

# OpenTheo

## Starting Young



### Message For The Young - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg speaks about starting young in ministry and the importance of surrendering one's will to God. He emphasizes that it is not the church's job to disciple young people, but rather it is the responsibility of parents and individuals to follow Jesus and live a godly life. Gregg also discusses the importance of having a personal relationship with God and recognizing genuine salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Overall, he encourages listeners to seek God and live a life surrendered to His will.

### Transcript

As recently as last night, people were asking me what I was going to preach about this morning, and I had to honestly say I didn't know. And this morning I awoke before the others in the family, and I did spend some time in prayer, and I asked the Lord to... well, among other things, I was asking the Lord what message He'd have me give, but... among other things I felt to pray for, I was praying for some of the young people that I know in this fellowship, some of whom are having hard times. In some of the families, there are people who are having crises with some of their youth.

And not only in this fellowship, I have many Christian friends in Oregon, where we used to live, from whom I hear reports that many of them are having struggles with some of the young people. And so I was praying specifically for those young people by name, and it occurred to me as I was praying that what I really ought to share is something for young people. Now, I'm not trying to steal Steve Major's thunder.

He already got to it a couple weeks ago. He shared a message for young people. And those of you who are old codgers like myself, I hope you won't feel like we're overlooking you.

In fact, almost everything I'll say today will be applicable to you older people, too. So whether you're a young person as young as some of these toddlers here, or whether your age will be measured in the teens, or whether you're a person like myself, old enough to be, but not actually yet, the grandfather of some who are here, or whether you're one of those eternal youths like Bill Grady, it's a message to the young or the

young in heart, but especially those who are young. And as I thought about it, of course, there were certain scriptures that came to mind immediately.

And there are many points I want to make. This is not a three-point sermon. That's why I had to give a three-point apology, because I was going to neglect to make a three-point sermon.

And there's going to be a multi-pointed sermon and our message. And if you hear any points early in the message and as the points go on, you forget what the earlier ones and you wish you had that written down, you may want to write them down. And if you can't do that, I printed up my notes this morning.

I made these notes this morning from scratch and then I printed them up just before I came. There is a stack of them on the table back there. If when you leave, you wish you had these scriptures written down.

These are the notes from which I'm teaching. I don't think you need the notes in advance of the teaching, but you may decide afterwards whether you do or not want them. So this is I'm calling this a message for the young, not a very imaginative title, but it never was great with titles.

And after all, I didn't have much time to think it up. So I want to make four. I want to go sort of four different places with this.

First, I want to talk principally to the young people who are raised in Christian families. Now, if you're a young person here, you're probably here with your parents and you might be here because of your parents. You might hear because you have to be here because you have Christian parents.

And it might be the only reason you're here. Because in some cases, those young people who have Christian parents and who come to church with their parents would not come without their parents, even if they had the choice. And that is because some young people do not share their parents' convictions or their parents' passion for the things of God.

Now, I was raised a church kid. Unlike a lot of the kids in my church, I actually was converted as a child. As far as I know, when I was four years old, I was converted.

I'm not sure if that's the actual time I was converted, but that's the first time I went for it at an altar call. And I don't remember any time before or after that that I was not a genuine believer who wanted to follow Jesus. It's just something I had for my youth.

But I went to a church. It was a Baptist church. Many of you know I was a Baptist growing up.

And there was a very large youth group of people my age. And as they grew up, especially as they reached their teens, many of them exhibited little evidence that they were Christians. I had actually a life-changing experience when I was 16 years old.

Although I'd been converted before, I believe, I believe it was a genuine conversion. At 16, I was filled with the Holy Spirit in such a way that it embarked me on a calling in ministry. I began teaching when I was 16 years old and preaching.

And in the early days, since I didn't know much because I was a kid, I did more preaching the gospel than teaching. Eventually, as I got older, like 17, 18, I thought I knew something. I began teaching younger Christians.

But I'll tell you, I love ministry to youth. And partly because I was a youth, like everybody was a youth at one time. I was a youth in the church.

And I was also a youth when I began preaching to youth. And I got older. I remember some of you know about the Organization Youth with a Mission, which is a youth-oriented missionary outreach ministry.

They have probably about 15,000 missionaries out in the world right now on the field somewhere or another. And I've done a lot of ministry in youth with a mission over the past 20, almost 20 years. And when I began teaching for youth with a mission, I was in my 20s.

And so were the students. I taught every year, many times a year for this organization. And they kept getting a new batch of youth, new students in, young students.

And I got older and older. And after about 18 years, it dawned on me that whereas I had always thought when I started teaching for youth with a mission, I thought I was teaching my peers. I was in my 20s.

They were in their 20s. They were my age, essentially. After a while, I was teaching people who were my children's peers.

And I didn't remember when the change happened because it was so constant. I mean, the youth I was teaching remained the same age each year, but I didn't. So when I talk to youth, I sometimes forget that I've gotten old and I'm not a youth anymore.

I don't feel old yet. Maybe when my bones start hurting, it'll dawn on me that I'm not young anymore. But I do enjoy talking to youth, though I will say this.

I don't always feel I can relate well with youth. And a lot of times when I was even a youth, I didn't feel I could relate well with my fellow youth. Because I really wanted to serve God.

And even among the church youth that I grew up with, some of whom I knew from the

time I was in kindergarten until the time I was a junior in high school. Then our family moved to another area. But I knew the same kids in the Sunday school, our church, from the time I was in kindergarten until I was a junior in high school.

