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Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your provision. Thank You that You take care of us. Thank You that when we seek to serve You, that You multiply our efforts. That You get us over the obstacles that appear to be on our path, that we couldn't overcome ourselves. And now, God, I ask that as I share this message that You've placed on my heart, that You will guide my words to say just the right thing and help my brothers and sisters here to hear what it is that You're saying. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Well, Friday morning I was a little panicky, because Thursday's usually the day I nail what my sermon is going to be and Friday morning I didn't really have it. So I kind of had that panicky feeling. I had an idea, like maybe I'm going to speak from the book of Jude, and it just didn't feel right. Like, when I get the message God wants me to preach, it really hits home. And I just start taking notes and an hour flies by and I'm still scribbling notes and it just pours out on me and I didn't really have that. So I was a little worried. And Friday morning I went out and had a breakfast with Rodney from Connection Church. And as we were sitting there, he mentioned a statistic that he heard. And as soon as he said the statistic, God hit my heart and said, "Here's what I want you to speak about." The statistic, though, is that 90% of churches that close, they have to shut their doors, do so in counties that are growing in population. 90% of the churches that run out of members and close down, that happens in counties where there are more and more people in the area. And he told me that, and just the day before, Carl handed me the 2013 membership statistics for Carl Burns Church. So that kind of thing was a little bit fresh in my mind. And our, because we're gonna go over this at some point, one of our monthly meetings, and I'll just tell you right now, membership at the end of 2012 was 84. We gained zero members in 2013 and lost one to death. So at the end of 2013 we had 83 members. And when I was thinking about that and then when Rodney said that thing about churches having to close in counties where population is growing, as this area definitely is, God really impressed on my heart at that moment. We can no longer simply be catchers of men. We must be fishers of men. We must go out and be fishers of men. That phrase, "fishers of men" comes from Matthew 4.19, when Jesus is calling his disciples he goes to these fishermen and he says, "If you follow me, I will make you fishers of men, rather than of fish." It used to be that in this country there was this great psychological urge among the people to go to church. Sunday morning is church time. You go to church. You don't skip church. And so we had this big crowd of people that would just they would go to this church and they would see if they liked it and if not they would go to this church and they'd keep going until they found one that suited them. And a church's job was not so much to go catch them and bring them in it was just to retain them. They had enough people coming through that all you really had to do was retain. It would be like if you went out in a boat into a lake where all the fish were constantly jumping and all you had to really do was making sure that the ones that landed in your boat stayed in your boat. And if that's the kind of fish that you have in your lake then that's a perfectly valid method. But nowadays the mindset of our culture has changed. If I were to tell you that we're moving church to Saturday night instead of Sunday morning, some of you couldn't handle that. Some of you would just fry your brains because Sunday morning is church time. I admit I have that feeling too. And you just don't skip it. You have to be there. The people out there don't have that feeling. They don't have that inclination. To them Sunday morning is their day to sleep in. They spent all day Saturday getting out there and having fun and doing stuff. And Sunday morning they got a rest because they're going back to work Monday. They don't have that urge or that inclination to come to church. And not only do they not have this need for church but they also, there's a lot of distrust towards church. A lot of them grew up in families where the parents complained about church or where the parents got hurt and the kids saw that. And when they grew up they were like, "I don't want to be a part of that. I remember the mess that that brought to my family." And so not only do they not feel the need, they're a little opposed. And so, and I was thinking about this and I thought you know, this situation that we're beginning to experience is a lot more like what Jesus was facing when he started his ministry. He didn't have a bunch of people looking for Christianity, looking for church. He had people who knew nothing about church and Christianity and wanted nothing to do with it. And so what was his solution? He went out and he hung out with sinners. He ate with tax collectors and prostitutes and the untouchables. He didn't find, he didn't go to the Mount where the Sermon on the Mount was and just sit down and wait for people to come listen to his Sermon. He went out first and started getting among the people and developed this reputation that made people interested in him and then they came in. And that's what I feel like God is saying the we need to do more of. It's not going out and handing out tracts door to door. It's not giving people the talk. Have you given your life to Jesus? Is Jesus your Lord? It's not even inviting people to a Bible study. In our minds Bible studies are casual times but to the people out there, that's too big of a hurdle. You know, I play games, board games and stuff with some of the kids and I know a couple of their friends who wouldn't come simply because this is the building we played at. They said, "Oh, if you're playing board games at the library I'll come but I won't go to that church." And sometimes that was the kids' decision and sometimes it was their parents' decision. But there's this mental hurdle, and I'll give you an analogy, if you're having a hard time wrapping your head around this. But some of you have been faced with this sudden boom in rising technology trends. Computers and smartphones and internet and Twitter and Facebook and all that stuff. And when you first were presented with that and your kids and grandkids are telling you to come use this, come do this stuff, and you're like, "Uh-uh, no, no, not me." Or they made you use a computer at work for the first time. And you're like, "Mm, nope, nope, nope, nope." And it was just, there was this mental hurdle and you're just like, "I can't handle that. I can't do that." That's the same mental hurdle that people have with church. And I know that to us church feels like family and it feels like a safe place. And it's the place you just want to be Sunday morning but not to them. To them it is this thing that you're like, "No, I just can't do that. I don't want that." So we have to go to them and not with a handful of tracks and not with a bunch of Christian lingo like sin and salvation and damnation and sanctification and whatever other Asians. The way to reach people is to just get into their lives and start showing love. Get in front of them where they can see you. They can't see you in here. Get in front of them and start showing love. Maybe you are showing love to them. Or maybe you're showing love to someone else in this world but it's on display for them to see. And as you love and serve and show God's heart to the world, that's when they will invite you to tell them more about what it is you're doing. Why are you doing this? What's your reason? And that's the paradox. Instead of the old way is we invite them. Come to church with me. They don't want that anymore. That church is a hurdle. We can't invite them anymore. Now instead they invite us. They invite us to share with them. But the only way they're going to do that is if they see you have something worth sharing. If they see you have something in your life that they want. And so we have to get out there and get in front of them and demonstrate what we have. It may mean if you spend so much time on Bible studies and committees and stuff that you just don't have time to go hang out at a bar or a bowling alley then your Christian stuff has gotten into the way of being able to go. Jesus ate and hung out with sinners. And let me tell you there are sinners at bars and bowling alleys. And if Jesus had to start his ministry in this day and age, that's where he would go. He wouldn't spend all his time in Christian activities. Not that those are bad. They're good and they're healthy for us. But if it's 100% of what you're doing then you're not able to carry out what God has called us to. There is a kind of Christian who won't do well with this model. And that person is the hypocrite. The Pharisee. Because the hypocrite, this is kind of what we talked about last week. The hypocrite is all about show. It's all about seeing a certain peer group, which in this case is us. And the reason that they do their Christian activities is to impress us and they don't care about the lost. And they know that it's a lot of work to love and care about the lost and they don't want anything to do with that. And I understand. It's uncomfortable to love and get involved in people's messy, hurting lives. And sometimes it's easier just to put on the show but at the end of the day you'll accomplish nothing that way. You do have to go out and get involved in the messy lives. This culture out here is very quick to spot hypocrisy. And sadly in churches today there's a lot of hypocrisy. There's a lot of people who talk a good game. Talk a good Christian game. But will not come and sit with them and just hang out with their friends, their sinners. And they say hypocrite. There's a method that a lot of successful churches today have been using and it's very simple and I'm going to explain it to you. You can think about it and pray about it and just decide what you want to do with it. But step one is you just go out and make friends. You just get around people and you show them love and you don't preach you don't invite them to church. You just get out and be a loving Christian looking person out there. You just love people. And then after there's a relationship that begins to be established then you invite them along as you go out and you do some good thing. It's not a Christian thing. You don't say hey you want to help me pass out tracks. You say hey we're going to go serve at a soup kitchen and you want to come with us. Or we're going to go pick up leaves or shovel snow for shut-ins. And they're like, people, they say yeah I'm going to be a good person. I want to be a person that does good things. And so they'll say yeah I'll join you. And somewhere along the way they'll say why are you so interested in doing all these good things? And then you can say well because God loves me and God loves people and so I want to share that love just by serving people. Not a big sermon. Just expressing that God and His love is the reason we do what we do. And eventually when they see your lifestyle, when they hear about this, they'll ask and they'll want to know more. And eventually that hurdle about coming into maybe like a church service or Bible study will be low enough and we can say alright let's go sit at a coffee house and I'll give you all the details. Or come to this little Bible study and you can just sit in the back and you don't have to say anything. But those hurdles, those mental hurdles are so big. And you might think, well you might think because I had this thought, no people are hypocrites and know-it-alls and they'll say you've got your Jesus thing, I've got my thing, whatever floats your boat, just you know that's fine. You're a nice person, great. I'm a nice person. And you think that they're not going to care, but it's not true. Because when you live the principles of the Bible, when you dedicate to living in a godly fashion, God will bless you and you will prosper. He's promised it and it will happen. Living godly life will result in prosperity and blessing more so than the people of this world. And they will see it and they will see that you seem to always prosper. And then they'll see that when your life is chaotic, when chaos comes into your life, that you handle it with grace and peace and you don't fly to pieces. You don't rashly make bad choices. And they'll see that that's not in their life, that's not in their heart. And they'll say, how come? What is the difference? And the difference is that what we believe is true. And that it's not just a sales pitch. I mean, God is real in our lives. Some of you are saying, I can't do that. And to a point, I agree with you. Because you need two things in order for this to really work. And number one is you really do need a living, dynamic, Holy Spirit-filled walk with the Lord. You can't be a hypocritical Christian who puts on a good face here and then goes home and just lives like the world. You really have to walk your talk. And if you're not truly living out that life, then yeah, this isn't going to work for you. If you don't actually have what it is that you're trying to share with other people, you have nothing to share. The other thing that you need, the other thing that this won't work without, is other Christians. The other people in this room. None of us can do this thing on our own. None of us is completely perfect enough to solo the stuff I've been talking about here. You have strengths and you have weaknesses. And God has deliberately designed you with your strengths and your weaknesses. And he's also put people into this church who complement your weaknesses. And he wants us to work together. And if you think, oh, I would do that, but I can't because I have some whatever it's used, that's not an excuse to get out of it. Because God says, I've put people around you who can make up the difference. And when you get to heaven and God says, why didn't you do that, you can't say, because I didn't have the ability. He said, yeah, but that guy next to you had the ability. Why didn't you ask for his help? And I was too proud is not an excuse. You are not a whole body. You are a part of the body. And this fishing team is not a bunch of single people out in Canoe's fishing solo. We are like the deadliest catch fishing boat when there's a pilot and there's a guy that takes care of the engine and there's a guy that takes care of the nets and there's the guy that sorts the fish. And we have a part to play on a team. Some of you are extroverts, some of you are introverts. Some of you have lots of resources, some of you have lots of time. As I was talking with Rodney, he said, you know, when you're having a church cookout, someone has to man the grill so that the extroverts can be over there talking to the people. And if you say, you know, I have this heart, this passion to do a hog roast or whatever, but I can't do it all myself, then of course you can't. That's not God's intention. He wants us to do it as a team. Some of you have great ideas but no talents. Some of you have great talents but no ideas. We've got to get these people together. So as you think about this, as you think about your strengths and your weaknesses, look around here for the people who compliment you. If you have skills but a hard time putting those skills to use, find the people around here who always seem to be organized and be able to put stuff together. Finally, some of you might think that what we're talking about here sounds disingenuous and manipulative. You might think, so now all my friendships are really just, you know, got this Christian agenda and he's like, that's not cool, that's not nice. But as I thought about that argument, because I was accusing myself of it, as I thought about it, I was like, you know what, every single relationship we have has an agenda, has an ulterior motive. Nobody wakes up and says, you know, there's not enough friendships in the world. I'm going to establish a friendship just for the sake of raising the count of friendships in the world. When we make a friend, it's because that person has something that we want. Maybe they compliment us all the time, or maybe they encourage us to get into trouble, or, you know, but when we make friends and when we hang out with people, it's because we have a motive. We have a motive for every relationship. And what I'm saying to you today is make sharing Jesus, which is a good thing, I think we all agree, make sharing Jesus your motive for your relationships, rather than looking at people and saying, what can I get from that person? Instead saying, I'm going to make a relationship because of what I can give to that person. It's sad when you claim to love Jesus, but you don't obey him. And he says, go bring people into my family. And I know the verse in the Bible says, go make disciples of all nations, but