

Episode 14. "The Infant Christian Crisis."

Tuesday, June 8, 2021. 56 Minutes Long.

A conversation between Shields, Wolfe, and Allen, the producers of the "Saving Christianity" podcast. The three admit the consequences of living as infant Christians with true stories that are humorous, tragic, and surprising. They confess their own struggles with Spiritual immaturity, and they reveal the true solution to the crisis.

John (00:00):

John Shields opens the episode by saying:

John (00:12):

Hello again, friends, and welcome back. Welcome to episode 14 in our bi-weekly series of "Saving Christianity." We're coming to you every-other-Tuesday from Christian Family Online, and I'm your host, John Shields. And welcome to today's podcast. Now, this episode is a sequel – or maybe better said, "Part Two" – of the previous episode, Episode 13. You may remember that it had the title: "The Infant Christian." That's right. "The Infant Christian." Now – that previous episode was based on Chapter 8 in the book, *Saving Christianity*. And we've talked (about) how non-Christians become Christians. We said it happens when non-Christians get tired of all their *trouble* their selfishness is causing them, and they pray to give their lives to Jesus. And that causes them to have a *personal Pentecost* in which the Holy Spirit indwells them and *baptizes* their inner spirits in supernatural power. And this awakens their sleeping inner spirits to start *motivating* them, and makes them Christians.

John (01:36):

Now they're new Christians, and they have a *second inner motivator* that can resist their natural inclinations, their natural selfishness. Now, that second motivator is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And if they allow Him to do it, He will produce in them the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit. But – He can only do that if we allow Him to motivate us. And many Christians *don't* do that. And therefore, we remain as *infant* Christians. They'll go (the infant Christians) to heaven when they die. But they're not living any part of heaven while here on earth. And then finally, we said that the reason new Christians *don't* allow the Holy Spirit to motivate them is because today's Institutional Christianity doesn't *teach* infant Christians how to live a Spirit-filled life. It doesn't *teach* how to live the Early Christian Lifestyle that we're discussing in these episodes.

John (02:58):

So, the title of this episode is: "The Infant Christian Crisis." (Repeats.) Now today, this is a three-way conversation between our producer, Shannon Wolfe, our co-founder Owen Allen, and

me. And we're going to talk about what it *feels* like to be an infant Christian ... and the *trouble* that today's denominations have because a lot of their members are infants ... and how society is actually *suffering* because of the infant Christians in it ... and what infant Christians can actually *do* to start growing spiritually. So, we have a lot to talk about. Let's get started by introducing Shannon Wolfe, our producer, and our co-founder, Owen Allen. Hello guys! And welcome to the episode!

Owen (03:58):

Well, thank you, John! It's good to be here. Happy to be here.

Shannon (04:02):

Thank you so much for inviting me to do this. I'm really excited to be in on this episode ... and definitely an eye-opening topic.

John (04:11):

Now Owen, why don't you get us started? You do the kickoff today. And then Shannon and I will jump in with our ideas as we go along.

Owen (04:22):

Okey-dokey. Well, you know guys, as I think about it, it seems to me that maybe the best way to start this conversation is by recognizing the fact that there *is* a crisis in today's Christianity. Some people may not realize that. And that crisis is happening in three parts, or three ways, you might call it. First, as we've said so many times, *attendance* in the denominations is declining rapidly. You know, in the year 2020, many, many – most, I guess really – Christian congregations were *shut down* by the Covid-19 Pandemic. And interestingly enough, 20 percent of them *never* reopened. So this attendance of the denominations continues to plummet. Secondly, Christianity's *influence* on society is declining rapidly. If you don't believe that, look out the window. So things are disintegrating all around us. And third, more and more pastors, priests, choir leaders, musicians, and other members, staff members, employees of the ... today's Christian denominations are *leaving* and dropping out for other work.

Owen (05:41):

So *why* is all this happening? Think about it this way. Or I think about it this way. As you know from a previous episode, I'm from Florida. And I've lived through many *hurricanes*. And I think that the Christian crisis today is like a "hurricane." Because hurricanes "feed" themselves, if you want to call it that, as they move across the surface of the ocean by drawing heat out of the water. In other words, heat is the "fuel" of their destructive power. And that's why they die when they hit land. There's no more heat for them to draw, and so they "starve" to death and they just become a rainstorm. And so I think the Christian crisis is also "feeding" itself, if we could say that, by drawing "fuel" from its environment. And I think we *know* what that "fuel" is that they're drawing on.

John (06:37):

Yeah, Owen. I think that "fuel" is what we've been talking about in the last few episodes. The "fuel" that the Christian crisis is feeding on is *Spiritual immaturity*. And the "fuel" is the fact that today's average Christian – and it hurts me to say this – *is no more Spiritual than a non-Christian*. You would think that would actually be an oxymoron, wouldn't you? In other words, we talked about it last time: The unspirituality – that's the *unspirituality* – of today's infant Christians is fueling the Christian crisis. Today's denominations have so many infant Christians among their members that they're fueling their own destruction.

