

# 1.12.2025 Sermon

## Vision 2025 | The Gym

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

freedom in God, embrace gratitude, spiritual balance, maturing Christians, gym metaphor, fitness center, spiritual exercise, personal growth, civic engagement, rescue moments, power dynamics, multiplying leaders, spiritual challenges, consistent effort, spiritual journey

### **SPEAKER**

**Rev. James Bady**

Do you mind if I talk to you today? Just talk; we're not going to do too much. Today is a day in our church year where we try to set up what our direction is for the year, and how are we developing things? What are the unique characteristics of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in the world of Christendom, and what is our focus? So, I will try to give you a little thought about that today, and some of the things that you may see from the various speakers throughout the year, and some little tweaks, or some things that may be different from what you've seen in the past.

For example, I am dressed very casually today. Huh? Oh, a lot of people were surprised. Some people surprised. And my old church mothers are looking at me and going, "You need to change, brother." And no, this is a part of the service, so we'll talk a little bit about what the theme is. And these clothes kind of represent the theme that we are embarking on this year. Some of you may have heard that we are using the metaphor of a gym for this year. In the metaphor of the gym, we think it will help us to unlock some thoughts about spirituality.

We think it will help us to expand our thinking of our engagement with God, both when times are good and bad and everywhere in between. Versus previously, we think about the church under the metaphor of a hospital. We think we can expand upon that. So, I first want to start out with some scripture. This is for the church mothers, then our definitions and interpretation of those scriptures, and then our metaphor and how it may apply to our life.

So the scriptures are these: Philippians 2:12, 2 Peter 1:5, and 1 Corinthians 15:46. They read this way: "Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but now even more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose." That's Philippians 2:12. 2 Peter: "To those whom the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours," jumping to verse five, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control

perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if you possess these qualities and continue to grow in them, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." And finally, 1 Corinthians 15:46: "So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The Spirit, however, was not first, but natural, and then the spiritual. For the first man is of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven." The reading of the word.

So, what am I taking from those? And I want you to hold in your mind three concepts as we go forward. The first, we talked about it a little bit, starting last week with Pastor Tracy explaining, we really are trying to develop maturing Christians who are able to work out their own salvation, that Christ came, that there would be no buffer between you and God, and so therefore that means there has to be a conversation, a direct conversation, between you and God, working out what it is for your life. So that's part one.

The second part is, in this development of our relationship with God, we have this life on Earth, and in this life on Earth, there has to be balance. There is this balance of virtues and how we carry ourselves and what we focus on that needs a balance. I can't just pray all day and everything's okay, balance. Then the last part about that is like, "Wow, that seems fairly difficult. I gotta work it out myself. I gotta create balance.

How do I then get an understanding of when I'm on the right track versus when I'm on the wrong track, because I've gotten caught up in my own mind?" Our brother Paul encourages us to look to nature, because we are of two characters, one of the dust and one of the Spirit, and the dust came first. So, don't ignore the physical world around you, also called nature, that helps teach us what is going on with us spiritually, so that we can continue to grow. You get thoughts. You remember the three characters, the three things were, I lost you already, maturing Christians working out your own salvation with balance, observing nature around you, observing the world that God put in place to help teach us about this balance and about this relationship. And we're taking those concepts and trying to fit them in the metaphor of the gym, right? Can we play this? We're about to play this one taping, something I mentioned during one of our congregational meetings, and we think it kind of fits.

You've commonly heard churches consider themselves the hospital for the broken. They consider themselves a hospital. The challenge is, most of us, once we get a little bit better, want to get out the doors of the hospital, right? And we will only listen to our doctor when we're in a hospital. I want to offer to you another parallel, and that is, are we a fitness center? Are we a fitness center? Because as long as you come, you can get better.

As long as you come, progress can be made. And the other part is, most of your learning is not done by the physical fitness trainers. It's about other people who are working out in the gym at the same time. We keep talking about we learn from each other, and there's always getting better in fitness. And you see, most of them are people who came from the community that they worked out with every day, once a week. It's a very different environment, and you never get tired of being there, because there's getting better, and then there's maintaining. There are certain things that no longer bother you if you stay consistent with God. There are certain illnesses that you eliminate or that you skip through quickly if you consistently go. I think it's the same in the church. There are certain traumas, there are certain issues, there are certain stresses, there are certain things that are minimized if you are consistently around your family. That's what I hope we will be.

