

**Series: THE OLIVE BRANCH DNA—**

**January 15, 2006  
WITHOUT WALLS  
Acts 10; Col. 3:11-14**

**I. INTRO**

- A. There is apparently only one man-made structure on Earth that can be seen from outer space. Anyone know what it is? It's the **Great Wall of China**. And no wonder—it's **1500 miles long**, and 25 feet high. Construction started in 200 B.C. It was worked on again around 600 A.D.—and then again around 1600 A.D.—and the work was all done by hand. If it were here in Canada, it would stretch from Quebec City to Winnipeg. This wall was built to protect China from invaders—and it was apparently pretty effective, until the days of airplanes and helicopters. It is an amazing piece of history.

1. This is a **famous** wall. There's also an **infamous** wall. Anyone know what it is? The **Berlin Wall**. Another name for it was **The Wall of Shame**. It was built by the East German police in 1961 to keep East Berliners from escaping to the west. It was topped with barbed wire and patrolled by guards with machine guns—ordered to shoot anyone who tried to cross it.

-On June 12, 1987, Ronald Reagan, whatever you may think of him, had an historic line when he visited the Wall. "Mr. Gorbachev... **tear down this wall!**" Within 2 years, the unimaginable happened. It came down. Anyone here have a piece of it?

2. Walls can be good things. Most of us are **glad** we have walls on our houses and locks on our doors. Most of us are glad that we have bathrooms and bedrooms with doors on them. Walls/boundaries give us privacy.  
-But there are other walls, like the Berlin Wall, that shouldn't exist. Walls of racism; walls of snobbery and exclusion and indifference. Walls that keep people from loving and accepting those they need to love and accept. Walls that insulate people from things they need exposed to. Walls of fear that keep us from being free, from being the people we've been called to be.

- B. Early in the development of our vision, we decided that we wanted to be a **church without walls**. Now, we didn't violate that when we bought **these** walls around us. The church is **people**, not a building. We didn't want to **do** church, we wanted to **be** the church—whether we're in a building or not.

-We want to be a church that, instead of having walls, is turned **inside-out**. Know why? Because **that's** when we become dangerously effective and life-changing. And that's what God has called us to be.

**II. LIVING ON WALL STREET**

- A. One of the unique things we see more and more of in North America are **gated communities**. Communities with walls around them—and security guards at the entrance to control access. People like to live there because it **feels** safer. No one can get in unless they're invited in.

-When you read the Old Testament, it almost appears like Israel—as the people of God—was a gated community. God chose Abraham and Sarah; then he chose their son Isaac—not Ishmael, or the children Abraham had with Keturah. The gates continued with Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau, Jacob was the carrier of the promise.

1. It would appear that when Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the walls went even higher. Moses was given instructions on how to build a portable temple. There was the outside area—into which only Israelites could go; then there was the inner temple, into which only the priest could go. Then there was the most holy place, where only the High Priest could go—once a year. And it was separated from the rest of the temple by a thick fabric wall.

-The only way anyone had access to God was through the priest. And if you were going to be a priest? Well, there were all kinds of other walls that had to do with gender, physical condition, marital status, race—the walls were pretty high! A little like some country clubs, I would imagine.

- a. If you were outside the Jewish race, there was no hope of you becoming one of God's people unless you defected from your ancestry and became a Jew. If you were a male, that would include circumcision. **Ow!**
  - b. There were other walls. Like dietary restrictions, rules about ceremonial cleanliness—even down to mold and mildew and which fabrics you could use together. There were walls around the Sabbath, who you could marry, where you lived. **Walls!**
3. I'll tell you exactly what was happening. God was preparing a people. A people who would know Him—and who would understand how destructive and pervasive sin was in His world. God was preparing the way for the Messiah who would salvage the world—and, most importantly, save its people. The salvation of all people depended on this.
    - a. I tried to think of a word picture for this, and the best I could come up with was the **womb**. When a woman is pregnant she has to be very careful about what she eats, what she does and the medicine she takes—cause it all gets funneled to the baby. In those **womb** months, this baby lives on a warm cushion of fluid—and is protected from the outside world by a **wall**...