Owen (07:28):

Well, that's correct, John. And here's a part of the problem that many people haven't even thought about. One reason the crisis is so destructive is that it's *not* limited to the rank and file members of the denominations. The crisis also includes some of the pastors, and priests, and elders, and choir leaders, musicians, other denominational leaders, because a lot of *them* – a lot of *them* – are infant Christians, too.

Shannon (08:01):

You know, that's sad. And you know, I hadn't really thought about it. Several years ago, I went to a youth workers convention. And one of the statistics that they put out there was that the average lifespan, or ministry-span for, you know, student ministry – even you know, for youth pastors – was about *four* years. And a lot, you know, I think kicked into that. And you're thinking, "Well, maybe that's just discouragement from people that, you know, don't like the way they lead student ministry." Blah, blah, whatever. But I think a lot of it, you know, now even with this topic coming back up, is that there's the *Spiritual immaturity*. We usually think of leaders in denominations as being *Spiritually mature*. But you know, now we're saying that they're *not*.

Owen (08:48):

Huh. (Chuckles.) Sadly, Shannon, that's totally true. I mean, *polls* prove it. Many of them are *not*. Many denominational people – regardless of their job title – I mean, it can be "bishop," "archbishop," and whatever the title could be. But they're still *infant* Christians. And I ... let me just do this. Let me tell one quick, true story that proves what we're driving at. It's a horrible story. But I'm going to tell it to our friends anyway. Recently in our community ... in the middle of the afternoon ... one of our local pastors walked out into the sanctuary ... threw a rope over the balcony railing ... and hung himself. He committed suicide. True story.

Owen (09:36):

And that afternoon, a little later, a TV reporter was interviewing the congregation's chief elder, and asked why the pastor did it. *Why* did the pastor commit suicide? And here's what the elder answered. He said the pastor did it because he was – quote – "human," and that he had the same – quote – "stress" that all other people have. So to me, what does that elder's *answer* – which was published locally in the newspapers and TV channels, so *that* was all told to the popu-

lation – what does this elder's *answer* tell us about today's pastors, and priests, and evangelists, and other Spiritual leaders?

John (10:29):

Well, you know, it tells us that Christian leaders are *infants*, too. Just like many of the rank and file members. Even this elder was apparently blind to himself. And so it is definitely something that we've said from the very beginning, from our Episode 01 of the podcast. The reason – what motivates us, why we are doing this – is the problem is *real*. It is affecting people's lives. It's affecting our culture, our society, everywhere. It's really not un-touched by this. And rather than being part of the solution, unfortunately, specifically related to *infancy* as Christians, we have become part of the problem.

Owen (11:22):

That's exactly right, that's exactly right. It's a horrible thing to look in the mirror, and say or think: "I'm part of the problem, instead of part of the solution." But you know, the terrible things that happened in the congregations ... that have happened to me and my family. And you think, "Well, I could get more *blessing* out of this." I remember a Christian was very angry one time (chuckles), and he shouted at me, "I can find more love in the closest bar, than I can in this congregation!" And (chuckles) sadly, dare I say, that was probably true in his life.

John (12:03):

Yeah. You know, Owen. I think about it a lot. All of us, part of the podcast here, we think about and talk about it, read about it, discuss it. And I just look around. And you just ask yourself, "Why?" Why is this? Why has that happened? And *why* is it continuing to happen? And is there anything we can *do* about it, to confront that? And to hopefully change the trajectory of this? And we're pouring all of our energy into this. One of the things we're doing, of course, is the podcast among other things. And I was just thinking about the simplicity of this in one way. We come *back* to the First Century, and we just *keep* going back there – to the original blueprint. To the original Christians. And reading about their life and their experiences. And we see the disconnect, and we see that all these many years – centuries – that pattern (chuckles) is not being *duplicated*. And that just breaks our heart.

Owen (13:27):

Well, it does. And you know, I look at us here sitting together with these microphones. We sort of represent in some ways three generations. You know, I'm the oldest horse in the barn. And then John comes along a generation or so behind me. And then Shannon, you're coming along a generation or so behind John. So when you think about it, between the three of us, we cover a great span of (chuckles) time. And yet, I bet you all three of us, if we were interviewed by that news reporter, we would say that we've all seen exactly the *same* things. Exactly the same tragedies, problems, suicides. I know three or four pastors personally who committed suicide in my lifetime. So these ... you have to say, "Hold it! Time out! Something's wrong somewhere! This 'ain't' Christianity."

Shannon (14:31):

That's an interesting dynamic that you point that out. Because I hadn't thought about that. The three of us in that pattern. So ... but yeah ... that's an interesting thought.

