

Will You “Ring the Bell”?

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When I first started keeping the Feast, almost every Feast started with the question,

“Why are we here?”

Anybody ever heard that question? Everybody has heard that question. I want to pose the question. How did we get here and where are we going? I’ve been to a lot of Feast of Tabernacles—I’m going to give some age away here—my first twelve or thirteen Feast of Tabernacles were spent camping in Big Sandy, Texas. How many of you have camped at Big Sandy, in Texas? My first Feast of Tabernacles, I was sixteen years old and I camped in an army tent with another young man in the church. Of course, our parents were there and we ate with them, but when you are young, that age and living at home, Feast preparation is pretty easy—you just do what you’re told. As you get older and babies start coming into your life, then preparation starts to become a little more difficult.

I was married in 1971 and ten months later, Jason was born. So, during the 1972 Feast, he was between two and three months old. If you have ever stayed in a tent with a two or three-month old, which is not what we are experiencing here—it’s a little different. A year later, Kelly was born. So that year I had a one year old and a three-month old at the Feast, staying in a tent; campfire, Coleman lanterns, all that stuff. In 1974 Jason was two and mobile, so we were in the Piney Woods with 8000 campers and my two-year old wandered off. What do you do? Three lots this way, three lots that way, how did we find him? We found him—it took about an hour to an hour and a half. You went to your captain of ten who went to the captain of fifty, who went to the captain of 100 who went to the captain of 1000—the word goes out—then you find your baby boy—a little shamefaced; how did you let your two year old disappear (unless you’ve had a two year old)? They can go fast.

Preparing for the Feast; even preparing for this Feast, I’m giving a sermon on preparation and I forgot my cuff links, I forgot my ties. I was catching a ride from the office to the airport and I wanted my Bible that was on my office desk because it had bigger print but I forgot to get it. So, I need more practice preparing for the Feast. Back then, preparing for a campout—Big Sandy and Dallas are about 120 miles from each other—but 120 miles was a long way for us. So, the first thing we did with our second tithe every year was bought a set a re-tread tires to go on the car, so we could make that 120 mile journey. We would pack up our rusted-out hood, Ford Fairlane with all the camping gear and throw the kids in and off we went; tents, tarps, carpets, chairs, lanterns, Coleman stove, sleeping bags, clothes for cold, clothes for wet, clothes for dry, clothes for warm. It was a lot of work. We learned to use check lists, we learned to prepare. It required a lot of planning and a lot of execution on the plan. Money was in short supply. I was a conscientious objector; I was on the 1W program so I was working

for the city of Dallas as a garbage man. I made a whopping \$83 per week with two small kids. Our second tithe was just south of \$1000 and that was after I worked part time selling cookware. I share that because it was some of the best Feasts that you can imagine. 8000 people in the Piney Woods, another three or four in Lake Loma campgrounds. We were in a gigantic Tabernacle which is a fancy word for a metal building with an asphalt floor and no air conditioning. I wasn't in Big Sandy when they had the big tent or when they met at the Red Wood as that was before my time. Getting ready for the Feast, we even had work parties before the Feast where we would go up there and clear the campgrounds—chop down little trees and get ready for the Feast. There were a lot of service opportunities. You had the captain system where you had the opportunity to serve. They had security details every night so it was done in two-hour shifts where two guys with their flashlights would go up and down the streets, making sure everybody was safe and secure. Restroom cleaning detail; when you have 12,000 people using bathhouses, they can get trashed pretty quickly, so everybody got to serve and do some work. If the rains came in Big Sandy, tents would fall down, rain would go under the tents, everybody's stuff would get wet, so there were opportunities to help and keep the trenches flowing. When you have somebody in need and all their stuff is sopping wet, then everybody else pitches in and it was like a big family. It was amazing. You had sing-a-longs and campfires going. As you walked down these streets you couldn't go three or four camp spaces before somebody came out and tried to give you something to eat or drink or invited you in; it was such an experience. I would not trade that for anything.

The Feast wasn't easy; it was a lot of work. It was very, very fulfilling. Every year it got better. We got more and more camping gear and eventually we were able to toss the pump-up kerosene stuff and we went high dollar and had propane; propane lanterns and stoves. We thought we were in "tall cotton" at that point. We made a lot of mistakes at the Feast. Sometimes we would play too much. Sometimes we would eat too much. Sometimes we would stay up too late. Every year you learn, you get older, you get more mature, you learn what not to do, you learn what to do and you get better prepared—experienced.