-Only when the baby is fully formed does it enter the outside world and become independent.

- b. God had promised a child would be born of a virgin—who would be a **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace**. The Book of Revelation points out that the nation of Israel was the womb from which God birthed the Messiah.
- B. Unfortunately, by the time Jesus came, these temporary protective walls had become the **iron curtain**. What was out, stayed out, and what was in, stayed in. And it was in protecting these walls that religious professionals got so furious with Jesus.
- Instead of preparing people for the Messiah, religion turned these walls into barriers of racism, sexism and hatred.
1. It was Jesus tearing down these walls that eventually got him sent to a cross. He included women, right in his band of followers—which was totally unheard of. He spoke to Samaritan's and Gentiles, touched lepers. Jesus made it clear that the whole Old Testament had been pointing to **Him**. Remember when he gave the glass of wine to his disciples at the last supper and said, "This is a **new covenant**

***in my blood!***” He was saying—the walls have done their job. Now it’s a whole new deal!

-The moment Jesus died, that huge thick fabric wall in the Jewish temple that separated God from man ripped from top to bottom. Jesus had removed the final wall separating men from God. Forever.

2. Before He ascended, Jesus said to his disciples, “Now you know the truth. Go and tell ***everyone that they are invited into a relationship with God***—starting here, and out to the rest of the world!

-Guess how long it took for the Good News to make it outside of Judaism to the Gentiles. ***Ten years!*** And God had to kick down the wall. Acts 10 tells the story.

- a. Peter was in Joppa, hanging with someone called Simon the Tanner. It was lunch time, and Peter was hungry. And the Holy Spirit used that to speak to Peter. He kind of goes into a trance, and this giant cloth with a rope tied on each corner gets let down. On it are all these animals that were on the other side of the wall for a good Jewish guy like Peter. Pork chops, scallops, lobster flambé—you get my drift. God said, “Peter, get up. Kill! Eat!” Peter says, “Lord, I’ve never ***touched*** that kind of food! Besides, I thought meat came shrink-wrapped?” Actually he didn’t say that. It happens three times.
- b. There’s a knock at the door. God had been preparing a Gentile soldier in a in a neighboring city—Caesarea. Cornelius, a high-ranking officer in the Roman army had been visited by an angel. He had been what was known as a “God-fearer.” That was as close as a non-Jewish person could get to God.
  - The angel affirmed Cornelius and the love and kindness He’d shown to others. Then he told him to send for Peter—which he did. It was this delegation that knocked on the door. Pretty good timing, eh? And suddenly, it clicked in. God was kicking down a wall his followers had been unwilling to dismantle. Peter invited them into his home—and then went and met Cornelius and his household. And the Spirit of God, right while Peter was speaking, kicked down the wall. And suddenly it became clear. All the old walls and barriers were God. God had built a bridge with a cross.
  - Paul the Apostle, who used to be one of the keepers of the Wall, wrote more clearly about this than anyone. Listen to what he wrote.

***You are ALL sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ...There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are ALL one in Christ Jesus (Gal.3:26,28 NIV).***

-The New Testament makes it clear that we no longer need a priest to connect us with God. ***For there is one God and ONE MEDIATOR between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5 NIV).*** The Spirit of God now comes to live and work in ***all*** who believe—not just special people.

- C. Now, you may be thinking, “Why in the world is Ken going into all this detail about **walls?**” I’ll tell you why. We keep rebuilding them!
- Sometimes religious professionals do this more than anyone—a form of job protection, I suppose. Listen to what Jesus said about people like me: **They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called "Doctor" and "Reverend" (Matt. 23:5-7 Msg.)**

How many of you think this still applies to church leaders like me?

-Think about it, within 500 years of having the whole priesthood thing dismantled by Jesus, the church had rebuilt it. A special place—and a special person to talk to God for others. How in the **world** did the church move from having women as prophetesses and leaders and members of Jesus’ inner circle to where they could only teach children? How is it that the church went from saying that that in Christ, we are all the same to subtly—and sometimes blatantly supporting slavery? Why wasn’t it the **whole** church that supported civil rights and women’s rights?

