

INTRODUCTION

The title of this series is "God's Medicine for Hurting Families." As I've said before, there is no such thing as a perfect family or a perfect marriage – just as there isn't a perfect church. But it is possible to have a healthy marriage and a healthy family.

A college professor stopped to speak to a man whose car had evidently broken down beside the road. The professor said, "Sir, it appears your tubular air container has lost most of its rotundity." The motorist replied, "What did you say?" The professor restated, "The cylindrical apparatus which supports your vehicle has been incrementally dispossessed of its desired pressure gradient." The motorist answered, "I beg your pardon?" The professor tried one more time, saying, "The elastic substance surrounding the circular frame whose successive revolutions mobilize you forward has failed to retain its pristine roundness." The man scratched his head. Finally a little boy walked by and said, "Hey mister, you have a flat tire!" He understood that.

Sometimes we try to cover it up and politicians can produce plenty of double-speak and rhetoric, but let me make it plain: America is in trouble. The breakdown in the family has produced a moral decline that is frightening. The only hope for America is a real revival. The only hope for the American family is a spiritual awakening. That's what I want to talk to you about today.

Many of you have gone through the study called "Experiencing God" written by Henry Blackaby. One premise of that great study is to realize that God is always at work around us. Our task is to look around and see what God is doing and get in on it, to join Him in His work. Today, I want you to know about something that is happening in America today that I see as the greatest hope for healing and revival in our land and I'm going to ask you to join it. Every great awakening in America's brief history began a prayer revival.

There is a great movement that is sweeping our nation – the Lighthouse Prayer movement. I didn't come up with this idea; I've just been hearing about it and reading about it for the past year. Families all around this nation are dedicating themselves to pray for their neighbors and, yes, these families have problems of their own. But the old adage is really true: The family that prays together, stays together.

This message could be just what the Doctor (the Great Physician) ordered to revitalize and renew your family and your own walk with the Lord.

Now, let's look at our text in Matthew 5:14-16. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set upon a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Today, I'm going to challenge you to do exactly what Jesus commanded us to do. I'm going to challenge you to be a light in the small world in which Jesus has placed you – your own neighborhood. Now Jesus gave us the general command to pray and He gave us the general command to let our light shine but it's up to us to come with creative ways to do this. It reminds me of a story about Will Rogers.

During the days of World War I, the United States was having trouble with German submarines. Military leaders were perplexed as to how to deal with this constant threat to allied shipping. The philosopher/comedian Will Rogers offered a solution to this problem. He said, "What we need to do is boil the ocean. This will create such a pressure that it will force the submarines to the top. Then it will be as easy to destroy them as shooting ducks in a pond." A reporter replied, "That's a good idea, Will, but how are we going to boil the ocean?" Rogers answered, "I'm just telling you what to do. It's up to you to work out the details."

Jesus said, "Let your light shine." That's the good idea. Now let me give you the details. You may have read this passage many times and thought, "Okay, I know I'm supposed to let my light shine for Jesus, but exactly *how* can I do that?" This message is designed to provide you with a practical way that thousands of Christian families are already letting their light shine for Jesus – by becoming a Lighthouse of Prayer.

Now, most of us understand what a lighthouse is. Before the invention of sophisticated marine navigation tools like Loraine and the Global Positioning System, ships were sailing with only a compass. Lighthouses were built for two purposes. Some were to show where the harbor was and some were to warn the sailors of dangerous rocks. These had foghorns that sounded when it was too foggy to see the light. Thousands of sailors and passengers have depended on lighthouses for safe passage into calm harbors. Lighthouses aren't modern inventions, they've been around for thousands of years.

One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was the amazing Lighthouse in Alexandria, Egypt, built on the island of Pharos. Construction was begun in 290 B.C. and when it was completed it was the tallest building in the world. It held that claim until an earthquake destroyed it about 1,000 years later. The base of the lighthouse was 200 feet square and the lighthouse rose to a height of 384 feet (a modern 40-story building). It had a remarkable mirror that reflected the sunlight during the day, and a fire by night. Sailors could see the light from the Pharos lighthouse 35 miles away.

