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Sermon Notes

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Understanding the Four Diagnostic Questions

John 15:1-11

Basic Concept: God wants us to grow to maturity, and that growth will not occur without faithfully abiding in Christ and being diligent in obedience to His commands

I. Context:

Jesus' Final Words to His Disciples

John's Gospel: FIRST AND FOREMOST written to give us eternal life through faith in Christ as God in the flesh

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

SECONDLY... to describe the nature of the eternal life that Christ came to bring

- Like an abundance of high-quality wine at a joyful wedding
- Like being born again
- Like having a spring of water inside us that we can drink from anytime we want
- Like being paralyzed and suddenly being able to walk again
- Like eating food from heaven that God miraculously provides
- Like having a river of living water flowing through you to others
- Like being born blind, then suddenly being able to see the magnificence of color for the first time
- Like having a Good Shepherd so committed to your needs and safety that He would die to protect you
- Like being dead for four days and then suddenly coming alive at Christ's word

Here in this passage, Jesus said that eternal life is like being a branch on a vine that bears eternal fruit

John 15:5-8 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

One year ago, the ministerial staff brought before you four diagnostic questions for spiritual health

I think it wise to return to those questions this morning for a spiritual check-up

I. Personal Devotions: “Have you spent time in the scriptures and prayer today?”

II. Family Devotions: Have You Been Fulfilling Your Role in Family Devotions?

III. Evangelism: Have You Shared the Gospel Lately?

IV. Ministry: Have You Committed to a Pattern of Ministry at First Baptist Church?

Let’s take them one at a time

I. Personal Devotions: “Have you spent time in the scriptures and prayer today?”

A. Personal Devotionals Vital for Growth and Fruitfulness

It is impossible to grow in grace and to be eternally fruitful apart from dwelling moment-by-moment in Christ. Jesus made this clear when He said *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5) To “remain” in Christ means to walk with Him, to be conscious of His presence, to talk with Him and to listen to Him. It means to obey His commands and worship Him in spirit and in truth. The key to this is the simple discipline of the Quiet Time, or personal devotions. This is unhurried time totally focused on two basic things: hearing from God through the scriptures, and talking to God through prayer. May I say boldly that, if you are not doing this on a daily basis, your ability to grow and bear fruit will be severely impaired.

B. Top Priority: Hearing God Speak **Today** by Scripture

Nowadays, people complain of the pace of life, saying they don’t have time for a quiet time. To realize how shocking this is, you need only to understand what time was given for. There is a magnificent passage in Hebrews 3 that puts this all in perspective: *So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion ...”* (Hebrews 3:7-8) The author to Hebrews is quoting an Old Testament scripture, Psalm 95, and using its strong message to warn people of rebelling against God—of drifting away (Hebrews 2:1), turning away (Hebrews 3:12) or falling away (Hebrews 6:6) from God. That it is a quotation is clear from the quotation marks “Today, if you hear his voice...” and from the way most English

Bibles set this quotation apart in special font or a special paragraph arrangement. It is Psalm 95:7-11 that the author to Hebrews is quoting. King David wrote that Psalm, as the author readily acknowledges in Hebrews 4:7. But in Hebrews 3:7, the author says *as the Holy Spirit says*, “Today, if you hear his voice...” Whenever we are reading scripture, we are hearing the speech of the Holy Spirit. He is speaking directly to us. Note the verb tense is present. He does not say *as the Holy Spirit said* but *as the Holy Spirit says*. This present speaking by the Spirit is also emphasized by the quotation itself: “Today, if you hear his voice.” Every time we read scripture, we are hearing the very voice of God Himself. And that should happen “Today” or “As long as it is called “Today”” (Hebrews 3:13) Your life is made up of a series of things called “Today”. You can’t obey God yesterday and you can’t obey God tomorrow. You can only ever obey God “Today”. And the key to walking with God is to hear His voice and obey Him TODAY. And when we hear Him speak to us today, we must obey... we must not harden our hearts as they did in the rebellion. Therefore, a healthy Christian life must center every day on hearing God speak to our hearts by reading scripture. How should we read? Deeply, carefully, thoughtfully, with meditation and memorization. Not quickly, lightly, thoughtlessly, as if to check a box on a “To Do” list. Read that your heart may be renewed and transformed (Romans 12:2) by what you read.

