

Series: “**Being the Church in a World Gone Wild**”

CDOBC – beginning on 1/28/18

Today’s Title: “**Plans Written in Pencil**”

February 3, 2019 - 1 *Corinthians* 16:5-12

Objective: To help people realize the importance of planning and other ministry/leadership truths.

Opening prayer

Super Bowl Sunday does not happen without planning.

Not only does the NFL have plans in place for next year’s Super Bowl, but they have plans for the next 5 years.

Miami's Hard Rock Stadium (2020), Raymond James Stadium in *Tampa* (2021) and the new Hollywood Park stadium currently under construction in *Los Angeles* (2022), *Phoenix* State Farm Stadium (2023) and *New Orleans* (2024).

Not only is there a great deal of planning on the NFL side, but every team is trying to make plans which will enable them to play in those games.

None of this happens without a great deal of thought / planning / vision / and hard work!

In the church world – there are some who look at planning as a lack of faith – or there are others who simply have a small or dismissive view of leadership. This is where I was for many years. I had a small view of leadership – and I figured as long as I preached biblical sermons, God would take care of the rest.

This is true...but it's a partial truth – and it minimizes / negates the spiritual gift of leadership – the gift of wisdom – and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

- The world is always changing.
- People are always changing.
- Opportunities that were not possible or likely a few years ago are now wide open.
- Finances, experience of workers, resources – all of these are variables the Pastor / ministry leader must be aware of and open to.

My job as the Lead Pastor is not only to preach the full counsel of God's Word, but to lead God's people as God enables.

Lately, God's been doing a whole bunch of enabling!!!

A few weeks ago, Jim Oetter preached, and he mentioned that I had begun work on my doctorate. I'm only 2 classes in...and I have about 3 years left...the focus of my program is on Church / Pastoral Leadership.

I have a belief – and burden – that too many pastors have a small view of the pastorate – and therefore a small view of the local church – and many churches are resistant to leadership due to long-standing attitudes and practices which are often present in churches.

My convictions are not simply from my own experience, but what I've observed over the past decades of pastoring and working with pastors and churches.

Our passage today is fascinating – as Paul gives us a glimpse into 2 of the worlds that he lived in.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 16:5-12

Paul was not only an amazing theologian and an amazing evangelist – but he was also an amazing leader, and the first world he gives us a peek into is his leadership practices / principles.

World #1: Paul's view / practice of leadership

It's easy to miss Paul's leadership skill – because he's so pastoral in his letters – and practical, down-to-earth in so much of what he writes.

But Paul was a high-energy, motivated, driven person – and we see this in his view and practice of his leadership.

1. Leadership involves having a vision / plan for future ministry. vs. 5

“I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia...”

This is subtle...but very important. When he wrote 1 Corinthians, he was in Ephesus. He stayed in Ephesus for about 3 years – one of his longest stays.

Paul was always thinking beyond the moment – beyond the present – and looking to what was next. He was content with what the Lord was doing where he was, but

there was a fire of discontent that burned within him of the places that never heard the Gospel.

He had vision – he planned – and his plan was to travel through Macedonia.

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” — Yogi Berra

Paul was always looking to where he needed to go next.

Romans 15:19-20

“from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;

20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named...”

15:24-26 – *Paul’s plan to go to Spain – via Rome!*

“I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.

26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.”

This is a challenge...because leaders with this kind of passionate vision are often misunderstood because they never want to stop. In a sense they’re never satisfied - they’re always looking forward - what’s next - what can we do next to reach those who don’t know Christ. What do we have to change - should we plant a church - should we launch a new service - should we change

something we're doing to be more effective? For those who are following this kind of leader, it can be taxing.

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” — Antoine de

Saint-Exupéry, writer and pioneering aviator

The problem / tension is when those in the church don't have a passion to reach the lost – they just want to be comfortable – if they have a visionary pastor who has a passion to reach more people for Christ – the future of the church will be decided by which view is adopted by the church.