That's exactly what Jesus has asked us to do—to let our light shine brightly to provide guidance to those who are out on the dark seas of life. Now I want you to think about where you live. You may live in a neighborhood or out in the country or in an apartment complex or a nursing home or a dorm room. Wherever you live, there are always people not far away who need the light of Jesus. Can you say that your family is a lighthouse? Would you like for your home to be a lighthouse?

This message will explain this concept to you, and then if you decide to make your home a lighthouse, I promise that it will make a tremendous difference in your life, your family, and your neighborhood. Remember, this is not just some wild idea that I've concocted, there are already thousands of homes around America that are effectively providing the light of Jesus to their neighborhoods. I'm asking you to consider joining this great prayer movement.

There are three basic things to do if you decide to make your home a lighthouse. First it involves:

I. PRAYER FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS

First, let me give you a simple description of what a Lighthouse of Prayer is:

A lighthouse of prayer is a cluster of two or more believers who are banded together to pray for, care about and share the blessings of Christ with their neighbors.

Let's examine this description a little more closely:

Question # 1: Who are the two or more believers? It may be a husband and wife or a couple and their children. It may be two single adult Christians who live in the same apartment complex; it may be two ladies who are neighbors or two workers who are burdened for their fellow employees at work. It could be two students who are burdened for their fellow classmates. It works anywhere. Find this other person and ask them if they will join you in being a lighthouse.

The main force of this challenge is directed toward families, to pray for those who live around you in your neighborhood, but even if that doesn't fit your current profile, you can make it work. It would be great, if every dad here today would say, "We are going to become a lighthouse of prayer in our neighborhood." But it may be up to the wife, or even the children, to express the desire to let your home become a lighthouse. Somebody has got to take the lead and say, "We are going to start praying for our neighbors."

Question #2: Who are my neighbors? That's exactly the question Jesus was asked when He told some people that the second greatest commandment is "to love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus proceeded to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. Remember, the poor guy was mugged and was lying in the middle of the road bleeding. The religious Jewish men bypassed him, but the Samaritan, a half-breed, stopped and gave him assistance. This was a total stranger, but he saw someone who needed assistance, and he acted "neighborly" toward him. Our English word "neighbor" is a derivative of the word "nigh" which means "close by." A neighbor is anyone who is "close by" where you are. Of course, those people who live on your street are your neighbors and those who live in your apartment complex are also. But it could also apply to those who work close to you at your job or sit close to you at the soccer game. Basically, Jesus said that your neighbor is anyone to whom you can provide help and assistance.

Question #3: How can I pray for my neighbors? We all know the Bible tells us in many places that we are to pray for one another. In James 5:16 we read, "pray for one another that you may be healed." There is a great way to pray for your neighbor based on an acrostic of the word "bless." If you really want to bless your neighbors, pray for these five areas:

Body – you pray for their good health and physical strength.

Labor – you pray for their job, that they will be effective and productive.

Emotional – you ask God to give them joy, peace, happiness and inner strength.

Social – you pray that their relationships with other will be strong, for their family and friends.

Spiritual – you pray that they will know God and will have a strong relationship with Him.

Now, it doesn't take long to pray a blessing on your neighbors, but if you agree with me that prayer changes people, then you will want to pray for your neighbors in that way. That's the kind of prayer you can pray for the people that God has placed in your world – that's how you can be a lighthouse.

When most people think of praying, they picture themselves on their knees in the privacy of their home or prayer closet and that's the primary way Jesus taught us to pray. But that's not the only way to pray. Many people who have committed themselves to be a lighthouse of prayer have discovered an innovative way to pray for their neighbors – it's called a prayer walk. Write those words down: prayer walk. It's pretty simple; you just walk through your neighborhood with your prayer partner.

When you pass the home of your neighbors, you pray for God to bless them, using the five letters of that word. You don't fall on your knees in their yard and shout out your prayer; you don't even have to stop walking. As you and your prayer partner walk by that home you just talk conversationally to the Lord, asking Him to bless them in those five areas. If you wish, you can leave door-hangers on your neighbors' doors to let them know that you are praying for them and asking them to fill out any prayer needs they have and you will stop by later to pick up the prayer requests.