John (14:41):

Owen and Shannon, I come back to just a few thoughts about this: *Why* have we gotten it so wrong? We know that the enemy is opposed to us. We know that he is the master of deception. But how have we just gotten this so wrong? And *why* has it taken so long for us to ... I know we're not the first ones to ever feel like that we're on to the solution to this. Right, I understand that. But for the sake of this podcast and the book, *Saving Christianity*, and all of the motivation behind that. Maybe ... Owen, talk to us a little bit about that. *Why* is that? *Why* is there such a disconnect?

Owen (15:37):

Well, you know, John, and I think Shannon would agree. In this last ... last episode ... previous episode number 13 ... we talked about all of the troubles that (inaudible), and we talked about the whole core of the issue was that so many Christians are *infants*. All right. In management, we taught a principle called "Linking." You "Cause-Link" backwards: What caused ... what caused ... the cause? And you get back to the *original* cause that we called the "Cue Ball." (Chuckles.) And so *what* was the "Cue Ball"? In other words, *why* are so many Christians infants? There has to be a reason. There's an old saying that, "Nothing comes from nothing." Something *causes* everything. That's a law of physics. So, what it turns out is: We talked about the Day of Pentecost. We talked about Jesus's promise: "I will go to heaven, and I will ask the Father, and He will send you another Helper, or Comforter, to indwell you and give you Spiritual power."

Owen (16:49):

Well, but here's the trick. That's not *all* the Holy Spirit gave us! The Holy Spirit also gave us a *structure*, a structure for living together and relating together as Christians. And that structure – this will surprise a lot of our friends who're listening in their cars or their kitchens – that structure was the *Small Group Structure*. Early Christians met in small groups of 10, 15, 18 people meeting in private homes. And their meetings were led by the Holy Spirit. Not by a pastor. Not by a priest. Not by an elder. But by the Holy Spirit. And for three centuries that happened. That worked that way. And then what occurred? The Emperor Constantine, the Roman emperor, appeared on the scene and *rebuilt* the structure. That's what he did. And he created a "big group, big building, big meeting" structure that we still have today. And he *outlawed* Christian Small Groups.

Owen (18:11):

And *that* was the turning point 1,700 years ago. And we've never, ever changed it. I'll start with this, John. We were talking about the (Covid-19) Pandemic in 2020 and early 2021. We were talking about the fact that even in those states where the requirement for a *mask* has been

lifted, many people still wear it. And they don't know why. And they can't explain it. But they want to wear it. Well, that's the power of *habits*. That's the power of a new habit. And so what Constantine established has now become a 1,700-year *habit*. And that's hard to turn around.

John (19:07):

Yeah. You know, Owen, Shannon. I was talking to someone this week, and I used the Covid-19 Pandemic as an illustration. And I kind of lay that over what you just said, Owen. From Constantine forward these 1,700 years, there's a sense in which people were "vaccinated." And they got .. you know, if you get a vaccination, I'm not a doctor, but I think I understand this. And when you get the vaccination, they give you a little bit of the cure. A little bit of the remedy by giving you the virus itself. And what that does, by giving you just a little bit of it, it keeps you from getting the *whole* of it. And I think that's what happened. We've been "vaccinated." We got just enough Christianity to *keep* us – right! – it's just enough of it to *keep* us from getting the full-blown Christian experience! And so I just was kind of laying that template over it. And to me, it's a pretty good analogy.

Owen (20:25):

Well, as I think about it, I had to laugh out loud. (Laughs.) You know, I said, "Vaccinated, inoculated, against the *truth*!" (Laughs.) Because you know, what I have found, John, is many Christians – and I guess this is part and parcel of being an infant Christian – but many Christians, if you start talking to them about this subject, about simply what we're saying, we're talking about "Quality Control" in a Management sense. We want better *quality* Christian life and Christian worship, and ... but they become angry. They become bitter. And they say, "You're against Christianity." And "You're against the Institution." And you're against this, that, and the other. But that's not *true* at all. And you know, it's ... so look at all the people that have refused to take the vaccination in 2020 and 2021 for the Covid-19. Why would you *not* take the vaccination? But many people, for whatever reasons – fear, and resentment, and whatever it all could be – won't take it. And so what we've got to find is some way to *break* through that sound barrier. *Break* through that glass ceiling. And find some way to show the three of us at this table, and everybody, everywhere, that Christianity is a joyful, exciting experience. And if it's *not*, if you're *not* living daily miracles, you need to look in the mirror.

John (22:07):

You know, I was thinking, Owen, I was talking ... maybe this is just a too simple of an illustration. But I was talking to a gentleman this week. And he said he went to a local hardware store and bought a ... some yard equipment, a particular piece that we refer to as a "weed-eater." And anyway, he got home. And after getting home with this new product, he was never able to get it *started*. So he was never able to use it for the very reason that it was produced. It never benefited him. So what did he do? Well, he took it *back*. He laid it on the counter, and he said to the guy, "Hey, this doesn't work!" And they basically said, "Well, you know, what are we going to do about that?"

