

WHATEVER THE COST



BOOK STUDY GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON # 1 - WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

When your faith is under fire, it is important to remember that God uses fire to make your faith flourish.

BIBLE VERSE

Be alert. Continue strong in the faith. Have courage, and be strong. —1 Corinthians 16:13 NCV

MAIN POINTS

1. Transference – In Christ, we are transferred from darkness to light.
2. Transformation – God's Word transforms us into His image.
3. Translation – Our lives translate God's love to those around us.
4. Total Surrender – Powerful living is a result of total surrender—whatever the cost.

LESSON # 2 - THEOLOGY TO BIOGRAPHY

The Word of God became flesh, so let's not turn it back into words again! (from John 1:14)

BIBLE VERSE

When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. —Proverbs 16:7

MAIN POINTS

1. First WHO, then DO.
2. Jesus must be both Savior AND Lord.
3. We must focus on depth and God will handle the breadth.
4. More is accomplished in the pain cave than the comfort zone.
5. Work is worship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON # 3 - DYING TO YOUR DREAMS

When you let go of what's in your hand, God will give you what's in His hand.

BIBLE VERSE

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. — John 12:24

MAIN POINTS

1. We often spend our lives chasing success, while not ever stopping to define it.
2. Focus on the Person of God and not His purpose, promise, and platforms.
3. Hold what God gives you with an open hand.
4. Perception is not reality—Truth is reality.
5. Life is about His-story, not Your-story.

LESSON #4 – FROM A BASEBALL BAT TO A BROOMSTICK

*Your faithfulness today determines your fitfulness tomorrow.
Faith in the little proves you are fit for the big.*

BIBLE VERSE

He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much. —Luke 16:10a

MAIN POINTS

1. The Christian life is about passion, not position.
2. Faithfulness is proven in the ordinary.
3. Duty is ours; results are God's.
4. Wherever you are, make your spot sweet.
5. Excellence is having the second-mile mindset.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON #5 - COUNTER-CULTURE CHURCH

If Church is a destination, then going to Church is paramount, but if Church is a body, then being the Church is paramount.

BIBLE VERSE

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. —Matthew 16:18

MAIN POINTS

1. In God's kingdom, no division exists between sacred and secular.
2. The Church must go to "the gates."
3. Our tools of diligence become our weapons of deliverance.
4. Authority follows responsibility.

LESSON #6 - BATTLE READY

If you want to dance like David danced, you need to fight like David fought. Don't get your groove on until you get your gear on.

BIBLE VERSE

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock, Who trains my hands for war,
And my fingers for battle. —Psalm 144:1*

MAIN POINTS

1. Know you're in a battle.
2. Know your enemy.
3. Know the battlefields.
4. Know the enemy's strategy.
5. Know the enemy's weapons.

[All Scripture is from NASB, unless otherwise noted.]



LESSON #1

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

When your faith is under fire, it is important to remember that God uses fire to make your faith flourish.

BIBLE VERSE

Be alert. Continue strong in the faith. Have courage, and be strong. —1 Corinthians 16:13 NCV

INTRODUCTION

Identical twins David and Jason Benham, authors of the book *Whatever the Cost*, caught the attention of HGTV reality show producers after playing pro baseball and then starting a successful real estate company. The show would be called *Flip It Forward* and air in the fall of 2014. During filming, a TV executive came to meet with the brothers and take them to dinner. Here's what he said ...

“Okay, guys, you’re about to be known by millions. Nobody knows you right now, but very soon people are going to discover you and start checking you out. We’re going to reveal your show in New York City. But we’ve been following your Twitter posts and noticed you guys tweet a lot about your faith. You even speak about controversial issues. We don’t mind you talking about your faith, but speaking about the controversial stuff may give people the impression that you’re ‘haters,’ and I don’t want people thinking something about you that you’re not. David tweeted something about your dad baptizing ‘Jane Roe’ of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision.”

For reference to what the producer was speaking about, in 1995, David and Jason’s dad, at that time a pastor, had the privilege of leading Norma McCorvey to faith in Jesus Christ. She is also known as “Jane Roe” from the infamous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, which legalized abortion in the United States.

The TV executive concluded by saying, “That may be a little much right now.”

It seems like the world is telling Christians today: “Just keep this Jesus thing to yourselves. Be a Christian, if you want; but be quiet. ‘That may be a little much right now.’”

The Benham brothers have decided to not be quiet, to not keep Jesus to themselves, to speak the truth in love about all the fuss in the world. And let’s be honest, this is going to be the life of any true Christ follower in the 21st century. We’re told to be politically and spiritually correct, dance the fine line, and especially never be offensive by playing the “Christ card.”

But what is going on these days? Have you ever wondered why all the fuss on the earth?

The news feed is filled with random acts of violence every day. Rage fills the headlines from the freeway, to the school playground, the workplace, and even the shopping mall. No person and no place seem to be exempt anymore. Many places that were once safe-zones of innocence are now battlegrounds of violence. Looking to scripture, we find the reason the world is the way it is ...

There are two kingdoms—the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness—and they are in conflict. They are enemies with no option for peace. No compromise. No truce. Winner takes all. This is a fight to the death.

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus in chapter 6, verse 12, The Message Bible states it like this: "This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels."

By the end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, God's kingdom of light destroys the kingdom of Satan, overcoming the darkness once and for all. This is due to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross and the final result of his resurrection.

Herein also, we find the scene of the original battle that started in Heaven and now continues to rage here on the earth. Satan threw the first punch and tried to take authority away from God—he wanted it all for himself. However, God defeated Satan and threw him, along with his followers—angels like himself (now called demons)—out of heaven.

THE 4-STEP "FUSS" FIGHTER

In Revelation 12:11, we read: "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death."

This powerful verse also serves as the battle plan for how the people of God will overcome the devil. Let's take a deeper look at the four steps based on these three phrases from Revelation 12:11, using an alliteration to help us remember them.

#1—Transference

"...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." —Colossians 1:12-14 [Bolded word only for emphasis]

From our Revelation 12:11 passage ... "And they overcame him, because of the blood of the Lamb..."

The first step is salvation—the truth and power of the Gospel received and accepted by a sinner. God finds us, offers rescue, and our faith connects to him.

All of us are sinners, and therefore we must pay the penalty for sin, which is death. But Jesus, who never sinned, took our punishment for us and stripped away Satan's authority at the cross. Through salvation we become children of God—we experience transference from Satan's kingdom of darkness into God's kingdom of light.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." —2 Corinthians 5:21

#2—Transformation

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” —Romans 12:2 [Bolded word for emphasis only.]

From our Revelation 12:11 passage ... “And they overcame him, ... because of the word of their testimony.”

Our testimony is what God has done both in us and through us. We simply divide this into two parts: transformation and translation.

Transformation is a lifelong process to make us more like Jesus. It's like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly—a metamorphosis—a change into a new creation. Although we instantly gain a new identity when we are transferred from darkness to light at salvation, our mind has not yet caught up with this new identity. So we must, therefore, be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

The war for our souls takes place on the battlefield of the mind. God transforms how we think as he renews our minds through His word. Renewal is simply replacing the old with the new—it's counter-acting the lies of the devil with the truth of God, all of which takes place in the mind. Once our mind changes, our behavior changes, which produces our testimony. This is where translation comes in.

#3—Translation

“We have been **sent to speak for** Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God.” —2 Corinthians 5:20 NCV [Bolded words for emphasis only.]

God first begins working inside of you, but He has no intention of stopping there. He wants to work through you, translating His love to the world through His transformed people. When God touches His physical universe, He does it through the portal of man—if He does it any other way, it's called a miracle.

The story of Moses paints this incredible picture when God told him that he was going to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery. Listen to what God said:

“So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians ... Therefore, come now, and I will send **you** to Pharaoh, so that **you** may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” —Exodus 3:8-10 (Bolded words for emphasis only.)

Can you imagine the confusion Moses must have felt? “Wait a minute, God—I thought You said You were going to deliver them, but now You're telling me to do it?” The truth is, God was going to deliver

His people, but His method was Moses. His power would translate through this man into the world as a testimony of God's power in the earth.

The transformation that takes place inside of us must then be translated to the world around us. We have the glorious privilege of having the power of Christ, not only flowing to us, but also through us! The same way that God used Moses, He wants to use us. This is called the "word of our testimony."

#4—Total Surrender

"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."—John 3:20

From our Revelation 12:11 passage ... "And they overcame him, ... because "they did not love their life even when faced with death."

As the Benham brothers' story shows, choosing to live out our testimony will lead to conflict. Translating in today's culture can cause us to lose TV shows, business deals, jobs, and even friendships. We can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, and yes, even accused of being a "hater." Therefore, we must be totally surrendered to God, whatever the cost.

Many will not only refuse to hear our message, but some will actually hate it. The same boiling water that softens the carrot also hardens the egg. Some people will soften to our message and others will harden. It's not the temperature of the water that needs to change, it's the consistency of what's in the water that must change and only the Holy Spirit can do that. We just need to stay hot—to keep translating God's love.

When we choose to translate His message to the world, there will be a price to pay, because the kingdom of light that now resides in our hearts stands opposed to the kingdom of darkness. We don't fit in like we once did, because our lives are now all about God's message. So be prepared, because the attack will come.

When Satan attacks, we have this choice—to raise the white flag or fight. Give in or step up. The only way we'll fight with any power, is with the same attitude as the angels in heaven—even in the face of death, we will stand—a whatever-the-cost attitude. This is the key to living powerfully on the earth.

The cost of not standing for the faith is far greater than the cost of standing strong. The bottom line is that if we chose to stand strong today, it may cost us something, but if we refuse to stand strong, it will cost our children everything.

Let's review the 4-Step Fuss Fighter...

Step One: Transference—In Christ, we are transferred from darkness to light.

Step Two: Transformation—God's Word transforms us into His Image.

Step Three: Translation—Our lives translate God's love to those around us.

Step Four: Total Surrender—We will live powerfully, whatever the cost.

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”—Revelation 12:11

THEOLOGY TRANSLATING INTO BIOGRAPHY

The Benhams share that the most important lesson their dad taught them growing up was how to translate their theology into biography. He did this by showing them how ...

- what you believe must be lived out every day.
- faith applies to all of life.
- to be the Church and not just go to Church.
- whatever God is doing in your hearts needs to show up in your actions.

To the Benham family, the Church was not a building, but a body. And as the body of Christ, they needed to get out and be involved in their community, right where people live. To be translators. So in closing, it's important to discuss the point of translation a bit more, as it relates to our current culture.

The culture in which we live seems fine when we claim to have experienced transference from faith and even declare to be transformed in our mind and behavior, but it is when step three—translation—starts to occur, everything changes. Many today don't want us to live out the step of translation. So, this is where the “rubber meets the road.” Translation is where we can offend people, be called “haters,” and risk our safe reputations.

When the Word of God becomes flesh—the life of Jesus living in us—in the translation stage, this is where we must choose whether we will just turn back to our own words or continue forward, choosing and using God's Word.

