



Sarah was rich. She had inherited 20 million dollars. Plus, she had an additional income of one thousand dollars a day. That is a lot of money in our day but that is an immense amount of money in the late 1800's when she lived. Sarah was also well known; she was the belle of the New Haven Connecticut. No social event was complete without her presence. No one hosted a party without inviting her. She was also very powerful. Her name and money would open almost any door in America.

Although Sarah was rich, well known and powerful, she was also miserable. You see her only daughter had died at 5 weeks of age. Then her husband had passed away shortly afterwards. So she was left alone, with her name, her money, her memories and her guilt. It was her guilt that caused her to move west. So she bought an 8-room farmhouse on 160 acres of land. Then she hired 16 carpenters and put them to work. For the next 38 years, craftsmen laboured everyday, 24 hours a day, to build a mansion for her to live in.

But if you saw what she was building, you would have wondered what was going on. Sarah's instructions were more than eccentric; they were eerie. The design had a macabre touch. Each window had to have 13 panes, each wall 13 panels, each closet 13 hooks and each chandelier 13 globes. The floor plan had corridors that snaked randomly, some going nowhere. One door opened to a blank wall, another to a 50 ft. drop. One set of stairs led to a ceiling that had no door. Trapdoors, secret passages, tunnels ran everywhere. The building of this mysterious house only ended when Sarah died. The completed estate sprawled over 6 acres and had 6 kitchens, 13 bathrooms, 40 stairways 47 fireplaces, 52 skylights, 467 doors, 10,000 windows, 160 rooms and a bell tower.

Now here is where it gets even weirder, if you asked anyone if she lived alone they would say, "*well sort of... sometimes she has visitors.*" Every night at midnight, a servant would pass through the secret labyrinth that led to the Bell tower *and ring the bell to summon the spirits.* Sarah would then enter the Blue Room and for the next 2 hours would entertain her ghostly guests until the bell would ring again at 2 am. Then Sarah would return to her quarters and she thought the ghosts would return to their graves.

Who were these ghosts? She claimed they were soldiers and Native Americans who had been killed by the most popular rifle in America the Winchester. Sarah's name was Sarah Winchester and the Winchester repeating rifle, which had brought a fortune to her family had been invented by her father, had brought death to many people. So she had spent the remaining years of her life building a Castle of regret.

When I think of her story I want to say, if only she had met my Jesus, who with a word He could have freed her from all that guilt. Nightly, she could have spoken with Him instead of the ghosts, found a new peace and joy and she could have found others who shared her faith and found friendship and care. If only she had met my Jesus, her mansion could have been a place of joy instead of pain and her life could have been one of freedom instead of bondage.

Now beside that picture of sprawling confusion, let me place a different picture. Turn to I Peter 2:4, 5. Peter is writing to Christians living in Cappadocia, Galatia, other parts of Turkey and to us today, was saying, "*Let me tell you what Jesus is building.*"

Picture this in your mind. God is building a Spiritual house, a majestic Cathedral, a world-altering Church out of each of us with Himself as the cornerstone (foundation). He has hand picked you and I and as a master strategist, placed us in the exact location in the world/city/town where He knows we will be needed. We are all part of 2 churches. There is a huge massive unseen Cathedral made up of millions upon millions of us, which is His Worldwide Church. And then smaller, visible churches, which He places on street corners, store fronts and mud/brick huts that are His perfectly designed Spiritual Houses (Churches).

One of those magnificent structures, designed by God, built by bringing individuals from all over the world, full of talents, ideas and passion for Jesus is Brentview Baptist Church. The unique stones which make up this place are you and I. Understand that part of God's design for the church is to place a growing and gifted you as an integral part of this church. That means that it is God's dream that the way you live your life should have a profound affect on the life, the joy, the unity and the ministry of this church. Who we are and how we act will either advance the ministry or block God's dreams for this church.

You see we are United together by God on purpose. But in order for that purpose to come to pass, there are some things which God wants us to do together. As

a church, we have tried to write some of those things down so we can keep them in front of our minds. We call them a Personal Covenant (at the end of this transcript). As we get ready for this Fall season, I thought it would be helpful to review our Church Covenant together. Personal Covenant: *"I commit myself to striving to do the following with God's help.*

I. I will passionately seek to follow God.

Let me begin by showing you a picture. This picture was dedicated to the memory of one of our very special ladies, Sophie Frieter; it will hang in our Prayer room. Sophie was Walter Frieter's wife for 57 years. She was a gem, a gentle godly lady who loved Jesus and loved her church. This picture is a crown of thorns (taken from in front of one of our Missionaries homes in Cameroon) and homemade spikes representing the spikes which pinned our Jesus to the cross. They represent that which unites us in this place. It is the fact that Jesus Christ not only died for our sins but also to give us a way of walking with God during our lives. What unites us is not a denomination or specific person, it is that Jesus Christ has *touched our hearts and that relationship is in the process of changing our lives.* The covenant begins by reminding us to be committed to that which will make that transformation of our hearts and life happen better.

a. We promise to stay in the Scriptures.

