romans 15 again, uh, but let me go all the way down to 3 John 1:5-8 because I think this is interesting. When you get to 3 John, you've come to the very last writing of the New Testament outside of Revelation, alright? So in the very last chronologically speaking written book in the New Testament outside of Revelation, here's what John the apostle says. John writes and says, "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren," now he's talking about those outside of your church, "and especially when they are strangers; and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner

worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accept nothing from the Gentiles, rather accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore," notice what he says here, "Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." All the way down to the last epistle of the New Testament, the, the apostles are stressing again, "Support those who help the cooperative work of missions among the local churches."

Now do you think this is a New Testament concept? And I've left out 70% of it. So what we are doing, what we've been about for decades building Anchored in Truth missions where one local church can be used to help unify with and cooperate with and motivate other local churches to be true churches themselves and then plant other churches, is a 2,000 year old truth that's just been neglected. It's just been neglected and one of the ways it's been crushed and ruined is because in our efforts of cooperation – listen to me – we left out true biblical unity. We just tried to cooperate because we all had the same name. We just tired to cooperate because we all were in the same denomination but that doesn't matter to God when we're anchored in true doctrine and empowered by the true Spirit and walking in true discipleship. That's what we have to have, one local church to the other to have true unity and true cooperation.

Now this is killing me. Look, you're only getting it once a day so bear up, bear up with 10-15 more minutes, alright? Here's a question, it'll be on the screen. Do we qualify as a mother church? Do we qualify as a church at Jerusalem? I mean, let's don't have false humility, let's just be honest. Look at the Scriptures and look at the landscape of churches and let's ask that question. If so, what is our role as a mother church? What is this cooperative missions effort that we as a mother church should be about? Well, I submit to you that cooperative missions effort that should come out of this mother church, there are other mother churches but this mother church is Anchored in Truth missions. Anchored in Truth missions is the embodiment of this mother church's role that we have.

Well, I left out a verse in Corinthians. Well, if you could just, if I could just make your brains work hard this morning, in fact, just keep your brain off of the ice storm and just think with me for a moment. In Corinthians, Paul wrote the Corinthians, I don't have time to bring it back up, but here's what he said in effect. In effect he said, "You guys live right and do right because it's your duty to do so before the other churches." Did you hear that? You have a duty, Grace Life Church of the Shoals, to be biblical, to be glory of God focused, Bible saturated, Christ honoring not just in words and not just on paper but in the function of our body life. Why? We have a duty to help the other churches get it right and they have a duty to help us do it right. I think, I think Christendom as a whole has missed this. This isn't, this isn't Jeff Noblit, this is 2,000 year old stuff. God's called you to something bigger than you. God's called you to something bigger than your class enjoying each other this week in small groups. God's called us to the duty of doing it right that more of his churches will be inspired, mentored, discipled to do it right also. Are you with me, church? Boy, I'd hate to burn 40 years on you and get this far and you miss it.

If we are a true mother church, then we should be able to say imperfectly but yet with some good degree of consistency, we are a church embracing true doctrine, we are a church experiencing true spiritual power though not enough, and we are a church walking in true discipleship. Another way to say that, that we are biblically and spiritually healthy. And this should pop up on your screen, and that is we want to be sound theology and a proven methodology. It's easy to have sound theology. Just get you a statement of faith, put it in a file somewhere, and say, "That's our statement of faith." Well, who cares? Yippe yi yo kiya. Those are dime a dozen but do you have your church lived out a proven methodology. Our personalized strategic world missions that I developed years ago and you embraced because it was biblical, it's stronger than it's ever been. Our methodology for every member ministry through small groups has been in the upper 80% of attendance compared to worship attendance for almost forever. Unheard of. Absolutely unheard of. But you see how you're in this with me. It's our duty to walk this out to help God's other churches as they also will help others and help us in return.

So now we come, listen, now we come to the final structural beam in the house of Anchored in Truth missions. Now we've already been doing it but it hasn't been structured like it needs to be and functioning like it ought to be, but that's where we are right now as we're installing this final essential structural beam and all we're about is missions, and that is the Pastor's Training Institute. The Pastor's Training Institute is that final structural beam in our effort to be a part of what the Bible, the New Testament so lays out we should be doing.

Now just hitting on the, a few things here and the Pastor's Training Institute, we're going to take the four decades of our experience of reforming and revitalizing Grace Life Church and teach that. I teach a master plan, if you will. Sometimes I call it the encyclopedia of the local church. We hit on the being glory of God focused, we hit on being Christ honoring, we hit on being glory of God, uh, uh, local church centered. We, we teach a lot on preaching the word in the power of the Spirit. Brother Tim Seal amplifies that in his, in his teaching on expository preaching. We teach on personalized strategic world missions. We teach on every member ministry through small groups. We, we give you the sound theology but then we give them the proven methodology and on and on and on we could go. How to develop elders. Conflict resolution. Church discipline issues. Biblical counseling. Not just from a textbook, but from four decades of learning and application. I would have given my right leg for that 40 years ago. If some pastor had said, "Sit down here. Let me show you how this has worked here." Not that they have to follow our pattern exactly but do what's worked and then develop out of that your own process in your own local church.

Now to those local, to those training elements that come out of the bulk and warp of our local church life we'll also have some courses like biblical theology, just the ones we think are important, church history, an intensive on 1 Peter because it teaches so thoroughly on suffering in leadership and God's work, biblical pastoral ministries in 1 and 2 Timothy. Now what we want to emphasize is – are you listening – the professors of the Pastor's Training Institute are also possessors and that's important. Our professors are possessors. They've lived the reality of planting a church, establishing the church well,

grounding it in sound doctrine, striving to be empowered by the true Spirit, and walking in true discipleship, or they have decades of learning concerning reforming and revitalizing existing churches to walk in biblical and spiritual health.

Now for those who have not maybe had that extensive of time in a local church setting, reforming and reviving it, and by the way, that's a very very small fraternity of men who long-term have experienced those things, but there are some trustworthy brothers that we will bring in for like church history, Dr. Tom Nettles, who loves our work and has been very commendable of our work, and Tom Nettles is the preeminent Baptist historian in the world today. I don't think there's any negotiation about that. And he was delighted to come and he's going to teach an intensive this summer on church history. And by the way, any of you can take that if you want to. It, it will be rich. If any of this, uh, applies to you or it's an interest to you, I should say.

One of the things I want to talk about is a continuing relationship. Are you listening to me? We are not interested in guys just popping in, finishing the curriculum, getting a certificate and leaving. That's not, I'm not interested in that. We're interested in guys who want to be trained and mentored and then when they go out, we will continue to help them, to oversee them, to encourage them, to financially support them, whatever they need. And by the way, we've been doing that, just that now we want to do it even better as time goes on.

Now the three tracks and Dr. Seal, you and I hadn't talked about this but it's not really in essence different from what we've already talked about, but three tracks I see this functioning on, okay? And I call these relationship tracks because we're talking about relationships with guys we're training that never ends. One of the premier local churches in America, if I mentioned its name or the pastor's name, all of you would know it, but their approach to when they have a church planter go out is they support him two years and then he's cut off. You just start getting in trouble in two years. You just start realizing what it's about in two years. So we've literally had some of his men call us and say, "Can we connect to Anchored in Truth because we need a continuing mentor? We need continuing encouragement and correction and oversight and support." And so we're talking about this continual relationship begins in the Pastor's Training Institute along three different tracks.

Track 1 is when, um, it, it's a student who is already an active member of an Anchored in Truth partnership church, alright? They're already a part of a church that we've connected with, they've connected with us, and they will come through the training. Now they can come to Muscle Shoals and be trained or they can stay in that church and be trained through the internet. All of the classes are offered over the internet. And one thing that we want to make clear here is the entire time we're training them, they remain under the authority of their pastor and elders in their local church, not ours. We're not interested in separating them from the people who raised them up. We're just coming alongside and helping to train them. Then when they finish the curriculum and their pastor and their local church feels they're properly mentored, then they will go out under the authority of their local church as the primary mentor and sponsor and all the Anchored in Truth

family will stand behind them to help them in every way we can, alright? So that's people who are members at Grace Life or people who are members of any, uh, church in fellowship with Anchored in Truth ministries.

