

ELDERS

understanding their function in
Church Government

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Introduction

The nation is under attack by forces of evil which we cannot even imagine, but God has provided a place for peace and safety here in His church, His body, so we can be warriors for Him in prayer. Sometimes when I hear the news, I think, “Where is Samson? Where are David’s mighty men?” I’d like to throw a couple of swords around; it’s the testosterone thing. But the Lord was saying to me this morning, “You know what? The Samson’s and the mighty men are here, now, in this room.” The power of those men is right here. David’s mighty men, that power is right here. Because He is raising up men and women of prayer which are far more powerful than these crazy people in Iraq and Syria. As we sang worship songs this morning, I realized even there Jesus has not been forgotten. These servicemen that are sacrificing their lives are not for nothing. They actually know exactly what they are doing. Those that are fighting for the United States know exactly what they are doing. Navy Seals? Many of them are born-again Christians. They understand what is at stake. And what is at stake is the freedom we have right here. What is at stake is the safety that we have right here in America, in this church. It won’t be taken away from us. Even in the midst of the cruelty that these men face, they know that their Lord will not leave nor forsake them in the valley of the shadow of death. He is not the kind of shepherd who is going to run away as a hireling would in times of trouble.

Today we will continue with the teaching on church government. Let me review some of the things God has been doing among us from our beginning. I can remember when Dale Rumble would come and teach at the small group that met in a living room at a private home. There was only a handful of us there, fifteen sometimes less. Dale had the vision it wasn’t going to remain like that. There was something special God was doing in the Hudson Valley. We would listen to him preach the word of God. We just had a couple of guitar players and a trumpet but we knew how to worship God. The word of God was there, the worship was there and the koinonea in the Spirit was there, the fellowship in the Holy Spirit. Those ingredients are the makings of a church. We didn’t know much about church govern-

ment back there in 1969. I can remember when we were meeting, Dale wasn't ordained as an elder; we didn't know what elders even were. He was our teacher. At one point, we had some men come up from Philadelphia, John Poole and others. They began to teach us something about eldership, plurality, and began to give us a vision of what that was for. I can remember going to Dale and saying, "Well, Dale, what do you think? Do you think you are going to be an elder? Do you think God wants us to have elders?" A very typical Dale said, "Well I don't know. We'll have to pray about it." Of all the things that we should not have to pray about, I would have thought that was it! Being young and courageous and full of energy, I said, "No, this is the word of God. We should just do it!" Well it did come to pass but not on my time schedule and the elders that ended up being appointed were not necessarily the ones I would have picked. But God is in those things as we come together and devote ourselves to prayer, devote ourselves to fellowship, such things as government starts to form. Government only exists to oversee what God is doing. That's its purpose. It isn't there to give the five year plan, to somehow cook up something in a committee, somehow to discern what God is doing all by ourselves without God's input. But rather those in government along *with* the church are to oversee what *God* is doing in the church, trying to understand and discern what *GOD* is doing. It is easy to recognize what the enemy is about. It is something most of us can easily see and understand. The enemy is about lying (that's what he is doing), he is about division (that's what he is doing), the enemy is about bitterness (that's what he is doing). We see that easily. We say, "Aha, I see that, and that, and that." We seem to be aware of what the enemy is doing so clearly. However that is not our job; our job is to see what *God* is doing among us. When you raise your children, it is to see what God is doing in them, to encourage them. It is no different. If you don't even have a family, all you have are friends, you encourage and strengthen what God is doing in them.

What is a Church Leader?

Leadership is born just for that purpose to encourage and strengthen, that's all. And too, to ensure the safety of the church. We have to remember that in Isaiah 60 it says, "*The government is upon His shoulders.*" Again, *the government is upon His shoulders.* It is not upon the shoulders of the elders. It is not upon your shoulders. It is upon His shoulders because He is the Good Shepherd. The only time they use the term of "Senior Pastor" in the New Testament, is when they are referring to Jesus. He is the Senior Pastor! All the rest of us pastors are just underlings, bond-servants of the Lord, bond-slaves. Jim Garret uses the word DOULOS, bond-slaves to the

Lord. When we come to the Lord there is a freedom in everything we do in the Holy Spirit, but in another sense we are *not* free to do anything *we* want to do. We do things according to His will and His purpose, being led by the Holy Spirit, not by our own discernment but the discernment of the Holy Spirit within us. Therefore the government of God is on His shoulders and through the Holy Spirit. Never forget that. Never forget it. Remember the most important decision the church made in the early days was when Peter was so hungry he fell into a trance. The Holy Spirit gave him a dream. The early church didn't cook this up about having the Gentiles come into the church because they went to an elders' meeting and got some revelation. They didn't even get it from the prophetic brothers who could have prophesied it. The concept of the Gentile church came into being from nothing else than the Holy Spirit in a dream through Peter. The Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit.