II Timothy 3:16, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."*

We believe that the Scriptures have been God breathed. While the different books have flowed through the minds and personalities of numerous Bible writers, what they have in common is the breath of God. As you read it and as you hear it preached, God breathes His breath (life) into you. Close your eyes and listen to Psalm 23, *"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely*

goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

I'll bet you felt Him walk by and breathe His peace into your heart, didn't you? But that passage also adds that the scriptures are useful for teaching us how to live. Mark Twain said, *“Most people are bothered by those passages which they can't understand. But for me, I have noticed that the passages of scripture that trouble me most are those which I do understand.”* I feel like I am discovering the Word once again. It is wonderful, rich and powerful but it will only make a difference in your life if you read it.

b. We promise to pray.

As I have been preparing for our Fall series, it struck again, that while the Apostle Paul never knew how he would get in trouble next, he did know that he would end up in trouble somehow. How did he survive? His secret is found in Philippians 4:6, 7, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

I came across this last week. In one region of Africa, the first converts to Christianity were very diligent about praying. In fact, the believers each had their own special place outside the village where they went to pray in solitude. The villagers reached these “prayer rooms” by using their own private footpaths through the brush. When grass began to grow over one of these trails, it was evident that the person to whom it belonged was not praying very much. Because these new Christians were concerned for each other's spiritual welfare, a unique custom sprang up. Whenever anyone noticed an overgrown “Prayer path,” he or she would go to the person and lovingly warn, *“Friend, there's grass on your path!”*

Let's covenant together to keep the grass off our path to prayer for the sake of each other, our ministry here and for the Kingdom's sake.

c. I promise to live so others see Jesus.

When Phillip Brooks was recovering from an illness, he wasn't seeing any visitors but when Robert Ingersoll, who was an agnostic called. The Bishop received him at once. "*I appreciate this very much,*" said Ingersoll, "*but why did you see me when you deny yourself to your friends?*"

"It is this way," said the Bishop. "*I feel confident of seeing my friends in the next world, but this may be my last chance of seeing you.*"

d. I promise to be involved in a significant way with other believers.

As we said last week God designed us to need each other, to have coffee together, to gather with a small group and to meet for encouragement around a camp fire, a dinner table or a restaurant table. God made us to need each other and be needed by each other. As soon as the church began in Acts, you will see people meeting around tables, in homes or at public places so they could laugh together, cry together, pray together and grow together. You need to know that we believe in community in this place and encourage you to find that place where you find friendship and care.

II. I will protect the unity of my church.

Read a) – d). Why is this so important? First, because we are family; we have, in common, the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed so we could be placed in the family of God. Good ministry comes out of good friendship. Good working relationships don't flow out of obedience; they flow out of understanding and trust. Good friendship happens as we know that we have each other's backs and that we won't settle for not dealing with issues between ourselves, so that even when we disagree there is a depth of trust, respect and care which we give because we are friends.

Psalm 133:1, "*How a wonderful it is, how beautiful it is when God's people live together in harmony.*" (TEV)

Colossians 3:15, "*Each one of you is part of the body of Christ and you were chosen to live together in peace.*" (CEV)

Now, you may be asking why gossiping is singled out in this way. Gossip, of course, happens when we fail to take our concerns directly to the other person. It

happens so innocently because we love to be in the loop, we love to tell a story with a little extra sizzle to it and if we are angry at another person it feels ok to stretch the truth a little. It is placed there because very few things destroy careers, ministries and friendships like gossip.

Let me help you picture what gossip is like. One day a person who had been a gossip and spread malicious untruths about a local priest felt convicted about what he had done so he came to the priest to ask for forgiveness. The priest, hearing the person's confession, asked him to remain standing on the front step until he returned. When he reappeared he was carrying 2 feather pillow cases. Before his eyes, the priest cut both feather cases open and let the feathers blow away in the wind. And then he said, *"When you have brought back all the feathers from these 2 pillow cases I will forgive you because your words have flown to the 4 winds and have destroyed my good name and my ministry."*

It is so dangerous that at Rick Warren's Church in Saddleback, every time they welcome new members into the church they must promise not to gossip and not listen to gossip. Why? They have found out that nothing destroys a fellowship like gossip. Nothing takes the heart out of a church like gossip. Nothing causes God to withdraw His work in a church like gossip. We need to covenant together to speak together as friends not speak to others wrongly about those we call our friends.

Chuck Swindoll says, *"If you don't say it, they can't repeat it."*

Will Rogers said, *"So live that you wouldn't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip."*

III. I will support the testimony of my Church.

Read a) – d). Can I just briefly make a comment on the first and last statements? First, regarding attendance; you have heard me say that I free you to be gone at times during the summer or winter on vacation because you need to be away to be refreshed and build special memories for you and those you love. But I also remind you what you Lord Jesus says in Hebrew 10:24, 25, *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* Did you notice it uses the term habit when speaking about

those who miss gathering together with other Christians? The truth of the matter is that it is so easy to take a holiday from church and it ends up to be a habit of an extended holiday from God.