We learn that you get out of the Feast what you put into the Feast. So, to have a good Feast, you have to give a good Feast. When you were in your early twenties and going to the Feast, our heads were all about having fun and partying, doing all that kind of stuff. But you learn and mature and learn how to serve and how giving, gives joy and gives a kind of fulfillment that you will never get just by serving yourself. It was an opportunity. It wasn't easy but it was fulfilling.

For this Feast, I hope you all prepared better than I did. You had to start planning, had to start asking "Where am I going to stay, what am I going to do? What are we going to eat, what are we going to wear?" You had to make all these plans. Then you had to execute the plans and I know you did it fairly well because we are all here. My Dad always said, "Proper prior preparation, prevents poor performance." He was a Marine and I think that's where it came from because I see some giggles out there. It's true; we

are not here at the Feast just to enjoy ourselves. We are here to give a good Feast and to serve people the best way that we can.

Back in the late '60's, we were excited, we were confident, we knew that "the time of the end was at hand". We had to prepare because we did not want to be stuck in that nasty tribulation. We had to get ready and we were excited. Then, 1972 came, 1972 went and nothing happened. People began to be less and less excited. A lot of people quit. The hyper growth that we had experienced had slowed way, way down and things began to change. We had new speculations. They were way more general now because we got caught in the trap of putting a date on a prophecy that never happened and that can be discouraging. That's kind of what happened. A lot of people left.

The church started to fracture. One split after another. Now, thirty years later, how many people have passed through the churches of God? How many are left? How many quit? How many just gave up, for one reason or another? How many are left and looking forward? Where is that zeal, that excitement that we had when we were outrunning the tribulation? How many Ambassador College graduates have gone? We put these graduates up on a big pedestal; they knew everything, could teach everything but now you look at how many graduated from A.C. who just tossed in the hat—they are done.

I want to talk about Navy Seal training. Navy Seals have a thing called "Ring the Bell". That's where the title of the sermon came from:

Will You "Ring the Bell"?

In Navy Seal training, a lot of guys sign up for Navy Seal training who don't even get started. As a matter of fact, they have a pre-conditioning camp and only 79% of the people who start that preliminary training make it to where they can sign their recruiting papers. So, 21% are gone before they even get started. After they sign their enlistment papers, those who graduate recruit training, 50% of the ones left, graduate recruit training and that leaves 45% of the ones who started. Those who complete Seal pre-indoctrination, 90% of the ones left complete that, which means only 41% of those who started. Then it gets fun, they go into BUDS training; Basic Underwater Demolition. 33%—2/3 of the people—wash out at BUDS training. Only 11% are left.

To give you an idea of BUDS training, the last week is called "Hell Week" and they put people through some pressure. Instead of describing it, I just want to read this to you.

"Hell Week" is the defining week of BUDS training; it's held early on. In the third week of the first phase, before the Navy makes an expensive investment in SEAL operational training. "Hell Week" consists of five and a half days of cold, wet, brutally difficult, operational training on fewer than four hours of sleep. "Hell Week" tests physical endurance, mental toughness, pain and cold tolerance, teamwork, attitude and your ability to perform work under high physical and mental stress and sleep deprivation. Above all, it tests determination and desire. On average, only 25% of Seal candidates make it through "Hell Week". It's the toughest training in the U.S. military. It is often the

greatest achievement of their lives. Over the years (this is important) research has been done to determine a common trait in those individuals who make it through “Hell week”. But there is no definitive answer. It’s not necessarily the largest, it’s not necessarily the strongest, it’s not the fastest swimmers, but those with a burning desire to be Seals. The instructors have observed the only one true predictor of which candidates ultimately succeed are those who want it the most. Trainees are constantly in motion, swimming, paddling, carrying boats on their head, doing log PT set ups, pushups, rolling in the sand, slogging through the mud, paddling boats and doing surf passage. Being still can be just as challenging when you’re standing intermittently in formation. Soaking wet on the beach, up to your waist in the water with the cold ocean wind cutting through you, mud covers uniform, hands, faces—everything but the eyes. The sand chaffs the raw skin, the salt water makes cuts burn. Students perform evolutions that require them to think, lead and make sound decisions and functionally operate when they are extremely sleep deprived, approaching hypothermia and even hallucinating. While trainees get plenty to eat, some are so fatigued they fall asleep in their food. Others fall asleep while paddling boats and have to be pulled out of the water by teammates. [Pretty rough stuff.] Seal candidates commonly have the mistaken belief that “Hell Week” and BUDS are all about physical strength. Actually, it is as much mental as it is physical. Trainees just decide that they are too cold, it’s too sandy, too sore, too tired to go on. It’s their minds that give up on them, not their bodies. While instructors can get anyone to quit if they wanted to, that’s not what they’re after. They apply great physical and mental stress, sow the seeds of doubt and give tempting invitations for trainees to quit. But it’s up to the individual student to either turn it into increased resolve or decide on his own to quit. The majority of the students who make it through “Hell Week” go on to graduate BUDS and become Seals, having survived that severe trial. They feel literally unstoppable.

So, their instructors are playing with their minds, they are planting doubt, they are talking to that inner self—quit, “ring the bell”. They make it honorable—just quit, just “ring the bell”. Have some coffee, have some donuts, watch your class continue to suffer—just “ring the bell”. You know you want to; you know you want to quit; you know you’re hurting—just “ring the bell”. To quit and make the pain stop. We all have to deal with that.

There was one guy named David Goggins, who was a seriously tough guy. He went through “Hell Week”, three times in a row. He wouldn’t quit. They didn’t graduate him, but he wouldn’t quit; three weeks of that.

So, after initial training, something interesting happens; they start a twenty-four-month cycle. Eighteen months of additional training and six months of deployment. They do that twenty-four month cycle all the time they are a Navy Seal. Eighteen months of training, six months of deployment, eighteen months of training, six months of deployment; so, they never, ever stop training. The common denominators are that they just want it; they won’t quit.

Turn to Ephesians 6:11; just like an elite soldier prepares for battle, we have to prepare daily for our spiritual battle.

Ephesians 6:11 *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

13) *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

14) *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

15) *and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16) *above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

17) *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;*

18) *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (NKJV)*

A Navy Seal has to learn how to use his weapons; some are offensive, some are defensive. In this list, beginning with truth, we have to learn to use the weapons that Yehovah has provided us, to be prepared. It begins with truth. Righteousness, acting on the truth. Practicing, application, shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Taking the shield of faith. If we don't believe we can make it, then we aren't going to make it. If we don't believe that Yehovah will fight our battles and that He is going to give us the strength, then we will "ring the bell". We have to have the faith and the helmet of salvation. We are saved, as long as we are in motion, making progress, if we believe—we are saved. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Let's turn to 1 Corinthians 9:24.

1 Corinthians 9:24 *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*

25) *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*

26) *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.*

27) *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (NKJV)*

Let's go to Mark 13 now.

Mark 13:33 *Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.*

34) *It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.*

35) *Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—*

36) *lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*" (NKJV)

2 Timothy 2:3; this is the verse that Onward Christian Soldiers was taken from.

2 Timothy 2:3 *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

4) *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.* (NKJV)

As members of the ecclesia, at the Feast in 2021, how did we get here? How did we come to be part of the ecclesia? We got recruited; that's how it all started. Turn to John 6:41.

John 6:41 *The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."*

42) *And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"*

43) *Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves.*

44) *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

45) *It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught by God. Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.* (NKJV)

After we recruited, we counseled, we considered our options, we were given some scriptures, we were told to count the cost.

Luke 14:28 *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—*

29) *lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,*

30) *saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?*

31) *Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

32) *Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.*

33) *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.* (NKJV)

I remember my baptismal counseling, I was riding around security during services with a local Elder—Jack Campbell—and we kept all of those people safe while they were in

there listening to services, but it was a couple of hours of baptismal counseling. That happened two or three times that week. "You better know what you're jumping into and you better be ready. Don't start this if you're not ready to make it all the way through." We were educated, we were indoctrinated and then we were baptized, hands laid on us, we received the Holy Spirit, we thought we had it made. But training was just beginning through study, prayer, meditation and application. Look at 1 Samuel 16; we all started with different backgrounds. Some appeared to have more advantages than others. You can't really look, just like with the Navy Seal, and tell who is going to finish the race. This story points that out.

1 Samuel 16:1 *Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."*

2) *And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." But the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, I have come to sacrifice to the LORD."*

3) *Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you."*

4) *So Samuel did what the LORD said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"*

5) *And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.*

6) *So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!"*

7) *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

8) *So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."*

9) *Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."*

10) *Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these."*

11) *And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here."*

12) *So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!"*

13) *Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah. (NKJV)*

Samuel couldn't tell by looking. He knew Yehovah, talked to Him, he couldn't tell by looking. You think about David, the young shepherd boy; "I just got anointed king; I just won the lottery." But then you look at what David went through over the next fifteen years being tracked down with Saul determined to eliminate him. You look at how he had to live with his band in the wilderness. Fifteen years of training before he became king.

