

# Strength That Leads Somewhere

*Building Core Strength*

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**Bible Text:** Luke 13:1-35

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Well many of us have watched the recent wild fires out west with concern and amazement, haven't we? There are currently fires burning in six different states. In Colorado alone they are fighting 10 major fires right now. The statistics are really staggering. For example the Waldo Canyon fire resulted in 18,000 acres burned—think about that—350 homes destroyed and 32,000 residents evaluated. That would be a significant percentage of our town if that were happening here. Then there is the Hyde Park fire, 87,000 acres, 250 homes destroyed, 10,000 residents evacuated. Just amazing.

Many of these pictures give us a new appreciation for the work of our fire fighters and the credible danger that they face day in and day out. Some have even lost their lives this week trying to serve other people.

It is hard for us, I think, to imagine. Many of us have never experienced anything like this. Yet this was happening and to people in this country at this very week.

Of course, ultimately, the human toll, just staggering to think about that.

I would encourage to you pray for people in the western states along with literally millions of people throughout our country who this week have been without electricity as a result of these intense storms and downed power lines and stifling heat.

Now let me ask you this. Are events like these supposed to have any impact on us? Is there any fruit, any effect that God would desire in us as we watch situations like this unfold? And how is any or all of this connected to the issue of strength in our souls?

With that you might open your Bible, if you would, to Luke chapter 13. That is on page 58 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need one of those this morning. So Luke chapter 13 or page 58 of the back section of the New Testament of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our church's theme this year is building core strength. If you have been around our church this year you know that for sure. And we have organized a lot of this around this theme verse, Psalm 138:3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”<sup>1</sup>

And I hope that is becoming more and more true for you. So you know I am getting strong spiritually. I am becoming closer to Christ and there is more and more strength in my very core, more and more strength in my very soul. I hope you can point to specific evidences of how that is happening for you and I hope that is becoming true for us as a church.

We have talked about it in three special areas of emphasis is year. One, just shoring up foundation areas in our walk with Christ. This is an individual issue and I hope you are becoming more like Jesus as a result as you are becoming stronger spiritually. And then in our church ministry we are doing in some ways a complete audit of what we do around here just thinking about the fundamentals, thinking about the things we have to be strong in and the ways that we need to grow in this point in the year, now in July. Frankly, we could look back over the first six months and see some good things that have happened as a result of that and hopefully thinking about it comprising the basis of godliness and effective community service. So that is a big part of core strength and just majoring on the majors as individuals and as a church.

And then, secondly, planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the launch of a cluster of new ministries there. God has been really good to us even in the last couple of weeks a lot of details have come together. We are so thankful for that. Be sure if you use Joe Blake, if you see Mike King, if you see pastor Oak and Josh Greiner, just a lot of men and women who are serving on your behalf in that way and serving tirelessly. God is really blessing their efforts. The plan is to close on our bonds this Thursday and if you have ever been involved in something like that, someone described it to me like a Chinese fire drill that never ends. But the lawyers and the bankers and all God’s people and so it has gone well, though. We are having fun, just like you would in a Chinese fire drill, of course, if you ever did that when you were a kid. And so now it looks like we are going to be able to close on or about the 12<sup>th</sup>. And then we have our ground breaking a week from today.

Where are you going to be at five o'clock next Sunday afternoon? I hope it is going to be at 1920 Northwestern, because we are going to have a high time together as the people of God, because he is the one who gave us strength to get to this place. And we are going to celebrate that. We are going to thank him and we are going to plan with the help of God to make that site look a whole lot better over the next year or so and so it is going to be a great ground breaking. We are inviting our neighbors and all of that. So I want to encourage you to put that on you calendar. And you don’t have to be a member of the church, just somebody who wants to thank God for what he is doing. He gave us the strength and we need to praise him for that.

And then, lastly, thinking about the future. If Christ tarries his coming, preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 138:3.

starting January first of next year. So a lot going on around here. A lot of excitement, frankly. And a lot that is going to require the strength of God. And that is exactly where you want to be, right? That is exactly where you want to be, believing if God is who he says he is, we are going to be fine. If not, we are in trouble. That is the place of faith, frankly, you want to be.

Now, our passage this morning could really help us with this whole matter of strength and here is why. Now the Lord is drawing closer and closer to his death, his burial and his resurrection. And so you see the intensity of these messages increasing. That will be clear as we read this text this morning. And, frankly, some of us, we need that level of intensity. We need the heat and to go up, to help us to be what he wants us to be.

