

**Intro:** Good morning Encounter Church and thank you to those watching us online this morning, wherever you may be, or whenever you are watching this! Our hope is that you have been blessed by the Lord already this morning with the incredible worship that Stacey and the team lead us in and it is my hope that the Word that will be shared with you will bless you just as much! For those of you watching online, drop us a line in the comment section, whether it is a prayer request, or just letting us know where you are watching us from. To those who this is your first time with us, we are glad you are here and chose Encounter Church to worship God at this morning.

I'm glad to have my mom and sister with us this morning and as always, it's good to have all the home folk here this morning.

For those who don't know, I am not The Pastor Ken. I am The Other Pastor Ken and my Wife, Kathy, and I serve as the Stewardship Pastors here and if you have questions about money or credit or how to better deal with your money, we might be able to help. Kathy, waive at the folks this morning. She is the one who is really good at the budgeting stuff and has been doing our household finances our entire 40 years of marriage. So, connect with Kathy or me if you have questions about that.

Pastor is not with us this morning, and I am honored to share the Word in his place this morning. So Pastor, wherever you are this morning, or whenever you will be watching this, be blessed, be safe coming home, and I trust you will be blessed of the Lord by the Word that is shared this morning too and we are ready for you to be back sharing the Word with us next Sunday!

**Message:** Last week, Pastor Justin started a new series on PURSUE and he did a great job with the topic about Direction. In case you missed it last week, and I think his notes are available through the church office or at [encounterpeople.tv](http://encounterpeople.tv), but his points were these: (things in red go on the screen please)

1. Prayer helps us hear before we move.
2. Prayer aligns our will with God's will.
3. Prayer gives us direction when we don't know what to do.
4. Direction requires listening and
5. God's direction doesn't always make sense.

This morning, I will continue on the topic of pursue with the title:

**P-U-R-S-U-E:**

**Just a word you know the definition of, or does it define you?**

We'll close this morning with that statement again and let me say at the top of this message before I say anything else, that if this message is for no one else today, it is for me. I have found myself in the position of knowing what the word PURSUE means, but it not actively defining me.

We all probably know what pursue means, or at least, we all have our own definition of what we think pursue means.

Webster defines the word “pursue” as:

*“to follow, chase, or actively work to achieve a goal, object, or activity over time.”*

When I met Kathy all those years ago, which just seems like yesterday, I can remember pursuing her. You can probably see the smile coming on my face right now me just thinking about it. We both worked at Big Blue and she worked on one end of the teller line and I worked at the total opposite end of that long teller line and I could hardly keep my eyes off her. We started dating March 25, 1986 and from March 29, 1986 until we got married on August 23, 1986, we saw each other every day and almost every night. I think we just missed 1 night seeing each other, getting to know one another. It was kinda fun because only 1 person at the bank knew we were dating, so we had to keep it hush-hush. Anyway, we spent lots of hours together talking on the phone, seeing each other, getting to know one another and I was stoked. When we decided to get married, I was really stoked! That was 40 years ago and I’m still stoked. Husbands should never stop pursuing their wife. Keep it lively. Keep it fresh. Kiss her when you leave and kiss her when you get back home. But, it almost didn’t happen. The first time I asked her out, she said “no”, and I could have stopped pursuing her – but I didn’t, and I’m so glad I continued to pursue her.

And that’s how we should be with God, but too often, we get complacent, comfortable, dare I say, lukewarm, in our relationship with Him, not because He quit pursuing us, because He never stops doing that. **Rev 3:20** says that He stands at our heart’s door and knocks and if anyone hears His voice and opens their heart’s door that He will come in and eat with them and them with Him. **Luke 15:4** in the Parable of the Lost Sheep tells us about the Good Shepherd that leaves the 99 sheep to go find the 1 lost sheep. Both of these verses are about God’s pursuit of us.

The core meanings of pursue then would be:

- To chase or to follow means to run after or track someone or something to catch them (i.e. police pursuing a suspect).
- To strive for a goal means to try hard to attain, accomplish, or obtain something (i.e. pursuing a dream or a career).
- To engage in an activity means to practice or carry on a hobby, occupation, or course of action (i.e. pursuing a master’s degree or a woodworking hobby).

Next slide: A good synonym for the word “pursue” is the word “seek” which means “striving actively toward a desired outcome”. Are you and am I striving actively toward the desired outcome of pursuing God?

Our everyday action should be to be pursuing, or seeking, God, and His presence on a regular basis. Instead, I am concerned, that generally speaking, the church today is more apathetic, or lethargic, towards the things of God, and the mission of the church than maybe ever before. We're older, we're working longer, we are watching kids or grandkids, attending games, and on and on. I know for me, too many times, the demands of the job and the activities of the kids and grandkids and the things that need to be done around the home, or just sitting down and relaxing, tend to be more of where my time and attention are spent rather than indeed pursuing the things of God, much less pursuing God Himself. Maybe you are in that same position this morning, and maybe you, like me, have been in this position too long, and just have not gotten out of that mindset and those actions.

I don't know the exact date when we will be officially moving into the Encounter East building, but it will be here before we know it as fast as what time is going, and my concern is – and not talking about any of you, but talking about me, as again, this message is primarily for me - that if I don't change something and really begin pursuing the Lord and what He has for me and for me to do, that I will not be ready for that move when it comes.

I need to be doing more than what I'm doing. And the realization has come to me over the last several months, that the attacks that have come to the Thomason family and to me personally, could be attacks from the enemy trying to keep me, and Kathy and me, from setting our eyes and our sights on that good work that the Lord will have for Kathy and I to do when we get to Encounter East – and we cannot wait until we get over there to start pursuing the Lord for those things. Likewise, I don't personally know where any of you are, but as for this church, we need to get ready for when we are to go to Encounter East, to that building and property that God has so generously given to us, and to that neighborhood and surrounding area to do the work that God has for us to do.

That Sunnyside Baptist Church congregation could have donated that property to the City of WF, or donated it to a non-profit looking for a facility, but God so delicately wound that situation so intricately, that they would find Pastor Darren to come preach for them for a number of weeks and have that conversation about what to do with that property only to find out Encounter Church, where Pastor Darren and Melissa had just started coming to weeks or months before, was looking for a new church building, and through talks with Darren, and Pastor and the Elders, they decided to give us their building. It wasn't Sunnyside Baptist Church who gave us that building and property, it was God Almighty who gave Encounter that building through Sunnyside Baptist because He had found Encounter Church faithful in building a church that He approved of. I sincerely believe that Encounter Church is a people that God takes delight in. God has ordained that property for Encounter Church and Encounter Church MUST be ready to go when that bell rings! **We can't wait until the doors open to GET ready. We have to BE ready when those doors**

**open.** Just like the football teams have been practicing for several weeks to BE ready for their football season when those games begin, we have to BE ready. What's the Lord been telling you that He wants you to do? Are you doing that? Are you ready or do you need to do some things to GET ready?

So how do we do that? I'm glad you asked, and I think I have some answers for that this morning, though there are many more answers to what we are supposed to do, or need to do, as time rolls on closer to that date.

I do think this series on PURSUE is the right series for this moment in time as we head into the 10 days of prayer September 11-21.

So, I want to ask us this morning, **is PURSUE just a word with a definition to you, or is PURSUE something that can be said of you?**

I want to put it out there this way by defining PURSUE as an acrostic:

The letter P could be for several words, but in light of what Justin shared with us last week, with the 10 days of prayer coming next month, I think the letter P should stand for

Next slide: **PRAYER** (the P is bolded and so too will the u, the R, the S, the U, and the E) – We all should know **2 Chronicles 7:14** which says “if MY people, who are called by MY name will humble themselves and pray, and seek (there's that synonym that also means pursue!) my face, and turn from their wicked ways, THEN will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land”. How many know, we need our land healed NOW more than ever. **Unless the church prays, our land is not going to get healed! If the church doesn't pray, the land won't get healed and neither will the people in the land.**

Next slide: That letter P could also stand for **PEACE**. **Psalms 34:14 (KJV)** says to “depart from evil and do good; seek peace, and PURSUE it”. So when we depart from evil and when we PURSUE God, HE gives us HIS peace, and we need HIS peace with so much going on in our lives and in this world.

Next slide: P could also stand for **PATIENCE**. **Hebrews 6:10-12 (KJV)**, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister, 11 and we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, 12, that YE BE NOT SLOTHFUL, but followers (pursuers) of them who through faith and PATIENCE inherit the promises. We have promises yet to inherit – but we have to pursue! Several words in that portion of Scripture are all active, seeking words and they are not passive words.

So P is for Prayer.

Next slide: The letter U is for **UNDERSTANDING**, maybe not the understanding you would think, but the Understanding that we do not always Understand the ways and the plans of God, and we just need to trust Him and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and not become neutral because of the obstacles that keep us from understanding or the fact that God just has not yet let us understand.

Next slide: Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths”. We have to trust that we may not understand where the journey will take us but we have to understand that the steps of the righteous are ordered by the Lord, Ps 37:23. We have to take that one step at a time, Ps 110:105, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”. Sometimes, that’s all God will give us is that next step, and that is all we need to understand. **U is for Understand that we won’t always Understand.**

The letter R can be a number of words such as Rejoice, as in Phil 4:4, that says “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say “rejoice!”. Rejoice, not only in the good times, but the not-so-good times as well. The letter R can be for Righteousness for His Word says that when we accept Christ as our Savior that we become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, 2 Corinthians 5:21. But I want to use

Next slide: **The letter R is for Repentance.** I think we need to stay in a continual sense of repentance. Not a down-in-the-dumps type of mindset or body language, and not a “I can’t do anything right” attitude, but an immediate recognition of when I have sinned against God and then have the presence of mind and courage to immediately repent of my sins so the blood of Jesus keeps me clean. HE can move easier through clean vessels. We don’t need to see how close to the line we can be to the world’s way of doing things and still have a foot in church. We need that change of becoming hot again for the Lord. **Rev 3:15**, Jesus said to the church at Laodicea, that He would rather us be hot or cold and not to be lukewarm. I don’t want to be lukewarm to God. He’s been way too good to me. Repentance means a change in heart, mind, and direction. There is that “direction” word from Pastor Justin last week. Too often the church has become lukewarm in its efforts to the kingdom of God. You can read for yourself what Jesus said about the lukewarm in Rev 3:16. I need a change in direction to be hot for the Lord. How about you? We need to get ready for the work the Lord has for us to do, not just when we get to Encounter East, but NOW!

Next slide: **The letter S would stand for Single-minded, or Stable.** James 1:5-8, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to each man, or each person, liberally, and upbraideth (meaning He won’t scold us for asking) not; and it shall be given to him. 6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord. 8. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways". So be single-minded. Ask God what you want. Then stand on the Word and His promises for those things. In other words, be stable.

Next slide: The second letter U can be for **UNITY**. We cannot have COMMUNITY without UNITY. Unity doesn't mean we have to agree with everyone. Unity means the state of being one in faith, purpose, love and mission. It says nothing about agreeing with everyone. John Maxwell says we can disagree without being disagreeable. We can all agree to disagree and still get the job done, whatever that job may be. We just need to get it done and we don't need to wait until we open the doors at Encounter East to start those things. I think we need to start asking God, "Lord, what would you have me to do in conjunction with the rest of the Encounter body right now for us to promote your work before we get to Encounter East and then show us what we are supposed to do when we get to Encounter East".

For our purposes this morning,

Next slide: The letter E can stand for **Excellence**. I heard Kathy say many times to our three sons over the years to be men of excellence in everything they do. Now whether they do it or not is up to them. But she planted the seed for them to be men of excellence and I tried to plant that seed by example to them as well. I trust I have succeeded though not all the time did I achieve it.

But Christ Himself was a man of excellence as well as a man of perfection. But being a man or woman of excellence is not being a man or woman of perfection, as none of us will reach that perfected state on this side of glory, but we can all strive for perfection. However, **Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 5:48 "to be perfect even as He is perfect"**. We know we won't ever be perfect, but in pursuing Christ, the only perfect One, we can become more like Him. He pursued God's will even unto His death. In the Garden of Gethsemene, Jesus prayed, sweating those great drops of blood, "Father, not my will, but Your will be done." Is that our prayer?