So welcome to the fitness center. Hopefully, you brought the correct attire, that you're hydrated, and one thing I didn't put on there, usually your trainer pushes you a little bit further than you want to go. Just that one more rep that you're like, "Man, come on, stop." And then they always have this annoying energy and enthusiasm like, "I'm gonna punch you." Anybody, anybody else?

All right, a couple other people have been there, but that's who I will be. I will be that fitness trainer a couple times this year. You don't want to let me have it, but it's done in love, because I'm trying to hopefully expose you to some different things to think about that will help you encapsulate your life in a better way. And that's all. I'm not going to argue to make you do it. I will present something to you to see if it matches where you're going, if it matches, because I'm not trying to create in you what's in me. God didn't put me in you. He put you in you.

Our whole goal is to try to give you context and exercises that can hopefully draw that out, and that's different from a hospital. That's different. I went and looked up some data about hospitals relative to the population and how long people are there. I'm a numbers guy, so I apologize for those who just want the theme to move on, but I want to give you a sense of the magnitude of the difference of what we're trying to accomplish here in this mental shift. So, in the United States today, there are about 2.4 beds per 1,000 people in the country, right? So, point two, 5% of hospital beds per the population that's out there. What does that tell you? You can't all be there at once. It's not designed for that. We okay? We need more hospitals.

Yes, right. It says you're not supposed to be there much, and you're not supposed to be there long. It is for the dramatic moments of your life only. I don't think that's what church is for, only the dramatic moments of your life only. So, say you've been very, very good and you actually go and get your annual check-ups, like I recommend you all do, and you've done the right things. What does your doctor tell you? "See you next year"? Your doctor is saying it. The numbers are saying it. So, I think we need

something that's a little more sustainable than "See you next year." All right? This is, you know, Christmas, "See you next Christmas." So, it's a little different, right?

So, something that applies less about the dramatic moments of my life, but the ongoing, sustainable moments of my life, so that I can be well. And there are just so many different parallels that I find the more I think about it. So, for example, the text of Peter about balance, and to your godliness, add kindness to your this. Add that. Do you know in the physical world that if you overwork one part of your body, it not only becomes aesthetically not pleasing, it actually damages other parts of your body? So, it's not neutral and it's not vanity. It is for health; you need balance in the physical world.

For example, the reason I found this out, I was having all kinds of pain in my back, and I went to a massage therapist thinking, "Oh, I need to get these knots out of my back." And they were, went in there, they were working on it, and they said, "Well, hold on, you do chest checks, chest exercises." I said, "Yeah, do it." Blah, blah, blah, okay. "How much back work do you do?" Excuse me, yeah, back work. "What you are having is lesions; your connective tissue is pulling so hard on your back because it doesn't have the strength to balance out what's going on in the front. I can get these knots out of your back, but they're coming again, because now you're not balanced."

The same in the spiritual world, if I over-focus on what's your favorite topic? Oh, now everybody's afraid. Oh, come on. Some of y'all grew up like me. We were morality all day, every day, prayer, okay, morality, forgot about kindness and love, didn't we? Forgot about peace, forgot about joy. Bad. Silence. These are the reasons we want to make this mental shift, because I think it unlocks more of what Paul was trying to explain to us when he was talking in Timothy about, "Hey, bodily exercise relative to spiritual exercise is small. There is so much more in the spiritual realm," but unfortunately, what we've done on Earth is taken the small part of physical exercise and reduced it even further to only the unimaginable events that happen in a hospital. So, we've taken a small and made it smaller, and our goal is to open it back up. Amen.

So, I want to do a little bit of that today in helping us to think through even why we all come to church. Because we don't all come to church for the same reasons. Anybody surprised by that? All right, so I just pulled out a couple of them, and there are probably many, many, many more. One is about personal or group moral development, right? So, we find that in the teachings of Paul and even people coming to Jesus and saying, "Jesus, teach us to pray," right? So, there's a teaching element, and all of us getting better, both as an individual and as a group. But then there's also civic development, right? So, we see that in Acts when they are taking care of the widows and the orphans and that.

So, there's civic engagement even going on then, that people come to church expecting to see, right? But it doesn't stop there. There's also that dreaded obligation. "Them church folks told me, if I want to be good, I gotta come to church. So, I want to be considered good, so I'm gonna go, obligation. That's the law." And then this is the one that we, I think, where we got the piece about the hospital, and that is rescue. We come to be rescued. It is our moment of healing. It is our moment of finding someone who will listen. It is our moment, but it's only a moment. The last one I'll share today, which is, you know, it goes down this dark trail, and that is power, power.