Alright, track 2 would be men who strongly feel called to preach but they find themselves in biblically, spiritually unhealthy churches and they have no hope that their church is going to try become biblically and spiritually healthy. They may contact and say, "I would love to enroll and I want to move my life and move my family to Grace Life Church." Now they could say maybe at Brother Jono Sims' church at Shelbyville Mills in Shelbyville, TN. As long as it's a church we know is solid and in our fellowship. "We want to move our lives there. We want to join your church. We want to be trained there." And then they would go out fully under our authority with the Anchored in Truth family backing us up as we send them out, alright? But that's only if they come from a church that is not sound in doctrine, in Spirit empowerment, or in true discipleship.

Now track 3 would be for a limited number of students who would say, "Hey, we're on board, we've been connected with y'all for years but we need this course and this course." Then we would say, "Okay, tell us where you've been, what you've learned," and we will approve them to just take what they need to take to be more sharpened and better able to continue on in their pastorate and in their church planting work.

So in a summarized Reader's Digest version, that's where we find ourselves and, uh, perspective students for the Pastor's Training Institute will be required and after I've edited this some, to listen to these messages and sign on to what we're about, okay? And, um, do we qualify for this? Are you committed to make sure we qualify for this? I can't bring guys in here and they say, "Well, your teaching is solid and we love your people, but you're no more sound than 90% of them out there," which means you're not sound at all. I don't think that's true. Here's what I'm saying to you, church, what did I say last week? Take your vitamin B shot and gird up your loins, our best work is ahead of us. Now don't despise the day of small things. Jesus had 11 true disciples and he changed the world. Trust me, if I wanted big numbers we could probably get some pretty big numbers but I wouldn't be teaching this. This, this screams out a lot.

I'm, I'm gonna close with this illustration and I'll be done. You have this giant, just picture in your mind this giant circle and in this giant circle is what we call Christendom. It's everything out there that claims to be Christianity, alright? And let's reduce that down a lot and you get to a smaller church circle that's called evangelicalism, still a great big group of everybody who considers themselves basically non-Orthodox or non-Catholic. Alright, then you get inside of evangelicalism and you narrow that down even more, you get a smaller circle and that circle would be truly conservative, Bible believing evangelicals, okay? Now you draw that down a bunch more and you get to that circle that is those evangelicals who are committed to the doctrines of grace, reformed theology. Getting small. Then you reduce that down a, a good bit more and you get down to those who are Reformed and thoroughly baptistic. They don't believe in, um, well, we're evangelistic. We don't really believe that you sprinkle babies and you're done. We believe you ought to all repent and believe and baptism should be a symbol of a true profession

of faith in Jesus Christ. Then you get down to a smaller circle from there and you get down to those Reformed Baptists who are striving to walk in this truth that's heard about us and wants to connect to us. So you get down to a smaller group that says, "We think we want to connect to you," but they listen to these sermons and we interview them and either they or us say, "You don't fit." Then you're getting down to a small group and pretty soon you get down to a little group out of Christendom that fits us and you say, "If we're gonna impact the world, God's gonna have to be in that." It'll take God to do that. And God says, "Yeah, I took 11 fishermen and a few other guys and changed the world, why can't I do it again?"

Jesus said, "Look out there, they look like sheep without a shepherd. There's no qualified godly men to teach them, to preach to them, to organize them, to structure them, teach them how they're to care and love for each other, teach them how to evangelize and build new churches. Look at them, they're like sheep without a shepherd." And Jesus said, "This isn't good." And see, it's the Lord of the harvest that he might thrust out laborers into that harvest. And I challenge you, Grace Church, to join me and all of us together as we continue this pilgrimage God's had us on. Who knows, by the time we all get to heaven, there'll be 7, 77, 100, 7,000 glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated churches and here's the key, are you ready, here's the key, that glorify God, that when you look at them, God gets the glory because they're functioning according to his wisdom and by his power and it shows his beauty and his wonder to the world. And that's why we breathe, that's why we exist, that God might be made much of through us.

Well, if you're opposed to what I just preached, would you stand and do jumping jacks right now? I know you don't but I'm just excited that after this labor for all these years and you are a key part of that overall labor, we're finally installing that final beam in the structure. Now let's fill that house up and see what God does with it. Amen?