

Series: **The Original Church Planter**

Today's Title: **"Church Leadership" – part 1**

July 23, 2023 – Acts 20:13-21

Objective: To encourage believers to serve with others in confidence due to God's power.

This past Monday – Wednesday, I attended our association's annual Retreat for Church Leaders.

It was up in Phoenix – it was about 145 degrees!

The focus of the retreat was on '*healthy church culture*' – and there were many helpful things I brought home with me.

We had times of worship – very helpful teaching from some of our association pastors who have gone through the process of re-building their church culture from unhealthy and inward – to healthy and outward focused.

It is exciting to see the new faces – many younger pastors now leading many of our association churches.

Our association is focused on planting healthy churches – and we had the chance to commission a young couple – **T.J. and Jess McCall** - who will be planting a church in Palm Springs – with a desire to reach the Coachella Valley.

Our church was able to partner with them with a financial gift.

Interesting story...which demonstrates the value of association.

There was a church in Palm Springs that years ago had turned inward – stopped trying to serve and reach the community – stopped sharing the gospel with non-believers

– as a result, they had declined for years, and recently had to close their doors.

However, this church was part of our association’ southern California region – and they gave the church building and property to the association – *with hopes that a new church could be planted there and do what they weren’t able to do.*

This is exactly what Craycroft Baptist on 22nd Street & Craycroft here in Tucson did – which led to Hope City Church being planted – which we helped out with.

I’m excited to see how this new church plant in Palm Springs will expand the kingdom of God!

God is really do a wonderful work in our association of churches.

There is an excitement – spiritual life that is bursting forth all around Arizona!

God is at work in our state!

On Wednesday morning – we had a breakout session where many of the pastors gathered to share the ‘bold step’ of faith / ministry their church is planning for the next year.

It was so encouraging to hear so many wonderful things happening throughout our association churches.

Opening Prayer

Today, we’re going to begin a section of verses that will take us 3 weeks to work through.

Today is part 1.

Turn to Acts 20:13-21

In vs. 13-31 Luke records Paul's farewell speech to the elders from the church in Ephesus.

In this speech a helpful picture of church leadership emerges. We will see multiple qualities of Paul and his ministry that are great examples for church leaders – and Christians serving in the church - to emulate.

I see 4 leadership principles in our verses today.

Leadership Principle #1:

Equip the church to endure without you. vs. 13-17

We see Paul – spending time with his church planting team – his co-workers / co-laborers in the work – and he spends a day with the elders from the church in Ephesus.

It's clear – by the existence of the elders – that when Paul was in Ephesus for 2 years – one of the things he did was to raise up leadership for the church – so that they could function within a Biblical framework.

Paul's intent with every church he and his team planted – that each church should understand the truth of Christ and the high standard for leaders in the church – so that each church could function – with spiritual integrity and spiritual health – without Paul guiding them every step of the way.

Read vs. 13-17

If you remember from last week...

Paul had been in the port city of Troas – and the Christians in that city gathered together – on Sunday (“the first day of the week” – vs. 7), and Paul preached all night.

A boy falls asleep and falls to his death from the 3rd floor.

Paul resurrects him – preaches until sunrise – because, as Luke told us in **vs. 7**, Paul was “...intending to depart on the next day.”

That was his plan.

But it was an eventful night!

vs. 13 - Paul sends the planting team away on the ship – and he decides to walk the 30 miles to the next stop – a port city named Assos.

Why did he walk – instead of boarding the ship?

Some commentators believe it was a safety issue – that the plot we read about in **vs. 3** was still a threat.

Or...

He walked with some of those from Troas – who had been in the all-night service – and Paul wanted to talk with them more – to give some instruction / further explanation on what he taught the night before, etc.

We really get a sense here of the time Paul spent with the different churches.

His entire 3rd trip is focused on visiting the cities where they had already planted churches – to encourage and strengthen the believers in those cities.

Paul wanted to make sure each church would endure without him.

These churches needed to be effective and passionate in sharing the gospel – and willing to stand firm on the truth of Christ – even when facing persecution from within or without.

Luke records the details of the journey.

- Paul decided to walk to Assos.
- The next day, they were all on the ship, and they traveled from Assos to Mitylene.
- Then from Mitylene to Chios.

