

Thesis: **Wherever you are, don't settle there!**

INTRODUCTION

On December 21, 2009, Debbie and I went up into the balcony concourse here at Ridgecrest to walk for exercise. I would like to say that we had been walking briskly at least 5 days each week for at least 30 minutes each day, but that would not be true. If intentions were enough, I would have been in excellent shape, but the road to heart disease is paved with good intentions.

As we began our walk, I was very tired. The weekend had been busy (as are yours), and it is not unusual for Monday to be my "drained day," but this particular Monday I was more drained than usual. I had been experiencing some stamina issues for months, and I usually attributed it to my lack of exercise or my increasing age. I had not had any chest pains or other symptoms that would have clearly indicated a heart problem.

I was weary enough that Debbie became concerned and encouraged me to make an appointment with Dr. Luthy. On Tuesday I saw her and discussed my symptoms. An EKG indicated some changes had taken place, and Dr. Luthy wanted me to have a stress test. It was arranged for the next day.

The stress test lived up to its name! I managed to get my heart rate in the target range just before I saw the face of Jesus. Before and after pictures were taken, and when I was summoned from the waiting room I was told that Dr. Luthy was on the line (I did not take that as a good sign!). The results of the stress test showed I had blockage, but it would require an angiogram to determine the specifics. After an ultrasound of my heart, the angiogram was scheduled for the next day (Christmas Eve).

I returned to my cardiologist the next morning, and then walked across the enclosed walkway to the main hospital. After the prerequisite paperwork, the angiogram was performed by Dr. Penick, and three blockages were found: one was 100% blocked and my body had created natural bypasses around the blockage; a second was 40% blocked (and they did nothing to it); and the third was 90% blocked and it received a stent. By noon Christmas Day we were back at daughter Robin's home in Nixa for Christmas Dinner, and four days later we left on a planned trip to Florida. What a week!

I told you that story for two reasons: First, because it might be easier than repeating it many times individually, and second, because it illustrates a significant point that introduces today's message. Here is that point: Successful intervention requires accurate information.

Is that principle true spiritually? Is it true in your life personally? Is it true in the life of a church?

My favorite Max DePree quote is this: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."

Today I want to assume my responsibility as a leader and as a servant. I want to attempt to define current reality at Ridgecrest Baptist Church. I want to preface my words by reaffirming what you know to be true: I love this church! I am so thankful that God brought me here in 1984 and has allowed me to stay until this day. I could literally speak for hours on the good things God has done and is still doing in and through this church. I have a letter on my desk from Gary Taylor with the Missouri Baptist Convention, congratulating Ridgecrest on being a pacesetter church in baptisms in Missouri. We have a great staff team, dedicated and gifted elders, deacons who understand the meaning of the word deacon and serve unselfishly, and literally hundreds of dedicated servants of the Lord who show up week after week to minister to the body of Christ and to prepare God's people to raze hell in our community and around the world. We are five years into the Remington's era, and we have been privileged to be part of changing the world for a lot of people. Celebrate Recovery is strong and getting stronger as we seek to resource precious people on their journey to recovery from the hurts, habits, and hangups that have adversely affected their lives. For every ministry I have mentioned there are others that are often unsung or even unnoticed which are making a radical difference through their service.

I would like to stop right now, hold hands, sing Kum ba Yah, and go home rejoicing, but if I did, the picture would be only partially complete. Indeed, the message I have to share today is in some ways painful for me. To help you hear my heart and what I trust is God's word for Ridgecrest today, turn with me to the 11th chapter of the first book in your bible, the book of beginnings, Genesis. We are past the creation narrative, past the sin and fall of Adam and Eve, and past the flood. We are at a pivotal moment in redemption history as God sovereignly chooses an unlikely man in an

idolatrous nation to become the Father of the Faithful, the people of God. When we meet this man, he is living in a place called Ur of the Chaldees, on the Euphrates River near what is now called the Persian Gulf. Let's begin with Chapter 11, verse 31 (NIV):

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

Genesis 12

12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. NIV

How could this ancient story have anything to say to our current reality? Let me point you to three words that I believe could characterize the present moment for Ridgecrest, as well as the last 2-3 years. These three words are found in Genesis 11:31, as follows: *they settled there*. Where was there? It was short of where God had called them! God's plan was to bring them to Canaan; God's plan was to bless them; God's plan was to make Abraham and his descendants a blessing! But they went half-way and *settled there!*

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) writes: *Many reach to Charran, and yet fall short of Canaan.* According to one estimate Abraham stayed at least 15 years in Haran; he *settled there*.

Let's bring this home: In my humble opinion, **Ridgecrest has stopped short of God's best and settled there!** Does that mean every individual member of Ridgecrest? Absolutely not! But sufficient members have settled down to bring us as a church to a place where it could be said: *they settled there*.