John (22:58):

And he said, "Well, that's your decision. But it doesn't work. I'm giving it back. I'm taking it back. Here it is." And I think, because of everything that we're talking about in these episodes, is that lots of people kind of look at their Christianity like that. We went somewhere – quote – "the church." And we got home, and we've realized, you know, "This won't *start*. This is *not* doing what the manufacturer, the person who sold me this, i.e., the minister, said this is the way it was going to work, and it's *not* working. And in fact, I can't even get it started."

Owen (23:40):

And nowhere to *take* it back !

John (23:42):

Right! Yeah. (Laughter.) And so they just say, "Okay, well you know, they advertise this ..." (laughter and jokes) "... they advertise this product, but I still got a bunch of *weeds!*"

Owen (23:53):

And you know, Shannon, I was thinking about you. You probably remember from the segment we did on me, I got my start in the *youth ministry*. And my biggest and earliest lessons on Spirituality, and non-Spirituality, and the relationship between them came in the youth ministry. And I think you've had a lot of that same experience. But do you find in today's younger crowd the same kinds of issues that John and I found in our days of youth ministry?

Shannon (24:31):

I do. And I appreciate you asking. I think, you know, in my mind, just in hearing you guys discuss, you know, our opening. Even you know, with pastor John, there's actually a few things that have stuck out to me. And going along with your Covid-19 immunity, immunization, inoculation – whatever that word is – is that I think people aren't getting the vaccine, but also people don't want to tap into *Christianity*. Or you know, as you're talking, they get home and it's not *working*. And it comes *back*. I think there's just a lot of fear in there of the unknown. You know, "I've made this commitment to Jesus. But I still like the way things were." You know, as one of the things that you guys discuss a lot, "Change isn't change until there's *change*."

Shannon (25:18):

And so you know, even going back to that phrase is that, you know, just the fear of, "I don't know what this is." You know, my wife and I were discussing the (Covid-19) vaccine and, you know, whether I should get it. Whether I shouldn't. Blah, blah, and all that. And you know, ultimately the good outweighs the bad with it. But one of my fears was that, you know, my blood type. Would I get Bell's palsy? Or you know, is there something else that I might would get in a long-term thing? And just the fear of the long-term. Even discussing it with my mom, you know. Just the fear of the long-term. And so I think that's one thing that can keep us in that "immature" or in that "infant" stage of ... even if Christianity is ... (inaudible) ... You know, kind of like Peter. I want to step on the *edge* of the boat. (Laughter.) But I'm not ready to dip my toes in the wa-

ter. Or maybe I am just dipping my toes in the water. You know, the white-water rafting term is a "Lily Dipper."

Shannon (26:18):

(Laughter.) You're kind of just putting a paddle just a little bit in the water. Instead of getting all the way in. And so I think that in our mind sticks out. As far as student ministry, and even looking at some of our topics that we were – you know, that we could possibly discuss. You know. Alcoholism, suicide, porn, you know, sex outside of marriage. There's just so many things that can keep us in that *infancy* if we allow it to. And so yes, to answer your question, "Yes." You know that's not just an "adult thing." I mean, that's a "student" (thing), that's a "child" (thing). I mean you know it's ... those aren't just "adult" topics. You know, those are, you know, topics – "human" topics. Exactly. And so it really does span the ... you know, it's *everyone*.

Owen (27:12):

But you know what, Shannon? You just said something I don't think we've ever mentioned on these episodes. And I'll say it this way. I was talking to a man three, four, days ago, sitting at my kitchen table. And we were talking about the joys of Christianity. The wonderful Fruit of the Spirit, Gifts of the Spirit, "Living a little bit of heaven on earth." We were talking about angels and wonderful things. And he looked at me a minute and he said, "You know what?" He said, "That would *scare* the death out of my congregation." And I just stared at him. But I knew that was true. Because Shannon, one of the most frequent things people say to me is, "Well, I don't know about that now. I'd be *afraid* of that."

Owen (28:03):

And you know, I think so often, I don't care what version of the Bible you look in. And there are over 400 versions. You look in Chapter 5 of Galatians, you will *not* find the Fruit of the Spirit listed there containing the word "fear." In fact, Paul wrote we were "*Not* given a spirit of fear." So the Holy Spirit does not have *fear* in Him, and He doesn't give it to us. So where does *fear* come from? What a priest I used to know, used to call: "Stinky Flesh." It comes from our human nature. And so that's the first hurdle we have to get over. "They 'ain't' nothing *scary* about the Holy Spirit."