And remember, first and foremost this is a book that is written by a doctor who is an associate of Christ, a traveling companion and who, as a result, is writing to his friend Theophilus as a result of the first hand reports that he has gathered together. And now he is writing it down for his friend. And he wants his friend to make a series of decisions, just like he wants us to make a series of decisions. He wants him to do something with this information. That is why we are referring to this as strength that leads somewhere.

And as I read, you are going to see five very clear divisions in all of this and so please be looking as I read for five results of believing the gospel of Christ.

In Luke chapter 13 beginning at verse one.

“Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.”<sup>2</sup>

Think about that. Think about these wild fires. Think about much that has happened in this country and even our community this week, very similar.

And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."<sup>3</sup>

I see a life of repentance is what that is all about. Now, what does that lead to? And what is does the lack of it result in? Here is the illustration. Lock on to it logically, verse six.

And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 13:1.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 13:2-5.

down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, if you are not a repentant person, if you are not a fruitful person, what might you be like? Here it is in verse 11.

"And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

So He was saying...<sup>5</sup>

If you are thinking right now, ok, if I am supposed to be a repentant person, if that results in fruitfulness, are we talking about big things or little things? Well, it depends on the perspective. So he has been saying, verse 18:

"What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES." And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 13:6-10.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 13:11-18.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 13:18-23.

I mean, if you are supposed to be fruitfulness as a result of repentance, I don't see a whole lot of that.

And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You." And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.' Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"<sup>7</sup>

We are talking about strength that produces fruit. We are talking about strength that leads somewhere. So let's organize the rest of our time around the five clear divisions in this text and five results of believing the gospel of Christ.

And, first of all, repentance that leads to fruitfulness has to start there. You saw this chapter opening up with two contemporary tragedies, at least contemporary to the hearers of that day. One was this group of Galileans who had been killed by Pilate while they were worshipping and Jesus says in Luke 13:1

"Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices."<sup>8</sup>

Now what is somewhat ironic here is that apparently everybody in that day knew exactly what was being spoken about and exactly what had happened. Whereas we don't know

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 13:23-35.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 13:1.

anything about this event, other than what we read in this particular text. But it would be very consistent with what we know about Pilate that he was the kind of man who would be upset about the way some of the people in Galilee were worshipping and would actually have them killed in the temple while they were worshipping, which would be an incredibly cruel and blasphemous act.

Then there were these 18 persons who died when the tower of Siloam fell.

Verse four.

“Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?”<sup>9</sup>

Again, we don't have any specific facts about that event either other than what we read about in this text, but that is ok. It is not about all the details of what happened to the Galileans or what happened to these persons of Siloam. But really the focus is on the wrong possible response to those events.

See, what concerned the Lord was believing that there was a direct cause and effect relationship between the trials a person faced and their own personal responsibility. In other words, any time somebody was facing a trial, it must be their fault or they were being judged in some way. That is why Jesus asked the question straight up.

“Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?”<sup>10</sup>

Or a very similar question in verse four

“Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?”<sup>11</sup>

And unfortunately many of the men and women in that day would have answered those questions with yes. That was part of their working theology, because apparently a book like the book of Job, for example, hadn't had much of an effect on them. And so when they saw a person, whether it be the Colorado wild fires or whether it be all the power outages this week, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, they would look at trial that a person was facing and conclude it must be their fault. Therefore I am better than them and that is the effect this event ought to have on me.

You may remember a similar story to that in the gospel of John where Jesus and his disciples were passing by and they saw a man born blind from birth. And his disciples even, men who were closest to him immediately asked this question. “Well, rabbi, who sinned, the man or his parents that he would be born blind?”

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 13:4.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 13:2.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 13:4.

Those were the only two options that they could consider in their minds. That is the way many people might have thought about the Colorado wild fires if they were living during this day or the power outages this week.

And that is problematic for several reasons, but don't miss the logic of the text. The point here is the desired effect of the situation with the Galileans, of the tower falling in Siloam, the desired effect was the same and Jesus said it exactly the same.

“I tell you no.”<sup>12</sup>

It wasn't because of the Galileans direct sinfulness, but he said:

“...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”<sup>13</sup>

And then, again, in verse five.

“I tell you, no, but unless you repent.”<sup>14</sup>

Whether we are talking about what happened to the Galileans, whether we are talking about what happened at the Tower of Siloam.

“I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”<sup>15</sup>

You say, “What is the point of that? What was the point for them and, more importantly, what is the point for us?”

And here is the answer. Because of these constant reminders of the existence of evil, like Pilate's murder of innocent worshippers or the constant reminders of the uncertainty of life, because we are just living in a fallen world that is groaning under the effects of sin, like the tower of Siloam falling or the Colorado wild fires, we ought to use those kind of events that happen in our world and happen even sometimes in our own community on a weekly basis and sometimes a daily basis, to repent ourselves. Bang, that is it, to identify issues in our own hearts and life that we can be reminded about as a result of observing events in this world.

“...unless you repent, you will likewise perish.”<sup>16</sup>

For example, they could have used Pilate's harsh treatment to cause them to ask whether they ever spoke or treated somebody in a harsh fashion. It is not a matter of, well, other people may have been sinning. That is why they are facing us. To wait a minute. As I

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 13:3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 13:5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

look at the harshness in this world, I wonder whether I am ever harsh with other people and I need to repent or I will likewise perish.

Or an event like the falling of the tower of Siloam as an occasion to ask whether they were living as if there was just assurance there would always be another day to get right with God. I will always have another day.

No, learn a lesson from the falling of the tower of Siloam. Repent or you could likewise perish. Get right with God. Trust God as Savior and Lord for them while they have the opportunity to do so.

Or for us these Colorado wild fires, an occasion to consider whether we are finding our joy and our strength and our material possessions. Do we ever do that? And is it easy to get wrapped up in our junk? Yeah.

This picture had an impact on me. I saw this on the CNN website. You look at that and it looks like there has just been a light snow in Colorado. That picture was taken this week. That is a result of the fires. And you can see the outline of the roads and every one of those houses in that neighborhood burned. And I don't know anything about fire and its effects, but just to look carefully at that picture, every house is just a pile of ash. And it would appear that those are very, very hot fires. There is not even any chimneys left hardly. I mean, just piles of ash everywhere.

Repent or you will likewise perish. What a great opportunity just to think about whether we are wrapping our lives up in things that could be taken that fast.

Now, take it logically to the next story in the text, this parable of the fig tree. How does that fit together? And the answer is a lifestyle of repentance. Look at the events that are going on in your world. Look at the events that are going on in your community and use it as opportunity to evaluate ways that you would need to change and grow, a lifestyle of repentance produces what? Figs on your tree. It produces ongoing fruitfulness.

Whereas questions like they were asking: Well, who sinned? Were the Galileans worse sinners? Were the people who died at the crashing of the tower of Siloam worse sinners? Questions that look at the sinfulness of everybody else. It just produces spiritual pride and stagnation. There is no such thing as growth apart from repentance. That is why Proverbs says:

“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”<sup>17</sup>

Let me ask you a question about all of that. How would you evaluate yourself on the matter of fruitfulness that has resulted from repentance? You were going in a particular way, but then because of some event that God used in your life or, perhaps, confrontation from another person or maybe a truth from the Word that really penetrated your heart,

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<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 28:13.



you turned around in that particular area and now you are more fruitful. Can you point to areas like that? Is there repentance that led to fruitfulness for you? Are you stronger spiritually because that has occurred?

Now let's bring the next part of the chapter into the discussion. There is also compassion that leads to authenticity. And you have this woman's hardship.

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.<sup>18</sup>

Can you picture that story as it unfolds? And don't you love Jesus' tenderness in this text?

“‘Woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again.”<sup>19</sup>

And what would you have expected to see next? Remember, this is in the synagogue. This is happening on the sabbath. People are there listening to the teaching from the Word. And so people had core strength that they had the kind of faith that had produced delightful results if they had fruit on their trees there would have been a rush of glorifying God, rejoicing with his woman. There would have been results. But all that was spoiled, wasn't it, by this religious leader's hypocrisy. He said:

“There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”<sup>20</sup>

Do you see why Luke is chaining these events as he has heard about them from eyewitnesses and now he is writing them down after careful study for his friend Theophilus? Do you see why he is chaining it together in this way? There is no strength there. There is no authenticity there. Whatever faith that religious leader had, it certainly hadn't produced any fruit. He is no softened heart because of a repentant lifestyle, no compassion for others flowing out of an appreciation for the compassion that God had already showed to him. This man was like this barren fig tree. He had been around biblical truth. He had lived a religious life, but when Jesus came to examine him, he was looking for fruit and didn't find any.