-How did the amazing truth that now everyone has the Spirit and everyone is a minister get reduced to one special person who does that?

-I’ll tell you why. We love walls!

1. Jesus died to end our hostilities with each other. Jesus died to bring down **all** the walls. All the barriers. Racism, prejudice, snobbery, “I’m better than you”—all this stuff. Paul says it like this:

***But now in Christ, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the BARRIER (wall!), the dividing wall of hostility...(Eph. 2:13-14 NIV).***

2. And sometimes the biggest walls are between the church—and the undecided. People Jesus died for. The church becomes a gated community—and what happens inside seems foreign and weird and exclusive to those who actually make it through the gate.

-And sometimes people reject Jesus, not because they aren’t attracted to Him, but because they think, “I’ve got to change the way I talk, the kind of music I listen to, and the politicians I vote for to be a part of this.

-Have you ever noticed that sometimes Christ-followers **talk** different? This little boy was down in the basement chasing down this mouse—and had no idea the priest had stopped by to visit his Mom. So, he runs up the stairs and into the living room holding this dead mouse by the tail. “Mom, look! He was running and I hit him with the broom and smashed him up against the wall. He was still moving, so I hit him with the board—and stomped on him! And...” When he suddenly noticed his Mom frantically pointing at the priest and making cutting gestures across her neck, he said, “and then the good Lord took him home!”

3. We don't want **any** artificial man-made barriers around here. We want to live inside out—so that through us, God enters our everyday world—and changes it, changes us, and changes others.

### III. A CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

- A. Before I get too far down this path about walls, I want to mention that some walls are good and right and necessary. Anyone here familiar with **firewalls**? If it's in a car, it's intended to stop the spread of a fire from the engine compartment to the passenger area. If it's in a computer, it's to stop people from hacking into your computer. Firewalls are **good!**

-There are some walls that God never intended to come down. In Proverbs, Solomon says that a person without self-control is like a city whose walls are broken down. This is the point: when our moral walls of self control, when it comes to our sexual behavior, or the things we say to others, or our eating, drinking and spending habits are broken down—we are open to extremely destructive forces. If you get a few stones knocked out of those walls, you'd better take the time and effort to rebuild them, because if you don't, you'll keep slipping into dangerous behavior again and again.
- B. Jesus made it clear that **his** intent was that there be no walls of separation between us and others. It's interesting, one of the most damning accusations the religious professionals thought they could make against Jesus was, "**He's the friend of sinners! He welcomes sinners and eats with them!**"
  1. The one who seemed to provoke the most controversy in Jesus' little motley crew of followers was Matthew, writer of the first gospel in the New Testament. Matthew was a tax-collector—considered by most Jews in his day, particularly the religious ones, to be lower than low. To be a tax collector for the Romans was the equivalent of being a traitor to your race, your country, and your God. Matthew was an outsider.

-When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Matthew threw a party for all his irreligious friends—and invited Jesus. Who came. Imagine a party for the lowest of the low on the totem pole in our culture—and what it would look like, smell like and sound like—you'd probably get the general drift. **That** stirred things up—especially when Jesus, the single most prominent Rabbi—supposedly the Messiah—went to this party. And that's when the religious professionals started to squawk. Know what Jesus said? What kind of people does a doctor or hospital treat. Sick or healthy? How many of you know the answer?

-Everything about the way Jesus lived and died said, "No more walls! Everyone's welcome!" And he made it clear that the Father is **passionate** about outsiders. He said the Father throws a party every time one person who is outside his love and grace—comes home.
  2. Jesus made it clear that his people would be **no walls** kind of people. He said to us, "I don't want you to **leave** the world—but live in your world—with me at the core of your life. And from that vantage point, I want you to make a difference.

-Listen to what He said:  
<sup>14</sup>"**You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.** <sup>15</sup>**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.**

**<sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16 NIV).**

-Truth is, light doesn't do any good unless it gets into a dark place. Salt doesn't do any good unless it gets out of the little box or salt shaker you keep it in. Right?

Too much light in the wrong place—and it's blinding. Irritating. Too much salt in the wrong place—and it will mummify your food, make your blood pressure go up.