Prayer walking is an integral part of this lighthouse of prayer movement, and thousands of people have found that walking is good for you physically, and praying is good for you spiritually, so you can't lose! If you will start praying for your neighbors, it will change you and it will change your neighbors.

The second aspect of being a lighthouse of prayer is to:

II. SHOW YOUR NEIGHBORS YOU CARE

In addition to praying for them, you need to take a further step and look for practical ways to show that you care for your neighbors. The easiest way to do this is to approach them and just be honest. Tell them that your church is asking its members to begin to pray for their neighbors, you have volunteered to pray for those around your home, then ask each of your neighbors if there are any special prayer needs they have in their lives. Just by asking them how you can pray for them shows them that you care. Generations ago, neighbors used to know each other. Today, most Americans are so individualistic that they can live next to people for years and not even know them. Studies have shown that the average American can't name their five closest neighbors – can you? Factors like television, high fences, gated communities, and busy lifestyles all combine to separate us from our neighbors. In most other countries around the world, people tend to walk most places, and they usually know who their neighbors are. We jump in our cars and are too busy to stop and visit. America leads the world in shutting out its neighbors. It's sad that Americans don't seem to be as "neighborly" as we used to be. Wouldn't you like to get to know your neighbors better? If you volunteer to become a lighthouse, you will be improving

relations between you and your neighbors. You'll be amazed how your neighborhood will improve if you provide the lighthouse.

Let me give you three reasons why you should begin to show your neighbors that you care:

(1) Your neighbors matter to God

God loves your neighbors. He knows their names – even if you don't! God loves them so much that His Son was willing to go to the cross and give His life for them. God knows more than the names of your neighbors and He also knows their needs. You won't really start being a lighthouse until you affirm the fact that if God cares for your neighbors and He does; then so should you.

In Luke 15, Jesus told three stories about lost things. First a shepherd lost a sheep and he left the other 99 sheep to go find the lost one. He was thrilled when he found the lost sheep. Then a woman lost a coin. She turned her house upside down to find it; she was overjoyed when she found it. Then he told the story about a father who lost a son. The son left home and went off and lived a life of depravity. But when the son returned, the Father celebrated. But Jesus wasn't talking about sheep, silver, or sons, He was talking about people just like your neighbors. In each case there was joy when the lost object was recovered, and Jesus said, "in the same way, there is joy in the presence of angels over one sinner who repents." Wouldn't it be great if some of your neighbors were brought to Christ because you started praying for them and showing them you care? I believe that God gets more excited when one little neighborhood boy or girl accepts Christ than He does when 3,000 well-dressed saints gather to study.

Your neighbors matter to God. There's another reason that you ought to become a lighthouse of prayer.

(2) Your neighbors welcome prayer

Your neighbors may decline your invitation to attend church at times, but studies have shown that over 95% of Americans believe in the power of prayer. Few people will refuse to allow you to pray for them. On the contrary, people are impressed that you would even offer to pray for them. They are never offended when you simply offer to pray for them. They will welcome your prayers.

A Christian couple in Modesto, California, was burdened to begin to pray for the residents of their apartment complex. There were 200 apartment units, and after laying a foundation of prayer, they personally approached all the residents of those 200 apartments. The people in 199 of them accepted their offer to pray for them and that's California! Most of the people gave the couple some prayer requests on the spot so they were off and running being a lighthouse for their neighborhood. Since they established their apartment as a lighthouse, dozens of their neighbors have come to Christ and are now attending church and it all started when these caring friends just asked their neighbors if they could pray for them.

When your neighbors open themselves up to prayer, they open themselves up to a personal God who can begin to make a difference in their lives. Prayer releases the power and grace of God in their lives. Think about God's love and grace as a mighty reservoir of blessing. This reservoir is connected by a prayer pipeline to every home in your neighborhood and the valve that opens the pipeline is prayer. Before long, your entire neighborhood can blossom into a beautiful garden of friends watered by the powerful prayers you offer.