C. Speaking to God in Prayer

And secondly, you must speak to God in prayer. Prayer is the language of the soul, and the soul that breathes no prayer to God is dead. There are so many commands to pray in the Bible that there is no need to list them here. But let me encourage you not to substitute moment-by-moment quick situational praying (like Nehemiah did before the King in Nehemiah 2:4) for the totally focused, on your knees, doing nothing but prayer time that I have in mind. Both are vital to a healthy walk with God. But here I am advocating a “Quiet Time,” a time in which you concentrate your mind totally on prayer. Let your worship flow in prayer, let your complaints and requests be laid before the throne with faith, let your heart-felt confession of sin cleanse your soul (1 John 1:9, Hebrews 4:16). Spend more and more time in prayer in 2004. Intercede for others as you are commanded (Ephesians 6:18 “*Always keep on praying for all the saints*”), wrestle for them in prayer (Colossians 4:12).

D. Morning the Best Time

Finally, let me advocate a *morning* quiet time, if at all possible. Jesus set this example for us in that He prayed to His Father “*very early in the morning, while it was still dark.*” (Mark 1:35) The Psalmists also display this same pattern (Psalm 5:3 “*In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning, O Lord, I lay my request before you and wait in expectation.*” See also Psalm 88:13, 143:8 and others).

Closing Exhortation: Make it your top priority in the year 2004 to grow in your consistency, depth, fervency, and love in devotions to God. It is the foundation of everything else you will try to do.

E. Questions for Personal Examination

1. How many times have you met with the Lord for personal Bible study and prayer in the last thirty days?
2. What grade would you give your personal devotional life over the last six months?
3. What is your biggest weakness in personal scripture intake and fervent prayer?
4. What is your greatest strength in this area?

5. Do you keep a scripture notebook, with personal notes made on the passages you are reading?
6. Do you have a year-long plan for Bible reading? [I.e. a “Read through the Bible in a year” plan]
7. Have you committed yourself to memorize any scripture this year?
8. Are you being faithful to that commitment?
9. Do you keep a notebook for your intercessory prayer life, keeping a record of prayers answered?
10. Which of the following areas would you most like to improve upon in your prayer life: length of time, fervency, compassion for others, praying scripture back to God, being expectant & faith-filled in prayer, persistence over a long period of time, frequency of prayer?
11. Do you meet with the Lord usually in the morning or evening?
12. Would you be willing to make a sacrifice to meet with the Lord in the morning?
13. What is the biggest obstacle to your consistency in your devotional life?
14. What specific goals for growth in your devotional life would be reasonable to make?
15. Are you willing to commit to the Lord that you will reach these goals this year?

II. Family Devotions: Have You Been Fulfilling Your Role in Family Devotions?

A. The Stewardship of the Family: Souls Are At Stake

The family was the first human institution established by God, and it is at the core of what God is doing in the world. Each family is established when a man and a woman are joined in the covenant of marriage, a union ordained and blessed by God. Christ established this union as something formed by God, when He said *What God has joined together, let man not separate.* (Matthew 19:6) Some people think a married couple is not truly a family until children come, but that is false. The moment a man and woman say “I do” before God, they have become a family. That marriage union is, according to Paul, a mysterious picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. It is not an overstatement to say that a church will only be as healthy as the families that comprise it.

Once God brings children into the family, a higher level of stewardship is introduced, to which fathers and mothers are called. God’s desire in the family is for godly offspring (Malachi 2:15), and children are “sanctified” (i.e. set apart unto God) by being in a family with even one believing parent (1 Corinthians 7:14). Parents bear the primary responsibility to train their children in the fear of the Lord. This command is given in several places in the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:9, Ephesians 6:4). It is especially emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:6-9: *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Parents in the New Covenant have even greater responsibility to train their children than did Jewish parents in the Old Covenant, because the gospel of Jesus Christ has now been entrusted to us. Parents must evangelize their children every day, and then continue to disciple them moment by moment to bring them to a solid, mature faith in Christ, filled with the good habits of godliness which will protect them and make them fruitful for Christ their whole lives. Parents are not to leave this responsibility to the church... they bear the weight of this stewardship far more than pastors or youth workers or Sunday School teachers ever will.

The multigenerational passing on of spiritual truth is clearly established in Psalm 78:1-8:

*O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old— what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. **We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.***

Thus every family is primarily about the glory of God in the care and nurture of eternal souls, souls entrusted to the family as a stewardship.

B. Satan's Wholesale Attack on the Family

The devil knows how strategically important the family is, and therefore much of his energy and attack is focused there. He wants to do everything he can to keep families from being the healthy disciple-making greenhouses they were meant to be. The devil's attacks include temptations toward worldliness and sin, excessive busyness, worries over finances, conflicts and arguments, sickness, lack of Christlike servant leadership on the part of husbands, lack of submission on the part of wives, rebellion on the part of children, and many others. The devil's entire world system is geared to attack and destroy the home through divorce, adultery, materialism, the workaholic success syndrome, etc. As a result, divorce rates are high, families are in disarray, and there is scarcely any time for family discipleship and worship.

The remedy to all this is for godly Christian families 1) to understand from scripture God's pattern and the devil's attacks; and 2) take necessary steps to establish God's patterns and resist the devil's schemes. A key step in this is to make a commitment to upholding the basic pattern of family devotions—the "family altar."

C. The Family Altar: Biblical Background, and Practical Hints

1. Biblical background

We see a regular pattern in the Old Testament of the patriarchs, the father-leaders of the people of God leading their families in personal worship of God in the old pattern—the building of an altar to sacrifice to God.

a. Noah

Genesis 8:18-21 *So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds-- everything that moves on the earth-- came out of the ark, one kind after another. 20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.*

b. Abraham

Genesis 12:7-8 *The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.*

Genesis 13:3-4 *From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.*

Genesis 13:18 *So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.*

What was done physically in the Old Covenant is now done spiritually in the new. A "family altar" is not a pile of stones or earth for slaying an animal, but a pattern of family worship and scripture study which binds the family together under the Lord's leadership.

2. Practical hints

- a. read the booklet *Rediscovering the Lost Treasure of Family Worship* by Jerry Marcellino (see the Family Worship section of their website, www.audubonpress.com) We have a few of these booklets in the church office.
- b. watch out for the following excuses
 - We're just too busy... our schedule won't allow it
 - I don't know enough of the Bible
 - The kids will be bored
 - I don't know what to do or how to have a family devotional
 - The kids get all they need at church

c. watch out for sporadic forays and inconsistency (obviously it is not likely that any family will have a structured family devotion 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days over the next year... but consistency is the key)

d. eight practical guidelines

- Develop a regular pattern of family worship
- Father should take the lead (if possible; this is not possible when father is temporarily away or there is no father)
- Plan out your family devotional life over the long haul... what goal are you seeking to achieve this year? What books of the Bible are you going through?
- Open with prayer for God's help during family worship... "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:6)
- Read Scripture; let children participate as much as they are able; ask probing questions to bring out meaning of text; discuss in depth, as much as time allows; focus on how this passage teaches us about God's glory
- Catechize children (use "Children's 'Prove It' Catechism" from Truth for Eternity Ministries)
- Sing hymn of praise to God
- Close with prayer in which each member prays out loud

D. Everyone Has a Role

1. Fact #1: Not every member of FBC has a family group with which they can interact in the upcoming year
 - Some are widows or widowers
 - Some are unmarried and live alone
 - Some have children that are all grown
 - Some have never had children
 - Some are college and career folks who plan to get married but are still single
2. Fact #2: Everyone at FBC still has a role in family devotions

- a. everyone can pray for the families of our churches, that they would be faithful in their roles in the family devotions
 - b. everyone can encourage, affirm, and exhort families to be faithful to their roles in family devotions
 - c. those who may someday be married can learn and prepare themselves for their role (either as a future husband/father or a future wife/mother) by asking questions of godly role models in the church, by reading books and listening to tapes, by taking part in other people's family altar times, etc.
 - d. those whose days of daily family circle time may be over (i.e. widows, widowers) can pass on their wisdom and encouragement to younger folks who are going through it now
3. Fact #3: Some roles are very clear... and they are vital
- a. fathers: lead in a gentle, Christlike, servant manner; open the Bible, teach, pray, love, guide, be consistent, make the devotionals engaging and attractive; help other fathers be accountable, encourage them to be faithful
 - b. wives: support and respect your husband's leadership, participate actively, as co-discipler with your husband of your children; sing, pray, encourage, love, serve; encourage other women to be faithful in this area; pray for your husband to lead faithfully
 - c. children: follow your parents lead, don't grumble or complain about devotionals; actually be excited about them and look forward to them; participate as your parents allow and encourage; talk to your friends about how much you enjoy family altar time

E. Questions for Personal Examination

1. How consistent have you been in the last month to have a family devotional?
2. How consistent have you been in praying for this matter for specific families at First Baptist Church?
3. As you read over the descriptions of the roles, has the Spirit shown you any good things that you do well?
4. Has the Spirit shown you any areas of growth?
5. Fathers: do you seek to lead family altar times in a way that is engaging for the whole family?
6. Fathers: how much effort and planning do you put into your family devotional life?

7. Wives: do your children see you actively supporting and respecting your husband's leadership in this area?
8. Wives: do you pray faithfully for your husband's spiritual leadership of the family?
9. Children: have you ever grumbled or complained about family devotional time?
10. Children: what are some ways you could show love for God in the family devotions?

III. Evangelism: Have You Shared the Gospel Lately?

A. The Great Commission Five Times Over

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Luke 24:46-48 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

John 20:21-23 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

That evangelism, the preaching of the only hope of salvation for mankind, is the central work of the church on earth is clear from these (and many other) passages in the New Testament. Christ came "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10), and He has now sent us to do the same. This responsibility falls to the church collectively as a body, and spiritual gifts factor into how the church accomplishes this eternal task. Teachers must teach, givers must give, evangelists must evangelize, prayers must pray, encouragers must encourage, all to the end that the lost may be saved. However, we must not fail to acknowledge our personal, individual responsibility to be a witness for Christ.

B. Our Personal Responsibility: Evangelize the Lost

Ephesians 2:10 makes it clear that God saved us to do good works for Him: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Based on these commands cited above and many others, it is clear that among the good works God ordains for us to walk in is evangelism... and not just "among" the good works, but the central good work! Jesus asked a poignant

question: *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?* (Mark 8:36) And what good would it be for FBC to have wonderful programs, powerful worship, abundant financial resources, a beautiful building, plentiful parking, etc., and see so few people rescued from Satan's dominion of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of God?

The Triangle Region is one of the fastest growing regions of the country. Around us at all times are unchurched people whose lives are being ruined by sin. Even more devastating is that their souls stand under the wrath of God, and they have no hope of avoiding that wrath on Judgment Day apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that Gospel has been committed to us to proclaim.

Now, we are **not** responsible to bring the lost to saving faith... that is beyond our power and our calling. But we **ARE** called to witness to them, telling them of their lost condition under the wrath of God and of God's perfect remedy in Christ.

We are **not** responsible to bring people to repentance, but we **ARE** responsible to commit to them clearly the command God has given the whole earth: "Repent and believe the gospel of Christ!"

We are **not** responsible to bring people to new birth in Christ, but we **ARE** responsible to tell them they must be born again!

We are **not** responsible to be perfect and sinless, but we **ARE** responsible to let our lights so shine that people will see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

We are **not** responsible to drag people to church, but we **ARE** responsible to invite them clearly and winsomely.

We are **not** personally responsible to witness to people with whom we presently have no contact, but we **ARE** responsible to witness to those God entrusts to us in daily life as God provides opportunities **AND** to seek an ever-widening scope of opportunities, even to the point of getting on planes and going to the ends of the earth as missionaries as God directs, **AND** we are responsible to pray daily and to give material support to brothers and sisters who are serving God at the ends of the earth.