Listen to the Exodus 20:8, 9, *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work.”* I think sometimes we have forgotten that this one of the 10 commandments; not suggestions of God. It was the pattern of the New Testament church to meet on Sunday (I Corinthians 16:2, *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”*).

Why is it so important that we regularly meet together? It is because God, knowing how easily we get distracted from our commitment to Him, wanted to set aside a specific day for us to have a gathered appointment with Him so we would solidly place Him in the center of our lives. Understand also, that you never know when you need to be there for someone else or which Sunday God has a specific life-changing word just for you; a word you don't want to miss.

On the way out of church, one of our men came up to me in tears after the service last Sunday and said, *“There was a line you used in your sermon last Sunday and try as I might, I couldn't shake it all week. Can we get together and talk?”* That Sunday, he received a word from the heart of God to his heart that may have life-changing ramifications. I bet he was glad he came. The glorious thing is that God loves to meet us in all kinds of ways but we need to remember that there is something unique and profound that can happen when we gather together regularly with others.

d) Warmly welcoming those who visit.

Sunday morning come with three things on your mind: (i) come ready and excited about meeting with your Lord, (ii) come ready and excited about encouraging one other believer in their faith (don't be a joy stealer be a joy giver) and (iii) come ready to give 5 handshakes (3 to people you know and at least 2 people you don't know) and in the name of Jesus welcome them and warm their heart.

IV. I will serve in the ministries of the church.

Read a) – c). Around here we would encourage everyone to find a service to enjoy, a smaller group of believers with which to grow and a place to serve.

Let me give you an example. Last week we had a memorial service for one of the folk from the 2nd service. His name is Cy Haukedal. Cy was 81 years old when he passed away. He had been a very good business man with Esso, a smart investor and he had enjoyed building a number of houses. Upon his retirement, he felt a call to join a few others from this church and consider doing a church plant. His idea was to help get it started and then come back to Brentview. At the funeral, I met countless people who said they had been in Mae & Cy's house, been with them in a Small group, been with him on the building committee or been with him at some meeting and that he had had a profound effect on their lives.

Then 12 years ago, he had a stroke (followed by 2 more strokes) that caused him to be forced to be bound to a wheelchair. But he didn't give up and he didn't get bitter and it didn't affect his Christian witness. Instead, he became this prayer warrior, his positive caring heart just went on making a difference in others lives. One of the head men at Samaritan's Purse came up to me and said, *"That man is the reason I became a Christian a while ago."*

Cy had a servant's heart. He had concern for the other person and a deep love of Jesus. People lined up on Wednesday to tell his wife, Mae, that he (and them, as a couple) had profoundly touched their lives. I said, *"That is the kind of person I want to be."* Since then a single question has been rolling around in my head, *"Ask yourself, with how you are living today, how will you be remembered and what words will they use to describe you?"* I pray it will be words like they used to describe Cy. How does that happen? It happens as we commit ourselves to striving to do the following as part of this Church which God has placed us in.

Can I challenge you to read this personal covenant again and if it expresses the desire of you heart to sign it and place it in your Bible, so you will keep being encouraged to live it out. In that way as Hebrews 10 says, *"We will spur each other on to good deeds."* and as I Peter 2 says, *"We will be built up together into a holy priesthood that is not only acceptable to God but also a place He can easily flow His power in and through."*

PERSONAL COVENANT
Brentview Baptist Church

Having received Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and having publicly expressed my faith through believer's baptism, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite in membership with the Brentview Baptist Church family. In doing so, **I commit myself to striving to do the following with God's help:**

1. I will passionately seek to follow God ...

- a) by making Scripture the foundation for my beliefs and actions,
- b) by being constant and persistent in prayer,
- c) by bringing others to follow Jesus Christ through my words and actions, and
- d) by seeking to become an active and supportive member of a small group.
(2 Timothy 3:14-17; Philippians 4:6; Luke 8:21; Acts 2:46, 47)

2. I will protect the unity of my Church Family ...

- a) by acting in love toward other members,
- b) by refusing to gossip,
- c) by respecting, encouraging and following the leaders as they follow Christ, and
- d) by submitting to the Biblical guidelines for conflict resolution and harmony.
(Romans 15:5; Ephesians 4:25, 29; Hebrews 13:7, 17; Matthew 18:15-17)

3. I will support the testimony of my Church ...

- a) by attending faithfully,
- b) by living a godly life,
- c) by giving regularly of my time, talent and treasure, and
- d) by warmly welcoming those who visit.
(Hebrews 10:25; Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Leviticus 27:30)

4. I will serve in the ministries of the church ...

- a) by discovering my gifts and talents,
- b) by taking the opportunity to become equipped to serve, and
- c) by developing a servant's heart.
(1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 2:2-4, 7)

Your Signature

Date

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