(3) As you pray, God will reveal to you HOW to care

If you volunteer to be a lighthouse, you will want to go beyond just praying for your neighbors, you need to put feet to your prayers and look for simple, practical ways to show them that you care. As you begin to pray for them, God will show you some ways to demonstrate your love for your neighbors. Years ago, Paul Simon sang a funny song, "There must be 50 ways to leave your lover." He said, "Step out the back, Jack; make a new plan, Stan; don't need to be coy, Roy, just listen to me, just hop on the bus, Gus, you don't need to discuss much, just drop off the key, Lee and get yourself free." When I thought about that song, I thought that there must be at least 50 ways to show your neighbors that you care. Here are some examples. After you let your neighbors know that you are a lighthouse and that you are praying for them, try looking for ways like this to show them kindness:

- Offer to take care of a neighbor's pets when they are out of town
- Offer to collect their mail and papers when they are on vacation
- When you are cutting the grass in your yard; offer to cut your neighbor's too.
- When you see your neighbor working in his yard; offer to help
- If you have a garden, offer your neighbors some flowers or produce
- Clean up any trash that may accumulate along your street
- Volunteer to be the neighborhood watch house
- When you wash your car, offer to wash your neighbor's while you are wet and soapy
- Offer to provide emergency transportation if they ever need it
- Organize a block party
- Give clothes or toys to your neighbors if your children have outgrown them
- Offer to provide childcare for your neighbors

A book I was reading about lighthouses of prayer added one to the list of acts of kindness that probably doesn't apply to us. It said "Shovel snow off your neighbor's driveway."

Now that's just 12 ways. There must be at least 50 ways and probably more like 500 ways to show kindness to your neighbors. When you build a bridge of kindness to your neighbors' heart, it's easy for them to walk across that bridge to Jesus.

Linda Lesniewski, our Women's Ministry Coordinator, has been conducting prayer walks for her neighbors for quite a while. As she walks in the early morning, she prays for her neighbor's by name but she does more than that. If they have a newspaper delivered, she takes it from the curb up to the front porch and leaves it there. One of her neighbors wondered who her "paper angel" was and when she found out it was Linda; she brought her some brownies. Linda and Gary already are operating like a lighthouse of prayer.

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good deeds and praise your Father who is in heaven." These acts of kindness that show that you care must be done under the umbrella of praying for your neighbors. You see, if you perform kind deeds to your neighbors but you never mention that you are praying for them, they will appreciate you and you will be praised. In other words, you will receive the glory that should go to God. On the other hand, if you have asked your neighbors if you can pray for them, they realize that you are spiritually motivated to care for them and when you perform the acts of kindness, who gets the glory? God does. It's that simple.

Unexpected and undeserved acts of kindness are powerful evangelistic tools. Pastor Steve Sjogrin started a church from scratch about 20 years ago in Cincinnati that is based primarily on performing acts of kindness in Jesus' name to unchurched people. Today, over 3,000 people attend that church. He has written a book entitled *Conspiracy of Kindness*, and in it he tells the true story of Joe Delaney and his eight-year-old son, Jared.

As they were pitching a baseball in the backyard, Jared asked his dad, "Dad, is there a God?" Joe responded, "I'm not really qualified to answer that question, son. I only went to church a time or two when I was a kid." After a few more tosses of the ball, Jared ran into the house. When he came out, he had a balloon from the circus and a filing card. "What are you doing?" Joe asked. "I'm writing a letter to God." In his elementary handwriting, the boy penned, "Dear God, if you are real and if you are there, send people who know you to Dad and me." He attached the card to the balloon and released it. Two days later, Joe and Jared pulled into a church's car wash. Joe rolled down his window and asked, "How much?" It's free," he was told, "We just want to show God's love in a practical way." Joe asked, "Are you guys Christian?" "Yeah, we're Christians." Are you the kind of Christians who believe in God?" "Yes, we're that kind of Christians." Joe smiled and said, "I guess you're the answer to one of the strangest prayers God has ever received" (pp.16-17).

Joe and his entire family later became active Christians because they found a group of Christians to care enough to wash cars for free with no strings attached.