2. Don't ***run away*** from opposition or challenges. vs. 9

“...for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

I don't like conflict. My nature is to be a people-pleaser, but I've had to learn that's not always a healthy thing. A leader cannot be a people-pleaser, but they must love people and care for them – which often means doing things they don't initially like.

In church-life, we often view conflict – disagreements – different opinions – as something to avoid. Nobody likes awkward situations – so we try and avoid them if possible!

But gospel ministry by its nature will confront sin, call people to repentance, challenge our motives and lead us to a higher calling – higher purpose in life. This is not

easy – and it can often be met with opposition – rude comments, etc.

While Paul was in Ephesus, the ministry was transforming lives and people were repenting of their idol worship and this caused a huge riot in the city. The opposition to the gospel was intense – and in some cases violent. Paul didn't run from that – he ran toward it (*1st responder evangelist!*). Where there was resistance, he saw great opportunity.

This is not to say this should always be our response to resistance. After all, when Jesus sent out His disciples in pairs, He told them if they faced resistance to leave that town, knock the dust of that place off their sandals and move on to the next town. (Matt. 10:14)

So, this is not a dogmatic, universal principle here, but it's a reminder that sometimes we need to stay in the trenches and push back against the resistance we encounter. We must do this with grace and humility, but also with clarity and strength.

Are you timid or afraid of sharing your faith?

I know of a college student who last week took a public stand for being pro-life in a class of about 60. They were 1 of 4 or 5 other students in the entire class to raise their hands saying they were pro-life. That's guts!!!

That's standing up for what's right – no matter what everyone else thinks!!!

3. You must value others as equal members of the team. vs. 10-11

As a leader, it's vital for you to encourage others and not only share responsibility, but enable, empower and endorse others who are on the ministry team.

“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am.

11 So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.”

Nobody would put Paul and Timothy on the same level of talent, knowledge, gifting, authority – but Paul did.

He says in vs. 10 that Timothy is doing the same work I'm doing – the “work of the Lord”.

Then he stands up for Timothy – and pro-actively protects him from this rough, leather-necked group in Corinth.

Corinth was the Las Vegas and New York of the Mediterranean. It was a center of commerce – intellectualism, materialism, paganism– but this was also a busy ocean port – with ships constantly docking and unloading cargo, then loaded with other cargo before sailing again. I'm sure some of the believers in the Corinthian church were dock workers – tough sailor-types. Think of the New Jersey dock-worker

stereotypes – and you’re probably talking about some in the Corinthian church.

Timothy was a gentle and sensitive guy – he had some stomach problems – so Paul sets the tone as Timothy would be delivering this letter to those in Corinth.

‘Make sure you send him back in one piece!’

In **Romans 16** – in his closing comments, Paul recognizes 39 people who served with him in ministry. 39!!!

Valuing everyone on the team – seeing them as equals – peers - validating their work and contribution is a sign of health, humility, thankfulness and love.

4. Recognize that God’s Spirit leads others in different ways than He leads you. vs. 12

This is not only something for leaders to know, but for all of us. Remember back in 1:12

...each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.”

There were divisions in the Corinthian church – and Apollos was not causing the division, but he was preferred by some over Paul.

Paul confronted this problem of divisions – and he tried to send Apollos there to straighten them out – to tell them to knock it off – and not put him up against Paul – or against anyone. But it didn’t work out that way.

“Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.”

What a humble admission – and acceptance.

Paul “strongly urged him to visit” – but “it was not at all his will to come now.” I wonder how that conversation went...and how long it lasted! In the Greek, the idea is one of repetition, not strength – not forceful yelling, but repeated requests.

The Message translation:

About our friend Apollos, I've done my best to get him to pay you a visit, but haven't talked him into it yet. He doesn't think this is the right time. But there will be a “right time.”

Paul had respect for others – even when the other person had a different idea / understanding.

This doesn't apply to a different belief about Jesus, etc. This doesn't mean primary doctrinal differences should be embraced and seen as simply another option.