So therefore we know that the Holy Spirit has called every one of us whether you are an elder, deacon, home group leader, a father, mother, or a friend, you are called to be servants to the Lord, no different. The call isn't any different just a different scope. That's all. There are even times when the Lord may give you a word for an elder. The Lord may give you prophetic insight to say to me "*You know, Peter, I've been watching you and I felt the Lord say this to me . . .*" I want you to be able to share that with me. Amen.

So the idea of the term "elders" that we use in this fellowship is also translated as "overseers," also called "bishop," all coming from one Greek word "presbuteros." Remember Jesus said not to call anyone Father or Teacher. Even though that may be your function in the body of Christ, the idea is that we don't go around using titles. I don't know of anyone who has ever called me "Elder Peter." Thank you. Or "Teacher Peter or Pastor Peter." None of those fit. When I go into a different venue and somebody asks me how I would like to be introduced. I have to think about it a while . . . I guess Pastor might be all right since they don't know much else. It can get pretty ridiculous. So then, by what should we be called?! We are called by the names given to us, our Christian names. Peter, call me that. That works.

Elders - Overseers

Today we are going to delve into what elders are and what they are not. Then at some future time, the last part of this teaching will be presented on the five-fold, ascension-gift ministries which God has given to us. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, as

given in Ephesians chapter four. But for today we will concentrate on the term “elders.”

Let’s put this into the setting of the New Testament where Jesus called His twelve disciples. In the Catholic church doctrine these disciples were the first “heads of state,” so to speak. They say these were the only apostles and prophets for all time. After they died there weren’t any more. That is called dispensational teaching. Dispensationalists believe that after the apostles died there was nothing else. The apostles and prophets set the canon and then they died. However, as soon as you eliminate any additional apostles and prophets from the mix of what God has given us in the full list of ascension gift ministries, the five-fold ministries, you are missing a function of the church. The apostolic function of the church is to see the church grow and prosper. It is for the concept, the idea of church life, and the growth of churches in different regions and places.

As for the prophetic ascension gift, without a prophet to speak into our lives personally, even through prophetic teachings and prayer, there is something drastically missing. For example, when the temple in the Old Testament was being rebuilt, as you remember the people got permission from the king to rebuild it and they started but when they got persecuted they started to give up, eventually abandoning the project. Then the Lord brought prophets into their midst and they began to prophesy and took the elders aside and said, “Listen, you cannot just sit here and do nothing! You are supposed to be building the temple!” And so through the prophetic ministries they were stimulated, encouraged and proceeded with the work the Lord had set before them.

That is the setting for the government that Jesus put into place when He was walking upon the earth. Those five ministries are all important and should be integrated as a part of the eldership and church government in the local church. It doesn’t always happen but it should be. We could ask where the apostles are in our midst? Where are the prophets? We do have those who prophesy. Isn’t that good? We do have those who are called apostolically to come into our midst and speak to us in that way. That’s a good thing. Some say doing that causes too much trouble; it’s not worth the risk. “What if it’s a false prophecy? What if the apostle gets it wrong? I don’t want to get hurt like that.” For safety reasons we can make walls which are arbitrary and against the Holy Spirit coming in to minister to us. Are we going to listen to someone whether he is called “apostle” or “prophet”? He may give a false prophecy or false direction? *It is still the church’s responsibility to discern what is right or wrong* according to the Holy Spirit. The Lord has never relinquished you from that responsibility. That is because one day you are going to have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ

and say, “Yes, I am responsible for the truth You have given to me. I am not going to throw it away or give it to another person.” That understanding may cost you. It may cost you dearly. It may hurt you and hurt you dearly but the life it brings is far worth it. That is what the Lord was saying, “I died for you on the Cross so that My joy will be made full. Not so you can dwell on the negative in the Middle East, but that you could see what God is doing. You are the Samson’s of today. You are David’s mighty men and women. You are awesome prayer warriors. Awesome.