The final aspect of being a lighthouse of prayer is to:

III. TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE

Your ultimate goal is to share Jesus with your neighbors but that doesn't mean that you hit them over the head with a Bible. There is a natural progression. Once you start praying, and then start showing them that you care by performing acts of kindness, it will be the most natural thing to just share the Lord with them as well. Here's a couple of simple ways to share Jesus with your neighbors. First:

(1) Ask them how God is answering prayer

Once you start praying for the needs of your neighbors, you already have a built-in topic of spiritual conversation. After you've been praying for them for several days, be sure to check up and see if God has answered your prayers for them yet. If they have a sick family member, or a rebellious teenager, or a problem at work; ask them how things are. Their response will allow you to share spiritual truth with them. Let them know that God always answers prayer. His timing is just always the same as ours! Talking to them about prayer in general is a great way to initiate a conversation about God's power.

(2) Tell how Jesus has blessed your life

Another natural way to share with them is by simply giving a testimony of how God has blessed your life. You aren't asking them a bunch of tough questions; you are just sharing your heart with them. Your goal is to lead them into a deeper relationship with God and if they aren't attending church, you can just tell them what a blessing your church is to you. Your testimony of how Jesus has blessed your life will create a spiritual hunger in them that only Jesus can satisfy. Have you ever wondered why people come to church in the first place?

A recent study asked 10,000 Christians how they came to Christ and their church....
.5% said they did so as a result of a revival service. 2% said they went because they had a special need. 3% went because liked the church programs. 5% liked the Sunday School. 6% liked the pastor (I think that number is a little high). 79% came to Christ because they were invited to do so by a friend!

Now, I want to challenge every family, every single person to heed the call of Jesus to let your light shine by establishing your home as a lighthouse of prayer. You are probably wondering what's involved. It's very simple:

Will you be a lighthouse? (5 by 5) Instead of thinking of a 4 by 4 truck, starting thinking in terms of a 5 by 5 prayer program:

1. **5 blessings for** (remember what B.L.E.S.S stands for)
2. **5 neighbors for** (it may be more, but that's a good minimum)
3. **5 minutes a day**, (that's all it takes to pray for your neighbors)
4. **5 days a week for** (you can do it Monday through Friday)
5. **5 weeks** (again, that's the minimum, but watch what happens after just five weeks. If you don't see the hand of God moving in your neighbor's lives, you can quit)

Now this is a message that you can do something about. Everybody in this congregation is going to make a decision. Some of you will say, "No, I'm not interesting in becoming a lighthouse of prayer." If that's your decision, you can tune out the rest of the message. Others of you are going to say, "Yes, I will make my home a lighthouse for my neighborhood." Your question now is **HOW** do I sign up?

1. Accept God's call to be a light

Don't do this just because you heard a preacher bring a challenge. If you are doing it because I ask you to do it, it won't last very long. Instead you need to hear Jesus' challenge again, "Let your light so shine that men will see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." That's the main reason you want to become a lighthouse.

2. Enlist your prayer partners

If you are married, you already have a potential partner. It's best if husbands and wives pray together for their neighbors. If you are single, think about a friend or a Christian neighbor that you can enlist to be your prayer partner. Even if you don't have a partner to begin with, you can decide to be a lighthouse and find a partner to join you.

3. Equip yourself (simple training)

Take a moment and look at the enlistment card in your bulletin. There is a place for you to sign up to establish your home as a lighthouse. The training sessions are listed there. Debra Roberts has agreed to be our lighthouse coordinator and she will schedule some training times when you can watch a short video that will give you much more practical advice on how to be an effective lighthouse. When you register online to be a Lighthouse, you can receive some resources that will help you be a better lighthouse.
<http://www.gabc.org/lighthouse.htm>

4. Start praying!

You don't have to wait to be trained to start praying. Go home this afternoon and write down the names of your neighbors, those who live in the houses around you or in the apartments around you. If you don't know their names, start praying for them anyway and look for an opportunity to meet them to offer to pray for them.