-There is a certain pressure in Canada that I think could be called, **containment**.

"We don't really care what you do on the inside of your church walls, but please **keep** it there!" But we're not going to do that. We **can't** do that—and follow Jesus.

3. When we say we want to be a church without walls, what we're saying is that our goal is not going to be collecting people as often as possible in one building, or starting as many organizations as possible where the Christians are ganged up together in one school, one company, one political group, or one profession. Because the salt and light needs to be spread everywhere.
  - And it doesn't get spread just because we show up. It has to get **out** of our lives in the way we love and live to flavor where we are—or bring color and light to where we are. God uses what we say—but only if our lives back it up.
4. Maybe we need to talk about our personal walls. I think Matthew records one of the reasons there are walls between us and others through an illustration Jesus used in his most famous message, the Sermon on the Mount.
  - Some of you will remember it. He was talking about passing judgment on others. He said,
    - <sup>1</sup>"Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. <sup>3</sup>And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? <sup>4</sup>How can you think of saying, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye (Matt. 7:1-5 NLT).**
    - I need a volunteer to come up and help me give you a visual on this.
    - It's actually a hilarious imagine—and ophthalmologist trying to do surgery on someone's eyes when he has this huge plank sticking out of his! Knocking people down, poking the screen out of the computer, putting holes in the wall.
    - a. It's pretty clear, isn't it, that the log Jesus is talking about is a judgmental, critical, racist or prejudiced spirit. Think Matthew had ever felt that from religious people? Truth is, we all have these logs. We sometimes inherit them from our family, or get them from our culture. Sometimes we just dislike—have contempt for people not like us. It ranges from standing in the check-out line behind someone from another culture or race who can't quite get the language to making demeaning comments about women...or men.
      - We use little words that immediately relay our attitudes—like "fag" or "pot-head" or "loser" or "pig" or "round eye" or...whatever. Sometimes it's not a word—it's just a look, a roll of the eyes.

-Back to the wood “thing.” We take these logs in our eyes and build walls with them.

Ever seen a log wall? They build forts out of logs. They’re almost impossible to get through.

- b. With our hostility and contempt, we rebuild the very walls Jesus gave his life to take down. Truth is, you have **never** looked into the eyes of someone who doesn’t matter to God!
  - c. And I believe that Jesus would say to you and me, “Why don’t you take that plank out of your eye—the one you’ve used to build a wall of contempt, indifference or contempt, and use all that lumber to build a **bridge!** Build a bridge to people you struggle to understand or know or love so that they can find the life I died to give.
  - d. Let’s tell the truth to ourselves this morning, okay? Where’s the plank? Who are you most likely to judge, or criticize or avoid? What group of people do you struggle most with? Is it preppy looking people with their *Tommy Hilfiger* shirts, Dockers and neatly parted hair? Or is it heavy metal tattooed, with more punctures than a lace tablecloth? Americans? People of another race or socio-economic status? Is it the gay population—or the straight population? Is it people without education—or people who are proud of their education. People who are anal-retentive—or people who are sloppy?  
-Where’s the plank—and where’s the wall? What would it take to God to so work in you that the same lumber that has created a wall—is used to create a bridge.
4. See, truth is, it’s not organizations that create walls, it’s people. And the only way this can be a **church** without walls is if we are **people** without walls. How do you think God will vote in the upcoming election? Think He has a favorite political party? How many of you think God has a favorite type of music—like Classical or something? How many of you think God has a favorite language—one He uses most of the time with His favorite people? How many of you think God prefers Baptists? Or Pentecostals? Maybe He really loves The Olive Branch more than all the others—how about that?

-I’m pretty convinced that many people think if they turn their lives over to God, it’s going to look like the Religious Right, or like a convent. They don’t know that God loves and uses heavy metal artists, and movie producers, and cartoonists, and CEOs—every one He can get His Hands on—and He doesn’t rip them out of where they are and make them work in a church, He brings the beauty of his leadership wherever it will be allowed. And it’s **always** good.