All of them, when I was young, I figured they were Christians because they were in the Christian families just like I was in a Christian family. But as they got into their teens, it was clear that many of them had no relationship with Jesus Christ. And so I began preaching to that group, actually, and to others when I was 16.

And to me, it's a very urgent thing to reach young people who are raised in Christian families. It is not the church's job, per se, to win the souls or to disciple these young people. It is the parents' primary task, but sometimes the parents do their best and even have reason to believe their children are Christians.

Because the children have made a profession of faith. And the children have lived under the authority of their parents in such a way that they don't exhibit any remarkable evidence of not being Christians. And so the parents sometimes aren't even aware that their children are not Christians.

But I think what's even worse, sometimes the children themselves don't know that they're not Christians. And one of the scariest things I can imagine is presenting myself, as I shall and as you shall, before the throne of God on the Day of Judgment and discovering there for the first time that I was not a Christian. You may be thinking as I am of Matthew chapter 7 when I say that.

In Matthew chapter 7, beginning with verse 21, Jesus said this, and this is one of the... I've always said this is one of the scariest passages in the Bible that I've ever seen. Matthew 7, 21 through 23 says, not every... this is Jesus speaking... Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Now, these are not backsliders. These are people, Jesus said, he never knew them.

Yep, they certainly didn't know that until, well, until it was too late to do anything about it. There on the... it's the Day of Judgment. There's no other opportunity to change course at this point.

This is the end. And they have gotten... they're believing themselves to be in God's family. They say, Lord, we did all these things in your name.

And the things they did are much more impressive than anything I've ever done in his name. Prophesying, casting out demons, doing mighty works and wonders. They really

had some remarkable credentials and reasons to believe they were really Christians.

But Jesus said, you weren't really a Christian. You thought you were. And that's a very late time to discover that you aren't really a Christian.

I think many kids who grew up in Christian homes grow up under Christian influence. They embrace, for the most part, the beliefs their parents pass along them. I have a daughter who's 27 who... I don't know how she's living right now.

As far as I know, she's not living for God. But last time I saw her, when I believed she was not living for God, she told me she still believed everything I ever taught her. She has not renounced anything.

Except she just never lived it. And that's a scary thing because when she lived with me, I thought she was a Christian. Because she believed what I believed.

She lived under our authority. I mean, I thought she was a Christian. But when she got out on her own and didn't have our authority and so forth, whether she believed these things enough to save her became manifested.

And this is something that even that's late to find out. But on the Day of Judgment, it is exceedingly late. Now, you'd say, well, how could these people say, Lord, Lord, we did these things in your name, and yet Jesus never really knew them? How could they cast out demons and prophesy and do mighty works in his name? I don't know the answer to that.

But one thing that he makes clear in this is that doing those things isn't what it takes. Now, some true Christians do all those things. The apostles did all those things.

And Stephen and Philip and many Christians since then have done all those things in Jesus' name and have been true Christians and are in heaven today. But doing those things apparently is not what matters. Because they can do those things in his name and he'll say, I never knew you.

So what does matter? Well, fortunately, Jesus doesn't leave the question unanswered. He answers it before he gives the example. In verse 21, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven.

Now, when he says he who does the will of my father in heaven, it doesn't just mean there's a certain set number of things that God has said you have to do. And that's his will. You have to do all those things and jump through those hoops.

You know, say a sinner's prayer, walk forward in an altar call, get yourself baptized, do this, do that. OK, what else? Anything else on the list I've missed? I've checked it all off.

OK, I've done all those things.

Those are all the things I believe the will of God. I've done them. I'm going to have no doing the will of God means this, that for your lifetime, from the time you begin until the time your end, your life ends.

That is, from the time you begin doing the will of God to the time your life ends, you are living for the will of God, not your own will. And this is the one thing that many that's the one step many Christians don't take. They want to be saved enough to do whatever they consider to be the minimal requirements.

Give me the list. Tell me what it is God wants me to do. I don't be ever so difficult.

Just give me the list. I'll check it off. And before I'm dead, hopefully I'll have done all these things.

But that's not what doing the will of the father is doing the will of the father means you've surrendered your will. It means that what you want no longer is an issue with you. And what God wants is the only issue.

And those who have come to that point can be said to truly be doing the will of the father. Jesus said, I do only those things that please him. I've not come to do my own will, Jesus said.

And so a true Christian is one who's made that transition from just believing the right things to actually living for the will of God. And living for that means that's what defines your whole agenda. As a matter of fact, it replaces your whole agenda.

It becomes his agenda is all that matters to me. That's what doing the will of the father means. You've probably heard the expression that God has no grandchildren, which I don't know who made that up.

I've heard different people that it was attributed to. But for Christians raising or for kids raising a Christian home, it's a very important thing to realize that God doesn't have grandchildren. Your grandparents have grandchildren and you are their grandchildren because your parents are their children.

But your parents may be God's children and you are not God's grandchild. He doesn't have grandchildren. He only has children.

And therefore, if your parents are God's children, then you either have no relationship with God at all or else you have become one of his children, too. You become part of his family. And how do we how did Jesus define those that were part of that family? If you look at Matthew chapter 12, Matthew chapter 12, 46 through 50 says, while he was still talking to the multitude, behold, his mother and brother stood outside seeking to speak

to him.

Then one said to him, look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak with you. But he answered and said to one who told him, who is my mother and who are my brothers? And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven, that's the same expression he used back in chapter seven, isn't it? Not everyone who says me, Lord, Lord, but those who do the will of my father in heaven, they're the ones who inherit the kingdom of God.