And was Jesus ok with that? A fruitless, religious person is ok with Jesus. Not exactly, huh?

"You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is,

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<sup>18</sup> Luke 13:10-11.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 13:12-13.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 13:14.

whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"<sup>21</sup>

In other words, you treat your animals better than you treat this woman. Where is the fruit in that? Weak legalism is no substitute for strong compassion and authenticity. And the people around can see the difference, by the way. People are constantly looking at your fruit or lack thereof. And they will respond and they responded at this particular situation. The entire crowd, Luke reports:

"...was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him."<sup>22</sup>

Now let's put all this together. I know we are talking about a lot here, so put it all together. The overall theme here is we derive our strength in part from recognizing that genuine faith produces visible fruitfulness.

Please tell me none of us would want to be like this barren fig tree. Would you say that this morning? I do not want to be like that. Or we do not want to be like this heartless religious leader. No, we want a lifestyle of repentance. It is not easy, but repent or you will likewise perish. We want a lifestyle of repentance that leads to demonstrable and delightful fruit.

Now let's talk about a couple of specific applications of all of this. First of all, I want to just ask you directly. Are you sure there has been a definite time in your life where you admitted that you could not get to heaven on your own? You were not born with that knowledge. You were born in sin according to Scripture and we were all heading down the path of I am good enough to save myself. I am righteous enough to get to heaven on my own. That is the way you come out of the womb. There is no question about that. So at some point you had to repent. If you have come to Christ you had to repent. You had to change your mind. You had to say, "Wait a minute. I am not good enough on my own to get to heaven. My own works, my own righteousness which I thought was good enough to satisfy God, that is like filthy rags compared to his holiness. And as a proud American I don't like to admit that I need something from somebody else. I don't like to admit that I have some sort of a lack. But when I think about the holiness of God, when I think about he is a..."

What did we sing earlier? A consuming fire. That makes whatever I am bringing to the table pretty lame in comparison to his holiness. So I am going to empty my hands of whatever I thought would earn my way to heaven on my own and I am going to come to God with empty hands. I am repenting and I am coming with empty hands and I am asking Christ on the basis of his shed blood on the cross.... We lift it high. That starts by acknowledging your need of a Savior and placing your faith and trust in him. And I would ask you this morning. Has there ever been a definite time in your life where you repented, where you changed your mind on that central issue and you placed your faith and trust in Christ, not your own works, in Christ as your only hope of eternity?

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<sup>21</sup> Luke 13:15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 13:17.

Christian friend, I would ask you. Are you, if you have trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord, are you developing a repentant life style that results in demonstrable and delightful fruit and when you see tragedies take place in the lives of others around or maybe even in your own heart and life, you are using that as an opportunity to repent, to cleanse yourself.

We have had some illustration of that even this week where a 20 year young man is killed right down here by Myer. This week just in front of the bank. It happened that quickly. And some of us act like we will always have another day to make that right. We will always have another day to get that straightened out. That event can help us to repent.

Jerry Tribbet, one of our own members has a brain aneurism this week, very easily could have died. It is amazing what the doctors were able to do and we need to continue to pray for Jerry and his family, but that was a very, very serious issue. That reminds all of us about the brevity of life.

Megan {?}'s mother passed away at a very young age that quickly this week. And I want to encourage you to pray for Mark and Megan, a serious tragedy in the lives of people in this church.

But all those kind of events can soften us. All those kind of events can be used by God to help us be in a constant state of repentance. I would ask you this morning. Are there figs on your tree? That is it. Is your life strong and getting stronger as a result?

Now you might say, "Boy, are we talking about big things? Are we always talking about big ticket issues?"

Not necessarily. That is why we need this next part of the text. This is kind of like a waterfall. It just keeps making that statement over and over, that point over and over about the importance of repentance that leads to fruit. And remember this often begins small. It is like a mustard seed. It is like leaven. And maybe the step of repentance for you is not a big ticket issue. And maybe for you it is just a matter of starting to pray before your meals. That is the step that you are going to start taking in your life. You have never done that before. Maybe for you it is you are going to start reading your Bible on a regular basis and maybe for you, you know, there is something wrong between you and somebody else in your life and you have let that go and you are going to pick up the phone. You are going to get that right today. And that is a small step in many ways. Maybe it is taking a step of serving in some way. Maybe it is a matter of trying to build more Christian friendships or telling someone you know about Christ. Maybe in the grand scheme of life it is a relatively small thing, but don't ever forget this. Just like leaven, just like the mustard seed, the results can be dramatic. A little bit of repentance, a little bit of fruitfulness can be used by God in significant ways.

And so this mustard seed which is as small as it gets, grows and becomes a tree. This little bit of leaven can be used by God in significant ways. See, God is in the business of

blessing and multiplying what is humbly brought to him. We ought to believe that a repentant heart that longs to love God and serve him can be used in marvelous ways. A little bit of fruit can be multiplied in significant ways. That is what I am saying.

I have asked Marnie Rausch to come and share with us for a moment this morning. IF you know Marnie she is really fired up about camp. She loves to get young people to come to camp. And we have seen her out in the foyer year after year in the middle of the winter all fired up about camp. And I wanted her to come this morning and talk to you about camp and why that mustard seed in her heart has caused she and her family to be fruitful the way that they are and how God has chosen to multiply that in some very significant ways.

Marnie, share with us, would you?

Marnie Raush:

Thank you, pastor Viars. I am thankful to get to speak to you briefly about our experience at camp and why we think it is such an important week as well as a worthwhile investment in the lives of our kids. And what pastor Viars just said about how God is in the business of blessing and multiplying what is humbly brought to him.

This is a very true statement and we have seen it shown through in each of our children as they have all gone to summer camp. Lake Anne Camp is a Christian summer camp with purpose. The heart of their ministry is to positively impact young people for Christ. One of their mottos is: Christ first in love and life. Lake Anne believes that if their staff does not have an intimate walk with the Lord, neither will their campers. This is the type of place we wanted to send our own children. Over the years the number of kids we have brought to camp has grown and grown. The year ... this year our church brought 67 campers.

Yes, it is just one week of camp, but the kids and teens are impacted that ... in ways that go much beyond that week. Within our church, children and teens have trusted Christ as Savior, repented of sin in their lives, made decisions to be baptized and even made decisions about how they want to live their lives as they get older. Important things, life changing things.

I asked my own kids if they could tell me why camp was important to them. Our oldest daughter Emily said, "The majority of kids and teens today grow up living in a routinely busy lifestyle. My childhood was no exception to this. It was a struggle for me to find time to discover what a real relationship with God could look like in the midst of the distractions of every day life. Camp allowed me the opportunity to remove myself from these distractions and realign my priorities in life. It was at camp that I went from just knowing about God to actually knowing God."

Our daughter Hannah was a camper at Lake Anne for many years, but she was also a counselor for a few years. She made this observation. "Being a camper counselor does

not end on the last day of camp. I still hear from my campers on occasion. My favorite is when I get a Facebook message from them saying something like, ‘When we were at camp, I didn’t like what you were telling me about what the Bible says about my lifestyle, but now I understand and I am choosing to follow Christ.’”

One of our former campers said, “One of the most valuable things about the camp is the designated time for the camper to speak with his counselor one to one. Tough questions are asked and the counselor can really learn about the camper. The focus is always how the camper can grow in or begin a relationship with Christ.” All the camp activities are fun, but they are meant to build trust so these kinds of conversations can take place.”

The best news that I could share with you this morning is that we have had at least one of our campers trust Christ just this past week. We have also had several of them that have rededicated their lives to Christ and I asked our campers on the bus on the way home why camp was so important to them. And here are a few of their responses.

“At camp I learned to always trust God in everything I go through in my life.”

Another said, “Camp helped me to realize where I am in my walk with God and where I need to be. It got me fired up for God. I want to be different for him.”

And a third said, “Camp was important to me, because it got me closer to God and changed the way I act and talk to people.”

It is pretty exciting stuff, isn’t it?

We must remember that while kids and teens learn a lot at camp and important decisions are being made, this does not mean that they will come home a completely different person. Struggles may continue in their lives. Wrong choices may still be made, but it is at these times that a message heard at camp or a Bible verse given by a counselor can come back into their minds and remind them of the decision they made and to follow through with that.

I love traveling or even just being here at our February conference when I have opportunities to see things God is doing all over our nation and even the world. Camp is just one small piece of all that he is doing, but I am so thankful for the ways God has worked in the lives of kids and teens through this effective ministry.

I am thankful to be able to use my abilities to get kids to camp because I know it is bearing fruit in their lives and in mine.

Our 67 campers just got home last night from their week at camp along with all the dirty laundry that accompanies them. Many decisions have been made and many seeds have been planted. Would you please pray for these precious souls as they seek to follow through with the decisions they made and apply the things they have learned so that this

mustard seed of a week at camp grows into a great tree that impacts their lives virtually forever.

My own children and therefore our whole family has been impacted eternally as have other families in our church. And that is why I am so passionate about getting kids to camp this summer.

Praise God for what he is doing.

[applause]

Steve Viars:

Isn't that a great story? Thank you, Marnie. And that is really what we are talking about. And I hope you are thinking right now about what about your level of fruitfulness and what Marnie is talking about, the reason she is out in the foyer in the middle of the winter talking about camp and something that I just learned about. I didn't know, but I knew she coordinated all the transportation. I didn't know she worked so hard behind the scenes with the camp and others to be sure that scholarships were available for any family who wanted to send their child, but wasn't able to. She has been doing a lot of that linkage behind the scenes. Well, where does that passion come from?

It is the process we are talking about this morning, a lifestyle of repentance that produces fruitfulness that God chooses to bless in some pretty amazing ways.

Well, bring these last two stories in quickly in order to complete the puzzle. There is also a matter of urgency that leads to readiness. Luke explains that somebody asked a very important question. He asked:

“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”<sup>23</sup>

And we don't know for sure why this man asked this question at this particular point, but Luke as he is assembling all this material in order for Theophilus to understand and make his decision, he arranges it in this particular fashion, perhaps because there were so few people who actually had the fruitfulness, so few who had the demonstrable evidence of their salvation. The Lord gives a very sobering answer. He says:

"Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you,

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<sup>23</sup> Luke 13:23.

I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.<sup>24</sup>

That is why it is so important for us to be clear about the proclamation of the gospel and passionate about the proclamation of the gospel. There ought to be a sense of urgency. It really is possible to confuse being around church or being around the things of God with actually having had a definite time in your life where you have repented and trusted Christ. And I realize that may be a hard message for some to hear, but it is our responsibility after we have come to Christ to clearly proclaim it. And Paul said this:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”<sup>25</sup>

And I hope you will be the kind of person who is looking for opportunities to share the good news of Christ with those God has placed around you, but do it completely and make it clear that we are talking about repentance. We are talking about admitting one’s need for Christ, admitting one’s sin and turning from that.

I would also say yet again, be sure that you are in the beloved. Be sure there has been a definite time where you have trusted Christ. Peter would later say:

“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.”<sup>26</sup>

There ought to be a matter of urgency about this matter of trusting Christ and repenting of our sin.

I would also say this to our church family. I realize it is vacation season. So we have got a lot of people in our church family who are on vacation right now and that is a good thing, right? We ought to pray for them, pray for their safety, pray for their relaxation, et cetera, et cetera. but here is what is going on behind the scenes right now. We are getting ready for new years. You say new years? I am not talking about January first. I am talking about the end of August, because the end of August for us as a church is new years in a lot of ways. That is when everybody is back. That is when people are putting their kids in school. That is when they are more likely to be open to attending a church. And so we want to be ready as a church family for that.

So if you are a child’s worker around our church, there is going to be some training about fall readiness sometime in the next month. If you work with our youth, there is going to be some training about fall readiness. If you work in our adult Bible fellowships, et cetera, our pastors and deacons, we are putting a lot of work behind the scenes to be ready to be sure that we are ready for the end of August, because we are glad about a

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<sup>24</sup> Luke 13:24-27.

<sup>25</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Peter 1:10.

Faith West, but we also have a Faith East and we want to do everything we can to win the people of this part of our town to Christ. And there is an urgency about all of this if we really do believe in the crucial nature of repentance, then we are going to proclaim that message as clearly as we possibly can in an urgent fashion.

Now what about this last part of the chapter? There is also a focus that leads to concern. It is really interesting that the way that this chapter ends is by Jesus showing his concern and his compassion for those who have not yet repented.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!"<sup>27</sup>

What do we do as we see these wild fires raging? What do we do as we see tragedy going on all around our country and even sometimes right here in our community and our church family? Certainly not conclude that they must have sinned.

Repent or you will likewise perish.

And I hope we will have a repentant heart. I hope we will let this tragedy draw us closer to Christ and desiring to be more like him. I hope that in turn will produce fruitfulness and then we will be passionate about communicating that message to others.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 13:34.