John (28:56):

Owen, I'm thinking about this. I watch a military show (on TV). And I really, really enjoy it. I kind of live vicariously through these actors portraying those in the military. And one of the things – it's a very elite team that this show is made about – and one of the things that they, the leader of that team, says all the time, no matter what the issue is, no matter what it is. He says, "Work the problem. Work the problem. Work the problem." In other words, we're not going to stop. We're going to work the problem. We're not going to take "No" for an answer. We're going to, we're going to "Work the problem, work the problem." And so one of the things we're trying to do through this podcast, the book, and other means, is to "Work the problem." We're trying to "Work the problem."

John (29:50):

We're not going to be just satisfied and say, "Oh, nothing can be done." And I think ... and I'm not throwing bouquets at ourselves ... but I think we pretty much have, or reached, some conclusions about the *problem* and what the *problem* is. I just like to add one more. And maybe we could kind of shift the topic a little more towards some solutions here. I think about it in this way. I think one of the significant failures, you now, of the Body of – within the Body of Christ, the Family of God, Christianity, the "church," whatever term we use, particularly related to the leadership that we call "pastors." Now, I want to quickly insert there on that, I *am* currently a practicing minister, okay? I "pastor" a local congregation. So I'm looking in the mirror as I say this – is that it's the Christian experience, not intentionally, but we have not given people the *whole* truth.

John (31:03):

Uh, we haven't discussed for them. And so they're looking at us kind of as the *expert*, if you will. And if we are not able to talk to them about the *solution* in the Christian experience. Then they're going to have to scratch and claw and find it out for themselves. And people are *not* doing that. And so therefore, the problem just continues to happen over and over again, century after century. And you can see our little-to-no influence in our culture, in our society. Which is opposite of what happened in the first century. They had a huge impact on the society, and culture, and the world.

John (31:51):

And we talk about it, how they literally changed the landscape of the world. And that's what we want. We want to come *back*. And we've really done people a *disservice*, right? We've just turned Christianity into an "afterlife insurance policy." And that is so ... there're many, many words I could think about that. But it's a *tragedy*. And so, rather than just wallow in our frustration over that, we really are trying to move towards some solutions. You've already mentioned one, and this is something that was lost: It's the Small Group experience.

Owen (32:39):

Totally. I'm a Small Group person. You know, I was thinking too, Shannon (laughs), about this. About ... (pauses) most of the ... (pauses) this hurts. This hurts, John. But normally, when you talk to pastors, and elders, and priests, and people – deacons and all the people in authority in the institution. And you talk about, or *they* talk about, they get in pulpit on the Lord's day, and they talk about making things *better*. You know, you've got books on "church" *growth* and "church" *improvement*, all these types of things. Dozens and dozens of books in the bookstore. And what do they all come down to? "Work harder in what we've *got!*" In other words, if you're going to improve (the institution), *attend* more. And *give* more. And work *harder*. And serve on *more* committees. And preach *longer* (chuckles) sermons. And sing *longer* songs. And don't sing four stanzas. Now sing five stanzas. And push the envelope on what we've *got*. And I sometimes say that's like trying to make a "lead airplane" fly. You know, it's not going to get off the ground no matter how hard you push it.

John (34:00):

Yeah, I don't mean to sound negative. But I just – I think it's important that we *get* this. We're just honest and real about, authentic about this. And exactly what you're talking about is for instance, somehow, somewhere along the way, we transitioned from hymns that are beautiful, well-written, deep, Bible-based hymns. And we came to this conclusion: "Oh, no, no, no. Let's go modern. More contemporary, that's going to be better. That's going to work." And then we said, "Well, no, we need to do away with the pews. And we just need to have chairs. And we need to do away with stained glass. And we need to paint our entire sanctuary black." And then we said, "Well, no, no, we just need a better sound system, and smoke machines. And we need all kinds of flashing lights" – and all of these sorts of things.

John (35:00):

And then we said, "Well, no, what we probably need to do, is do away with formal clothing. Just come in your flip-flops and your shorts. Maybe that'll work," and we just see on and on. But the proof's in the pudding. And the fact is (chuckles) yeah, nobody's getting any more *Spiritual*. Our influence is not strengthening. It's weakening. And we see back to all of the polling that is just so disturbing. There's no difference between unbelievers and believers. Which doesn't even seem possible. How that could *be*? So literally, clearly, we can see ... we can, as you said, Owen. We just take the *same* issue and tweak it. And somehow we think it's going to be better if I change the color ... if I change this whatever.

Owen (35:57):

But, see. I don't want to be hokey. But I think Shannon will like this too. I mean, this is so trite it's nauseating. What that really is, "Is arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." (Laughter and remarks.)

John (36:12):

All the while, it was *sinking*.

Owen (36:14):

Yeah. Water's bubbling up around your knees, and you're *lining* them up. Well, it's sort of funny. But you know, as the old joke says, "You have to laugh to keep from crying." Well, but see. There's a *reason*. Everything has a *reason*. So you know, we've told the story ... I don't think I actually told this story ... but I tell the story about the decision I made in my life – that either Christianity was a *hoax*, or Christians today are doing something *wrong*. And after I prayed about it and thought about it for several weeks. I made a decision. We all have to do that. (The decision was) ... "No," Christianity is *real*. And "Yes," we are doing something *wrong*. And I'm going to find out what it is and fix it.