We are often tested by fire when we truly commit to translation. Why? Because God uses suffering to make us stronger—strength comes from the strain. Just as gold is refined in the fire, so we are refined

by suffering. When you live a life of conviction for sin and commitment to God's Word, you will assuredly experience conflict with the culture. The question then becomes—who do you fear? Those who love the darkness and hate the light fear exposure. Translators of God's word will bring the light. Those who hate the light will hate those who bring light.

One of the Benham's many principles is "boldness apart from brokenness makes a bully." God must first break us, so He can use us. No one is advocating a holier-than-thou attitude here. Rather, God transfers His great love and salvation to us, we then experience transformation in our speech and actions, and finally we translate love from the light into the darkness.

We must stop speaking the language of the darkness—the politically correct and safe jargon of the day—and speak the language of God, the One who can change anyone, anytime, anywhere. When the truth of our speech is filled with the love of God, then people see a complete picture of Jesus.

The apostle Paul, while still Saul, before he met Jesus, believed he was a voice for the light, but he was only a bully for a belief. Then he met the Lord on the road to Damascus and he was quite literally transferred into the light of Christ—even blinded temporarily—then transformed, and eventually became one of the greatest translators in Church history, writing the bulk of the New Testament. Saul turned Paul went from ...

- the hunter to the hunted.
- a murderer to a minister.
- a man devoted to darkness into a lover of the light.
- a traitor to a translator.

God brought David and Jason Benham to this same crossroads, asking, "Will you stand for the light even when the darkness wants to destroy you? Will you translate light and love into the culture, even when they refuse it?" Today, in the truths of Scripture presented to you, God brings the same offer and opportunity to you.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are you a transferred person?
- Has Christ saved you out of the darkness and into the light?
- Are you being transformed into the image of Jesus?
- Have you committed to spending time daily in God's Word, studying and meditating on it?
- Are your thoughts, attitudes, and actions being transformed into alignment with Christ?
- Will you be a translator, speaking for God, even when the culture tells you to sit down and be quiet?

WRAP-UP

You want to live a whatever-the-cost life? It's going to put your faith under fire more often than you would like. But, remember, when your faith is under fire, it is important to remember that God uses fire to make your faith flourish. A faith that tells everyone exactly what all the fuss is truly about!

We can be strong and stand firm in the faith when we:

- 1—Transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light through salvation in Jesus Christ.
- 2—Transform by the renewing of our minds in God's Word.
- 3—Translate the life of Christ that is inside of us to a lost and dying world.
- 4—Totally Surrender to living powerfully for Jesus—whatever the cost.

As we close, let us encourage each other to ... Be alert. Continue strong in the faith. Have courage, and be strong. —1 Corinthians 16:13 NCV



LESSON #2

THEOLOGY TO BIOGRAPHY

*When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even
his enemies to be at peace with him. —Proverbs 16:7*

BIBLE VERSE

*The Word of God became flesh, so let's not turn it back into
words again! (from John 1:14)*

INTRODUCTION

In last week's message, we touched on this concept of theology becoming biography. Today, we want to expand on this concept and go deeper.

The Benham brothers state: "HGTV ended our contract for the TV show solely because of pressure from the GLAAD organization. The network loved us, our families, our work ethic, our energy, our desire for excellence, and they even deeply respected our Christian beliefs. They could say nothing bad about us. They had no problem with us. They believed we had a successful and worthwhile family show in the works. In short—our lives were pleasing to them. And we all walked away in peace and mutual respect. Pressure from one outside entity, who could only disagree with our views, not our actions, caused the division. But our theology had to be biography. We had to speak up, so the Word of God made flesh could have a greater impact on the world. But what originally attracted HGTV to us—our biography—caused us to be fired when it manifested our theology."

As the brothers like to say, "HGTV didn't have a problem with our ways, they had a problem with our words."

In *Whatever the Cost*, the Benham brothers share many strong principles to encourage and inspire spiritual growth and maturity. From their time in the Scriptures, they have a deep well of theology from which to draw to craft two amazing biographies. As we walk through the 5 principles in today's message, we will see how each one helps lay a foundation for us to live lives pleasing to the Lord that causes even those who disagree with us to pause and take notice.

PRINCIPLE #1 — First who, then do.

To explain this principle, the Benhams use a story from their pro baseball days. "If you ask us to boil down all the lessons we learned in professional baseball to a simple word, we'd say "identity." It was easy to get caught up in the identity of being a professional athlete. We learned that if you are defined by what you do, then your level of success will dictate your self-worth. If you fail, then in your mind you're a failure. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. It's impossible to die to a dream when it defines you."

Point 1– When what you do defines you, then your career longings, personal desires, and/or long-term dreams can naturally pull you away from God and from those he's given to your care.

As Christians we can rest in the fact that we are not defined by the jobs we hold in our hands—we are defined by the One who holds us in His hand. Whether you're swinging a bat or pushing a broomstick, who you are will never change, regardless of how many times your job description does. We are human

beings, not human doings. In Christ, we are a new creation, so being faithful no matter what we do for a living, gives us the ability to live powerfully for Jesus because our identities are found in Him alone.

Point 2—How we see ourselves determines how we conduct ourselves.

This is why Satan attacks Christians at the level of their identities. He knows that if we see ourselves as ministers, then we will act like ministers. He's fine with us finding our identities in our vocations, but he doesn't want us to find our identities in who we are in Christ—on mission for Him. Once we see ourselves as ministers of God, Satan has no power to stand against us.

Point 3—What you do flows out of who you are.

When you squeeze an orange does tomato juice come out? Of course not. Why? Because what comes out of an orange is the essence of what's in it. The same is true for all of us. What comes out is determined by what is inside of us.

1 Samuel 16:7 applies well to all three of our points ...

God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Why do you think God looks solely at a person's heart? Because the heart is the essence of who we are and therefore the source of what we do—our behavior. Drawing close to Jesus daily through prayer and Bible study develops a heart that blesses God and attracts others.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Do you find your identity in what you do for work?
- Do you see yourself as a minister of God right where you are?

PRINCIPLE #2 — Jesus is both our Savior AND Lord.

Point 1— Christ is ruler of all of life—our time, talents, and treasure.

It's one thing to have Jesus as your Savior, but another to have Him as Lord. Jesus doesn't just want to save us and stack us up at a spiritual bus stop, waiting for Him to pick us up and go home to glory. He wants us to occupy until He returns. Christ wants us to live powerfully for Him with whatever He's given us to do, in the unique way He's equipped each of us to do it. All we are and have are His—our time, talent, and treasure. We simply need to surrender it all to Him.

Point 2—Jesus Christ is Lord in victory and in defeat.

Surrendering to Jesus as Lord means giving everything we have to Him, whatever the cost. Jesus being Lord of our lives doesn't always look like we may think. Quite often, God tests our level of commitment by allowing us to experience failure.

Jason Benham experienced this truth in a difficult loss to Auburn in the 1998 NCAA Regional Baseball Tournament where he had made a critical error in the ninth inning that cost his team the game. In his own words, he said...

"I remember calling a trusted friend on a pay phone the day after we lost to Auburn. I was in the airport before flying back to Liberty University. I'll never forget what he said. 'You know, Jase, it looked like Jesus failed that day when He was walking up that hill with a cross on His back, but He was winning every step of the way.' That's all I needed to hear. Everything made sense. Total surrender to God is when duty is ours and results are God's. Sometimes God allows us to achieve our dreams. Other times we have to die to them."

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." – Job 1:21

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Is Jesus the ruler over all of your life—time, talent, and treasure?
- Are you surrendered to Jesus in both victory and defeat?

PRINCIPLE #3 — We must focus on depth and God will handle the breadth.

Leonard Ravenhill, a renowned Christian evangelist, was once asked what he thought of a certain mega-church. He responded, "It's a mile wide and an inch deep." All too often as Christians, we focus on the length of our branches, when God tells us to focus on the depth of our roots. When we focus on our depth in Him, He can then focus on the breadth of our lives. Our one role is to simply go deep with God and be faithful right where He has planted us. We don't need to worry about how wide or high our branches extend—we just need to focus on how deep our roots grow. The Benham's share about a challenge for them in high school, one that taught them this principle.

"Dallas, Texas is a mecca for high school baseball. The city's large 5A public schools produce some of the top baseball players in the nation. Playing for these schools is a sure means of getting scouted by collegiate and Major League Baseball teams. Our private high school, Garland Christian Academy, however, didn't even have a baseball field at the time and was possibly the smallest school in the city.

We practiced in the corner of the football field and played an all-away schedule. At this time, travel ball wasn't what it is today. Back then, high school ball was the place where amateur talent got recognized. But how do you get recognized if your school is tiny and you don't even have a field? Would scouts ever hear about us?

“We decided that if we were going to make it to the next level, we needed to go to public school for our junior and senior years. Mom had different plans though. Although Dad was starting to be swayed by our ambition, Mom told him, “You’ve told those boys that God will get them where they need to go, but now for the sake of baseball, you’ll pull them out of the school where they’ve matured like fruit on the vine?” Mom put her foot down, Dad course-corrected, and we were told to bloom where we were planted. Our one role was to go deep with God and be faithful right where He planted us. We didn’t then, and don’t need now, to worry about how wide or high our branches are going to grow—we just need to focus on how deep our roots go. He’ll handle the breadth of our branches as we focus on depth in Him.”

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. —Colossians 2:6-7

We live in a society where the length of the branches is the constant focus and where all the attention is placed (size of our church, number of Twitter followers or Facebook friends, money in the bank, etc.). So, as a Christ follower, to stay focused on root growing is definitely going against the grain. Yet, in the long run, the depth and strength of our roots is how we withstand the storms of life and how we sustain on-going growth of, not only our branches, but the fruit of Christ grown from them. Regardless of what anyone else around does, dig deep in prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and personal/corporate worship to become strong, just as the verses in Colossians encourage us to do.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are there areas of your life where you have neglected to go deep with Jesus?
- Do you find yourself focusing on your branches more than your roots?

PRINCIPLE #4 — More is accomplished in the pain cave than the comfort zone.

Discipline is doing what we don't want to do to accomplish what we truly want. If we want to go deep with God, this will require discipline.

The only way to maintain a disciplined lifestyle is to get comfortable with discomfort. It's like the difference between an adrenaline rush and an endorphin release. Adrenaline is the fight-or-flight feeling that happens quickly and wears off fast. An endorphin release, on the other hand, happens slowly and lasts

for a long time—yet it only occurs through pain. Athletes call this the “runner’s high.” Life is best lived off the endorphins of peace—through pain—and not off the adrenaline from one rush to the next.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.—James 1:2-4

Let’s be honest—for the majority of us, the times we have truly grown spiritually have been in the valley, not on the mountain. When times of great blessing come, we may often forget God and stop seeking Him, thereby stagnating our growth. But when the trials come, we hit our knees, give up, and submit. Then—we grow. Endurance through suffering produces maturity, as James said.

If you evaluate your life and feel you are not growing, there is a strong likelihood you would also confess you are in a comfort zone. But even more honestly, comfort zones can often become ruts. We get comfortable, we get stuck, the rut begins, and growth stops.

None of us today are going to volunteer to enter the pain cave, but the next time it comes, maybe your perspective can be different. Maybe you can see an opportunity for maturity, rather than just an obstacle to happiness.

