

# Chapter 4: Old Dogs Given New Perspectives

By Larry Meager

## Welcome and Introduction

Good morning, everyone. My name is Larry Meagher. It's a strange name, but you've got to deal with what you got, right? My wife is Kay; probably many of you know her. She teaches in the Sabbath school. I want to thank David and Pastor Jake for inviting me to speak here at Summit Northwest.

I was a pastor for 40 years, starting in upstate New York and moving through Central, Northern, and Southern California. My wife taught school for 40 years, so we've been supporting each other like this for over 50 years of marriage.

I have to say, I love Pastor Jake—his sermons, his messages, his style. He's a good man. When he asked me to fill in, I said, "Jake, I'll do what the pastor asks of me." Does the pastor ask you to do anything? If he does, you've got to say yes, I guess!

I'm an old man, and this setup doesn't look familiar, does it? This is how we used to do it about 40 years ago. We don't do it like Jake anymore with his nice laptop. I don't sit down, and I don't drink water, so I'm just here.

## The Kingdom of God on Earth

The point of my lesson today is to learn the story of Jesus so that it shapes the way we live everyday life, Sunday through Saturday. The church must be different than society. Christians are not called to blend into political parties or cultural trends. The church itself is the kind of community that must be guided by God's Spirit to show what the kingdom of God is like—whether you're working at Chipotle or standing in line at Costco.

When Christians try to control society through politics, they lose sight of their true calling. It is not our calling to run the government. Instead, we must focus on living faithfully as God's kingdom on earth. As Jesus said on trial to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world."

We need to be living as witnesses of Jesus Christ crucified, Jesus Christ risen, and Christ coming again. It's in the way we treat people—the weak in our society, or even just learning how to drive in Washington versus California (two very different styles!). We are not here to win culture wars; we are here to live together as a community.

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### Story One: Nico "The Dragon" Hill

I was pastoring a church in Thousand Oaks that had a beautiful Southern California style patio. I was sitting out there before service and saw a gentleman get out of his car. He was about 6'2" and good-looking, wearing a shirt that said "Faith." As he walked up, I thought, *Man, he's got more tattoos than Pastor Jake does.*

I introduced myself and asked his name. He said, "My name is Nico the Dragon Hill." He told me he was an MMA fighter from Hollywood and had been a world champion in the '80s. He told me about a fight in Russia

where he kicked an opponent so hard he broke the man's femur. I'm thinking, *What is this gentleman doing at my church?*

Over the next few weeks, I got to know him. He had been a slave to meth for eight years. He had lived in his car. He had worked as security for high-end escorts. But in the middle of the night, he started waking up and writing poems about good and evil, "the yin-yang of life." His mom told him he would never run away from faith.

He started writing Christian rap. Now, we don't really do rap at Thousand Oaks, and I don't think you do it at Summit Northwest, but the people loved it. Within six weeks, I had him up front preaching. We eventually sent him to the Weimar Bible school. The Holy Spirit took him from meth to ministry. Today, he preaches in prisons and in Africa to people who would never listen to someone like me.

## **Story Two: Rocky in Mule Creek**

A wife once came to me because her husband, Rocky, was unfaithful. To make a long story short, Rocky ended up being charged with bad behavior involving a minor. I am convinced to this day that he was falsely accused and set up by people out to get him, but he was sentenced to life in prison.

I talked to him two weeks ago. He is in Mule Creek Penitentiary. He told me, "Pastor, I'm doing well. I keep my Friday night meetings going. We're working with Amazing Facts, teaching the Bible, and having baptisms."

Then he said something that blew my mind: "Pastor Larry, if I was not in jail and I was on the outside, I would be a lost man. I thank God that I am in prison for the rest of my life so that I can do what the Holy Spirit has called me to do."

## **Story Three: Rage Against the Machine and Ecclesiastes**

My oldest son, Jeff, has a brother-in-law who leads bands like AWOLNATION and The Barbarians of California. Jeff told me he was sitting in a living room once with members of Rage Against the Machine and Weezer.

I asked, "What were they talking about?" He said they were talking about how evil Hollywood is, and how they felt like the devil and God are vying for everyone's soul. The founder of AWOLNATION has read the Bible cover to cover. A year ago, he was fascinated by Revelation. Now, he's studying the book of Ecclesiastes using a commentary by Dr. Jacques Doukhan from Andrews Seminary. I don't make this stuff up—this is the Spirit at work in places we don't expect.

## **Story Four: The Dog Park Evangelists**

Look at these two dogs: Archer and Angus. I call them my evangelist and my conference president. In this video, you can see them scouting out the Springvale dog park. I'm not kidding—they look like they're looking for a place to pitch an evangelistic tent!

While at the dog park, I met a Hispanic couple with boxers. They had both been married before, the husband had been in prison, and they were struggling. Because of our dogs, we started talking. That turned into counseling, which turned into Bible studies, and eventually, they found a church home with Pastor Manny in Oxnard. People at dog parks are always willing to talk. It's amazing.

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## **The Wind Blows Where It Pleases**

The Spirit doesn't just work with us and our "group." The Spirit is working everywhere. Rocky, in prison, has witnessed to people like Tex Watson (the right hand of Charles Manson) and Suge Knight (the president of Death Row Records).

In John 3:6-17, Jesus tells Nicodemus:

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

This pushes back against the idea that faith is just personal spirituality. Christianity is about belonging to a community. The church doesn't just *have* a social ethic; the church *is* the social ethic. The way we live together—generous, loving our enemies—is our moral witness.

## **A Final Perspective**

My father was a pastor for 40 years. Toward the end of his life, he had Alzheimer's. My sister and I asked him once, "So, who is God going to save?" This was a man who grew up in the 1950s Adventist church—not a great time for legalism. But he had learned the gospel. He looked at us and said, "Anybody that believes in the name of Jesus Christ. And I'm going to leave the rest up to God."

I retired six years ago and began volunteering for Northwest Boxer Rescue. I transport dogs and meet people in their homes. Often, they have pictures of dogs they've lost. I tell them, "Do you know that Scripture teaches our pets will be in heaven with us?" (If you want the biblical proof, Dr. Richard Davidson from Andrews Seminary has an article on it).

When I tell them that, they say, "Really? I've thought that all along. I'm going to have to make sure I get to heaven!" And I say, "Well, give your heart to Jesus."

The Spirit is working everywhere. May we part from our earthly, sectarian visions and see the universal work of God as the Spirit blows where it pleases.

**Amen.**