He says not those who have a biological relationship with me. But those who do the will of my father in heaven, that's my brother and my sister and my mother. In other words, you can tell who's really in the family by who's obeying the head of the family.

My father, she said, I have a father. If Mary isn't doing the will of my father right now, then she's not my mother right now. Do you realize when you read this, that Jesus basically tentatively disowned his mother? Because she had come, we read in Mark's gospel in chapter three, that she and the brothers had come to take him into custody because they thought he was kind of going a little too far in the way he was living.

They were not in the will of the father at that time. And they were not, as far as he was concerned, related to him. Only those who do the will of my father are related to me, he says.

My family is made up of those who are doers of God's will. And that would be, again, not just occasionally, not hit or miss, not doing a few things that I believe to be the will of God, like maybe casting out a few demons or prophesying. It has to do with living to do God's will instead of my will.

That transition has not occurred in many people's lives who would regard themselves Christians. Now, when it comes to doing the father's will, I'd like to urge those who still have the opportunity, because they are young, to start young. Start while you're young.

And there's many good reasons for that. In Ecclesiastes chapter 12, Solomon, who at this time, when he wrote this, was an old man and had not started young enough. Actually, he started young, but he didn't finish.

He started out wise. He started out under the influence of his father, David, who had told him, get wisdom with all you're getting. Get understanding and give up everything you have to to get wisdom.

And he meant divine, godly wisdom. And so Solomon, as a youth, had picked up those values and he did seek that wisdom and got it. But then as he got older, he kind of drifted.

He drifted for a long time and and he came under the judgment of God. But apparently in his old age, he came back to the Lord and wrote Ecclesiastes. And he from that vantage point, from that experience, he said to the young reader.

In Ecclesiastes 12, remember now your creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them. And then he goes on to give a poetic description of what old age is like. And it's really not a pretty picture from the way he gives it, although it's all in poetry.

He's talking about the feebleness and the vanishing hearing and eyesight and disappearing passions and so forth. But and fearfulness and insecurity. But he says to the young person, remember God now before the difficult days come.

There's a lot of people. When I was in high school, I used to witness to people a lot. And one of the guys I used to witness to a lot, he was in several of my classes.

He used to kind of mock and say, well, when I see Jesus coming to clouds, then I'll say, I believe, I believe. I doubt it. That's going to be a difficult day for the sinner.

And if you don't make your choices for God earlier than that, you're not likely to do it in the difficult day. A lot of people think, well, you know, I got a lot of living to do. I get old and when death is near and, you know, I'm starting to fall apart, body parts are falling off and so forth.

Then I'll know the time is right to get right with God. No, Solomon says, no, don't wait till then. Don't wait till difficult times come.

Why give God the dregs of your life? Why wait until you've used up all your youth and your energy and your opportunities and use them all on yourself? And then when there's not much left. You say, OK, God, I'm going to do you a big favor. I'm going to give you these last few months so I can go to heaven.

That's, you know, people who might, you know, if someone could really do that, God would save them. The thief on the cross is an example of that. But not many people can really do that.

When you spend your life every day, you spend living for yourself instead of the will of God, is establishing a pattern in your personality that gets cemented in there. And the years that go by that you're not serving God are years in which you are establishing a pattern. Whereas the years that go by when you are serving God, you're establishing another pattern.

And it's much easier to continue in a pattern well begun than to break a pattern that's been well established through the years. And the older you get, the harder it is to get saved. The harder it is to have a softer heart.



There's statistics about that. Most people, I saw statistics, I forget exactly what they were, but like 80% of people who get saved, get saved before they're 30 years old. And that other 20%, you know, it's measured out, you know, in the different decades of their lives, from 30 to 40 and so forth, and it gets diminishingly small.

Like after 70 years, almost nobody gets saved. Now you'd be surprised because a lot of people live to be over 70. And then over 70 is when, you know, all those fun things that people want to do and put off getting saved for, persons over 70 usually don't have as much interest in those things.

I mean, the sex drive is weaker. A lot of things are, not always, but a lot of things are not such the great temptation they were. You'd think everyone would get saved after 70 if they hadn't yet, especially since they know they're not going to live all that much longer compared to when they were 30.

The irony is that people over 70 almost never get saved. And if you got saved when you were over 70, praise God. It's a miracle when anyone gets saved.

And with God, nothing should be called impossible. But we shouldn't presume upon God. We shouldn't try to beat the odds, young people, and say, well, when I get older, then I'll give my heart to God.

A lot of people try when they're older and find their hearts are too callous, too hard. There's no softness left. They can't repent.

They try. There are people who've been on their deathbeds, as they thought, called for the priest, asked to make their confession, wanted to get right with God. They recovered unexpectedly and didn't live for God, proving that their repentance wasn't genuine, although they desperately wanted it to be at the time.

You can't repent when you decide to repent. You repent when God grants repentance. It says in Isaiah, call upon him while he is near.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. When you are young, he's almost always near. He's almost always able to be found by the young because the hearts are still soft enough and moldable like clay.

But you start molding it every day of your life. If you don't mold it for God, you're going to have a piece of pottery there when you're older that you may never be able to change the shape of. God may just have to shatter it.

And sometimes he can start over again. But you've lost a lot of time by then. I was raised in a fairly godly manner.

I didn't do any of the scandalous things my generation did. I didn't drink. I didn't smoke.

Didn't use drugs. Didn't go to parties. I studied the Bible.

Went to church a lot. Went what we called calling. You know, every Tuesday night we'd go out, visit people who hadn't been to church in a while and go witness to them and stuff.