that verse sometimes kind of freaks us out and frightens us because we think, oh, that means you have to get up here and grab a mic and start preaching. No, no. Jesus is just saying, bring people into the family. Make friends who eventually believe in me. Jesus says, it's sad when you say that he's wonderful when you're here at church and in private, but in public you just kind of disavow him and pretend like he's not that big a deal. It's sad when you say people need saving, but you don't do anything about it. There is a saying, okay, let me do it first, there's this group called the Moravians. Some of you probably heard of them. They were a huge push of missionaries. And it was a while ago, I don't remember how long ago, but I remember they were still sailing on ships. So it was before airplanes. The Moravians, huge missionary movement, and there was a saying that came out of that time. May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering. May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering. That stirs my heart. Because I love Jesus. And the suffering that he went through touches me really deeply. And I want to make sure that he receives everything that he suffered for. And if that means I have to get uncomfortable, that means I have to meet some screwed up people and spend time with them, then so be it. And you know, if we manage to bring everyone in Carmel to Christ, and they all just decide that they have another church they want to go to, and sadly we have to close our doors, I'll still be okay. Because the work will be getting done. And it's at the end of the day, it's not about these numbers, it's about the people in our community who are being saved. It's about fulfilling our commission and saving the lost. So as we have our time of open worship, I want you to think about where you can just start to get your foothold into the world outside of Bible studies and Christian circles. I know that personally I have basically outside of, at least in Carmel, I have no foothold outside of my Christian circles. Everything I do is with the youth or the Bible study or someone I know from here, and that for me has got to change. So as we have open worship, I want you to think about where you're going to get your foothold into this society, and be thinking about your weaknesses and who in here can compliment those weaknesses. Maybe you know someone in here who knits and you've got this great idea for going to the women's shelter and making baby booties for the babies at the women's shelter. So you grab that person and say let's do this together. Let's make a plan to go do this. Or maybe you see a bunch of kids who are always playing in some park somewhere without any adults around, unsupervised or whatever, and you say let's just go out some Saturday and bring frisbees and balls and spend time with them just to show that they're not ignored. You know those kids maybe run around laughing and playing, but they realize there's no adults around. I've personally been thinking I've got this huge stack of board games at home and we have sometimes church board game night and I play games with the youth group, but I'm thinking you know I need to go spend a Saturday over at the game store making friends with non-Christians and playing games with them and building relationships outside of these circles. So during this time, just begin to think where are you going to make your foothold and who are you going to bring along with you? Because the lamb who was slain is worthy of the reward of his suffering. Jesus is worth it. I hope you know him to that degree. I hope you've really met Jesus Christ and that you understand the fullness and the beauty and the wonder that we have. And what an amazing thing we have to share. And he loves the people in our community so much. He loves them so much that he sent Jesus to the cross for them. Don't worry about failure. Let God worry about that. You will succeed or fail based on his plan and he'll take care of it. Don't you worry. Just trust him and get out there and start loving the people that he loves. I'm going to go ahead and close in prayer and I'm also going to pray for our meal. And I'm also going to let you guys know that the Boy Scouts have set up a table to buy pancake breakfast tickets out there. So you can be here February 1st and enjoy some yummy pancakes. But we're going to pray for the food and then the worship team will have one. Do you have a closing song? Actually, I've run pretty late. We'll just pray and we'll be dismissed. Heavenly Father, wonderful, glorious God. We praise you and we thank you for all of the good things that you give us. We are humbled and amazed at how much love you have poured out on us. Can't even comprehend the extent of it. Please, as we go back into our lives, help us not forget the importance of what you did on the cross and what you did on the cross was not just for us. It was for every single person out there. Every person in every bar and every bowling alley, that's who Jesus died for. Help us to find ways to get into their lives. Help us to find the ways to reach those people. To not just catch but to be fishers of men. Give us inspiration. Help us to meet the other people in this church who we need to partner and get together with for encouragement and support. Help us to form the teams that we will rely upon to go out into this world to share this wonderful, beautiful, glorious thing that we have. Thank you for the food that we have today. Bless the hands that prepared it. Bless it to the nourishment of our bodies so that we are strong and able to go out and carry out this good and great, wonderful work. In Jesus' name, Amen.