As the Benhams like to say, “When God puts you in a pain cave don’t try to climb out—just build a fire and get comfortable, trusting that He is the God of the pain. You’ll look much different when you leave than when you entered. You can enter the pain cave now by building disciplines into your spiritual life that forge reflections of Christ in you—fasting, praying, diligent Bible study, hospitality, discipleship, and giving of your time, talent, and treasures.”

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are you willing to live a disciplined life?
- What are some areas where you can build discipline into your life?
- Are you willing to commit to this new paradigm?

PRINCIPLE #5 — As Christians, our work is our worship.

The Hebrew word for worship—avodah—is also the same word used for work. Our work becomes worship when we do it with all of our might for the glory of the Lord.

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” —Colossians 3:23–24

One day, David and Jason's dad took them to a local mall in Dallas to teach them this principle first-hand. Here's the story from *Whatever the Cost* ...

"We walked inside and joined a crowd of people lining the picture windows of one of the mall restaurants—Denny's. We were pretty jazzed about eating at Denny's until Dad told us we were just there to watch. We lined up along the window, until Dad said, "Watch the busboy. Do you see him? The older man in his fifties with the white apron and hat." Finally we saw him. Next to him was a cart that he pushed down the aisle until he came to a dirty, vacant table. He slowed the cart down and analyzed the scene. He looked at his watch. He looked back at the table. Then . . . boom! For the next twenty seconds he painted one of the most incredible pictures of work ethic we've ever seen. It was amazing! Like something out of a cartoon, dishes went flying into one bucket, utensils into another, trash in the bag, washrags used to clean every inch of the table and chairs, and salt/pepper/sugar stationed perfectly on an immaculately cleaned table. Everything was put in proper place for the next patrons. He looked back at his watch with a sense of satisfaction and quietly strolled to the next table. Now we understood why so many people stood outside the windows—they were there to see the busboy. When he finished the table, those watching him erupted in applause. Dad looked over at us and said, 'Every job is sacred. Every job is worthy of your best effort, no matter what the job is. You make it the best you can and turn it into something people are cheering about because your effort inspires them.' Who cheers for busboys at restaurants? Our dad did and he taught us to do the same. The busboy memory continues to encourage us that every job God places in our hands must be done for the glory of the Lord."

Work is a beautiful thing—it existed before Adam sinned. When we complete the work God has given us to do, we can experience the rest God has ordained for us.

The Benhams developed a 3-R model for work...

Point 1—The requirement for work is faithfulness.

- *He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much. —Luke 16:10*

Point 2—The reward for work is rest.

- *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. —Matthew 11:29*

Point 3—The result of work is that God is glorified.

- *I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. —Jesus in John 17:4 NIV*

Mission accomplished. The work is done. God's will is enacted. He is glorified.

Every human being is made in the image of God and as such we are workers. God is working and so must we. When we complete the work He's given us to do, then God is glorified. The work of Jesus was

to bring His Father glory by going to the cross, but along the way He had a daily life to live as well—obeying his parents, working as a carpenter, healing the sick, and so on. The same is true with us—our one big work is to glorify the Lord in all we do and we accomplish this by being faithful in all the little works He gives us to do along the way—being a faithful spouse, parent, employee, entrepreneur, teacher, plumber, student, or friend. Our work becomes worship when we work with all of our might for God's glory.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Do you truly see your work as worship to God?
- What are some ways you can improve at your work, so that God receives it as worship?

WRAP-UP

The word of God became flesh, but when we have a tendency to turn it back into words again, we must make sure to turn our theology into biography!

We can do this by:

1—Understanding that who we are matters more than what we do.

2—Completely surrendering to Jesus as Lord of our lives.

3—Focusing on depth and letting God handle our breadth.

4—Living in the pain cave and not the comfort zone.

5—Seeing our work as worship to God.



*When you let go of what's in your hand, God will give you
what's in His hand.*

BIBLE VERSE

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. — John 12:24

INTRODUCTION

For those of you who have may have joined us in the middle of this Whatever the Cost Series, our teaching points are from David and Jason Benham's book of the same name. In 2014, they were shooting a reality show for HGTV and had everything stopped, due to tremendous pressure on the network from the GLAAD organization before the show could even air. The bottom line—their Biblical beliefs became an issue and the brothers wouldn't back down.

David and Jason share about the days following the show's cancellation: "In the first few days, many people asked about the possibility of pitching a new show to a different network. At that point we weren't interested in pursuing another show. We felt like King David must have felt when—as a young boy with a direct path to the throne—he heard Goliath's taunts against the people of God. He cast aside all fear, including losing his personal future as king and ran straight toward the giant. He didn't take his personal platform or future promises into account; he simply ran to the roar. At this moment in our lives, we heard our own Goliath—the agenda to silence Biblical beliefs—and his taunts drowned out any desire for own personal success."

"Yet we really wanted the show to happen and to be everything we dreamed it could be. After all, this was going to become a huge platform for ministry. But we were careful not to let it become our baby, which is very dangerous for leaders. The only way we could keep the show from becoming an idol in our lives was to die to it, and stay dead to it, by holding it with an open hand. This way God wouldn't have to pry our fingers off of it if He wanted to take it away. As Aragorn, one of J. R. R. Tolkien's characters in "The Two Towers," said, "One who cannot cast away a treasure at need is in fetters."

One of the amazing things about Christianity is life can only be experienced by going through this kind of death, just like a kernel of wheat. We see this reality weaving it's way through Christ's teaching throughout His earthly ministry, as our focus verse—John 12:24—shows us.

For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. —2 Corinthians 4:11

When we let go—die to ourselves, our own dreams and desires—is when God is truly free to live powerfully through us. Let's jump into our 5 principles now ...

PRINCIPLE #1—We often spend our lives chasing success, while not ever stopping to define it.

"There is perhaps nothing worse than reaching the top of the ladder and discovering that you're on the wrong wall." —Joseph Campbell, 20th Century American writer.

Answer this question for yourself: What is success?

Merriam-Webster defines success as “the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame.” If this is all success is, then many of us are failures. Success is often defined as a destination toward a goal, an aim, or a purpose. Some view the approval of a person—a spouse, a parent, or a boss—as the destination. Others view money, fame, or good health as the arrival. Yet God’s definition is vastly different.

Success is not a destination, but a journey—a life lived glorifying God by faithfully completing the work He’s given us to do.

In John 17:4 Jesus prayed to His Father, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”

Jesus was publicly humiliated; His followers left Him; He didn’t have earthly possessions; and He was killed by those He came to serve. In the world’s eyes, He was a failure. But in God’s eyes, He was a huge success, because He faithfully completed the work His Father had given Him to do. And that brings God glory.

The same is true with the prophet Ezekiel as God told him, “But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.” —Ezekiel 2:7

Success for Ezekiel was not in the destination of changed lives for God, but in faithfully obeying what God told him to do, whether they listened or not. Success was obedience in the journey!

The richest and wisest man who ever lived had something to say about success as well. King Solomon’s search for success and significance led him to some very interesting conclusions.

“Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”

—Ecclesiastes 2:11-12

What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.
—Ecclesiastes 6:9

Pushing and striving after our own dream—American or not—is, as Solomon said, like chasing the wind. But, as soon as we decide to walk with God—to die to our own idea of success and to simply obey Him in whatever work He’s given us to do along our life’s journey—we quickly experience success as God defines it.

As a Christian, success is not a destination—it’s the journey. When you go through the trials of life and remain true to God, you are a living example of success, regardless of where life may take you, because God is glorified when you’re faithful to Him.

And Solomon’s final word on success? The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. —Ecclesiastes 12:13

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- What is your definition of success?
- How does your own definition compare to this new paradigm?

PRINCIPLE #2 — Focus on the Person of God and not His purposes, promises, and platforms.

It's a natural path for us to focus on the purpose of God and not the God of purpose. When this takes place, we begin transacting with God at the level of the mind and no longer at the level of the heart. Things then have to “make sense” for us before we will follow God, as strategy overtakes the Spirit.

But when our focus remains on the Person of God and we allow His purposes to follow in the wake, then we transact with Him from the heart. We'll obey Him whatever the cost, even if it doesn't make sense in our minds. Therefore, we seek to live Person-driven lives—while we let God take care of the purposes, promises, and platforms. This gives us the ability to live powerfully for God, especially through trials.

For the Benham brothers, their purpose early in life was to bring God glory through baseball. They cruised through college and into the pro's and they felt strongly that God's purpose for them was to glorify Him by playing in the Major Leagues. But God had different plans. Although at times they allowed the purpose and platform of being Major League baseball players to become their main focus, God continually brought them back to focusing on Him alone. So when it came time for God to remove the platform of baseball from them, they didn't lose their purpose in life.

The story of the patriarch, Abraham, taught the brothers this profound principle. Abraham was promised by God that he would have a son in his old age, and that he would be the father of many nations (Genesis 12). For an old man with no children that must've been quite a promise with a new purpose to live! Yet it would take years before this promise would be fulfilled.

Unfortunately, during the delay, instead of focusing on the person of God, Abraham focused on the promise of God and therefore produced Ishmael. Yet several years later, after his promised son, Isaac, was born, God told him to sacrifice his son—to die to the promise!

Abraham didn't hesitate to obey. Thankfully, he didn't have to do it because it was simply a test to see if Abraham was focusing on the promise of God or on the God of the promise. He was now operating at the level of the heart and not the mind—both in line with God's faithfulness.

By focusing on the Person of God, instead of His purposes, promises, and platforms we will be led by

the Spirit in our heart and not by strategy in our head. This is crucial if we are going to live powerfully for Jesus today. Of course, strategy is good, but it must not lead. That's the Spirit's job.

Let's take a moment to define the 3 P's we've been using thus far ...

- A [purpose](#) is a reason or a goal for an action. You can't simply see a purpose; an action must make it visible. God's purpose for David and Jason was to play baseball up through the minor leagues. While they felt and believed their purpose was to go on and play in the majors, they had to trust the Person, not their expected purpose that He first spoke to them. The Person of Christ knows when, where, and how long a purpose is to last; we can't, and we shouldn't focus on our purpose.
- A [promise](#) is an assurance or a guarantee of an action to come. A promise is not a deadline, but a determined result. Had David and Jason held onto the promise that God would have them play in the Majors, rather than stay focused on His Person, either or both of them could have made some major life mistakes and/or become bitter men. They believed and acted on His promises, but stayed focused on the Person to know when the promise was delivered.
- A [platform](#) is a place and position of power to communicate a purpose. Had the Benhams refused to believe God was changing their platform away from baseball, the course of their lives may have become very different. We might not be talking about these principles today had they not stayed focused on the Person of Christ and held loosely the platform of pro baseball.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Is there a platform you once had that you keep insisting God give back to you?
- Is there a purpose you feel, but it hasn't come to be?
- Do you believe God has given you a promise to which you can't let go?

PRINCIPLE #3 — Hold what God gives you with an open hand.

If you hold your hand palm up with fingers outstretched and someone lays their cell phone in your open hand, what holds the phone there? ... Gravity. But what if you then close your fingers over the phone to grip it? Do you have to do that to keep it in your hand?...No. Now, you're just not allowing it to be taken away. The difference? Gravity versus grip.

Gravity is a fixed law of nature. And God is the one who holds everything in place where He wants it. In the same way, we must hold onto the things He gives us with an open hand, allowing His Spirit to keep them there, not our own futile grip. Then, if and when He wants to take it away, He doesn't have to pry our fingers loose.

There are two aspects to this principle:

Point 1—When God places something in your hand, don't hold onto it with white-knuckled tenacity. Let Him keep it there if He sees fit. You don't have to wrap your fingers around it.

A great example of holding something with an open hand is found in 2 Samuel 15, where King David's son Absalom had risen up against him and caused David to leave Jerusalem. Behind him followed Zadok the priest and the Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Verse 25 says, "The king said to Zadok, 'Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the Lord, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation.'" David treated the most valuable and powerful earthly possession with an open hand. If he could do that with the Ark of the Covenant, then we can do the same!

Point 2—Let God put whatever He wants in your hand.

Not only do we have a tendency to grab hold of what God places in our hands, but we also have a temptation to "go out and get" something, as opposed to waiting on the Lord to bring it to us if He sees fit.

Isaiah 40:31 says, "They who wait for the Lord will renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings of eagles...." If you don't wait for the Lord you can still have wings, but more like a hummingbird—you'll work a lot harder and fly a lot lower. But if you wait on the Lord you'll have the wings of an eagle—you'll fly a lot higher with a lot less work.

There are two aspects of waiting on God: the state of waiting and the service of waiting.

1—The state of waiting involves looking and listening for God in all things and at all times—actively waiting for His lead.

2—The service of waiting is the opportunity to serve while we wait. It's important to engage in the ser-

vice of waiting while we faithfully remain in the state of waiting.

Think about a waiter at a restaurant—he is “waiting” on customers, which means he is serving their needs. He isn’t concerned with his own life at that moment, only with others. He’s constantly watching and listening and then when he sees a need, he springs into action.

This is a picture of waiting on the Lord—we wait on Him by serving others, and in so doing, He will put opportunities and blessings into our hands as He sees fit. We don’t ever have to go out and grab them for ourselves—“and all these things will be added to you” Matthew 6:33.

Isn’t it interesting how a demonstration of worship and surrender includes offering open hands to God? We’re not going out and grabbing things to give Him, nor are we wrapping our fingers around what God has given to us. We come before His presence with open and outstretched hands.

The fear of losing what you have, or of not getting something you desire, especially if you realize how powerful it could be for God’s glory and the good of others, is an incredibly strong emotion. Identifying this fear and facing it head-on is the key to real breakthrough. We simply need to wait on the Lord with our hands open wide!

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Is there something you’re grasping to get?
- Is there something you’re wrapping your fingers around to keep?
- Where do you need to simply open your hands and let go?

PRINCIPLE #4—Perception is not reality—Truth is reality.

Concerning ourselves with perception—what people say about us—makes man-pleasers. Concerning ourselves with reality—what God says about us—makes God-pleasers. We must concern ourselves with reality over perception.

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. —Galatians 1:10

When the kingdom of light comes into our lives, it will inevitably clash with the kingdom of darkness. When this happens, each Christian has a decision to make—to stand boldly for Christ or to back down. If you stand boldly, it will cost you something, but if you have the first three principles we’ve discussed today in place—you have God’s view of success, you focus on the Person of God, and you hold everything with an open hand—you will be prepared to handle one of the primary attacks of Satan today—

false accusations (creating a false narrative about your life and giving you the “anti” label), especially in America. But when this happens, just remember: perception is not reality—reality is reality.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. —Matthew 5:11 (Bolded words for emphasis only).

The Benham brothers faced this head on when they hosted a city-wide prayer event, the night before the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, NC, called Charlotte714 (from 2 Chronicles 7:14). Despite the media labeling this event as a political rant filled with hateful rhetoric, which it was not at all, David and Jason chose not to concern themselves with what people said about them, but rather with what God told them to do.

Although the pressure to back away from being perceived in a negative light was a real temptation for the Benham’s, they chose to not concern themselves with perception but reality. And the reality was—and still is—that America had forsaken God and only upon our humble repentance to Him would our nation be healed. 9,000 Christians showed up from over 150 churches across Charlotte. The event was a spiritually impacting time.

Listen to the story in their own words: “We began putting our plan together. Interestingly, when the Washington Post heard about the event, they called and asked what church was hosting it and which pastor was leading. We simply responded, ‘The Church of Charlotte is hosting the event and Christians are leading it.’ The silence on the other end was priceless. It was the sound of a paradigm shift. For us, this was an opportunity to be the Church in our city and not just go to church, as our dad had shown us so many years ago. We realized that if church is a destination, then attendance was paramount, but if Church is a body, then being the Church is paramount. For us, calling a solemn assembly together was simply being the Church. And doing it as local businessmen and not vocational ministers was God’s way of challenging a lot of our old-school church paradigms. With no social media presence, no congregation, and no following of any kind, we went to work—with nothing but a word from the Lord to act upon. But very clearly, He spoke to our hearts again: ‘Put down your egos and face your fears. No big-name speakers. Be locally led. This cannot be another cool ministry event. Call My people to get on their faces before Me and cry out in repentance—start there first. And don’t do it in a church building—do it in public, the day before the convention.’”

“It was during this event that our comments were picked up as we publicly confessed our sins and the sins of our nation as a means of repentance in the Church. Holding firmly to God’s Word about sin was something that clashed with our culture, and therefore we were painted as ‘haters’ in the media. We were vilified and called all sorts of names, and many Christian leaders began to separate from us. We were now the ‘controversial’ brothers who were turning people off to Christianity. None of this was true—it was only perception.”

Here’s what the Benham’s discovered—if you focus on how people perceive you as opposed to who the “real” you is in Christ, then you will fall into the same trap that we discussed in Principle #2. You will begin to transact with God at the level of the mind (strategic) and no longer at the level of the heart

(Spirit). From this point, you will become a man-pleaser as the idea of relevance overtakes your commitment to reverence.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- If we truly dropped the illusion of perception from our lives, what might we do with the reality of what God has called us to?
- How much of your life is lived for perception?
- How much of your life is driven by the reality of God?
- Who are you truly trying to please?

PRINCIPLE #5—Life is about His-story, not Your-story.

So much of the Christian experience today is all about “me”—how God can bless me, protect me, provide for me, comfort me, on and on we go. While God loves blessing His kids, focusing on the blessings shifts our attention from being a part of God’s story to God being a part of ours. It’s a very fine line and is extremely easy to cross—this is why it’s vital to remember that our lives are all about God’s story, not ours.

The exciting part of this is God has a special role for each of us in His-story! And we are the only ones on earth—past, present, and future—that can fulfill our specific place in our unique way that He has created us to do it. When we fully grasp this, our lives become an incredible blessing to God and others. All those blessings God gives us come in the wake.

While we’ve been hearing and reading amazing stories from David and Jason Benham’s lives, have you noticed yet that they are not the lead character in any of the scenes? The lead in their lives is always God. In fact, without Him, there would be no story. There are thousands upon thousands of men who have played minor league ball; Millions who have been successful businessmen. The news is filled daily with energetic movers and shakers in our culture. And the roster of reality TV stars grows almost daily. The unique difference in the Benham’s story, which warrants a book and this series, is simply one factor: the active presence of God.

The questions for this principle are: “In your life, is Jesus a ...

- crew member?
- supporting character?
- co-star?

Or the ...

- writer?
- director?
- producer?

History is not just chronology—knowing all the facts. History is His story—knowing why the facts are the facts. When we put this all together from beginning to end, we begin to see the most amazing picture of redemption by our Heavenly Father—the Author of history. And each person's role in His-story!

Christ taught the Benhams the importance of this principle in the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. —Matthew 6:9-10

Before we request anything from God, we are to pray for the ultimate end—"Your Kingdom come. Your will be done." His-story is all about His kingdom and His will coming to the earth.

Throughout the Bible, we see men and women of God who stepped into His story at various points in time and they fulfilled their role to the utmost. Some were elevated to the highest positions in the land, while others were tortured and beaten. We don't know how our role is going to end, but what we do know is that when we faithfully complete the work He's given us to do, as we learned in principle #1, we will fulfill our role in HIS-story!

We have an opportunity to make a difference, not in making ourselves famous or insuring our spot in history, but in re-drawing the legacy of our entire families, and possibly generations, simply by being obedient to who, what, where, and when God tells us.

It's not "I," but Christ. Our testimony is no longer about us, in talking about ourselves and how spiritual we are, but of God and His Kingdom coming to the earth.

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence. —1 Peter 3:15

The point of this verse? Always be ready to tell His-story to anyone, anywhere, anytime!

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Have you concerned yourself more with your story or God's story?
- Today, what do you see as your role in God's story?
- Are your prayers filled with concerns about your story or His-story?

WRAP-UP

Dying to our dreams is never easy, but it's the only way we will experience the abundant life of Christ while here on the earth. David had to die to his dream of being king in order to take on Goliath. The Benhams had to die to their dream of being reality TV stars in order to take on their "giant." And they could not have done it without these principles:

1—Defining success as obedience in the journey.

2—Focusing on the person of God over His purposes, plans, promises, and platforms for your life.

3—Holding what God gives you with an open hand.

4—Concerning yourself with reality (what God says) and not how you are perceived (what man says).

5—Fulfilling your role in His-story.

And we bring this all back to our opening Scripture of John 12:24, the great promise that, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."



LESSON #4

FROM A BASEBALL BAT TO A BROOMSTICK

*Your faithfulness today determines your fitfulness tomorrow.
Faith in the little proves you are fit for the big.*

BIBLE VERSE

He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much. - Luke 16:10

INTRODUCTION

A. W. Tozer once said, “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.” This can seem a bit harsh until we begin to have a greater, more mature understanding of the ways of God. Sometimes God allows things that hurt to come into our lives to prepare us for a greater work in His kingdom.

Chapter 8 in *Whatever the Cost* focuses on God stripping away David and Jason Benham’s identities as professional athletes and rebuilding them in order to produce much greater effectiveness for Him in their lives. As we learned in Session 2, the brothers had to discover that their identities were not to be found in what they did for a living, but in who they were as God’s children. And He loves you enough to do the exact same thing in your life.

The brothers share, “After baseball we took jobs we never imagined we’d have, doing things we never thought we’d do. We were in a brand-new stage of life and for the first time, we weren’t baseball players. It was a really strange time—we felt like fish out of water.”

Here’s David’s story of his transition from a baseball bat to a broomstick ...

“While it took Jason only a few weeks to pass through the fires of his identity crisis, it took me nearly a year. When Jason got out of baseball he landed a cool job working for a big company. I was in a dirty job working as a janitor at a tiny Christian school. I felt like I was in the belly of a whale. I was twenty-six and already had several of my own baseball cards and bats with my name on them. I remember walking down the hallway of the school while I thought back to some of my athletic accomplishments—written up in *Sports Illustrated*, all-state athlete in high school, a full scholarship to Liberty University, all-conference catcher, drafted three times to play pro baseball. ... ‘What’s that? A kid just threw up in the cafeteria? Okay, I’ll be right there.’