I did that when I was in my early teens. When I was in junior high and high school. And that's when most of my friends were getting into big trouble.

So you could say, well, Steve, you really lived a godly life. Well, not really. I mean, there was still a lot of selfishness there.

It's not easy to be a Christian when you're young. It's not easy to be a Christian when you're old. It's never easy.

But it's always necessary. And I didn't always live a perfectly godly life. But I did live godly enough to miss out, as I thought later, on a lot of the fun.

Especially when I got to my late teens. And a lot of people were getting saved who had had a lot of fun, as I figured it. People who'd used drugs, who'd been promiscuous, people who'd been partiers all their lives.

All their lives. They were, you know, 16, 17. And then they got saved.

Actually, I was a teenager during probably the most remarkable revival time that this country has seen in my lifetime, as near as I can tell. That was called the Jesus Movement. I was in Southern California.

People were getting saved everywhere. Most of them had been big sinners. Even in their young lives, they'd become very big sinners.

And then they got saved. And I remember thinking at the time, you know, I kept myself from all that stuff. And now, today, I'm saved.

They didn't keep themselves from all that stuff. And today, they're saved, too. Boy, did I get a raw deal, I thought.

Well, I'll tell you this. Any of them who really got saved, and some of them, I think, I don't know if they were really saved or not, because a lot of them didn't stick. The ones who really got saved had nothing but genuine regrets about what they had done before.

Because if you are genuinely saved, then you will, being genuinely saved means you hate sin. And it means you'll look back at every sin you committed before you were saved and say, if I could just go back and do that over again and do it different. If I could just go back and not do that this time.

And you know what? I lived a pretty godly life as a youth. But I did things that when I remember them, my heart aches. And I think, if I could just have a chance to relive that year again and not do that.

You know, the people who had all what I thought at the time was fun, and then they got saved, and boy, they got the best of all worlds, didn't they? No, they got the worst of all worlds. They got the worst of the world, and they got the worst of the Christian life, too, because they lived it with a great deal of regrets. Now, I'm not saying that Jesus thought the worst of them.

God forgives a lot of sin as much as He forgives a little bit of sin. But the fact is, a person's mentality when they really come to know the Lord is, I wish I hadn't wasted one day. I wish I hadn't ruined my purity.

I wish I hadn't established patterns of thought that are still hard for me to get over. And they were so hard to get over that most of the people I knew who got saved out of the hippie movement are not Christians today. You might say, well, they weren't saved.

God only knows as far as I'm concerned. But the fact is, at least half, if not more, are not saved today if we judge salvation by people's interest in God. And they wanted to be.

You know, you just cannot presume upon God. Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

You can't say, well, I'll sow my wild oats, now sow for a long time sin, and then I'll get right with God at the end. Well, you might be able to have control of the first part. You don't have any control over the second part.

You must call on God while he is near and hang on to him tight. We need to live our lives if we are wise. And very few young people are wise.

And I was not as wise as I needed to be. But we need to live our lives in such a way that we will come to the end of our lives and have no regrets. I'll tell you something.

I've never known anyone who on their deathbed regretted being godly or holy. I've never met anyone who regretted being faithful to their wife or regretted having been sober. No one on their deathbed regrets those things.

And if you are wise, no matter what age you are, you'll be aware that you will have a deathbed if you're lucky. Some people don't. Some people die suddenly.

In fact, about several thousand of them died since you went to bed last night. That happens every 12 hours. Several thousand people die somewhere in the world.

A lot of them were just your age. And most of them who died when they went to bed didn't know they were going to die within that 12-hour span. They thought they'd be up and around like you are.

Death visits us all. It doesn't tell us when. And many people don't have a deathbed.

But if you're one of the lucky ones, you will. You'll know you're dying. But it may do you no good.

It may be too late. Your heart may be too hardened. And if you can get saved at that time, truly being saved means that your heart will be saying, If only I had so much as another year to dedicate wholly to God in a way I never intended to do before.

If only I could have that lifetime back to go back and live knowing what I know now. You young people can't appreciate that right now. I'm only 47 years old.

That doesn't sound very young to you. But I may be only halfway through my life. I may have another half the same length as my previous life.

I don't know. I might die today. But I'll tell you this.

When you get older, you begin to recognize that deathbed is a reality. I mean, just this past week, we all know a young lady who died who is much younger than I am. And a year ago, she didn't even know she was in trouble.

I could be dead this time next year or sooner. So could you. The glorious thing about that case is that she discovered the Lord before she even discovered she was in trouble.

And now she's with the Lord and she has no regrets. The question is, will you have regrets? There will be regrets. I believe that because no one has lived a perfect life.

But a person who really loves God will regret everything that they ever did that was cheating God. That was wronging God. That was ignoring God.

And let me urge you to live a life that will have as few regrets as possible when you're older. Proverbs chapter 5, written by Solomon in his younger years, but younger than Ecclesiastes anyway, writing to his son. He says this to his son in Proverbs chapter 5, beginning at verse 7. Therefore, hear me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth.

Remove your way far from her. He's talking about the prostitute in this case or any other bad influence that leads you into sin. And do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and your years to the cruel one.

Lest aliens be filled with your wealth and your labors go to the house of a foreigner. And more importantly, verse 11, and you mourn at last when your flesh and your body are consumed and you say, How have I hated instruction and my heart despised correction? I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers nor inclined my ear to those who instruct me. I was on the verge of total ruin in the midst of the assembly in the congregation.