John (37:09):

Yeah, kind of really give your life to trying to help people to understand the *truth*. And for me – similar Owen. You know, I knew the Lord in terms of infancy, I guess you could say. I remained an infant for ... until, you know, 10, 12, 14 years after my initial conversion. And after *we* met, and we began our discussions – talking about all of these sorts of things – and it literally, you know, *changed* everything, everything. So I think trying to get this out to people is just huge for us. To help people to understand that there is *more* to the Christian experience than *infancy*. And God has so, so much more for us.

Owen (38:14):

He does, He does. I'm sure you agree, Shannon.

Shannon (38:18):

I do. And I've got ... there's a couple of things that I think about y'all's relationship. And you know the longevity that you guys have had. And you know, just hearing Pastor John describe your relationship is ... there's two words that come to mind, of the many words that belong in that type of a Small Group setting. A Small Group is two people, that's the minimum, you know. And so – but two words that come in there that, you know, not only apply to our members, and our students, or whoever. But also to our pastors and "church" (*sic*) workers is: *Accountability*, is something that we don't like, but it's something that we need. And then also the second word is: *Teachability*, is remaining teachable. And I don't remember the exact sermon, or when it was. But I do remember that it was Pastor John that said it. That you know, that we've got to remain *teachable*.

Shannon (39:12):

And I'm sure we've read about it many times. But that's one thing that I try. People ask me, you know, a lot of times – a couple of times a year I guess you'd say. "Are you ever going to move into *adult* ministry?" (Inaudible, with remarks and laughter.) And my answer to that is, "You know, right now God is *not* leading me into adult ministry," to takeover you know, or anything like that. Or to start a "church" (*sic*) or anything like that. Because students are *teachable*.

Shannon (39:37):

(Exclamations of agreement.) You know, and the adults we – I'll include myself in this – we are *not* teachable. And, or we're *limited* in our teachability. And, well: "I liked that sermon, that was a good sermon, Sunday." Well, if it was good – then what are you *doing* about it? You know, what (laughter) am *I* doing about it? You know? And so, I'll stick with students. Because they still seem to be teachable. And so you know, even you know, as *pastors* we've got to remain teachable and including that accountability.

Shannon (40:05):

Uh, and so you know, I love that y'all's relationship has been that "teacher-mentor." And I consider you guys teachers and mentors of *mine* as well. And again, not that I get it right all the time. But just one thing that my wife and I try to talk about with our kids, just our three, is just to

remain *teachable*. You've got to always be learning, and always be changing. You can't get "stuck" in your ways, as you're talking about. You know, you're "stuck" into the carpet and changing this and changing this. Well, you're changing the *exterior*. But nothing's changing *inside*.

Owen (40:39):

Excellent. You know (chuckles), I used to know a lady who used to say, when she was putting on her makeup, she would say, "Well, I got to put a little paint on the old barn." (Laughter.) And you know, that's what we *do*, don't we? We "paint the barn." But what about the "animals" inside? You know and there's ... I love what you said Shannon about ... sometimes I'll confess this to John. Sometimes I wish I was back in *youth ministry*. You know, because the greatest changes that I saw in my life and in other people's lives was in the incredible, incredible, years I spent in the youth ministry. And I want to say something too that's so important. I hadn't planned to say this, but I will. I was reading a book about the navy SEALs this week. And this SEAL that wrote the book said something I'd never thought about those words.

Owen (41:35):

He said, "You know ..." He was talking about his training as a SEAL. But here's what he said. He said, "You know, one year of *practical experience* is worth a lifetime of *theory*." (Repeats.) And that's what I found in the youth ministry. We didn't have much (chuckles) theory. You know, we didn't have long sermons and long teachings and everything. We just prayed and rejoiced in the Spirit. And we saw healings and miracles that you would not believe. And here's the kicker, Shannon. When I graduated to adult ministry? (Makes a sound of contempt with his mouth.) That's all she wrote.

John (42:24):

Yeah. You know, I would like to ... guys, I'd like to throw in something as an encouragement to people. Let's go back to my "weed-eater" illustration. Suppose that when he laid the product back on the counter the gentleman said, "Well, did you turn the *On-and-Off* switch?"

John (42:40):

"Oh, I didn't realize there was one."

John (42:43):

"Well, did you actually put any fuel in it?"

John (42:46):

"Oh, you have to do that?"

John (42:47):

"Oh, wait a minute. I don't see any string. You didn't put in any string?"

John (42:53):

"Oh, no. I didn't know to do that."