In one sense, this is not surprising. God's people (and maybe all people) have always had a tendency toward *settling down* short of the goal. God had told Adam and Eve to *be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it* (Genesis 1:28), and repeated that call to Noah (Genesis 9:1), but by the time we get to Chapter 11:1 we read that *they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there* and immediately began to build a tower. Why? So they could make a name for themselves and not be scattered abroad over the face of the earth!

This is the story of Cain, the story of Lot, the story of Jonah, even the story of the New Testament Church which *settled* down until persecution arose and forced them to obey God's command to *make disciples of all peoples*, to be a missionary movement on the earth.

Is it your story? Is it my story? Is it the story of Ridgecrest Baptist Church which was born in the heat of godly passion and grew wonderfully well for many years? Have we decided that this is a good place to settle down? Have we become increasingly "Me-centered" instead of "Mission-centered?" Do we evaluate our efforts on the basis of our personal tastes or on the basis of what it will take to bridge the gospel to our culture? In five more years, or ten, or twenty-five will they write this epitaph to this ministry: *they settled there?*

Why do we *settle down*? Do we, like Abraham, become comfortable with part-way obedience? Do we settle down by refusing to leave some things behind? Do we *settle down* by losing our first love for Jesus and His mission? Do we become consumers of religious goods and services while forgetting the call to be a blessing? Hear me, my friends: If Ridgecrest has settled down short of God's best it is because we have done so individually, one person at a time.

Let me be painfully personal: Have you reached a plateau in your spiritual life and have you *settled there*? Have you *settled* for being a spectator rather than embracing full membership with its privileges and responsibilities? When it comes to your worship, are you moving on toward worship becoming your passion, or have you gone half-way and *settled there*? When it comes to living out your faith within the context of a face-to-face, “one-another” community of believers in a small group, have you stopped short and *settled there*? When it comes to serving others have you embraced God’s plan to make you a blessing to the body of Christ and an ambassador to the world or are you content to sit, soak, and sour? How about in your giving? I am not talking about those who have had severe financial reversals, or those that are now having adult family members move back home, with the accompanying financial challenges. I am talking about those of us who have jobs and steady incomes but who have stopped short of sacrificial giving and *settled there*! I am talking to 899 heads of households who did not, as far as we know, give anything at all to support this ministry! It’s not about what I want from you; it is about what I want for you! I want for you a life that pleases God, a life that is lived large in His service, a life that is showing clear evidence of spiritual growth. I want for you treasure in heaven! So I ask you: Have you reached a place of comfort and complacency and *settled there*? Have you become a Lazy Boy Christian, kicked back in your spiritual recliner? **It is a sin to stop short of God’s goal and settle there!**

Here is my plea: **Wherever you are, don’t settle there!** Let every one of us accept the challenge to move out and move on in our response to God’s call on our lives. Let it begin with me, with the elders, with the staff, with the deacons; but let it not end until every member of Ridgecrest has refused to *settle* short of God’s upward call!

I see hopeful signs that we are becoming unsettled with our personal *status quos*. I believe God is drawing us and that we are beginning to respond. Let me end today’s message with a clear call:

Specifically, I invite you to make an unshakeable commitment to be a hell-razer who seeks to destroy the works of the devil. As you make that commitment, I strongly urge you to embrace the 7/24 Challenge (seven days a week I will spend at least 24 minutes each day interacting with God through His word). I invite you to join your leadership team as we seek to engage in Saturation Praying, praying for everyone we come into contact

with, praying that God will make them curious concerning His Son, that the Holy Spirit would convict them of their need for a Savior, praying that they would choose to commit their lives to Jesus by repenting of their sins and trusting Him alone for their salvation, and finally praying that, through believer's baptism, they would profess their faith in Jesus and confess Him as their Lord! I encourage you to make a fresh commitment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I invite you to make a new commitment to being a functioning and active member of one of our small groups. I invite you to serve the Lord with gladness by making a firm decision to get in the game for the sake of a lost world. **I invite you to grow spiritually!** If we will make and keep these commitments, if we will refuse to *settle down* short of God's call, then God will use our lives and our prayers and our service to prepare the soil of people around us to receive the seed of God's word in their lives, and we will live to see the harvest!

I do not know where you are spiritually, but I am pretty sure we are all short of the goal God has for us. Hear again my plea: **Wherever you are, don't settle there!**

My vision for 2010 and beyond is not tied to the usual metrics of buildings, bodies, budgets, or even baptisms. My vision is for you and me and thousands of us to determine today: **We won't settle here**, short of the Father's plan and purpose for our lives! We will leave what needs to be left and move forward, even though we may not know where we are going. We will embrace the call to be people on the move, people with a glorious mission and a glorious Lord! Let me say it one more time: **Wherever you are, don't settle there!**