I'm talking about leadership decisions – timing issues – the gray areas of leadership where wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit are significant pieces of the process.

As a leader, you must realize that God works in many ways – the way He works in / through you is only one of His ways. Recognize the way He leads others is not wrong – and it's not in any way less important than His leading in your life.

Those are 4 of Paul's leadership practices...principles. The second world we have a glimpse of has some overlap with leadership, but these things encompass everyone in the Body of Christ.

World #2: Key elements required for healthy ministry teams

These principles also apply to leadership, but they have a broader application for every person in the local church.

1. Ministry is about developing relationships. vs. 6-7

Love in action!!!

"...perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go.

7 For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you..."

Ministry is about people – and Paul's leadership was not limited to functions, schedules, to-do lists, flow-charts, strategy, responsibilities, delegation, assignments, deadlines, results or accountability – he knew the most important part of his ministry was the people.

"For I do not want to see you now just in passing."

For some people, '*just passing thru*' is preferred.

They don't want to bother with the people – because people are often a bit messy and inconvenient – they mess up my routine and invade my space.

But you can't separate ministry from love, unless you've made it about the program, agenda or event.

Healthy teams do not ignore or avoid the people they love and serve in ministry.

Being part of a church – is about loving the people in the church – no matter what differences exist between you and them.

“I hope to spend some time with you.”

Small groups!!! This is what our small groups are designed to accomplish.

Christian growth is not about gaining biblical knowledge or studying theology in a class / group.

Christian growth is learning to love more – and better – to put *‘Love into action’*.

It’s learning biblical truth – so you can love more.

This requires...demands that you spend time with others in the Body of Christ – and we do this through small groups.

2. Serving always requires **flexibility**. vs. 7b

I talked earlier about the importance and necessity of planning / vision for the leader.

But there’s also a need for the leader – and those who are following – to be flexible – because it’s impossible to know the future – and to anticipate changes in the culture – or in life. Look at the end of vs. 7:

“if the Lord permits”

We must always remember – the plans we make must be written in pencil – because they might change.

We make our plans confident in the Spirit’s leading – but realizing they may change. Paul had to change course – as did others throughout biblical history.

Read Acts 16:6-14

Dwight D. Eisenhower - American army general and statesman who served as the 34th President of the United States from 1953 to 1961. During World War II, he was a five-star general in the United States Army and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe.

“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

I create a 5-year plan – knowing things will change – but I must lead – I must have a vision for the future ministry of this church. What happens next year – and the year or two after that will only happen because of plans made now.

“Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” - Warren Buffett, investor

“The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining.” — John F. Kennedy, former U.S. President

When your plans change, it doesn’t mean you were wrong - it means you’re not God! We must remain flexible, not headstrong in our plans, and follow as the Holy Spirit leads.

3. Serve where you are...now. vs. 8-9

“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me...”

Always looking to the future...to what will be...someday...when the time is right...then I’ll pull the trigger.

Some people plan, and plan, and plan – but they never do anything.

Matthew 25 is where we find the parable of the talents, and the servant who had 5 talents – and the one who had 2 talents went to work right away with what they had, and they were rewarded for their faithful work.

The servant with the 1 talent buried it in the ground because he was fearful of doing something wrong...or wanted to wait for just the right moment or opportunity. As a result, he was cast into the outer darkness.

Think of Joseph who was given dreams by God that one day he would rise to greatness. However, his path was anything but great, but we find him working hard – serving – trusting God for his future.

Or Moses, who spent 40 years tending sheep in the Sinai wilderness. From the palace in Egypt to a shepherd for 40 years. He was faithful – living life in the place God put him – until it was time for God to use him in greater ways.

Are you busy serving now – or are you waiting for the right opportunity...the right thing?

Get busy...now.

Apply it...

1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Each believer is called – by God – to “always abound in the work of the Lord”. We’re to be active – to exceed the ordinary or what’s *‘bare-bones’* necessary in our ministry work – because “your labor is not in vain”.

So how should you do this?

With what kind of mindset / attitude should you serve?