This the real disaster here. I mean, it's bad that this person went the wrong way. But what he regrets, what makes his regrets so bitter and in his final end, when his flesh is consuming and he's rotting away, he's died.

He says, I was in the middle of the congregation. I had instruction of the best kind. I was among good people.

I had good influences. I had good role models. I had the truth presented to me.

How have I hated this? I was on the verge of entire ruin. Despite the fact that I was in the midst of the assembly in the congregation. There are people who've never had any exposure to Christianity.

God will have to know, have to decide how to deal with them. But if you have had opportunity to know God, there's great responsibility. And you'll feel that very strongly at the end of your life.

And you'll be rejoicing that you took that responsibility seriously and lived according to God's ways for his will, not your own. Or else you'll have regrets such as that, which Solomon warns about here. Let me turn your attention now to Matthew chapter 16.

I want to talk to you about first-hand faith as opposed to second-hand faith. In Matthew 16, beginning at verse 15, Jesus said to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the son of the living God. Then Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bartona.

Now notice this. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. Now, this is interesting.

Peter confessed that he believed Jesus was the Christ and he meant it. And Jesus said, You know, you didn't learn that from people, did you? Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. Well, didn't he? Did he ever hear from people that Jesus was the Christ? Of course he'd heard that.

In fact, before he ever met Jesus, his brother Andrew came to him, according to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Andrew met Jesus and Andrew went to call Simon Peter and said, We found the Christ. We found him, the one that the prophets have spoken of.

So Peter, before he ever laid eyes on Jesus, had heard that Jesus was the Christ from a man. And now, probably very likely a couple of years later at this point. He says, You're the Christ.

I know you're the Christ. And Jesus said, You didn't learn that from flesh and blood. Now, it's not that Jesus was misinformed about Andrew having earlier told Peter this.

He knew that. He's not saying that flesh and blood had never mentioned this fact to

Peter before, but flesh and blood hadn't revealed it to him. To have something revealed to you is a supernatural thing.

And you cannot, no man can do this for another. Every Christian parent wishes they could reveal to their children that Jesus is the Christ. The most we can do is tell them and show them and do whatever we can to make that convincing and winsome.

But in the final analysis, flesh and blood does not reveal it to you. The Father reveals that to you. And unless you have had that revelation from God, if the only reason you know that Jesus is the Christ is because your parents told you or some teacher or preacher told you.

Then your faith is second hand. You need to have a first hand encounter with God and you have to be careful that you don't settle for anything less than that. Because it's easy to do so.

It's easy to learn all the doctrine and learn all the principles and learn all the verses of Scripture from your parents or from someone else and say, I know all this. I've been there, done that. OK, let's move along here.

I'm a Christian now. But unless God has revealed it to you by his spirit, then it's a second hand faith. You need a first hand faith, just like I hope your parents have.

Now, some parents might have a second hand faith, too. I mean, you older people here my age, you know, you've got to check it out, too. I mean, it's possible that you just believe because your parents believed or someone you knew believed or your peers believed and you just bought into the thing.

But do you know it? Let me ask you this. I'm asking you, young people, you older people can search your own hearts about this, too. Suppose Steve Basaraba and I and Chris Graves and everyone who's ever preached here was joined up on this stage with your Christian parents and the Christian preachers who most affect you.

Billy Graham got up here, whoever, you know, John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll, you name whoever it is you care about. And we all got up here and we said, well, guys, it's time to tell the truth. There's no Jesus.

There's no God. We never believed it. It's not true.

Don't believe it. What would you do? What would you do if everyone who ever told you about Jesus Christ came out and said, you know what? I never believed it myself. I was lying to you.

What would you do? What would you think? You know what I would think? I think I feel sorry for you guys. You missed it. I didn't.

Because I know him. Because flesh and blood did not reveal him to me. My parents told me about him.

The preachers I grew up under told me. All my Sunday school teachers, friends, peers and preachers have told me about Jesus a great deal. But I don't know about him because of them.

I became aware of him because of them initially. But I know him because not because flesh and blood has revealed to me, but the father has revealed it. And I don't care if every Christian I've ever heard of, if everyone in this room stood up and defected.

I mean, I would care because I wouldn't want that to happen. But it wouldn't change anything about my convictions because I'm not dependent on you or anyone else. And you young people, you need to make sure that you're not dependent on your parents or on your heroes, your Christian mentors, whatever.

I mean, sure, we benefit from them. We gain information and so forth. But at the core of your Christian life has got to be a firsthand experience.

You've got to know God other than by hearsay. You've got to know him because you know him. In John chapter four, we have that story of the woman at the well that Jesus talked to and she was very impressed.

She ran off to town to get all her friends and said, come here, this guy who told me everything I ever did. And so they came out to hear him and Jesus stayed a couple of days with them. It says in John four, verse forty one, many more believe because of his own word.

Then they said to the woman, now we believe not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard him. And we know that this is indeed the Christ, the savior of the world. Notice they first heard about him from this lady.

She said, hey, this guy, he's incredible. He told me everything I ever did. They said, that's impressive.

I like that. I believe this guy could be the Messiah. Just like you said, let's go hear him.

And then he said, after he heard him, he said, now we know it. Not because what you told us, but because we've heard him ourselves. And everyone who's going to get to heaven is going to get there with this testimony.

We believe now, not because you told us, but because we've heard him ourselves. Jesus said in John five, twenty four, I think it is. He says.

He that hears my words and believes on him that sent me has everlasting life. And shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life. He said a few verses

further down, he says.