C. Wherever You Are, Take the Next Step

1. Acknowledge that you have a personal responsibility to be a witness for Christ.
2. If appropriate, confess sin to God: "I have failed in my personal responsibility to witness for Christ... it has been _____ (days, months, years) since I have said anything to any non-Christian about the gospel; and it has been even longer since I have shared the whole gospel message with someone and commanded them to repent and believe in the name of Christ."
3. Repent from this sin, and resolve to make this upcoming year the richest year of personal witnessing you have ever had.

4. Assess your level of maturity, and ask God to show your next step. If it is simply to invite someone to church, do it. If it is to get a good gospel tract, and to give ten of them away in the next month, do it.
5. If you need additional training, get it! But beware... sitting in the classroom is not enough to discharge your responsibility to witness. You must be courageous and speak!
6. If you are afraid to witness, confess your fear and ask God for help.
7. If you haven't witnessed in years, witness once sometime in the first three months of the year. Invite someone to church, give them a tract, speak the name of Christ, say He is a wonderful Savior. Be bold and courageous! Then, after the first time, it will be easier to do it again.
8. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 and Colossians 1:29 speak of an energy and power for witnessing that conquers our fears, sins, and weaknesses.
9. Make a commitment to come to our monthly neighborhood outreach. There you can learn by watching, then eventually become more and more experienced yourself.

D. A Key Daily Prayer for the Year:

Central recommendation and challenge: Every day, pray the following prayer to God: **“O Lord, please give me a chance to witness to someone today. I will trust you for that chance and with your help make the most of it.”**

It has been my experience that, when I am praying this prayer, God answer it by giving me at least one witnessing opportunity that day.

E. Questions for Personal Examination

1. When was the last time you witnessed to a lost person in the name of Christ?
2. What makes you afraid to witness, if anything at all? How can you pray through those fears?
3. Are you willing to pray the prayer mentioned above on a daily basis: **“O Lord please give me a chance to witness to someone today. I will trust you for that chance and with your help make the most of it.”** ?
4. Are you able to explain the whole gospel message to someone [God, Man, Christ, Response]? If not, are you willing to get training and to memorize a clear gospel outline?
5. Have you ever led anyone to faith in Christ?
6. Do you feel that evangelism is only for pastors or other gifted people and not for you?
7. What does the Bible say about your personal responsibility to witness?

8. Are you praying for any lost people right now by name? If so, are you willing to be an answer to your own prayer and witness to them?
9. Have you ever been on the neighborhood outreach or another form of evangelistic visitation? If not, are you willing to start going?
10. Do you desire to have Christ's compassion for the lost, He who wept over Jerusalem? Are you willing to pray for a heart of compassion, to feel what Christ feels for them?

IV. Ministry: Have You Committed to a Pattern of Ministry at First Baptist Church?

A. Do You Have a Ministry?

The most precious earthly commodity is time. It is so much easier to give money than it is to give time. God has committed to us the ministry of the church, and we have trouble in so many cases making time to do anything more than attend church regularly.

My biggest concern for the members of FBC is that they will settle into a pattern of coming to the church for good teaching, worship, and fellowship, and giving their tithes and offerings, and yet doing little or nothing more for the Lord in serving the church. There are already people in this pattern in our church, and it makes it impossible for us to be faithful to all the fields of ministry God has committed to us.

Ask yourself a simple question: in what way have I sacrificed time to serve the ministries of FBC over the past twelve months? Is it a regular pattern of ministry, or just a sporadic thing? If someone asked you what your ministry is at this church, would you have an answer? Is your giving of time to serve the Lord through FBC ever a sacrifice, a commitment that costs you something?

B. Two Patterns of Ministry in a Local Church

1. Spiritual Gift Ministry

Spiritual gifts are mentioned prominently in many places in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, Ephesians 4, etc.) Because they are mentioned so clearly, they are most certainly intended to be a central part of the way each of us must serve in a church. Put simply, God has given to each believer a measure of His grace in the form of a spiritual gift package, an arrangement of skills and tendencies that are an abiding part of how that person is enabled to build the church up to maturity. They may include such elements as teaching, encouragement, giving, faith, evangelism, helping, administration, etc. God has entrusted these to each believer as a stewardship and He will demand them back on Judgment Day with an assessment of how the gifts were used.