Think of Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers. You look at all that he went through. Being falsely accused, being imprisoned, before he rose to prominence, before he was used by Yehovah. So in our journey, we began to experience trials and as our trials—as we progressed—our trials became more and more intense; more difficult. Testing us—will we "ring the bell"? That's what "Hell Week" is all about.

Leviticus 23:41 *You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.*

42) You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

43) that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. ” ’

44) So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD. (NKJV)

Why? To remind us of the journey, to remind us of the challenges, the difficulties, the planning, the sacrifice, the pain and the suffering that's a part of the journey. Forty years in the wilderness—remember when the Israelites left Egypt, they left with a high hand. They plundered their neighbors, they left with enormous wealth and yet how many of those people made it to the Promised Land? It was just two—Joshua and Caleb. There was a big fallout rate.

Let's go to Job. When it comes to trials, you can't skip trials without talking about Job.

Job 1:1 *There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. (NKJV)*

So, this guy had reached a pretty high level of self-control.

Verse 8

8) Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

9) So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10) Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11) *But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"*

12) *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

13) *Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house;*

14) *and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,*

15) *when the Sabeans raided them and took them away—indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"*

16) *While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"*

17) *While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"*

18) *While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,*

19) *and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"*

20) *Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped.*

21) *And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."*

22) *In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (NKJV)*

In Job 2:1, we see the second set of attacks and trials.

Job 2:1 *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.*

2) *And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."*

3) *Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."*

4) *So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.*

5) *But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"*

6) *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."*

7) So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8) And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. (NKJV)

So, he had a tough time. Can you really picture yourself, with one wave after another coming at you and before you can catch your breath, you get smacked with something else and then something else. Job is in pain. He is in physical pain, emotional pain, he is in every kind of pain, every kind of fear, every kind of anxiety, everything that we could possibly imagine, it's been thrown at him. Then, he gets advice from his wife in verse 9.

9) Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? [She says, "ring the bell"] Curse God and die!"

10) But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (NKJV)

Then you have, following that, the very painful chapters of his friends accusing him over and over.

"You know you deserve this. You know you had it coming. You know you've got hidden sin."

he's suffering from fatigue, sleep deprivation. I think of the Navy Seals operating on three and half hours of sleep every night and then physically moving all the time, all the time, all the time, until they are hallucinating and falling asleep in their plate. That's where Job was when he gets this advice from his friends. Yet, after that, he got to talk to Yehovah face on. Through all of that, he didn't "ring the bell". He hung in there. He made it through "Hell Week" and maybe that was "Hell Week" four times instead of three times, but he made it through. He completed his training. The last chapters of Job are much happier than how the book began.

Look at Paul's trials. He sums it up in 2 Corinthians 11:23. Paul does a little rant here.

2 Corinthians 11:23 *Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*

24) From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26) in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28) besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (NKJV)

That's some serious training! Consider what Christ endured for us. Christ willingly submitted to horrible, terrible, painful, emotionally exhausting, depleting, unimaginable suffering, for us.

1 Peter 2:20 *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*

21) For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22) Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24) who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. (NKJV)

We will face trials. I wish they were all behind us, but they are not. Sometimes it's going to be like "Hell Week". If we're not in a serious trial right now, then you're in a time of training. Just like the Navy Seals. They get eighteen months of training, six months of deployment. If you are not in a trial right now, you will be. Any time we want the trials to stop, we just "ring the bell". Just go along with the crowd and "Ring the Bell". Persecution starts slowly and begins to grow—just "ring the bell". The temptation to go along—go along to get along—"ring the bell". Blend in, become invisible, don't stand out—"ring the bell". The problem is, we are called to be a light. We are called to stand out. But that's scary—that draws attention. Matthew 5:14.

Matthew 5:14 *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJV)

We have to ask ourselves, what are our weaknesses? Where are we vulnerable? The Navy Seals train with those questions. Where are we vulnerable? What is a threat? Where do I need to learn? What do I need to do? I have a little flat spot in the road and it's smooth but it's not going to stay smooth forever, I need to prepare. What do I need to prepare for?