He says, marvel not this for the hour is coming and now is when all who are dead shall hear the voice of those who are dead. She'll hear the voice of the Son of Man and she'll live. Those who are dead shall live and who hear that the idea is you who are spiritually dead have to hear the voice of the Son of Man in order to live.

He says, whoever hears my voice and believes in him that sent me has eternal life. If you don't hear his voice, then you're not one of his sheep. His sheep know his voice.

You need to hear him yourself. That doesn't mean you have to get messages channeled to you from some unseen visitor or something. You don't have to hear an audible voice.

You need to in your heart have a direct contact, a direct revelation from God. That doesn't have to be something that would be so sensational that you could even describe exactly what happened to somebody. It just has to be so real and so genuine that you know that you don't believe because someone else says so.

And if the person who told you that Jesus decided to tell you that he isn't real, you'd know better because you know him. That is where you've got to come to. You've got to have a first-hand faith, a first-hand experience.

You've got to make sure you don't settle for less because a second-hand faith will not carry you through when the difficult time comes. It'll carry you through the easy times, but it won't carry you through the hard time. Everybody's looking for a faith they can live with, but you've got to have a faith you can die with.

And, you know, choosing the faith you can live with most easily isn't always the one you're going to want to die with because a lot of people choose easy roads or the faith, the religious system that pleases them, or they think they can do that without much self-denial. But you've got to take the hard road, if you find it hard, the narrow road. You've got to follow Jesus Christ because you can live with that and you can die with that.

But you can't die with a faith that you borrowed from somebody else. You have to own it. You have to get it directly from God.

Let me urge you to do so if you are not sure that you have. You see, that being so, we're talking now about a faith that the parents can transmit, well, let me put it this way, parents can teach it to their children, but they can't transmit it unless God does it. We can teach it.

We can model it. We can do our best to make it winsome, but we can't transmit it because although we own it, we have to go back to the sellers of oil to get our own oil. And you have to go to get your own oil from the seller, not from us.



We can't give you some of our oil. We'll try, but you won't own it until you go and get your own. And so to transmit the faith is a task that parents all wish they could do.

And some of them seem to have success. But really what they did is they did a good job teaching it and modeling it. And God then transmitted it to supernatural thing.

When someone gets saved, whether it's a child or an adult, it's supernatural. It's a it's it's a miracle being born again. Now, that's why conversion or getting saved is spoken of in the Bible as if it is like the planting of a seed.

James said, Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. Jesus talked about the word like it was seed sown on various kinds of ground. The farmer can sow seed, but he can't make it grow.

He can he can do everything that is conducive to growth, but still the seed grows apart from his power. And Jesus even told a parable like that over in Mark four. He says, The kingdom of God is like man.

So seed and he sleeps or he wakes. It doesn't make much difference. The seed grows of itself.

The seed grows, he says. He doesn't know how it just does. And that is what conversion is the result of from a supernatural seed.

The word of God being planted in good soil. Preferably, if you're from a Christian family, you've had the seed planted by your parents. Hopefully they've plowed.

Hopefully they've prepared the soil all they could. But the seed is still a miracle itself. They can put the seed there, but they can't guarantee its growth.

And that's a miracle. And you need to you need to make sure you're not satisfied until that miracle has happened to you. And you might say, well, how can I make a miracle happen to me? I can't make if my parents can't do it.

How can I do it? Well, you've got to you've got to pound on the doors of heaven because that's where the miracles come from. If you want to be saved, you've got to seek God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind. That's the only way you get it.

The Bible doesn't say it's going to be easier than that for anyone. It's got to be wholehearted. You've got to have your whole attention on seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

You won't lack anything. Everything else will be added to you that you need. Jesus promised that.

But you've got to seek that with all your heart. Let me turn your attention to First Thessalonians, chapter one, because there we have a short list from Paul of things that I believe are proofs of true conversion as opposed to nominal or seeming conversion. Everyone really needs to look at this.

Young people who are raised in Christian families are probably the most vulnerable to thinking they're saved when they're not. But everyone can have that. Anyone can make that mistake.

And here's how we recognize genuine salvation, at least how Paul recognized it. Paul was writing to the Thessalonians. He had preached in their synagogues for about three weeks, and then he got kicked out of there.

He began to minister among the Gentiles for a while. We don't know how long. Then he got run out of town altogether.

And shortly after that, he wrote this epistle back to this fledgling church, very young Christians in his church, only several weeks old as a church. And by the way, since Paul was the first Christian to preach there, the oldest Christian in the church was only several weeks old. They didn't have any older Christians there.

But what Paul said is he had great confidence in them, although they were suffering persecution, as he had when he was there, and they were not old people or old Christians. He says in verse four, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. That means I know that you are really saved.

You're really among those that God has chosen. How do I know that, though? Well, he tells us how he knows. I'll tell you something.

A lot of times I don't know for sure. When I look at a crowd of people, I assume the best. And if they're all professing Christians, I assume they're saved.

But I have to tell myself, I really don't know for sure who is and who isn't. Paul said there are ways that he has come to know that these people are really elect, that these people really are saved. He says in verse five, for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

As you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake, and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy in the Holy Spirit. And down he goes on to say so that you became examples to all who are in Macedonia, Achaia, et cetera, et cetera. And down in verse nine, for they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven.

Now, Paul says, I know you're saved. I know you're elect. And I'll tell you how I know it.

There's several things. One is I preach the word to you, but that I preach the word. A lot of people, a lot of Mark say there's a lot of bad soil out there.

That when I preach the word to you, it wasn't just like preaching to anybody where I just preach the word to everybody, but it came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. Now, that much assurance speaks of that witness inside that a person has when they're truly converted. They know they're converted.