“In that year, I realized that God not only breaks us of obvious, moral sins, but He also breaks us of hidden, deeply-rooted sin—like our desire to wrap our identity around what we do, instead of who we are. What I did for a living had become the core of my identity. And that was idolatry—professional baseball had impeded God as number one in my life.

“One night as I stood at the back of a sports award ceremony at the school, wearing my janitor’s shirt, and sporting a couple of trash bags stuffed in my back pockets, leaning against my broomstick, I watched as all the proud parents congratulated their sons and daughters for their on-field accomplishments. That’s when it all came rushing back to me—this was where I had been just a few years before. Those parents had been my parents and those kids getting recognized onstage—that had been me. Less than eight years separated me from them. That night was like having open-heart surgery. I remembered all those banquets and the cheers of the crowds. I remembered signing my scholarship and signing autographs for fans. I remembered seeing my face on a baseball card and my name on a bat. I remembered speaking in front of crowds to tell them about Jesus and about what it was like to be a professional athlete. I had enjoyed all that and I missed the platform it gave me. When the platform of being a

Christian athlete was taken from me, everything came crashing down. My entire identity as a man was wrapped up in my pursuit of professional baseball. Although I had committed to use my talent as a tool for God's glory, when that was gone, I didn't know what to do. I was in the middle of a personal crisis and Jason was of little help to me. I had to get through this one on my own.

"Leaning on the broomstick that night, I prayed, 'God, I feel completely useless to You right now. I've served You faithfully in the past.' ... Then I became a little upset. ... 'I tried to be a faithful witness on the baseball field. I was vocal about my faith. I mentored other players. But in the end, I'm pushing a broom while they're swinging bats!' I duked it out with God several times after that until one day He dropped a haymaker on me with these words: 'Do you love Me? Do you love Me for who I am or just for My blessings?' My response was, 'Yes, Lord, I love You.' 'Then be faithful in the little things,' I sensed Him saying to my heart. 'Be faithful right where I put you. Stop worrying about where you thought I was going to get you. You've made that an idol in your life. Just be faithful to Me.' I had made an idol out of the promise, purpose, plan, and platform God had given me for my life. I had to get back to the Person of God—not just focus on His plan for my life.

"The Lord's words broke me. I asked Him to forgive me for idolatry. From that point on, I made the commitment to be faithful in the little things, no matter what the job was."

David's story is key to the 5 principles we will dive into today. This is a very crucial message for every Christian, regardless of what you do and where your time each day is spent.

PRINCIPLE #1 — It's about passion, not position.

When the fruit of the ministry is pouring out of you, then the fuel of the minister is inside of you. It doesn't matter where you're placed or how you get paid.

In 2003, David left his job as a janitor and joined his brother in starting a real estate business. By 2010, the brothers had one hundred franchises, nearly thirty full-time staff members, teams of contractors, and several other businesses that were getting off the ground. The main tool in their bag—entrepreneurship—had brought influence into the lives of hundreds of people. Most of their days were spent mentoring and training people for success—in business and life. As they led spiritually according to the principles of the Bible, they became much more productive professionally. But they still struggled with the thought that they had gone into business and not into full-time ministry, which was their ultimate desire.

They sensed God speak to their hearts, saying, "Whoever told you that you weren't in full-time ministry? You've been in ministry all this time. Whether swinging a bat or sweeping a floor you're my minister right where you are!"

The Benham's shared: "We always had a heart to serve people in a vocational ministry, but we were

rerouted into business instead, so in our minds we weren't ministers—we were businessmen. But God was reminding us of our identities as His ministers right where He had placed us. All these years we had been leading our people spiritually—much like a pastor 'shepherds his flock'—and feeling guilty that we were building a business and not growing a ministry. We then discovered something very powerful: if the fruit of the ministry was pouring out of us, then the fuel of the minister was inside of us—it didn't matter where we were placed or how we got paid. We mistakenly thought that if we didn't work at a church or a Christian nonprofit—or held a job, such as me (David) being a janitor—then we weren't ministers. But that wasn't true. God began to show us that we were His ministers the moment we asked Christ into our hearts. And no matter where we were or how we got paid, we were to be on mission for God—for His glory and the good of others."

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us. —2 Corinthians 5:20

Point 1—God looks at the heart.

He weighs our motives. If our heart is to glorify God, then we are in ministry, whether we were closing real estate deals, mowing lawns, sweeping floors, babysitting kids, preaching sermons, or coaching a team. It isn't how we get paid or where we are placed that matters—it is who we are that makes all the difference.

Point 2—God gives us tools (talents) to be used to glorify Him and advance His kingdom.

Our talents are God-given and therefore are to be used for His glory and not our own. Our tools become toys when we seek to glorify ourselves.

Point 3—God intertwines our worship to Him with the needs of culture and the tools He's given us to meet those needs.

Dr. Tony Evans explains this concept: "A fundamental flaw that has characterized the followers of Jesus Christ is that we have separated our careers from our worship. Many of us have not seen the kingdom connection between the God we worship, the needs of our culture, and the skills He has given us that we may already be using in our jobs. I don't think it has occurred to many Christians that God has strategically positioned them [in their current vocation] to affect their culture for Him."

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Have you ever wanted to be in full-time ministry?
- Have you ever considered yourself in full-time ministry right now, even though you're not actively employed by a church or non-profit?
- Why would God want us all to be involved in His ministry?

PRINCIPLE #2 — Faithfulness is proven in the ordinary.

We've heard it said many times that God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. This is true. But God also uses extraordinary people to do very ordinary things. Faithfulness to God is tested in the fires of the ordinary.

We have all heard the phrase, "You have to pay your dues." This is actually a Biblical concept, except in God's Kingdom, "paying dues" is about preparation, not punishment or approval; it's about being tested. God's big assignments aren't just randomly handed out. Even a brief glance of Scripture proves this to be true.

David shares more about his bat to broomstick story ...

"Then came the fruits of repentance, the natural actions that were the results of my inner change. For me, I made the commitment to a laser-focused goal of bringing God glory as a janitor. It was as if God spoke directly to me and said, 'David, I want you to plunge these toilets the same way you used to take batting practice. Vacuum these floors with the same fervor you had signing autographs. And paint these walls in the same meticulous way you used to put on your uniform. Faithfulness is proved in the ordinary.'"

So, God uses extraordinary people to do very ordinary things. Faithfulness to God is tested in the fires of the ordinary.

The Benham's story is a powerful reminder that in God's economy, we are to do everything faithfully and with excellence—to do the ordinary things with extraordinary effort.

Oswald Chambers said it best, "There are times when there is no illumination and no thrill, but just the daily round, the common task. Routine is God's way of saving us between our times of inspiration. Do not expect God always to give you His thrilling minutes, but learn to live in the domain of drudgery by the power of God."

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are you doing an ordinary job in an extraordinary way?
- Are you willing to be faithful in very ordinary tasks, even when no one is watching?

PRINCIPLE #3—Duty is ours; results are God's.

U.S. president John Quincy Adams, once he finished his term, went back into Congress to work toward the abolishment of slavery. Every single bill he submitted along those lines got turned down—failure after failure. At the end of his life, he was asked whether he was discouraged by the fact he didn't see the end of slavery. He simply said, "Duty is mine. Results are God's." His job was to do what God told him to do and not be concerned with the results.

When the Benhams got fired from their HGTV show in 2014 they had a meeting with a Christian congressman who told them that they had lost the platform God had given them. He went on to say that if they would simply be less controversial and not talk about the hot topics, then they could possibly win their show back, thus achieving a greater platform.

The brothers responded to the well-meaning politician that they had a duty to represent the heart of God on anything that stood against the knowledge of God, and that they could not focus on the results of that action, otherwise they would run from the fight. It wasn't time for them to think strategically, but to think spiritually.

2 Corinthians 10:5 states, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

As we discussed in Session #3, being results-focused often causes us to think first strategically in our minds as opposed to spiritually in our hearts. When this happens we'll try and make the ends justify the means. But in God's economy, the opposite is true. The means justify the ends. God is more concerned about "how" we do something than He is with "what" we accomplish.

Ask yourself this question ... Am I more concerned about the results than I am about simply being faithful in my duty to honor God with my life?

This is certainly something we all struggle with, so be encouraged. Once you get your focus back on faithfulness to your duty, you will experience God's power in your life.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are you focused on duty or results?
- Are you focused on the means or the end?
- Have you focused on results to the point where you are no longer concerned with how you get there?

PRINCIPLE #4 — Wherever you are, make your spot sweet.

We've all heard the phrase "find your sweet spot." From baseball, the Benhams know a little something about this as in hitting a baseball on the sweet spot. Finding that perfect place between the bat and the ball usually ends up as an extra base hit or even a home run. The same is true in life—we all want to land in our sweet spot. This is where our greatest talent and greatest passion intersect. Find that place and you've found your sweet spot.

But most people never actually land on their sweet spot until they're at home in Heaven, so the Benhams found that a key to powerful living is to simply make your spot sweet—wherever you are. Be content with whatever God gives you and wherever He places you. The sweet spot then becomes more of a state of being than a destination to pursue.

Let's hear some more of David's story just before he became a janitor...

"Lori delivered our second son two days after 9/11. A lot of people were taking a sober look at life and what really mattered to them and I felt the Lord was moving me out of baseball. By January 2002, I called my agent and said I was thinking about letting the game go. He said, 'Listen, you've been to two Major League spring trainings and before you got injured, you were a developing prospect. So why don't we just put out feelers with another team?'

"A few days later, he called and told me of a minor league contract offer from the Colorado Rockies. I got off the phone and called Jason. When he answered my call, he said, 'I've got a great opportunity that can bring you and your family close to us.' (Jason had already moved to Charlotte by this time). I barely scratched out a living in the minors, so I needed a job if I was going to leave baseball. 'What is it?' I asked. 'Well, it's actually uh, um ... a janitorial job at a local Christian school.' I suddenly pictured myself in a pair of khakis with a huge key ring hanging off my pocket. I didn't have the slightest clue how to fix anything. I felt under-qualified and over-qualified all at the same time. I had a college education and was a pro athlete, yet I didn't even know how to plunge a toilet. So here I was—with two options in front of me: sign with the Rockies or be a janitor.

"For two days, my wife and I prayed about it and the most overwhelming peace came over me. Believe it

or not, I actually had the desire to be a janitor. I called Jason and told him I'd take the job. Next, I called my agent. 'What are you going to do?' he asked. 'I'm moving to Charlotte, North Carolina to be a janitor at a Christian school,' I said. Silence—nothing but crickets on the line. 'Are you serious?' he finally asked. 'Yes sir, 100 percent and ready to go clean toilets,' I responded. So I went from a baseball bat to a broomstick in just one phone call!"

Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. —Psalm 37:4

This simple little verse, which greatly encouraged David during this time, is often used in an immature context as some sort of magic genie promise from God. The truth of this verse, though, does not mean we get a red Porsche, if our hearts desire. It's not a blank check with God's signature attached. This verse means if we delight in the Lord—love what He loves—then our desires begin to reflect His desires. We start liking what He likes—and we like it! When this level of surrender occurs, we can then simply follow the desires of our hearts, because our desires will be properly aligned with God's desires.