-God’s Kingdom has no walls. And He wants his leadership and his grace and his compassion to spill over into where we work, the neighborhoods where we live, the hockey teams we coach, the golf club where we worship—I mean, play golf. We want to be a church—a gathered group of people—where there are no walls so our salt and light can go where it’s needed most.

- 5. You may have notice that we’ve refused to erect a **stained glass barrier** around here. And we’ve made some decisions along that line. We **religiously** avoid

religious language. It sounds cliché. Like Jesus, we tell stories and use images to make truth really clear. We talk about real problems and real issues—not theology. We use the kind of media and music people are used to so that no one feels like they have to change cultures to follow Jesus. But it's in people—like us—that the real walls come down.

C. I think most walls, like the Great Wall of China exist for a very simple reason. **Fear.**

1. It could be that maybe the biggest, most intimidating wall we need to get rid of when it comes to being a **church without walls**—is the wall of fear around heart. I mean, there are alligators in the moat and everything.

-There are always reasons for our fears, whether or not they're even rational. But mostly, when it comes to living inside out, Canada's policy of **containment** has worked. We're afraid; "What would people think?" I think that wall of fear is the main wall that has to come down.

-I know fear—it's not a very nice feeling. So, walk toward it. Don't let it put a wall between you and where Jesus has called you to live! If I were you, I'd go for it. That's what I want for my life!

2. I want you to think of the impact we could make if our faith, the life we've been given, got lived **mostly** outside these walls because of Jesus.

-What if we were to leak the secret we've kept for years, "I follow Jesus! I love Him! I'd do anything for Him! And for **His** sake, I'd do anything for you." What's inside **needs** to get out!

-Inside these walls, we know there is a God in Heaven, bigger than any problem we face, greater than any government—a God who lends his power to weak people. A God who loves with outrageous love. What if that truth leaked into our world?

-Inside these walls, we know the love and compassion of others. When we go into the hospital, go through a crisis—people know. People pray. People help. What if that went from the inside—out. What if that started happening in your neighborhood—and mine?

-Inside these walls, we know that God forgives any sin; I mean, He **power-washes** dirty hearts and makes them as clean as a baby's. He can free us from chains of addiction and fear that have kept us for years. What if, in this little container called, "my life"—that truth about grace made it into every corner, every crack. That God is a God with his arms outstretched to everyone.

-Inside these walls, we know that in a crazy-busy, frazzled, uptight world—there's peace. There's a God who, even though he runs universes, always has time for a chat, always has time to help. What if that truth made it from the inside—outside? Into my world. My neighborhood. Know how that truth will get there? Through **me.**

-I guess you could say, to be a church without walls—we need to get the inside—**out.** Live inside out lives. How about it—are you up for that?

-So...**so...**let's agree together to be salt and light wherever we are. Not 'church in pews'—but church on wheels, foot, skateboard, planes—all over. No walls between us—and the people God has called us to influence. Let's not let anything stand in our way, okay? No walls—just pathways.

**IV. CLOSING**

- A. I've already told you the story, several times, about Tony Campolo—and him holding a birthday party for a prostitute at 3:30 a.m. in a diner in Honolulu. Too bad. I love it—and I'd like to tell it again.
- Instead, let me tell you a story about me. There was a guy on our street that, initially I only knew as someone who was in love with his lawn. I knew that because our guys played street hockey—and he hated them getting stuff on his lawn. Four years, I found out that he had been diagnosed with cancer—and on top of that, had an aneurism and was very ill. So, I jumped the wall and went to see him—took him some fudge—kind of a peace offering. The wall came down--and we talked every so often. I always intended to do more—someday. Like you, I was busy.
- A little over a week ago, I found out—only in the newspaper—that he had died. I went to see the family and talk to them—but the part that stuck in my heart we have lived together on that street for 13 years, and I never had the influence I'd hoped to have. And that hurts.
- B. I have realized something. Our time and our opportunities are limited. And if we wait too long, time runs out. We miss our chance to make a difference. If this piece of lumber represented the log in your eye, what name would you have to put on it? What group of people? I'll tell you what, let's take all this lumber in our eyes; let's tear down every wall; and let's build BRIDGES. Let's live inside out!