Jesus, when He grew up historically, grew up in a small congregation of Jewish believers. They believed in Jehovah. Do you remember what was His custom? What did they say about the custom that Jesus had in the church that He used to go to? He read scripture. It says that He went down into Nazareth and He picked up the Torah and read the scriptures and said, “This day this prophesy is fulfilled upon My reading it.” Then He sat down *“as was His custom to read the scripture.”* Isn’t that awesome?

Almost everywhere else in the world, education and the ability to read was scarce. Today our custom among the American church is for people to be educated enough so everyone and anyone can read the bible. You can read the word for yourself and get a revelation. Jesus got a revelation from the Holy Spirit by Himself. That was customary. Therefore part of the environment Jesus embraced in church government was of this scenario. He didn’t say to change the custom of education for individuals or public reading of scriptures.

Sadly, we see that by the time the Middle Ages began two-hundred years later, there were no bibles around and no scriptures to be read. If there were they were kept under lock and key. Even those who were clergy were not allowed to read them. People were *killed* for reading any text of scripture. But as we look, we see that was not the environment Jesus was raised in, that was not what He was accustomed to and He did not correct this as a pattern for His church. Since He was correcting many other things at that time in the Jewish culture, we have to assume what He left intact was okay with Him. It was okay with Him that in the synagogues, where the Jews would come together for meetings, people could come and read scripture publically. People could come up front and share. They didn’t have to have permission. It was an open forum, almost “home group” in its style. You can get to do a lot of things in a home group setting where you don’t have to worry too much about people correcting you. Whereas if people correct you in church on Sunday, it’s a big deal. But in a home group, it’s no big deal. It has a more casual, freer atmosphere in which you can express your feelings. People have an exchange of life between them in a home group setting that’s really hard to do when we get together on Sunday morning.

That's one of the advantages of home group. And, that's the kind of place Jesus is coming from, almost like some modern day kibbutz where life is based on families rather than a large conglomerate.

Jesus' experience and the custom He was used to was not corrected. What He did confront was what was going on at the temple in Jerusalem, where the scribes and the pharisees were putting themselves aside from what God was doing among the people, because what God was doing among the people was ground-roots, Holy Spirit moving in their midst. So much so that when the people saw this "crazy guy" (John the Baptist) out in the dessert, next to a river, preaching and baptizing, they all flocked out to him because they all knew they had sinned! Who told them they had sinned? How did they know? Even the pharisees came out. They knew there was something drastically, terribly wrong with what was going around them. There was a movement of the Holy Spirit in that day, just like there has been among us today.

Well the Lord endured the cross so the church could be born. He did not do this instantaneously. He died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected that we might live in that resurrection life. He did that so He could send the Holy Spirit to come into our lives, individually and corporately as a church. At that point the church was born.

So, all is good; the church is doing well. They come and devote themselves to the apostle's teaching, to prayer. This is good. Wouldn't you love to have been there? "Wow. James is teaching today. Maybe it will be Peter or John. Drink it in." Awesome. Then this question of the converted Gentiles comes along. "Should we have Jewish customs for the Gentiles? Circumcision? Keeping of the Feasts? Should we; shouldn't we?" Division develops as there are different understandings and discernment. How did they come to grips with this? The apostolic brothers got together but the church understood, collectively, what was going on. This was different and God was birthing Gentiles into the church. When apostle Paul came to Jerusalem, they added their blessing to him because of how they saw the Holy Spirit working in Paul. They thought, "What is there to prevent this from happening? Is there anything wrong with this?" The answer was, "Nothing is wrong. This is why Jesus died so the Gentiles could be born into the church as well." Amen.

Why be an Elder?