John (42:56):

So my point of that illustration is: The *product* wasn't defective. The product was everything it was supposed to be. But the *instructions* hadn't been followed. And that's what has happened to us. So for those of you out there who've got maybe a bad taste in your mouth. Or maybe you'd say, "The product doesn't work for *me*."

John (43:19):

Um, I want to say to you: It *will* work. It *does* work. And if we'll just go *back* – which is what we're trying to do, is let's go *back* to the blueprint of the First Century. And that's an "On-Off" switch. That's the "*fuel*." That's the "*line*." Those are the things that make the product do what it was designed to do. And that is, to be able to live it out in a very real, practical, life-changing experience. A life of walking in the Spirit. And so don't throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Don't take your "weed-eater" back. Okay? It's ... this is about *fixed*. (Laughter and remarks.) Just go back to the instructions, and it'll work. What is it, what is it, Owen? How do you say it? "If we do what ... "

Owen (44:16):

Yeah. I was going to ... I was waiting on that minute. It's like our little motto: "If we *do* what they *did*, we will *have* what they *had*." Because we know for a fact that they *did* it. We know for a fact that *angels* guided them. We know for a fact that they had incredible *miracles*. We remember the (chuckles) time Paul (the apostle) was trying to collect some firewood. And a snake jumped (chuckles) out of the ... out of the fire (error) ... uh ... (out of) a pile of wood, and bit him and hung on his – hung on his hand! I had that happen to a relative of mine years ago. He pulled his hand out, and a big snake was hanging on it. And so the thing is, though, that snake was *fatal*. And so Paul was now *terminal*. And so all the people on the beach watched to see him kick the bucket and topple over. And he just sang and went his way. And so they *learned*, see? So you say, "Well, yeah. That was then. This is now." No, snakes are the *same*. But *so* is God. And *so* is the power of the Spirit. And *so* is a little thing that we call the "Gifts of Healings." What *are* the Gifts of the Spirit? (They) can overcome any snake, no matter how big he is. So the point is: Why don't we do *less* of what we're doing today, and *more* of what they did then? Experience! Experience the power.

John (45:42):

So I think we've got to be ... we've got to be willing to first of all, acknowledge the *problem*. And (then), looking for the *solution*. Looking for the answers. And then, let's just maybe put it in these terms: Take the risk! Right? Take the risk! And jump in and *experience* it for yourself.

And as we keep talking about ... that is, that is a very convincing (thing) when you *experience* it. When it moves off the page and into your life.

Shannon (46:11):

Bingo!

Owen (46:13):

That's a good way to say it! You know, Shannon, I was in one of our Small Groups about a week ago, and I asked them, I said, "Now ..." I think there were 10 or 11 people there that night. And I said, "Now, have you ever actually prayed – specifically prayed, 'God, give me the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit because I need it!'" And they stared at me like frightened rabbits. You know? But I tell the story about the time in my life – and I was so clueless that I didn't even know what *terms* to use. So my best friend and I at that time, we were sitting in a car in a driveway of my home. And we both leaned over, and put our heads on the dashboard, and prayed. And here's all we prayed: "God give us *everything* that they had in the First Century. Amen." That's all we prayed. And within three or four days, we were experiencing miracles. And so I think that's what everybody needs. "Give me what *they* had."

John (47:24):

I'm telling you! Can you imagine if *that* catches on? Wow. Yeah, that's what we're looking for. And I think it's notable that we need to say to people that it's certainly not (yet) at a *level* that we believe is possible. But in different ways, all of us are experiencing these things within our congregation – and some of the small groups that are meeting – and testimonies of things that God is doing in people's lives. And so this is *real*. This is ... you know, God is the ultimate *reality*. And so this is *real*. This is happening. And unfortunately, the Good News has been turned into either "no news" or "bad news." And we're trying to get it back.

John (48:12):

Or "wrong news."

John (48:15):

Yeah. Or "wrong news." Yeah, (we're) trying to get it back to the Good News that it actually is.

Owen (48:19):

You know, John. I tell the story in the book about the young man that called me at breakfast one morning and said, "This is urgent. I've got to come over and ask you a question!" (Chuckles.) So I said, "Well, I'm eating breakfast. But come on." (Laughter.) And so he rang the doorbell a few minutes later, came in, and sat down in a chair at my breakfast table, and looked uncomfortable. And he scratched and he shifted. And I said, "Well, go ahead. What is it you have?"

Owen (48:45):

And he said, "Well," he said. "What would you do if you opened the morning paper and there were great big headlines. And they said that a manuscript had been dug up in the desert and it proved without question that Christianity was a hoax, and that Jesus Christ had never lived. What would you do?"

Owen (49:06):

And I took a bite of eggs and said, "I'd believe it anyway."