We all love the verse Philippians 4:13—"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me,"—but we rarely stop to consider the context in which Paul was writing this. He was talking about how he had learned to be content with little or with much, with being hungry or being full—Paul had learned the secret of contentment. This, according to Paul, was his sweet spot. The good news is that contentment is something we can learn.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Is discontentment constantly at your door or are you making your spot sweet right where you are?

PRINCIPLE #5—Excellence is having the second-mile mindset.

One of David and Jason's dad's early mentors, Dr. Bill Gothard, explains the second-mile mindset this way:

"When Jesus gave the command to 'go the second mile,' he was referring to an old custom where Roman soldiers would force the Jews to carry their packs for them for one mile. The Jews hated this, of course, so when Jesus said 'carry it a second mile' it was completely counter to anything they had ever heard before. But there was a reason He gave this command.

Imagine the astonishment of the multitudes when Jesus said to go the second mile! Imagine also their inability to carry on much of a conversation during the first mile. The Roman soldier would probably regard his conscripted burden bearer as a mere servant and would expect him to be inwardly grumbling because of the task he was legally obligated to perform.

Then imagine the total change in attitude of the soldier, when at the end of the first mile, his servant would say, “I would like to carry your pack a second mile.” No longer would the Jew be viewed merely as a servant, but as a friend. The conversation would have a whole new basis for significance and would no doubt begin with this question: “Why are you doing this?” The Jewish man would then be able to explain the teaching he had learned from Jesus and because this had changed his life, the soldier would be open to hearing more.”

Over the years, the Benham’s built their business on the “second-mile mindset.” In their own words, “When you do more than what you’re paid to do and you do it with excellence, it literally blows peoples’ minds—and it’s really fun to watch! “

The brothers share more about their early days in business: “When we were just starting out, we didn’t have enough money coming in, so we took any odd job we could find. On one particular occasion a print-shop manager called and asked if we could help stack paper for a day. He said the job would take a solid eight hours for two guys and that he could pay us \$8 an hour. Done! We took the job and as we arrived the next morning, we observed three massive piles of 40 x 40 poster paper that needed to be stacked in triplicate into one pile. We surveyed the job, came up with a quick system on how to accomplish it, and four hours later, we were done.

“Now, we could have stopped there, sat in the break room until the end of the day, and collected our hard-earned pay, or we could actually do more than what we were paid to do. We noticed that the back of his shop was an absolute mess—there were boxes everywhere and everything was out of order. We then began a long and arduous process of cleaning the entire backend of the warehouse. Upon his arrival, he was greeted, not only with the printing paper done exactly as he had said, but he had a completely clean warehouse.

“He offered us full-time jobs right on the spot. We politely said, ‘No thank you,’ collected our \$64 each and went on our way. God showed us that day how the second-mile mindset opens the hearts of people in a way nothing else can. When you meet the need for which the boss is paying you, you may then have an open door to meet the need for which he’s not paying you. And oftentimes this will be a spiritual need he never even knew he had.”

We boiled down the second mile mindset into five easy-to-remember business principles. But, in reality, these are biblical principles for all of life. God doesn’t divide our lives into small segments in which some principles apply and others don’t. A true principle applies to every area of life. Here are five that the Benham’s developed early in their business career that reflect the second-mile mindset:

5 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR LIFE (AND BUSINESS)

1. Be faithful in little.
2. Be a fountain; not a drain.
3. Breathe life.
4. Be a producer; not a consumer.
5. Give more in value than you take in pay.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- In your job, do you work according to your ability or according to the pay?
- Do you make a habit of doing more than you're expected to do?
- Are you more of a consumer than a producer? If your answer is consumer, how can you change?

WRAP-UP

Whether you hold a baseball bat, a broomstick, a board budget, or a crying baby at home, our prayer today is that you might take a fresh look at your life, what you're doing, where you're headed, and hand it all over to God—every single aspect. God promises in Luke 16:10 that “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much.” Your faithfulness today will determine your fitfulness tomorrow, as you recognize:

1—It's about passion, not position; who you are and not what you do.

2—Faithfulness is proven in the ordinary.

3—Duty is ours; results are God's.

4—Your sweet spot is being content anywhere, everywhere you are.

5—The path to excellence is paved with the second-mile mindset.



LESSON #5

COUNTER-CULTURAL CHURCH

*If church is a destination, then going to church is paramount,
but if Church is a body, then being the Church is paramount.*

BIBLE VERSE

Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. —Matthew 16:18

INTRODUCTION

In their book, *Whatever The Cost*, David and Jason Benham share (as previously discussed in Session 2): “The most important lesson our dad taught us was how to turn our theology into our biography: he showed us how to take what we believed and live it out every day. He taught us to be the Church and not just go to church. This meant that whatever God was doing in our hearts needed to show up in our actions. The Church, according to Dad, was not a building, but a body. And as the body of Christ, we needed to get out and be involved in our city, right where people live.”

In our first lesson we discussed how to be victorious in the spiritual battle we all face. In sessions 2, 3, and 4, we talked about the type of people we can be as we apply Biblical principles to our lives. Now we'll turn our focus toward how we are to function as the Church—the unified Body of Christ—to impact culture with the power of God's kingdom, which can be viewed as counter-cultural in today's current Christian environment.

Let's take a look at some foundational principles the Benham's teach on how to be a counter-cultural Church:

Principle #1 — In God's Kingdom, no division exists between the sacred and secular.

The Benham brothers had to make a decision years ago—live for the applause of Heaven or strive for the recognition of men. They chose God, but this decision didn't put them in isolation from the world, but rather tossed them into the middle of it. They rejected the false notion that the sacred and the secular are two independent realms to keep separated from each other. Rather, they have decided to verbally and visibly demonstrate that God is the ruler over all of life.

Here's a simple question—is God sovereign over all things or not? Scripture makes His sovereignty clear, but if He truly is, then we can safely say that all things are then sacred. In other words, everything is under God's sovereign rule. “The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains” Psalm 24:1. This includes not only every area of our personal lives, but also the structures of society—government, marketplace, education, arts, media, etc. (We also call these the gates of a nation or spheres of cultural influence.)

As Glenn Martin said in his book, *Prevailing Worldviews*, “God, who is over all of life, is the author and creator of all institutions, church and state...Having been created by God for different purposes and having separate functions.”

If all things were created by God, the question then becomes, are we in a right relationship with God and are the structures of society—or spheres of culture—in right relationship with Him as well? This is where the Church comes in, because we have the “mind of Christ.”

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.
—1 Corinthians 2:16

The Church knows God's design for all aspects of life (marriage, sexuality, government, business, etc.) and has the answers to the problems of the world today. And His answers bring life! As God's representatives on the earth, it's our responsibility to bring His rule (order) to every institution on the earth.

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan.
—Proverbs 29:2

Here's the problem: As we learned in Session #1, the powers of darkness want authority at the gates of the nation, so there is always a battle for control. God wants light and life, while Satan wants darkness and death. And the way darkness reigns is when the light refuses to shine, or shines only in certain places, avoiding others.

David and Jason believe it's time for Christians to shatter the false dichotomy of sacred and secular and start occupying the earth—every part of it—until the return of our King.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- How about you? Do you separate the sacred from the secular?
- How would erasing this line affect your life? Work? Church? Community?

PRINCIPLE #2 —The Church must go to the gates.

In our focus Scripture, Jesus told us the gates of Hell would not overpower His Church. To understand this verse, we must know what “gates” were in Jesus’ time.

A city's gates were the epicenters of activity and influence—they were a combination of city hall, community center, marketplace, and more. We still have city gates today, but they are no longer entry points; they are spheres of cultural influence. These gates become “gates of Hell” when Satan takes authority there.

The only way the gates of Hell can prevail against the Church is if one of two things happen ...

1—The Church abandons the gates.

2—The Church doesn't use the right key to open the gates.

The Church's mission is to go to the gates of Hell and use the proper kingdom keys (Biblical truths) to

open the gates wide, so our great King can rule there. And wherever He rules, life and freedom are the result. Christ's life, flowing in a believer, brings internal restraint, which yields external freedom. This is the foundational building block that any nation seeking freedom must have, yet in America we've deviated from this path. It's time for the Church to return to the gates and use the keys of the kingdom to open them up once again.

Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in!
—Psalm 24:7

The context in which Jesus first mentioned the word “church” and talked about the gates of Hell is found in Matthew 16. He and his disciples were in a small town called Caesarea Phillipi, a Roman city, where they worshipped false gods by sacrificing their children and engaging in sexual perversion in the rock cliffs. Jesus led His disciples on a twenty-five mile trip to this city, which was considered in those days the gates of Hell. And the two practices taking place at these gates were sexual perversion and child sacrifice. Two of the very activities taking place today in America. This is the very place Christ taught His disciples the valuable lesson of where the Church was supposed to “be” the Church—at the gates of Hell.

So when does a gate become a gate of Hell? When Satan takes over a territory by ruling a person or place, builds a stronghold, and tells Christians to stay away and to keep silent. By this definition, can you name some gates of Hell in your community today?

But remember, if we bring Heaven's rule to Hell's gates, we will be attacked by the darkness. Satan does not want to give up authority. Yet it is there where Christ says His Church must go. The first mention of the word “church” out of Christ's mouth was when He was at such a gate.

So what do we do when we go to the gates? We use the proper keys that God's given us to open them. These Kingdom keys as Dr. Tony Evans calls them are Biblical truths applied to a life situation. Using the right key unlocks God's authority at the gate. We see this throughout Scripture in the life of Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and many others. And we see the same today in the Benham brothers' story of their business as they used Biblical truths to build their company, which unlocked God's authority through them in the gate of the marketplace.

Going to the gates and using the proper kingdom keys is a vital call to action for the Church today.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- What are some gates in your city where the “King of glory” needs to come in?
- What steps can you take to go to those gates and be a light for Jesus?

PRINCIPLE #3 — Our tool for diligence can also be a weapon for deliverance.

The weapons we are speaking of are spiritual by nature, used for a Heavenly battle. What's interesting is that the tools we use for work can also be used in a spiritual capacity to push back the darkness.

Each person has been given a divine skillset by God to build His kingdom in the unique way that God has designed each to work. We call these our tools.

Jesus came to earth and was a carpenter before He became a traveling minister. The God of the Universe chose the workplace as the training ground for His only Son. This should tell us something. The lessons we learn and the skills we acquire by being in the workplace are often what God uses as tools and as weapons.

In Joel 3:10, we see God preparing the Israelites for battle as He tells them to “beat your plowshares into swords And your pruning hooks into spears.” The tools of their diligence would now be used as weapons for their deliverance.

100 years later in Micah 4:3, we see God preparing the Israelites for peace as he tells them to “hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks.” The weapons of their deliverance would now be used as tools for their diligence. What an amazing turn-around!

The Church has a spiritual battle to fight as long as evil exists. For many in the workplace, God will use your tools, not only for your own personal diligence, but also to push back the darkness at the gates of Hell.

A good example of this is found in the book of Judges in the life of Shamgar. There is only one verse written about him in the Bible, but it's packed with an incredible truth ...