If you are willing to be a lighthouse of prayer, please fill out the attached card. You keep the top half to remind you to be a lighthouse of prayer. You may also register nationally as a lighthouse at <http://www.namb.net/prayer/lighthouses>. You will become a part of a growing number of lighthouses in North America. Fill out the bottom part of the card and drop it in one of the offering repositories as you leave. We will put you on our mailing list to receive updates on what's happening in our lighthouse ministry.

Can you imagine what would happen in East Texas if we had 200 or 500 lighthouses of prayer actively praying for our neighbors? It could revolutionize our entire community. Dr. John DeVries who has been instrumental in introducing this concept has written:

"Lighthouses of prayer are contributing powerfully to the national prayer revival that God is now raising up in North America. These are among the most hopeful signs on the spiritual horizon. The church will be revived, the Great Commission completed, and our society transformed only if God's people are faithful and earnest in prayer and obedient to His command "that requests, prayers, and intercession and thanksgiving be made for

everyone (1 Timothy 2:1) Prayer is essential because it is how God has chosen to work. It is his plan, not ours. When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works!"

CONCLUSION

Remember, this message is part of a series "God's Medicine for Hurting Families." You may object and say, "How can I pray for others when I'm having such terrible problems of my own? we need prayer. My family is in no position to pray for anyone else, we've got our own pain to try to deal with." Sometimes when your family is struggling with problems, it's tempting to want to find a quick fix. Wouldn't it be great if there was a pill you could take and "boom" suddenly all your family problems were gone? That's not going to happen but this is a strategy that you can adopt that will greatly lessen the pain of family problems. Start praying for your neighbors and their problems.

By praying for your neighbors, you will make an amazing discovery. Most experts agree that when you focus only on your own problems, you tend to sink into despair and desperation. However, if you will try to focus on helping other people deal with their problems, your pain seems to lessen. Oh, your problems are still there, but the difference is you aren't expending all your emotional energy on yourself. In other words, helping others is great therapy for your family! Try it.

Picture this: It's a dark, starless night and you are alone out on the sea in a small boat. You are scared and confused. The suddenly you see the light of a small lighthouse in the distance, so you start making your way toward the light. The light gives you a direction by which you can plot your course. You know that somebody built the lighthouse, and someone is maintaining the light. You realize that someone cares enough to offer to help you find your way to safety. Before long, you find yourself safely within the harbor, because the lighthouse was there for you.

Now change the picture. All around you there are people who are lost and confused. They have no clear direction in life. God has given you the light and now He says, "Let your light shine." Will you be the lighthouse that shows people you care enough to be willing to see that their personal ship lands safely within the protective harbor of God's love?

OUTLINE

I. PRAYER FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS

A lighthouse of prayer is a cluster of two or more believers who are banded together to pray for, care about, and share the blessings of Christ with their neighbors.

Body (healthy, strength)

Labor (work, income)

Emotional (joy, peace)

Social (family, marriage, friends)

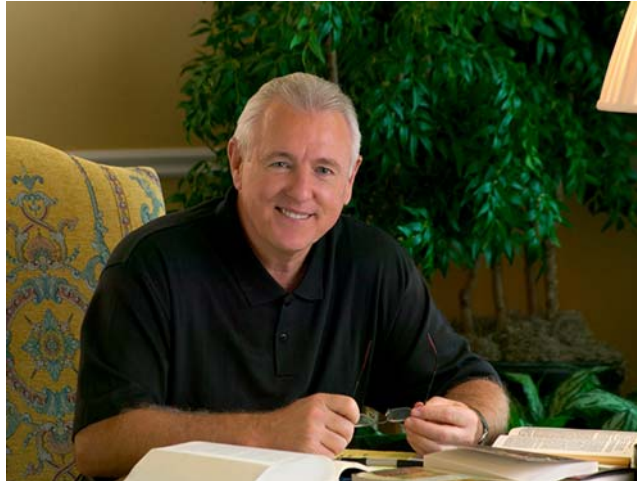
Spiritual (salvation, faith)

II. SHOW YOUR NEIGHBORS YOU CARE

1. Your neighbors matter to God
2. Neighbors welcome prayer
3. As you pray, God will reveal to you HOW to care

III. TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE

1. Ask how God is answering prayer
2. Tell how Jesus has blessed your life



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If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes