

Series: **The Original Church Planter**
Today's Title: ***"The Example and Cost of Ministry"***

August 20, 2023 – Acts 20:32-38

Objective: To help Christians understand the practice and cost of ministry.

Opening Prayer

Turn to Acts 20:32-38 – p. 930

The Church's mission is to "make disciples" – to promote Christ – to bring the message of Christ to the nations.

This is the primary ministry of the Church.

As we minister – as we obey this command... we build relationships with those we minister with.

We serve Christ ***together*** – not in isolation from one another.

In our passage today, Paul shares some key ministry insights – and uses his time in Ephesus as an example for the elders from Ephesus to follow – to duplicate.

Paul openly shows his love for them and continues to instruct and guide them - as he says 'good-bye' to them – knowing he will probably not see them again in this life.

Leaders enable ministry. vs. 32

Church leaders should not hog the ministry.

Kim and I have been grandparents now for just over 2 weeks – and I've learned something about my wife in the last 2 weeks – SHE'S A BABY HOG!

She doesn't want to share our little granddaughter – and when I'm holding her, Kim is always trying to get her back!!!

Some church leaders are '**ministry-hogs**'.

They hold on to ministry so tightly – they don't let anyone in – by doing so they stay in control.

- The ministry will be done in ways they want it done.
- This ensures they will always be needed – if nobody else knows the ministry as well as they do.

But the Apostle Paul knew his role was not to hog ministry or to protect or promote himself in the ministry.

It was to expand the ministry – to enable others in the ministry – to equip others in the ministry.

This is exactly what we see him doing here in vs. 32.

Read vs. 32

“I commend you...”

Paul is commending them to God's provision and care.

He is not simply commending them to ministry - to figure things out on their own.

He has taught them – He has modeled what a church leader does – and He is entrusting them “...to God”.

He is not only commending them – or entrusting them to God's care...but he is also releasing them to fulfill the calling of God on their life.

It is interesting to see when this same thing happened to Paul and Barnabas – at the beginning of their ministry.

Acts 13:2-3

While they (the church in Antioch) were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:26 – *returning to Antioch after their 1st church planting trip...*

“...and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.”

In the church in Antioch, we see the same idea – the same sort of commissioning – commending – to the work of the Lord.

Paul is following the example that he experienced when he was first commissioned / commended – to the ministry God had called him to do.

He doesn't try to maintain some sort of control over the elders from Ephesus. He is commending them – and releasing them...

“...to God and to the word of His grace...”

This is what we did a few weeks ago – not really in a formal ceremony – but we recognized teachers in our children's ministries: Next Gen Kids and our pre-school – BBOV – we recognized those teachers and teacher assistants – and we thanked them and commended them

– commissioned them to their work and ministry to kids this school year.

But this is also a ‘release’ – a letting go.

Paul is releasing these elders to their calling.

To release someone to God – is to release them to the truth of His Word.

It is a defined release.

A release to something specific – something tangible.

“...to God and to the word of His grace...”

We don’t enter ministry without ample provision for the ministry.

The Word of God – the Bible – the grace of God – are the tools of ministry that every Christian has at their disposal.

We don’t do ministry solely of our own skills, abilities, or resources.

We do ministry in the truth of Scripture – and the power of His grace.

The result of receiving “God...and the word of His grace...”

“...which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

When someone ministers according to “God...and the word of His grace...” – they will be built up – sanctified or set apart – and in heaven they will receive an “inheritance” – a reward for their faithful ministry.

Leaders must be an example for others. vs. 33-35

Paul set an example for them – and now it’s up to them to duplicate the example they were given.

Once again, this highlights the most important qualification for spiritual leadership is not a skill set or leadership experience, but their spiritual life – the leader’s spiritual health.

The example of their life - to those they lead!

Read vs. 33-35

We see a number of things in these verses which Paul would later detail in his first letter to Timothy – who became the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

He would tell Timothy what to look for – what was required – of any man who would hold the office of “overseer” (pastor / elder / deacon) in the church.

I see 5 things in what Paul tells them.

1. Not a lover of money.

“I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.”

1 Timothy 3:3

“Therefore an overseer must...not...(be) a lover of money.”

The motivation for the church leader must not be financial gain.

The gospel must be the motivation for the church leader – “making disciples” and teaching the truth of

Christ – must be the motivation for the church leader.

Not how much salary or how much stuff they can acquire.

This doesn't mean those who lead the local church shouldn't be compensated – and some compensated generously.

In that same letter to Timothy – Paul says:

1 Timothy 5:17-18

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.
“The laborer deserves his wages.”

The issue – where the sin enters into the picture – is with “coveting” what others have – with the love of money.

It's the leader's attitude and motivation which must be the gospel and “making disciples” – not money and stuff.

2. Leaders must be *independent*, but not *isolated*.

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.”

The church leader must not see the church as a piggy bank – or as his personal assistant – there to do his work for him.

1 Timothy 3:4a

“Therefore an overseer...He must manage his own household well...”

The leader is called to serve the church – not for him to expect or demand the church serve him.

Paul’s example was in working to supply his own needs and those who were with him.

They didn’t present an additional burden to the Christians in Ephesus.

He took care of his own – so others didn’t have to.

3. Good work ethic. – vs. 35 - “working hard in this way...”

There’s an old ‘joke’ about pastors – that we only work ½ day a week – and do whatever we want the other 6 days.

The truth is – pastoral ministry is hard work – and it requires a leader who is dedicated and faithful to put in the hours necessary.

I’ve heard of pastors who try and get by with an absolute minimum – treating their position as a cushy job – instead of a holy calling.

Paul’s example was the exact opposite.

“...working hard in this way...”

Paul was tireless – serving even though he was tired.

He set an example of a leader / pastor who gives himself to the people he is serving – working hard

to teach them and model for them the truth of Christ.

4. Helping those in need. (*sick, weak, poor*).

“...we must help the weak...”

The Greek word here – translated “help” in our English Bible – has the idea of ‘*take hold of, share, help, partake of, enjoy*’.

It speaks more than just helping those in need – but also has the idea of enjoying – partaking – which adds a dimension of relationship.

This is not pity – but genuine help, service, and companionship in the midst of the help.

5. Ministry is about giving – not receiving.

“...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

To stress his point, Paul quotes what Jesus taught concerning helping those in need.

Jesus taught when you help someone – when you meet their need by giving yourself – you will be blessed in some way, and this kind of blessing is greater than receiving things from others.

We looked at what Paul wrote to Timothy about the qualifications of church leaders – let’s take a quick look at the example of another leader – the 1st

prophet of Israel after Moses – Samuel – at the end of his ministry – he gives a farewell address – and points to the example of his life.

1 Samuel 12:3-5 – *Samuel's farewell address*

“Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before His anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.”

They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.”

And he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.”

This ‘concept’ – this essential practice – that spiritual leaders must be an example for the church and for the community – is not a N.T. development. Spiritual leadership – whether in the O.T. era – or in the N.T. era – the Church Age - has always been God’s design for leaders to live their life as an example – a reflection of God’s character and love. Their life must align with what the Bible teaches.

Ministry is about giving, not receiving. vs. 35

Read vs. 35

Paul's example in ministry was an application of what Jesus taught and modeled.

Paul quotes Jesus who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Why is this true?

Most of us prefer to receive – than to give!!

We live in a hyper-materialistic society.

Our culture values 'stuff'.

I'm always amazed at how many people need to rent storage units – and how many people can never put their car in the garage – because their garage is so full of their stuff!

I realize I'm speaking in generalities here – and I don't mean to criticize everyone whose car is kept on the driveway...

I'm trying to point out a larger, cultural issue that many of us probably struggle with – whether we know it or not.

If we are honest with ourselves, I think most of us – if not all of us – have way more stuff than we need.

By our practice, we reveal that our desire for "receiving" is greater than our desire for "giving".

If we practice this – intentionally or not – if we practice this in many areas of our life – we may not realize when we apply this same thinking in our ministry service.

We may not even realize this... but we may look at ministry for what it provides for us – does it satisfy us – does it make us feel good – as opposed to focusing on what we're able to give or provide for someone or for the larger church ministry.

This can be very subtle – and difficult to identify in your life – because this cultural value of materialism can easily shape our own heart and mind.

We must be alert – be aware – of this in our own heart – and make sure we're following Paul's example – and the example of Jesus – to focus on what we can give – not what we can receive.

Ministry is primarily a spiritual work. vs. 36

This seems like a no-brainer – something I don't even need to say.

'Of course, ministry is a spiritual work!!!!'

But I have found in my own life – that if I'm not careful – ministry can become a list of chores – a 'to-do list'.

It's not wrong to have a 'to-do list'.

But it is wrong if I fail to see the people – the lives – the souls that are behind the items on my list!

Read vs. 36

I don't believe this was some formulaic prayer.

This was a sincere, heart-felt prayer – with those he loved and cared for.

This is a spiritual work – they pray and ask for God’s blessing.

Protect yourself from thinking about your ministry as a chore – a job.

It’s so much more than that!!!

It’s a work, certainly, but a work on behalf of God – to point people to Him – to His love, grace, and truth!

That is so much more than a chore!!

The cost of ministry: You. vs. 37-38

Ministry is not about you...or me.

Ministry is about serving others – sacrificing for the gospel – for the kingdom.

It’s not about self-satisfaction – it’s giving your life for the gospel – so others can hear and understand what God has done for them – through His Son, Jesus.

Ministry is about emptying yourself – so others can be filled.

Read vs. 37-38

First, notice the genuine relationship Paul had with these men. Don’t get weirded out when it says they “kissed him”. This was – and still is normal in most eastern cultures.

It reveals the genuine closeness of their relationship.
Sincerity... a bond.

Second, vs. 38 – “being sorrowful” – In the Greek, this is a graphic term that means *‘to experience pain’*.

Luke uses the same term in his gospel – describing the pain and distress of Jesus’ parents – when He was about 12 years old – and they couldn’t find Him on their way back from Jerusalem.

Luke 2:48

“And when His parents saw Him, they were astonished. And His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us so? Behold, Your father and I have been searching for You in great distress.””

And Jesus used this word in the parable He told of the rich man and the beggar – Lazarus – when they died – and what their judgment and reward was.

Luke 16:24

“And he (the rich man) called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’””

Luke tells us their sorrow is because, “...they would not see his face again.”

- When we plant a church – there will be joy – and pain – as some will go with the plant – and our relationship with them will likely change.

Planting a church is likely a higher cost than most ministry in a church.

When a church plants a church - relationships will change – they won't be the same – but our priority is the kingdom of God and helping the lost hear the Gospel.

- When someone goes into missions work, there is joy – and pain – knowing God will likely move them to a different place.
- When someone follows God's call for ministry, there is always a cost – a sacrifice we must make – for the sake of the call.

When God moved me in August 2001 - after working in Youth Ministry for 13 years – down here to CDOBC – it was an exciting and joy-filled time – and at the same time it was painful.

The relationships Kim and I had with so many people – so many students – were going to change drastically.

But we would do it all over again in a heartbeat!!!
Because God was in it – God has blessed in so many ways!!

Are you willing to give yourself – even when it's painful – to the cause of Christ and the mission He's given us?

Apply it...

1. Include others in ministry.

We have a ‘Team Concept’ or a ‘Team Philosophy’ for ministry.

We don’t want people to minister alone – in isolation – we want to have a team of people serving in a ministry.

- This creates fellowship within the ministry.
- It also helps spread the burden of ministry – from 1 person to many.
- It also fosters healthy commitments – many hands lighten the load.
- It ensures the ministry continues when there is a change in leadership. Others are available to step in when someone leaves due to a variety of reasons.

2. Leaders must be an example.

This applies to all followers of Christ – we are all called to be examples of Christ – His ambassadors. But this is a qualification for church leaders.

If you aspire to any position of leadership in the church – your life must reflect Christ – and it must be an example for others to follow.

3. The spiritual focus of ministry.

Ministry is not about producing a good worship service – although we always try to do this.

It's not about kids having fun at church or at BBOV – although we always try to create great experience for kids.

I could give you countless examples here...but this is where I'm going with this.

Ministry is about “making disciples”.

It's about sharing the good news of Jesus – the Gospel – with those who are spiritually lost.

It's about helping those who follow Christ to know the truth of Christ – to live in obedience to the commands of Christ.

With this in mind... Sunday, September 17 is 'Back to Church Sunday'.

Everything we do as a church – is to share the Gospel with the lost – to help believers grow in the Faith.

So, who in your Circle of influence – Family, Friends, Neighbors, Co-Workers – other students – who has God placed in your life – that you can pray for – and invite to church on Sept. 17?

One of the practices we've started doing is during the closing song – write the name of the person – or persons – that God has placed in your life – write their name on a Post-it note – located on the sides of the sanctuary – and place it on the wall.

For the next few weeks – we will keep these on the walls to remind us to pray for them – and to invite them to church.

The message on September 17 will be evangelistic in its application – so those who come will hear the Gospel and they will have a chance to respond and put their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

I'm going to pray – and then as we sing the closing song – come and put someone's name on a post-it note – and allow God to use you in their life.

Closing prayer