It is therefore required of each believer that they determine what their gifts are, develop their gifts fully, and use their gifts faithfully by the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God in the health and growth of His church. A believer should seek to spend the majority of his time of service to the Lord in the local church doing his spiritual gift ministry, whatever it may be. The believer should be very intentional about this!

If you do not know what your gifts are, the church can help you find out, and the church can help you develop and use your gifts fully. But this stewardship is ultimately between you and God.

2. General Servant Ministries

In a local church, there are so many things to be done that one will often find himself/herself serving in ways not lining up with their spiritual gifts. If a covered-dish event is called for, many people will be serving their brothers and sisters through bringing meals, covering tables with tablecloths, cutting pies and serving them, cleaning up afterward. Jesus set us an example by washing His disciples' feet... not task is too menial or outside our calling as Christians.

Therefore, you must seek a pattern of ministry that involves regular sacrificial service to the church in areas that are required simply to run the church. As I said above, we will want to maximize our ministry time in the area of our spiritual gifts, but we are all going to be called to serve in a wide variety of ways. Also, it is through a general willingness to serve the church in any way that enables you to determine what your gifts are. You won't know until you try! And God may add new gifts to you suitable to the work to which He has called you.

We must all be willing to serve on committees, help a GA or RA program, sing in the choir (if we are going to make a positive contribution there!!), do yardwork around the church on workday, shovel snow, arrange flowers, visit the homebound, faithfully pray at a corporate prayer meeting, stuff envelopes, pray with the sick, vacuum a carpet, or whatever it takes to build the Kingdom.

C. "What Has the Church Done for Me Lately???"

A deadly consumerism has crept into the American church in which people look on the church as a place in which they pay for services received, and in which they are able to assess constantly the performance of the church in meeting their needs.

This reverses everything and is deadly for the individual Christian and for the local church!! Yet I have seen this kind of attitude again and again, even in our church.

Christ instead has given us a different pattern... of sacrificial service to others for the glory of God. First Baptist Church will succeed or fail in its mission in Durham based on the sacrificial service of its members.

D. Questions for Personal Examination

1. What is your ministry at First Baptist Church?
2. How many hours per week or month do you spend serving the church, NOT COUNTING time in which you are attending Sunday School or Sunday morning worship?
3. Do you know what your spiritual gift package is? Have you used it faithfully over the last year?
4. Do you see in yourself a pattern of sacrificial and humble service in general, willing to do anything to help the church grow?

5. Do you wait to be asked or do you volunteer? Are you alert to the needs of the church's ministries and take initiative (after prayer) to meet those needs?
6. Have you been asked or challenged to do a ministry and have refused in the last year? If so, was it because you were called by God to some other ministry in the church?
7. If you are an able-bodied senior adult, do you feel your time for ministry is past and now it's time for the church to minister to you? Are you in the habit of thinking or asking, "What has the church done for me lately?"
8. If you are an able-bodied youth, do you feel your time for ministry hasn't come yet and now it's time for the church to minister to you? Are you in the habit of thinking or asking, "What has the church done for me lately?"
9. If you are a college or seminary student, do you feel you need to concentrate on your studies and have no real time for serving in the church? Are you in the habit of thinking or asking, "What has the church done for me lately?"
10. If you are parents with children still at home, do you feel that life is just too busy in your growing family to serve in the church? Are you in the habit of thinking or asking, "What has the church done for me lately?"
11. Is the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin in this matter? If so, are you willing to repent and to serve more faithfully and sacrificially in the upcoming year?

I. Personal Devotions: "Have you spent time in the scriptures and prayer today?"

II. Family Devotions: Have You Been Fulfilling Your Role in Family Devotions?

III. Evangelism: Have You Shared the Gospel Lately?

IV. Ministry: Have You Committed to a Pattern of Ministry at First Baptist Church?

New Year's Resolutions:

^{ESV} 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.