Well to continue, the scripture is clear that you don't desire to be an "overseer" just because *someone told you* to do that. You, yourself have to want to do this. The scripture says that it is a good thing for someone to de-

sire to be an elder. It is a good thing. The tendency is for some to say, “If you want to be an elder, if you want to be a teacher, if you want to be any of these things, you are just self seeking and full of greed.” However the New Testament doesn’t teach us so. The scriptures say it is a good thing to desire to be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1). If that is the calling on your life and you have discerned that in the Holy Spirit, don’t throw it away but receive it. That is exactly what happened when Paul and Timothy went out along with the other apostolic brothers. They were really concerned that these groups of believers wouldn’t just be left out there for the wolves, for false doctrine to come in, for the enemy to come in to steal and destroy. The apostles saw that they needed church leadership and church government, so they could keep watch, so they could discern what God was doing, together with the whole church. That’s important, *together with the church*, not separate from but together with the church to understand what God was doing.

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, (What was lacking?) and appoint **elders** in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For an overseer must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, **a lover of what is good**, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9)*

Wow. Almost immediately every person who is called to be an elder realizes they don’t measure up! Not to the absolute of those scriptures. But there is a holding and an understanding that those scriptures are the base line, the plumb line that we are to be measured against. The basic idea behind these scriptures is interesting. It doesn’t say that those guys who are really talented and able to speak well, those guys who don’t get all flustered when something goes wrong, those guys who can play the guitar well, etc. It doesn’t say only those who are talented or anointed, but those who are called to oversee just need to have *character* in their lives to oversee, the character of Christ, the lover of what is good. The character of Christ is far more important than the anointing. That actually goes for all ministries. I would prefer someone with a guitar who doesn’t know how to play well over someone who is talented but his character is all wrong. If someone really wants to worship the Lord, they can use the most fragile voice and still bring us into a place of worship. Yes? Amen. Amen.

The anointing will come. It will because anointing isn’t born of the flesh, it is born in the Spirit. The Spirit then floods our soul and we go to the

heavenlies not because of a “ministry” but because the Holy Spirit Himself is among us. Thank You, Lord.

Another scripture about apostolic, New Testament ministries,

And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. (Paul is no longer to be with them.) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. (He has given them all he can give them. He has done what he could do. He’s saying, “I cannot do anything else for you. I’ve given you all the scriptures I know. I’ve shown you my heart which is for the Lord.”) For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Who else said that? Jesus said that He had not withheld anything that the Father had shown. Should we be any different to those that we love? True.) Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, . . . (Acts20:25)

Who made them overseers? Who made them elders? Who made them bishops? Who made them all of those things which we call church government leaders? Who made them that? The Holy Spirit. Was it any man? No. Was it Timothy or Paul? No. Was it the apostolic ministries? No. Was it the church itself? No. It was the Holy Spirit. Once you know that, it is hard to walk away. I can walk away from a man. I can walk away from ministry but I cannot walk away from the Holy Spirit.

There was one elders’ meeting I was in, more elders than we have now, and they were all getting on Dale’s case about something. I cannot even remember about what. Dale was “under the gun” and they just kept firing it at him. Criticize, criticize, criticize. Blah, blah, blah. Dale gets up from the scene and walks out of the room. I am devastated. I know what the scriptures say and I’m wondering what in the world is he doing?! He doesn’t have the right to walk away. He doesn’t have the freedom to do what he just did. So I got up and walked out into the hallway and said, “Dale, what are you doing?!” He said, “I cannot take it anymore. It’s too hard for me.” Have you ever been in that place? In your job, right! I went out to the hallway and said, “Dale, no. God has called you. God has called us to go back into that room. And if what you say is true and your heart is true, it will be made known. It will not retreat because the truth will *always* be made known.

Truth will never shrink back. Darkness cannot understand light and the light has an unbelievable effect on darkness. If this room were in total blackness, a candle would light up the whole room. If there was only one candle and darkness walks in, there is still a candle there. If the Holy Spirit

has made you an overseer, if the Holy Spirit has made each of us what we are called to be, don't shrink back from God's calling.

Paul's Final Advice and Warnings

This is what church government should do in a nut-shell.

. . . to shepherd (oversee) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Almost immediately Paul makes it known that it belongs to Jesus, the Lord. Shepherd the church of God which by the way doesn't belong to you; it belongs to God. The government is upon His shoulders.