Owen (49:11):

And he screamed. And he said, "What? What? You can't do that! What are you talking about? You'd do it *anyway*? Why, how could that be?" And I said, "Because I've *experienced* it." I said, "I've *experienced* angels, and Gifts, and the Fruit of the Spirit, and heaven here on earth. And I don't care what they put in the paper. Or what they dig up. I know it's real because I've *experienced* it. And I go back to the (navy) SEAL again. You know, practical experience is worth a lifetime of theory. And we've been working on theory."

John (49:48):

Yeah, yeah. I like – Owen – the old hymn. You remember, it says, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." Yeah, yeah. Hallelujah.

Shannon (49:59):

Well, whether you dig anything up, that's what most books – you'd just call them "books." *False teachings*, that's what they are. That's the ... he didn't have to dig that up. They're already writing that kind of stuff. So that's a good ... that's a very valid question that he asked you. But it's not a *past* thing. It's a *present* day thing, unfortunately. And so I think, you know, there's also some fear. We talked about fear earlier. That fear in moving forward is they're also afraid of what God will *do*. And the miracles, the life change, and all of that.

Shannon (50:33):

One thing that I try to pray – you know, myself and also we pray in our, with our, family, we pray with our students, and everything – is we pray that, you know, asking God to help us to represent Jesus the way *He* wants to be represented. You know, the active "church" (*sic*). And not the way I feel like that I've interpreted, you know. I don't want to represent Jesus the way *I* want to represent Jesus. I want to represent Jesus the way *He* wants me to be the representative of Him. And so, you know, I think that all kind of ties into that as well ... is that, you know, we want to represent Jesus the way *He* wants us to be represented. Not the way, you know, *I'm* doing it. Or somebody *else* is doing it, or whatever. And so ...

Owen (51:20):

And you know how we *do* that, Shannon? We let the *Holy Spirit* flow through us. What Jesus called in John 7:38 those "Rivers of Living Water" that bubble up within us. Can I tell you, Shannon, one funny story? (Chuckles.) You mentioned "fear" again. And it shows how we don't understand these things. I've never told this story to you. Years and years ago, a famous surgeon came to me for counseling. And he said, "You know, I'm a Christian." But he said, "I just can't do what you do. I just can't go all the way with it. I just can't give my life to it."

Owen (51:59):

I said, "Well, why not?" He said, "Well, actually," he said, "I'm afraid God will send me to Africa to be a surgical missionary." And he said, "I love my home and my practice here and I don't want to go." And he said, "So what do you think about that?" I said, "Well, I tell you how the answer is." I said, "If God *did* tell you to go to Africa, and you *did* go." I said, "You would be the *happiest* surgeon in Africa!" And see, that's the point. We don't trust God. Don't we think He knows what would make us *happy*?

John (52:35):

Yeah, I like to think of it like this, Owen. It's so: "I don't want to!" (Laughter.) But if you're following the Spirit, He *gives* you the "Want-To." (Laughter.)

Owen (52:44):

Yeah, yeah. That's exactly, exactly right. See, you can't out-talk it. Or out-think it. It's too wonderful to be dealt with. God's covered ... you know, God's *smart*, when you think about it. (Laughter.) And He's covered every single corner, and every single floor, ceiling, and all four walls. He's got it fixed.

John (53:07):

Yeah, I read something this week that just really, really was an inspiration to me. It was along the lines of *why* are we going to spend forever in eternity with God? And the answer was, "It will take it." (Laughter.) It will take it for us to ever increase, ever ... it'll be increasing throughout. In other words, God couldn't – or won't – manifest Himself in 10 years, or 10,000 years. That it'll take forever. Eternity, ever-increasing the glory of God that we will be experiencing. The wonder of who He is. You couldn't confine it to a century or a millennia. It's got to be infinite. And isn't that something to think about!

Owen (53:59):

We *can't* think about it. You know, my wife's father, who's in heaven now, was a minister. And she talks about it. She's told me this story, six or eight (chuckles) times. She says that he used to describe "eternity" this way: If a Sparrow went to the beach and picked up a grain of sand. And flew to England and put it down. And flew back to America, and got another grain. Flew to England and put it down. And did this until the entire beach was moved, eternity would only have just *started*. That's an interesting thought, isn't it? But imagine spending that with God and the angels and all of that wonderful power.

John (54:50):

Yeah, yeah. Well, I can see that from the big clock on the wall, that our time is up for this episode. And that's one thing about heaven: We won't have to live by the *clock*. And this has been one of the most interesting episodes we've done thus far. It's just been fun to knock this around a little bit. And thank you so much for joining us and our friends out in Podcast Land. I want to remind you that this is Episode 14, and the script and the recording of this are found on our website. Remember, it's: www.goSCpod.com. That's G-O-S-C-P-O-D .com. But for now, this is John Shields ... this is Shannon Wolfe ...

Owen (55:43):

... and this is Owen Allen, saying: May the God of our fathers bless you, and keep you, and guide you, and protect you, until we meet again.

John, Shannon, and Owen (56:06):

John, Shannon, and Owen end the episode.