I want to tell you a story. When I was fourteen, fifteen years old, I had an uncle that lived in Happy, Texas and I got to go and spend the summers in Happy, Texas. He was a rodeo guy, so when I got out there to spend the summer, I got to learn how to rope. I started out learning how to rope a five-gallon bucket. Then I graduated to a fence post. Then, he had a bunch of goats to train horses and practice roping skills on, because

goats are a lot faster than calves. So I was a real, live, goat roper. I ran around roping goats for practice. All of those skills—all those rodeo skills—are developed from a time in the past when you herded cows and you had to go through the process. I was thinking about this one time, talking to James at his house and just thinking about that poor calf. He's born into the world and he's so happy, he has his mama's milk and is just hanging out with the herd and everything is good. Then one day, this cowboy on a cutting horse moves him off from the herd. He tries to get around him and the horse is fast—it goes this way and that way—so the calf takes off running. Then all of a sudden, he has a rope around his neck and he is slammed to the ground. The cowboy jumps off, picks him up, slams him to the ground again and wraps up his legs. Then here comes a guy with a hot branding iron. Sometimes in the process, he gets to experience a gender change. His life is never, ever going to be the same. All he just wanted was to hang out with the herd.

You think about that, we also, as people, crave a connection with other people. We want to be part of “the herd”. But we aren't cut out of the herd like a cowboy with a cutting horse. We have to willingly leave the herd. Sometimes it's painful, but we have to choose to leave. A lot of people make the wrong choice. When Worldwide gave up all of God's laws, a lot of people just couldn't give up the herd. They would rather stay with the herd than leave. A lot of people left over the “God of the Old Testament understanding”. They admitted what the truth was, they understood it completely but decided that the herd was more important than the truth.

We have that same proclivity to be connected to people, but who does Yehovah want us to be connected to? Turn to Luke 14:25.

Luke 14:25 *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

We have to be willing to leave our herd and put Yehovah first. Who is our real herd? Christ tells us that in Matthew 12:46.

Matthew 12:46 *While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.*

47) Then one said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.”

48) But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?”

49) And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers!”

50) For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (NKJV)

So that’s our herd. Whoever obeys Yehovah. Whoever is connected to Yehovah, that’s who we are to connect with. In the church, our herd got smaller. It split again and it got smaller. It split again and it split again, and it split again. The Big Sandy Feast was once 12,000 people strong. Song service—12,000 people singing—and yet, it’s a different situation now. It’s not what feels good that counts. It is what is good. It’s what Yehovah says is good. Sometimes we have to give up what feels good. Does this mean that sometimes we are going to feel alone, we’re going to feel isolated, we’re going to feel different, we’re going to feel outcast? 1 Kings 19:1 is right after Elijah put the prophets of Ba’al to death and Jezebel is not really happy about it.

1 Kings 19:1 *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.*

2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”

3) And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4) But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (NKJV)

Verse 14.

14) And he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

15) Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria.

16) Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

17) It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.

18) Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (NKJV)

On top of all that. we have to love our enemies as ourselves.

Matthew 5:43 *You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*

44) But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (NKJV)

Training isn't always easy. Sometimes, it's like going through a "Hell Week". It's all we can do to hold on and yet, we are guaranteed the strength to get through. The common denominator of those who endure—God looks on the heart— It's those that want it, no matter what happens, they won't "ring the bell". Matthew 22:14 says "many are called, but few are chosen". Look at the attrition rate.

Matthew 7:13, *"enter by the narrow gate";*

these are scriptures that have already been read.

Matthew 7:13 *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)

Of all the people that sign up for Navy Seal training, nine and a half percent become Navy Seals. Over ninety percent fall out. Most people will take the easy path. That is not the journey that we are called to. It is not the easy path. What's in it for us, if we hang in there? What is in it for us if we refuse to "ring the bell"? If we just keep making progress, we see the answer in 1 John 3:1.

1 John 3:1 *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

2) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

Romans 8:12 *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*

13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

15) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16) The Spirit Himself [Itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19) For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

25) But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (NKJV)

Will you “ring the bell”? Will I “ring the bell”? We will be tried, we will be tested, we will be sifted, we will be trained. This calling is for the elite. Whatever our weaknesses are, they will be exploited, they will be tested; that’s where the adversary will attack us. We will be refined. We will be transformed. James 1:2 is very familiar scripture; I always get a giggle out of this one.

James 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (NKJV)*

1 Peter 1:6, a few pages over.

1 Peter 1:6 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

8) whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

9) receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

13) Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

15) but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

16) because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

17) And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

18) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (NKJV)

What we practice in private, we are rewarded for in public. There is no doubt that we are in a battle. We may lose a few rounds, we may get knocked down, over and over. We may get discouraged, lonely, depressed, but we have got to keep getting back up, keep training, keep coming back, determined to finish the race.

“Proper prior preparation prevents poor performance.”

Now is the time to prepare.