Now Paul is warning them because of this,

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20:29)

We think that somehow if God and the Holy Spirit and all the worship and the bible are present we will be exempt from the "wolves." But we would be one-hundred percent wrong. There are going to be times when savage wolves, those who desire to destroy will come in. They may not even know themselves that they are what they are. But you by the Holy Spirit are required by the Holy Spirit to have the discernment to recognize these times. Paul said you should know. I am saying all this because there will be a time when this does happen.

*Also from **among yourselves** men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:29)*

Not sparing the flock. It is pretty rare actually but it does happen. Somebody comes into the church. It is pretty obvious when someone like that comes in. I remember once I was at a student prayer meeting down in New Paltz, New York. There was about thirty people there all worshipping the Lord. This guy comes in and sat down with his guitar. When we stopped our singing he said, "The Lord has called me as an apostle to you." Whoa! Immediately I stood up and said, "No, you are not." His reaction was instantaneous. He called me a few names and walked out. It was a wolf and if I had just sat there and let the wolf talk, who knows whom he would have led astray? Who knows whom he would have taken with him? Who knows what doubt would have come in? I didn't know but I was not willing to take the chance because it is not my church. It is His, the Lord's! That man could have hit me; who knows. In today's culture it could have been worse, perhaps a gun. But I don't have a choice I am a slave to God. I got up and did what I had to do.

More subtlety, Paul says, by the way,

Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:30)

Now I used to think “perverse things” could be easily discerned. But it means incorrect things, perverted from correctness. Someone could bring a very subtle doctrine that is off a little but dangerous all the same. It is our responsibility in home groups, our responsibility as friends, our responsibility as Christians to bring correction in the Holy Spirit to those who are perverted in their understanding of the scripture. Listen, Brad has come to me and said, “Listen, Peter, while you were preaching today, it wasn’t in the bible. Here’s the scripture that God gave me.” Others have too. This is good. We are responsible to bring the truth among us wherever it comes from because if we don’t, indeed this perverseness *will happen*, and, has happened even here. Just a slight perversion and a sheep is gone. Some are obvious but others not so much. So what is the responsibility of the overseers? It says,

Therefore watch, and remember that for three years (day and night) I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:31)

The Right Heart Attitude

So those who are called to be overseers of what God is doing often times find themselves in tears. Let me tell you of my experience as an elder. It’s been a wonderful time. There have been times when it has been so wonderful it far out shadowed any of the things the enemy was trying to do. Those times when koinonea is in the church, when the Spirit brings brotherly love. One of the things we rebuilt in our eldership here at the Fountain of Life is the idea that we are not to come together and just do “problem solving.” If we are just doing problem solving, we’ve missed the whole point of what we are coming together for. We are to be friends devoted to one another and happy to see each other! Devoted to one another in friendship and brotherly love. There was a time past when I didn’t even want to go to an elders’ meeting. I said, “Honey, I don’t want to go. It’s too painful. It’s too painful. Every time I go I end up getting lectured for an hour and a half. It’s too painful to go through.” The Lord told me, “That’s not what I want. That’s not what you come together for.” We had to rebuild, make what was right and take down what was wrong. Men and brothers of God, in home groups and every time we come together, we are not to do problem solving and find out through a committee structure or by our own intellect what to do. Rather we should seek the face of God, together. Church gov-

ernment is on His shoulders and our responsibility is to seek the face of God. We could say, “Such and such has happened. We need to respond, to act now.” No. We need to seek the face of God first and foremost. He may give us a response; He might not. Whether we respond or not is a response. Oftentimes, I don’t bring correction, because I see what is going on isn’t a sin leading to death, but is something that needs to be corrected by a home group or by a friend, not by an elder. You may wonder why later on when you see something you did was wrong and the elders still did nothing. Well, we probably didn’t miss it. Rather, we seek the face of God and ask whether this is something we should bring or not? That’s more important than any of the problem solving. In fact, if you do problem solving in the natural it is like witchcraft, you are trying to manipulate what God is doing and put things into a natural, human setting.