After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel. —Judges 3:31

An oxgoad was a long pole used by farmers to prod sluggish oxen while plowing their fields. Because of the agricultural economy of Israel, Shamgar was more than likely a farmer who used an oxgoad as a tool for his work. What's interesting is that he took the same tool he used for work and used it as a weapon of war to defeat God's enemies! Of course, we know our enemy is Satan and not people. But we can do the same with our tools for work, just like Shamgar, and make them a weapon against evil in the hand of God.

For the Benham's, their trowel—or oxgoad—was a real estate business, specializing in foreclosed homes, that could be replicated in cities across America. With a clear vision, a detailed internal process, and a connected community of vendors, this has been their work—their tool—for many years.

But when they heard that their city had three functioning abortion clinics (a gate of Hell) they decided to “beat their plowshare into a sword” by replicating what they did in real estate to the mission field of the unborn. They simply created a streamlined approach to helping abortion-determined mothers choose life. They called it Cities4Life and have seen over 2,100 babies saved and families restored to date (2014). This has been done by simply using the tool of their trade as a weapon of war to push back the darkness and bring Life to those that need it most.

But before using their trowel as a sword, the brothers had to first identify where the exposed places in their city were—the places where Satan robs, kills, and destroys (John 10:10). They realized that this place was their local abortion clinics. The prophet Isaiah convicted them with his words:

So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. —Isaiah 1:15

They realized that God will not listen to our prayers or pay attention to our solemn assemblies, if we turn a blind eye to the shedding of innocent blood. So if they wanted go “prevail against the gates of Hell,” they needed to do something about the innocent blood of the unborn in their city.

God will do the same with us if we are simply faithful right where God has placed us and allow Him to use our skills ...

1—... as tools of diligence to extend His Kingdom.

2— ... as weapons of deliverance to defeat Satan’s kingdom.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- What are skills you have learned in your workplace that can be used to extend God’s kingdom?
- Consider your top five strengths. How can you use those to push back the darkness and shine the light of Christ?

PRINCIPLE #4 — Authority follows responsibility.

After Charlotte714, the Solemn Assembly the Benham’s organized on the night before the 2012 Democratic National Convention discussed in Session 2, David and Jason encouraged Christians that authority follows responsibility. When Christians are in their proper place of responsibility proclaiming Heaven’s rule to Hell’s gates, they bring God’s authority to the earth.

The brothers share: “The media was interested and intrigued in our rally. Fox and Friends was in Char-

lotte covering the Democratic convention and they called our company for a comment from us. Now, why would Fox News call the Benham Real Estate Group when they wanted a comment on what the evangelical community thinks about what happened at the DNC? I assure you, if they were looking for the most informed, scholarly opinion, they wouldn't have called us! And they certainly weren't looking for the coolest evangelical leaders or ones who had the largest churches. They were simply looking for Christians who were speaking about what was going on. Now, we know exactly how cowardly and without conviction we've been many times in our lives—more than we care to remember. But during Charlotte714, God graciously gave us the courage to stand in our place of responsibility as the salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16). We learned as young men that if you reject this responsibility, you lose your authority.”

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”

The way to receive authority is to stand in your proper place of responsibility. If you abandon your responsibility, you forfeit your authority.

Adam lost his authority in Genesis 3 when he watched passively as his wife, Eve, ate the forbidden fruit. Standing right next to her in silence, he forsook his responsibility to lead. By his silence, he lost his God-given authority and had to leave the garden.

The same scenario happens today when men don't stand in their place of responsibility. Consider fatherlessness in America—when men forsake their role in the home, they lose authority in both the home and the culture. Evil takes over in a nation when men refuse to stand in their God-given place in the home.

In the same way God gave Adam authority in the garden, He has granted the Church authority over the kingdom of darkness today. Yet in the same way Adam gave authority to Satan, the Church will do the same, if we sit passively by in silence. We must stand in our proper place of responsibility—first in our homes and then in our nation—so the authority of God might come that all may have life!

Authority follows responsibility in four major areas ...

1—Personal

2—Marriage

3—Workplace

4—Culture

PRINCIPLE #5— The Christian should breathe life into every situation.

Have you ever known someone who, when they walk into a room, seems to elevate the level of the activity in that room? Their presence is contagious. And to the contrary, have you known someone who always seems to bring a room down when they walk in? The Spirit of God on, and in, a person can be felt on a supernatural level to impact the “vibe” of any situation. This is what the Benhams call “breathing life.”

It’s one thing to be against darkness and death, but it’s another thing to breathe life. That’s what Jesus does—He defeats death and brings life everywhere He goes. In the Benhams’ words, “One of the core business principles we teach is to breathe life. We use this phrase because it should come as naturally to us as breathing—that wherever we go, we breathe the life of Jesus into our environment.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
— John 10:10

So when we breathe in the life of Jesus, we should breathe out that same life into those around us. Whether in the safety of our church buildings or at the gates of Hell, we are to breathe life everywhere we go.

“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” —Genesis 2:7

Thus says the Lord God, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.” —Ezekiel 37:9

The concept of us as Christ’s followers “breathing life” into people, places, and situations is a Biblical concept. We certainly know people who seem to breathe death wherever they go. Criticism, arrogance, pride, negativity, gossip, and bitterness are but a few signs of the death humans can bring. Through God’s Spirit, however, we can bring love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and gentleness to those around us.

Breathing life is not just something we do on a personal level, but also something we should do as a body of believers. When the Church is indeed “being” the Church, then Life comes to that city. Where death exists, Christ’s life may come!

There should be no pocket of death in a city where Christ’s life is not “breathed” by His Church. The same is true for Christians in business, government, entertainment, the arts, and so on—at every gate!

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Do you know someone who seems to bring life to you when you're around them?
- What ways can you breathe life in your family, co-workers, church, and city?
- What are ways we as the body of believers can actively breathe life into our city?

WRAP-UP

Whether you hold a baseball bat, a broomstick, a board budget, or a crying baby at home, our prayer today is that you might take a fresh look at your life, what you are doing, where you are headed, and hand it all over to God—every single aspect. God promises in Luke 16:10 that “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much.” Your faithfulness today will determine your fitfulness tomorrow, as you recognize:

1—It's about passion, not position; who you are and not what you do.

2—Faithfulness is proven in the ordinary.

3—Duty is ours; results are God's.

4—Your sweet spot is being content anywhere, everywhere you are.

5—The path to excellence is paved with the second-mile mindset.



LESSON #6

BATTLE READY

If you want to dance like David danced, you need to fight like David fought. Don't get your groove on until you get your gear on.

BIBLE VERSE

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock, Who trains my hands for war,
And my fingers for battle. —Psalm 144:1*

INTRODUCTION

On June 6, 1944, the world got a chance to see exactly what love looked like on a day famously known as D-Day. The battle of Omaha Beach took place during the Allied invasion of France in World War II. The beach was six miles wide with huge cliffs overlooking the ocean, which basically made an attack a suicide mission. The Americans had been given the great task of taking this front. The Germans used “dragon’s teeth” along the shore and heavily armed resistance nests atop the cliffs to build what was one of the most powerfully fortified positions in war history.

As our troops hit the beach that day, the German firepower was overwhelming. Because gusting winds and strong currents shifted many of our units off course, the troops who hit the beach had little to no cover. At that point they had to make a choice: save their own lives and retreat or lay down their lives and “run toward the bullets.” Such a choice is never easy, but it is the only one when we are motivated by love.

The question is—what does this love look like today? In the early Church, our brothers and sisters in Christ gave up everything they had for Jesus. As for their possessions, they shared freely with those in need. As for their work, they gave 100% for the glory of the Lord. Many of them laid down their lives that others might live. This is what love looked like then, and this is what it still looks like today. In Christ’s own words:

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” —John 15:13

With such a clear definition of love spelled out by Jesus, how does the Church live up to this today? Are we laying down our lives to be a blessing or are we protecting ourselves to get the blessing? Has “we” been replaced by “me” in the Church? Are we willing to give it all for Jesus whatever the cost? Christ showed us that love lays its life down for others, which means that there’s an enemy attacking and love is the answer! So we need to know a few simple truths to help us love the way that Christ loved us ...

BATTLE-READY TRUTH #1 — Know you are in a battle.

As we discussed in the first lesson, there are two kingdoms—the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness—and they are in conflict. They are enemies with no option for peace. This is a fight to the death. At the end of time, the kingdom of light will destroy the kingdom of darkness—totally and completely. But until then, the battle rages on.

Think about this—when Lucifer, who was an angel in Heaven, wanted to take God’s place, what happened? A great battle occurred in Heaven and God’s angels defeated Satan and his angels. So they were thrown out of Heaven. Where did they go? The earth. When God created man, where did He place him? The earth. Why would God place man in the same place where He cast the devil? Because

through “man” (Christ), God was going to destroy Satan once and for all.

When Jesus came to the earth and lived a sinless life, died on the cross, rose from the grave, and ascended to Heaven, He defeated Satan and his kingdom of darkness. Notice we said defeated, because Satan has not yet been destroyed—that will happen at the end of time. But until then, what do you think he is doing? Waging war against those who profess Jesus Christ.

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. —Revelation 12:17

If we don’t fully understand that we are in a spiritual battle, then we won’t be ready when the battle comes our way. Listen to how The Message Bible tells us to prepare and what to expect ...

God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we’ll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. —Ephesians 6:12 MSG

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Could this teaching explain some of the things that have happened to you since becoming a Christian?
- Have you ever considered that you were made to fight the spiritual battle?
- How might this understanding affect the way you live your life?

BATTLE-READY TRUTH #2 — Know your enemy.

We are not fighting against people, but against the forces of darkness.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. —Ephesians 6:12

For far too many decades, the Church has bought into the lie that we should fight against people—inside or outside the Church, anyone who ruffles our religious feathers. This plan of action clearly has not worked and has left many bruised and broken from in-fighting—those for whom Christ died.

In the garden on the night He was arrested, Peter fought flesh by grabbing the wrong weapon. He mis-

took the moment for a physical fight and proceeded to cut off the high priest servant's ear with a sword. Yet Jesus rebuked him, then healed the man, showing this was a spiritual battle, not physical. In the midst of a chaotic and violent moment, Christ transformed the event into a beautiful picture of grace and love. Wow!

So why did Peter grab the wrong weapon and fight the wrong way? One thing we know for sure from the story was that he was not keeping watch as Christ commanded him.

Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” —Matthew 26:41

Unfortunately, Peter fell asleep, so when he was awakened and startled, he picked up the wrong weapon. We see why it is so vital for us to keep watch today. “Looking and listening for God in all things,” we must be awake while waiting on Him. If you are properly keeping watch then ...

1—You're not surprised when God shows up.

2—You're not surprised when the enemy shows up.

But if you're not keeping watch, then you will:

1—Miss God when He shows up.

2—Grab the wrong weapon when the devil shows up.

With a quick glance at today's news, for those who are keeping watch, we see that Satan is building fortresses and taking dominion in nearly every area of culture. Just look at the ungodly ideas that have taken root in our government, our schools, media, and in the entertainment world. This age-old battle rages for the hearts and minds of people, as well as for positions of authority over nations. Satan seeks to dominate us individually, as well as collectively, as a nation. But we, the Church, are the only ones with the proper weapons to defeat this enemy.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. —2 Corinthians 10:4-5

This passage uses the phrase, “destruction of fortresses.” A fortress is built when a territory is conquered. This means an enemy has taken authority. In the Benham's story with HGTV, the reality of this truth was shown in a painful way, as their Biblical values were trampled in the media. So the question for them was—what were they supposed to do about it?

Armed with a fresh understanding of 2 Corinthians 10, they knew what to do—destroy Satan's fortress with the truth of God's Word, while loving the people held captive under his authority.

Their message was very simple, they said: “Jesus loves all people (physical), but He does not love all ideas (spiritual). We went into a spiritual battle as we stood on the truth of God’s Word, all the while feeling love and compassion for those who differed from us in their beliefs. This is how love led the way for us. We didn’t try to balance truth and love—we simply lifted up the name of Jesus, because He is the perfect embodiment of both truth and love.

Fortunately for David and Jason, they had the example of what “not” to do by how Peter responded when the fight came to his door. He fought in the physical when he should have been fighting in the spiritual. And although there are times when physical war is necessary because of false ideologies, today America is in a spiritual battle over the heart and soul of the nation. Therefore, we must love the people who disagree with us, but destroy the ideas that hold them captive.

But we always must remember that how we see the battle determines how we’ll fight. Don’t grab the wrong weapon like Peter. Fight only with the love of Christ.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Do you see the cultural battle of today as a spiritual fight? If so, how can you join it?
- Are you actively looking and listening for God in all things?
- Can you think of a time you reached for the wrong weapon?

BATTLE-READY TRUTH #3 – Know the battlefields.

Satan is attacking on three battlefields: personal (individual), corporate (the Church), and kingdom (nation). And in each of these battlefields, his tactic is to distract, deceive, and divide us away from our responsibility as Christians to “lay our lives down for our friends.” Let’s start by defining the three battlefields, then in the next section, we’ll talk about Satan’s strategy in each one. These are all kingdom battles, but they are broken into these three categories for simplicity.

1—The Personal Battle

This is the individual battle we fight every day against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have to slay the demons within before we can slay the dragon without.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. —1 John 2:16

We must die to ourselves (flesh) daily, so that we may live powerfully for God on the other two battlefields. Yet Satan wants us to fail here.

- He [distracts](#) us with all the stuff of the world (fame, fortune, sex, power, etc.).
- He [deceives](#) us by convincing these are worth living for and pursuing.
- He seeks to [divide](#) us away from our true identity in Christ, rendering us useless.

But we have the power of the Holy Spirit! We just need to tap in. Jesus went into the desert “full” of the Holy Spirit and came out in the “power” of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1-14) by defeating Satan’s personal attacks on Him. Jesus combatted the lies and temptations of the devil with the truth of God’s Word. We can experience this same power on a daily basis as we read the Bible, seek God’s face, and remain victorious over temptation in the personal battlefield.

2—The Corporate Battle

This is the battle against the Church body.

And upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. —Matthew 16:18-19

While the personal battle is against individuals, the corporate battle is against the Church—the community of believers who make up the body of Christ. We were not meant to fight alone. The gates of Hell will not prevail against the Church. This is why Satan hates the body of Christ. It is in community with all believers that we fight together against Satan’s attacks. The Church is the only body that has the supernatural authority to defeat him on the earth. The legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government aren’t strong enough, neither are conservative policies. Only God’s true Church empowered by Christ with one vision and one mission is enough to defeat Satan’s attacks.

Without unity in the Body of Christ, the battle will rage inside the Church instead of the Church fighting outside as a united army. Unity is a gift given by God to those filled with one vision and one mission—to lift up the name of Jesus.

The glory which you have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one just as We are one; I in them and You in Me that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them even as You have loved Me. —John 17:22-23

3—The Kingdom Battle

This is the battle for the heart and soul of the nation.

Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people. —Proverbs 14:34

The kingdom battle is the fight that will ensue when we seek to advance the comprehensive rule of God in every sphere of life, including government, media, religion, family, entertainment, the marketplace, education, and the arts. The way you know it's a kingdom battle is when you see God being systematically removed and replaced in these areas. Wherever Satan is gaining authority and setting up fortresses, he threatens the Church to stay out! The Church has, for the most part, neglected the kingdom battlefield over the past several decades, which is why Satan has achieved so much authority in the gates of our culture today.

The bottom line is that Satan wants us stuck in the first two battlefields. If he can defeat us in the personal battle and create disunity in the corporate battle, then we can't fight him in the kingdom battle. We'll be useless in occupying until Christ's return.

Here's the key—the more victorious we are in the personal battle and the more united we are in the corporate battle, the more powerful we are to fight the kingdom battle.

Many of the sermons preached today deal only with the first two battlefields, personal and corporate, while many of the sermons in the 1700s—the years leading up to American independence—included kingdom, while dealing with all three equally. This is what God's leaders had to do to build a nation that has been a safe haven and a launching pad for the gospel for more than two centuries.

When the Church unites and fights the kingdom battle, Satan loses authority every time, because Light always overcomes the darkness! When you open a closet door, does the darkness come out and fill the room? No! Quite the opposite. The light invades the darkness and overpowers. The New Living Translation states John 1:5 like this ...

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.”

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Are you living victoriously in the personal battle? If not, what steps will you take to gain victory there?
- Do you believe the Church has a responsibility to engage in kingdom battles for the culture with the Gospel of Christ?

BATTLE-READY TRUTH #4 – Know the enemy’s strategy.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. —2 Timothy 1:7

Throughout our journey we’ve learned some of the tactics that Satan uses for stealing our power and leaving us useless on these three battlefields. We’ve seen him use two weapons of choice time and time again. He wants to scare us away or lure us away from the fight. These are ditches on each side of the narrow road to victory in Jesus.

Point 1—Satan tries to scare us away from the fight.

He threatens us with fear and intimidation. That is exactly why the Scripture tells us over and over again “do not fear” and “do not be afraid.” Satan wants us to live in constant fear, but God wants us to take courage in Him and face our fears. When we face it, God will fight it. If Satan can’t scare you into silence, then he’ll step up his efforts.

The Benham’s share: “This is what happened to us. We first heard his threats for us to shut up or else. But when that didn’t work, he went after our reputations and tried to make us look like fools. That’s also a scary thing because no Christian wants the “anti-” label—especially these days. To use a baseball analogy here, after going through this situation, we learned that the external blessings we receive from God are just the minor leagues. The big leagues of blessing come when we have the honor of being ridiculed and mistreated for His name’s sake (Matthew 5:11–12). Jesus says that when we are persecuted for being a Christian, we are blessed and should rejoice. We should not fear persecution—we should face it and rejoice, because we know the greatest blessings come on the other side of our greatest fears. When we learn to stand in the face of those fears, we will live powerfully for Jesus. The moment we comprehended this truth it was as if God said to us, ‘Welcome to the big leagues, boys!’”

Point 2—Satan wants to lure us away from the fight.

If he can’t scare us away, then he’ll try to lure us away with blessings. We call these our dreams: the purposes, promises, and platforms God gives to us. Our dreams could be a job, education, a ministry, anything we feel called to—all of these are good things, but when they become our focus, they become idols. An idol can be anything that impedes or impairs God’s rightful place in our lives. The apostle John knew how tempting it would be to replace God when he warned us, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

But when we face our fears and die to our dreams, we will live powerfully. Note that we didn’t say, “we must live powerfully.” We said, “we will live powerfully.” Living powerfully comes from being filled with the Spirit, as we face our fears and die to our dreams. This creates a whatever-the-cost mind-set and powerful living is the natural result.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- How is the enemy trying to scare you right now?
- How is he trying to lure you these days?
- Have you experienced fear when thinking about speaking up for your beliefs? What steps will you take to overcome it?
- Have you pursued your dreams more than you've pursued your relationship with the Lord? How can you turn that around?

BATTLE-READY TRUTH #5 – Know the enemy's weapons.

As briefly discussed in principle 1 (Personal battle), Satan attempts to distract, deceive, and divide us on all three battlefields. These are three of his most effective weapons today.

- [Distraction](#) is designed to get your eyes off Jesus.
- [Deception](#) is a misleading from, or a misinterpretation, of the truth.
- [Division](#) is a dismantling of unity.

Satan distracts us with all the stuff of the world (fame, fortune, sex, power, and on). He deceives us that these are worth living for and going after. And he seeks to divide us away from our true identity in Christ, rendering us useless.

Corporately, Satan distracts us with our own plans, platforms, and programs in local churches instead of fighting God's battles in culture as the collective Church. He deceives us to believe we are not truly in a battle and that we aren't a fighting bride. And he divides us away from our responsibility as salt and light in culture (Matthew 5:13–16), which causes us to lose Christ's authority at the gates of our nation and remain divided in our own ranks. Therefore, we must keep watch!

... be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith. —1 Peter 5:8-9

As we keep watch on these battlefields, looking and listening for God in all things, we must recognize our enemy's weapons, so we won't be caught off guard when Satan shows up! And we won't grab the wrong weapon.

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ...

- Have you been distracted in your own personal life? In what ways?
- Have you been using Scripture to counteract the deceptions Satan puts into your mind?
- Are you living as a “lone ranger,” or are you actively involved in a faith community to keep you accountable?

WRAP-UP

If we want to dance like David danced in 2 Samuel 6, then we need to fight like David fought in 1 Samuel 17, just like our troops did when they stormed the beaches of Normandy. Why? Because love is willing to run toward the bullets, toward the giant. We too can run toward the spiritual battle that's taking place in our culture today as we ...

1—Recognize that we're in a battle.

2—Keep watch for the enemy.

3—Understand the three battlefields.

4—Discern the enemy's strategies.

5—Identify the enemy's weapons.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. —Ephesians 6:13

When our Lord walked the earth, He taught us to pray...“For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (Matthew 6:13). There is a reason these three things are placed in that specific order. When our hearts and minds are on God's kingdom, He uses our hands and feet to work powerfully in the earth, which brings His name glory!

Each battlefield needs men and women who are willing to face their fears, die to their dreams, and live powerfully for Jesus whatever the cost. When we do this, God's authority—His dominion—steps onto the field of battle and defeats Satan every time. When God put Adam on the earth, He told him to take dominion of the garden, but he couldn't do it without a fight. He lost dominion because of his silence. So the question is, in what garden has God placed you? Where has God given you dominion? Fight God's battles; don't keep quiet!

In your personal life, make Jesus your Lord—let Him have total control.

In your family, be the leader God has called you to be.

In the Church, recognize that you weren't meant to fight alone and unite with others to overcome Satan.

In your city and nation, go to the gates and bring God's kingdom there—in the unique way He's created you.

God has destined us to live powerful lives. Our Heavenly Father stands ready to embrace us when we cross the finish line. But until then we must fight—together!
Fight for our faith.

Fight for our families.

Fight for our city.

Fight for our nation.

Fight for our world!

And if we go down, we will go down standing up in the name of Jesus, whatever the cost!