The Mormons boast of their burning bosom. Well, Christians can boast of the same. It doesn't always burn, but it's always there.

A lot of people in different religions have some kind of sense of witness or assurance in them. And but but true Christians have that, too. It says in First John, he that believeth on the son of God has the witness in himself.

Or, as Paul put it in Romans eight, he said, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. That assurance that comes is from God. That's one of the marks of true conversion.

It's not just I think so. Hope so. Someone told me so.

Someone said that if I said these words, I would be. It's there's an assurance there. It's settled.

I know that I have a relationship with Jesus Christ and that is it. And it's a relationship that will give me peace. If this if I knew this was the last day of my life, I'd be at peace because I'm sure.

That's that assurance they had, but there's more. The word when he preached came to him in power and in the Holy Spirit. What were the evidences he saw of that power and of the Holy Spirit? Well, first of all, well, maybe not first, but among the things he mentions is that they received the word in much affliction.

Now, there's lots of ways in which people receive the word of God, but a lot of people who receive the word of God do so when it's easy. And then when the affliction comes, Jesus said they fall away. But these people received the word in affliction.

They were already in affliction when they heard the word and they accepted the word and the consequences. And they were willing, you know, their willingness to pay the cost of being disciples was evident right from the beginning because they were facing that cost in a way that few people do when they're faced with the gospel first time. And they were willing to suffer and they received the word of God happily in that situation.

That's the power of God. The word came to them with power. It wasn't just information coming to them.

It's he says also they became followers of the apostles and of Christ. That's how you really know someone is a Christian. Are they following Jesus? It's not a question of where you raise the Christian family.

Were you raised in America? Were you baptized? Did you were you confirmed? Do you go to Sunday school? The question is, are you following Jesus? If you want to know whether you're saved, don't say, well, yeah, I got saved on such and such a date back and so on. So I was raised in a church where that's what we're told. We were told if you don't remember the day you were saved, you weren't.

But if you do remember the day you're saved, you are. And I know a lot of people who can remember the day they were saved, but they're not. And I know some people like myself.

I don't remember the exact day I was there, but I am. That theology was manmade theology. I never read it in the Bible.

You know, if you don't remember the day you're saved, you are. It's a preaching point to try to get people to come forward. It looks good for the preacher to have people come forward.

And no altar calls are found in the Bible, interestingly enough. But it's a revivalist technique that came up in the 19th century. And it's very satisfying to the preacher.

Maybe I'll give an altar call today. I don't know. I don't usually do that.

But it's very satisfying to the preacher. He says, hey, I had an impact, you know. But altar calls don't prove that you had the right kind of impact.

Lots of people come forward at altar calls. And they can remember the day. They can mark it on their calendar.

They can call that their spiritual birthday. But I don't care if you can look back at some day 40 years ago or 10 years ago or 5 years ago and say that was my spiritual birthday. The question I have for you is, are you following Jesus now? If you are, you're a Christian.

If you aren't, you aren't. That's how Paul said, I know your election of God because you became a follower of Christ and of us, the apostles. The apostles in Christ are those who speak with the authority of God to us and whose examples we are told to follow in Scripture.

There is another thing he said became it was evident of true conversion is that they became they had a great deal of joy in the Holy Spirit. Now, joy, it's interesting. He says joy in the Holy Spirit, because there's a lot of joy or something that passes as joy outside of Christ, outside of the Holy Spirit.

There are a lot of people out there who are on a continual quest for joy, and some of them seem to find it. I'm not going to fool you. I'm not going to lie to you and say, you know, if you don't come to Jesus, you'll never be happy.

You get around, you'll find some people who seem pretty happy who aren't Christians. Now, we don't know what's going on deep down inside, but that's just it. We don't know.

For all we know, they are happy. We can say, oh, they couldn't really be happy because they don't know Jesus. Well, they might tell you, well, sorry, I am.

Hope that doesn't hurt your theology too much. The Bible doesn't say that you can't be happy outside of Jesus. The Bible says there is pleasure in sin for a season.

Whoever says you'll never be happy without Jesus, that is not true. But you will not be forever happy without Jesus. And if happiness is something to be desired, then forever happy is really to be desired.

And forever regretful, forever in grief is very much to be avoided. Now, you can be happy as a non-Christian. All you have to do is black out the part of your mind that is in touch with reality.

And stay numbed with a lot of stimulants. It can be drugs, alcohol, or it can be entertainment. It can be movies, music, all kinds of things can take your mind off of things and make you feel happy.

As long as the music doesn't stop. But the fact is, that's not joy in the Holy Spirit. Joy in the Holy Spirit was present with these people, although they were in affliction.

They weren't at a concert. They weren't at a party. They weren't, you know, in the lap of luxury with servants peeling grapes for them.

They were in affliction. And yet they were full of joy. Now, you can tell the joy in the Holy Spirit by the fact that there's no sensible reason for it.

Peter said it's a joy inexpressible and full of glory. It's something that no one can explain why it's there. Everything externally can be going wrong.

Now, you might say, I'd just as soon have a life where everything wasn't going wrong, thanks. But you can't guarantee yourself that. In your life, there will be many things that will go wrong, no matter how well you lay your plans.

Many things will go wrong. Life is simply not under your control. And hopefully you won't have life where everything goes wrong.

But you know what? There are people like Job, who everything went wrong. And sure, he wasn't giggling about it. That's not how joy in the Holy Spirit is expressed.

But he was confident in God. He was unmoved. He was secure.