If we look at **Galatians 5:22-23**, we see the fruit of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. These are things we need to pursue if we want to be more like Christ. The Lord dealt with me awhile back, and has done so a number of times, about my self-control, or lack of it, not that my words were cuss words, and not that my actions were any kind of notorious sins, but there are times I don't always respond to Kathy in the right tone, or with the right words. Why would I be "ugly" to her, the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important person in my life? Lack of self-control. But also I had to work on what I was putting into my body. Never done drugs or anything of the sort, but I love some good sweet tea or an ice cold Dr. Pepper or a good old Mountain Dew. I love those sugar cookies from Sam's, some Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla ice cream and Skittles. I found out awhile back that I am a stress eater. But Father's Day weekend, I got sick and lost about 10 pounds over a 2 or 3 day period and I've dropped more than 15 pounds

the last 2 months by staying off of sodas and cutting way back on my sweet teas, drinking more water and unsweet tea. Exhibiting more self-control. Those sweet drinks are not good for my body and I have cut way back on those. **1 Corinthians 6:19** tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost and I put too much of those sweet substances into this body without self-control. My weight is down. My blood pressure is down. My good cholesterol is going up and my bad cholesterol is coming down. My glucose numbers are coming down. On my wellness visit earlier this month, the dr no longer considers me borderline prediabetic / diabetic as those words were not on my report this time for the first time in a long time. There may be other things about self-control I need to get better at such as getting off Facebook and spending that time in the Word.

I need to be better about loving people and about showing them and telling them about the goodness of God. By and large, I have not been good at witnessing, yet we have a dying world out there that we pass by a number of folks every day that may be on their way to hell that I don't talk about God to. I want to pursue the things of God again and once again experience some things from Him that quite frankly has been a long time coming.

Maybe there's things that you need to work, on things you need to change direction on and once again begin, or for the very first time, begin to pursue, to seek after God.

So, in closing, here's what I want to do. There are 6 letters in the word P-U-R-S-U-E and I want to open the front here to 6 specific groups of people. If you don't want to participate, that's perfectly fine, but I think there may be some folks here this morning where you would say, yes Ken, there are some things in this acrostic that I need to pursue that I have laid low on for some time, and today is the day I want to change my direction on these things. You would say "I don't want to just know the definition of the word PURSUE, I want to be defined by the word PURSUE as it comes to the things of God."

A recap of that acrostic of the word **P-U-R-S-U-E**:

**P – Prayer**

**U – Understanding** that we don't always understand what God is doing or why He has asked us to do what He asked us to do.

**R – Repent awareness.** Knowing when we have sinned and immediately asking for forgiveness. Staying clean before the Lord and not letting those sins pile up. Hebrews 12:1 "lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily entangle, or beset, us..."

**S – Single-mindedness or Stable.** A double-minded person is unstable in all their ways.

**U – Unity.** Staying in unity with the Lord, first and foremost, but then also with the body in what the Lord is doing and wants to do for and through Encounter Church, now and when we move to East.

**E – Excellence. Become a man or woman of excellence in everything we do because that's what Jesus did.**

Altar call:

Here-I want those who would say "I need a better, a more active, more dedicated prayer life".

Here-I want those who would say "there are some things I have been trying to understand, trying to figure out on my own, and I just need to trust God about these things and just understand that I may never understand about them and I need peace over those things because it is keeping me from doing what God wants me to do."

Here-I want those who say, maybe for the first time, maybe for the 1,000<sup>th</sup> time, I need to repent of some things, maybe it is sin in your life, maybe it's just that you too have found yourself in a state of apathy and you want to change that. Or maybe you would say "I just need Jesus. I want this "being saved" thing.

Here-I want those who would say "I need to be more stable in my walk with the Lord, and be more single-minded than being tossed to and fro so much".

Here-I want those who would say "There are some folks that I need to walk in better unity with." Not with folks who abused you or things like that, but there are folks in the body of Christ, here at Encounter or elsewhere in the body of Christ, that you need to be more in unity with. Maybe you just need to let some people go that have kept you from walking more in line with God with.

Here-I want those who would say "I have not been a man or woman of excellence. I have just been existing from day-to-day," or you would say "every time I try to do better-to be a person of excellence, it seems like something happens that the devil, or situations, or people just knock me back down and I just really have a rotten attitude or outlook on life right now."

I want the elders and prayer team members to gather around these and I want to pray over the specific groups.