As an eldership, for instance, we may have our understanding of church discipline and how to deal with a conflict both shaken. Even when an eldership becomes as close as we can get, there are still disagreements. Our understanding of a doctrine doesn’t quite match. That is when we learn that our love for one another is far more important than these disagreements. The love that we have for the Lord overshadows it all! And so we are committed to each other. We cannot just walk out the door. You see if Bill and Paul (the other elders) don’t get it and I know that what I have is still true, my responsibility is to keep at it. I say, “You guys, I know you think I’m wrong, I’m crazy, but this is what I see!” And they have the same responsibility to me. In that sense, when I go to those elders’ meetings, I am more than happy to go. I cannot wait to go to an elders’ meeting. I love it. We have worship. We have koinonea. We have love and the building up of one another. We have those things. It is our little home group even if we go to another one as well. It doesn’t matter. That’s where we have fellowship. That kind of love and encouragement brings the next part that is really an inspiration in the Holy Spirit, where He brings to us “new things.” He gives us ideas we would have never had in the natural. He gives us an understanding that we would never have had with a natural overseeing process. The Holy Spirit comes and inspires us . . .

I think the number one outcome after all these things would be that the Lord gives elders an unbelievable love for the “flock,” a caring, a supernatural caring. It is good. It is not bad. It is good. It is not bad. It is good! It is not bad. The enemy would like to say, “It’s not worth it. Somebody else could do a better job anyway. The church is not doing well. Tithing isn’t what it used to be. Numbers aren’t what they used to be.” You know what I say to that? “Well you don’t know the church then. I discern this “voice” is the enemy. You don’t know the church because the church comes in and

meets together and comes before the throne of God and offers up worship and praise that's awesome and more than I can do by myself. And those of my friends who say I can just worship God when I'm fishing in a trout stream (God bless you and so can I but), it doesn't come close to worshipping with you guys, the church. Amen."

Well, I would like for everyone of you to know and understand, whatever you think of eldership and church government, it is not mystic, it is not hocus pocus, it isn't craziness. We are just a bunch of guys trying to discern the Holy Spirit for your safety, where the Lord would create in our midst a safe place to worship the Lord, for us to share a scripture, for us to share prophetic words or a testimony, an exhortation. A place for us to bring our lives together in every and any context, in the context of this Sunday morning meeting, in the context of picnics, in the context of home groups, and in the context of individual hospitality. When the church comes together we have koinonea and brotherly love. We don't tear down. We don't criticize. All those things are already there; we don't have to add to them. Amen.

As the Lord leads I may eventually go to the rest of the ascension gift ministries, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, but just now I would like to make mention of these functions in the context of eldership. Almost always those five ministries are born out of the function of eldership. One of the baselines for any ministry that we as elders primarily look for in a person is the *pastoral heart*, first and foremost. If that isn't there, if caring for the flock isn't there, then the idea of him teaching doesn't even come up. In order to be a good teacher, one needs to learn to care. It is something that is put into your heart. Someone who is an overseer, one who is an under-shepherd has something that comes from the heavenlies. It brings into the heart a fullness of caring that cannot be comprehended in the natural. It is supernatural and a wonderful experience.

Conclusion

I hope I've given you some compassion for us as elders. When we cry it is for your sake and for your safety that we do. We are not criers only, we also wield the sword of the Spirit in the word of God and in teaching. We are not afraid to bring it forth in this place, this church or in other places. I am not. The enemy has too many mighty men of his own.

But God is raising up today mighty men and women of God who are able to come forth with prophetic prayer and come and slice through what the enemy has planned! There is going to be a change in the warfare strategy in the Middle East. In the natural, it is already happening. Almost all-

ways what is happening in the natural is a forerunner of what is going to happen in the Spirit. There is going to be a change. We are going to become men and women of prayer and we are going to be like David's mighty men. We will yield the jawbone like Samson. Those prayers are going to bring down the enemy's strongholds in ways we've always dreamed of. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Thank You, Jesus. Father, we thank You that you have called us to be a church, that You have given us a safe place to worship even in this perverse generation. That You have kept us from the wolves, even those who may be among us. Lord, that you have caused us not to walk away but to hear Your Holy Spirit. We ask You, Lord God, to continue to do that more clearly and more powerfully even here with us, that each one of us would be able to prophesy in prayer and exhortation, each one of us would give a word of encouragement to each other. Your Holy Spirit would be stirred up to such a degree that it would be as the brightest sunset, the brightest sunrise, the brightest stars. That You would overshadow us, Lord God, with Your love and mercy this day we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