We especially see that in our political world today, that if I'm considered a part of a church, that must mean I must be good. And so, don't look at the details of me, because I go to church. Church has power that that power is guided by God. But I don't want you to forget there is this person called Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:19, remember Simon the sorcerer. He saw the goodness of the church and the move it was making among the people and the power to influence, and he wanted it. And he goes to the disciples and says, "Sell me that power that I too, may be able to move the people," not serve the people, not help the people. "I want to move them. I want that power." All of those things that you're seeing today are in the Bible, and it's for us to remember we're not all here for the same reason, but we must identify why we individually are here. There's an assumption that what you think everybody thinks, because it makes sense to you, "I go to church to be a good person, to learn." You think everybody's here for that same reason. "I go to church to help somebody." You think everybody's here for that same reason.

I'm sorry to burst your bubble. They're not all here for the same reason. I am sorry, but I want to challenge you this year to discover why you are here, because why you are here will change what you do while you are here. It will also change your expectations of others while you're here. It will also give you the motivation that when everything is not perfect, to still be there because you know why you're there, you know why you're going, and your distractions are fewer because you're focused. But just because you're here for a different reason doesn't mean it's a bad reason, right?

We again, we talked about the gym. So, some of you may know Joe Malundrucco. Joe, how often do you work out? Four days a week. Terry, you do power lifting, right? Okay, how often do you go? You're messing up my sermon only because she can take that, right? No, but people who go consistently, and she does, she trains. What are the things that you do, Andrea, when you go to the gym? Perfect, right? Joe, I'm all right, so let's go with the one about the moving people off your body. Do you get mad at other people that they're not doing the same work as you do? You care? Why? Okay, I forgot who I was talking to. No. Joe has a goal in mind, so the fact that you're not doing the same work as Joe, it doesn't bother Joe, right? He has a goal in mind. He's going to do different exercises than you. She's doing different exercises. She isn't concerned that you're not here to do the clean and jerk. She's

not concerned that you're not building the right technique, nor power, because her technique and power are for her goals. Same thing with Joe. So, these distractions of what others are doing and why they're doing it and what I do when I get there are different because you've matured and you're focused on why you do what you do, and that is based on the seed God has placed in your life.

Spiritually, that's how you should show up. Do you have that in your mind? If I was to ask you after service, "Why do you go to church?" do you know what it would be? Could you say it? Could you share it with others? For example, I think for me, over the next year, I'm really embracing one of our core values, and that is multiplying leaders. It's not for me to be, you know, super-duper, whatever it is, if I can implant in you anything that allows you to be more of who you are, as a leader and as a person. I'm good. That's all I want.

So, when people come up to me and say, "Hey, I have this great idea, I want to go and lead this," I say, "You leading it, right? Okay, all right, I'm happy. That's all I want." What is it for you? Because it's going to change how you show up in this building every day, every time you come. It's going to change what you expect when you walk through those doors. Every time. It's going to change how you hear each and every one of the sermons this year. It's going to keep you focused, because in this life, unfortunately, there's a grind. I'm sorry, it's a grind. Young people call it adulting. It's a grind. And you need to know what your goal is, so you can check where it is and where you've come from.

You need to check them both. It snowed last weekend or Sunday or Monday, all I know I had to get out there and shovel. And I'm out there shoveling. And you know, you always start out strong, just moving right along. Somewhere along the way, you get tired, things start to hurt, and you're like, "Why isn't anybody out here helping me, just me? Why isn't somebody out here helping me?"

And you know, you always start out strong, just moving right along. Somewhere along the way, you get tired, things start to hurt, and you're like, "Why isn't anybody out here helping me, just me? Why isn't somebody out here helping me?" And you look at where you're trying to go, which is all of this snow off my driveway, and you go, "Have I even started? What's going on?" And it's not until you look back at the part that's already been cleaned that you realize, "I'm grinding, but something's happened."

I'll close with this. In this year, you're going to grind. In this year, you're going to wonder, "Why isn't somebody helping me?" And in this year, some of you have already had this experience: "Is anything even happening? Because it seems like my destination is so far away." This is our journey, and through the power of God and the eloquence of these speakers, we hope to share with you some things that are of this world to help you deal with your spiritual challenges. That may look like a fitness

center, that may look like a gym. It may look like rescue, but sometimes it's going to look like just teaching, and other times it's going to look like you're just giving and straining. And, yeah, yeah, all of that. And I hope that you will put on the appropriate attire and then get to work, because it's going to be a grind, but you have the power to do it. Amen.