His wife wasn't. His wife complained about it. And he said, you talk like one of those foolish women.

Shall we receive only the good things from the Lord, not the evil also? Blessed be the name of the Lord. The Lord gives. The Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Now, that's joy, I believe, in the Holy Spirit, because everything went wrong. If you can still rejoice in God and genuinely praise him in the midst of affliction, then that is not joy as the world gives.

That's joy as the Holy Spirit gives. That's a fruit of the Spirit. So that is an that's an example of what of how you know you're saved.

You have this assurance. You you have this grip on the truth, even in the midst of affliction. Your grip is not lost.

A lot of people, you know, they really believe or they think they do until the crisis comes. My former pastor, Chuck Smith, when he took a new pastor at once before he ever came to Calvert Chapel, where he is now, he said that he he took a small pastor at once. And he he when he became pastor, he decided to get the membership list and find out which people hadn't been to church for a while and visit them.

So he found the name of this one guy who hadn't been to church for a while. He went and knocked on his door. He says, I am Pastor Smith.

I'm the new pastor at such and such church. And the man said, get off my porch. And if you don't get off, I'll kill you.

And Chuck said, well, what have I done to offend you so badly? The man says, I cannot believe in any God to allow my three year old daughter to get hit by a car and die. And he used to go to church before that happened. He stopped when that happened.

That's not the time to stop believing in God. That's not when you need God. Chuck said, well, are you one of God's children? Does he owe you something? You know, does he kind of owe it to you to keep your child from dying? Children dying all over the world.

Is your child supposed to be immune because you're what? You're something special. What has God? What does God owe you? Can you believe in God, the God who doesn't owe you anything when he decides not to give you anything? Can you only believe in God when things go in the way you want them to go? Or can you believe in God when they go exactly the way you don't want him to go, but it's still his will? Can you say the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

If you can, that's a mark of true salvation. Now, I'm not going to go longer today,

although I had a whole other section. Of course, I didn't know when I put this together this morning how long I'd spend on each point.

If you are interested in getting the notes on this message, they're in the back. There's not enough for every person, but there's enough for most families to have one. What I'm leaving out of this talk is I was going to go through the book of Second Timothy and draw out from it certain places where special exhortations are made to Timothy, especially as a young man, as a young man who's a believer.

And those are in the notes and the scriptural references are in the notes. If you want to look those up on your own, if you're interested in that. One thing I would say this, though, if you look at one of those passages in First Timothy.

First Timothy one, I'm sorry, Second Timothy, chapter one, verse five, Paul says to Timothy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and I'm persuaded is in you also. Now, Timothy came from a godly home. What kind of a godly home? His father was a Greek.

We don't know. We don't know if his father ever accepted the gospel. His mother was a Jew.

And when Paul, when Timothy was raised in the word of God, it was really under a Jewish mother teaching him the law of God. And then Paul came to Lystra, where they lived, preached the gospel and both his mother and apparently his grandmother and Timothy all got saved. But Paul recognized that the influence of that godly mother and grandmother had had something to do with Timothy's own influence in Timothy.

They they tried to raise him in a godly way, even though he had an ungodly. Well, we don't know how ungodly, but his father was a pagan. And Paul says something really important here.

He says he says that faith I'm talking about was in your grandmother and that faith I'm talking about was in your mother. He says, I'm persuaded it's in you, too. And he speaks of it as that genuine faith.

Now, my challenge to young people of Christian families is this. There may be no question in your mind that the genuine faith is in your grandparents. There may be really no question in your mind that that genuine faith is in your parents.

But are you persuaded that it is in you, too? And is it genuine faith? Is it a firsthand faith? Or are you just cruising on the coattails of somebody else's religious beliefs and experience, namely your parents or someone else's? Well, no one's going to cruise into heaven that way. And I just want you to realize that a lot of people are just complacent about it. A lot of young people, they say, well, I'm about as good as any other kids in the

church, better than some.

You know, I'm doing it about as well as my parents are or whatever you think. It's not enough. It's not enough to do as well or to do at all.

What is necessary is that you have gotten a personal revelation of God. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, then you don't have it. OK, I can't tell you what it feels like to have it, but you know what it feels like if you have it.

I'm not talking I'm not trying to talk some kind of gobbledygook here where, you know, like the Earhart seminar training, people say, oh, you've got to get it and they won't tell you what it is. You have to get it to know what it is. Well, I'm not trying to play that kind of mind games.

I'm just saying this, that when you know God, then you know God. And if you don't know God, you might think you do. But you would know if you really know.

And like I said, the best way to guess or to discern, I should say, is if the Christians you admire most, you get up and say, guess what? Christianity is a big sham. Never was true. Never will be.

It's a big joke. Ha ha. You lose.

You followed us and we were lying. If everyone who you would respect as Christian get up and say that. And you can say, you guys are out to lunch.

I thought you knew as well as I did. I guess you didn't. But I know.

I know God. I know Jesus. And the fact that Cheryl passed this past week may not make some of you younger people feel the urgency since she was older than the younger people here.

I said she was older than me, younger than me and younger than a lot of people here. And it just shows that age is not the issue. It's not how old someone is.

It's when God says it's time to come. God comes calling. He takes people in their sleep, takes them in accidents.

He takes them in sickness. And as I said, a great number of great several thousands died on this planet since you went to bed last night. And before you go to bed tonight, many thousands more will be dead who don't expect to be.

I hope you're not one of them. And you might say, Steve, you're using scare tactics. Good, solid scare tactics, I hope.

We have reason to fear if we're not prepared to meet God.