Chios was the birthplace of the famous Greek poet Homer, who lived around 800 B.C.

His most famous works are the Iliad and Odyssey.

- The next day - from Chios to Samos.

Samos was the birthplace of Pythagoras – the famous Greek philosopher and mathematician – who died in 490 B.C.

The discovery of the Pythagorean Theorem - which bears his name - was likely made after his death by his followers.

- After Samos, the ship traveled to the port city of Miletus.

They bypassed the port of Ephesus – probably because the next ship to catch would be many days later.

You might wonder how we find spiritual significance in the details of a narrative account like this.

It's important we don't spiritualize these details – making them something the Holy Spirit never intended.

I'm unaware of any spiritual significance to the travel details – so I believe the Spirit inspires Luke to record these details to give credibility to the historical account.

This description matches how ships in the 1st century would navigate this area of the Mediterranean.

They would often make short journeys – from one port to another.

They would do this for economic reasons – delivering cargo and passengers to these various ports.

It was also a very dangerous place to sail.

The “...winds and rocky coasts were tricky to

navigate...” (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Acts, by Darrell L. Bock, p 621)

and these short trips were a safer way to travel.

vs. 16 - Luke tells us Paul was determined to arrive in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost – which is a major Jewish holiday – which is celebrated 50 days after

Passover / Feast of Unleavened Bread – which Paul had just celebrated in Philippi – before arriving in Troas (vs. 6).

The journey to Troas – and the time in Troas – according to **vs. 6** - was a total of 12 days.

If you count the travel time Luke just summarized, it is now 17 days after Passover – 33 more days until Pentecost.

From Miletus to Jerusalem is a trip of about 610 miles.

Upon arriving in Miletus, which was about 30 miles from Ephesus, Paul sends for the elders from the church in Ephesus to come and see him in Miletus.

This is the last time they will see him alive – and he wants to see them – talk with them to prepare them for leading the church – and to bid them ‘goodbye’.

Leadership Principle #2:

The leader's life must be an example to the church. vs. 17-18

Remember, Paul spent just over 2 years in Ephesus. He has a relationship with this group – probably more than any other group of leaders.

Corinth would be a close 2nd place – due to the time Paul spent in Corinth.

These men who are the elders of the church in Ephesus knew Paul.

Paul had taught them – and no doubt mentored them and prepared them to lead the Ephesian church.

The 2nd principle we see in our text is Paul's life – how his life was an example for them to follow.

Read vs. 17-18

In our day of – what I will call: '*Common Hypocrisy*' among so many leaders – this is a helpful reminder / corrective.

Unfortunately, in our culture at large – but also in many churches – we have a crisis of leadership.

I believe this crisis is on many levels of leadership, but one of the big problems we see is hypocritical leadership.

Leaders professing one thing and doing another.

Leaders prohibiting certain behaviors (especially during COVID) and then doing the very thing they prohibited.

"Don't travel." – but they or their spouse traveled.

"Don't gather together." – but they gathered with friends and family.

"Hair salons / beauty parlors need to be closed." – but they had private appointments to get their hair done.

Paul lived in line with what he preached.

He 'walked the talk'.

He tells these leaders from Ephesus, “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia...”

If you aspire to church leadership - at any level – you need to live as an example to others.

In **1 Timothy 3**, a section in which Paul details the qualifications for someone who aspires to be an elder or deacon in the church, he says, “...if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” (3:1)

Church leadership is not just about knowing theology or doctrine – ***it’s about living your theology.***

In the very first sermon I preached in my homiletics class (preaching class) in seminary, I chose this passage:

1 Corinthians 11:1

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

This was in the early 1990’s – and Charles Barkley was my illustration.

If you’re old enough, you may remember his statement that was all over the news when he declared,

“I am not a role model.”

In my short 5–7-minute sermon in that class, I disagreed with Barkley – and one of my points was that a role model doesn’t get to choose if they are / are not a role model.

If people make you a role model – you’re then a role model – at least for those people.

Paul understood how important his lifestyle was. He gladly embraced the idea that he could be a role model – and he lived with that reminder.

Leadership Principle #3:

The leader must be humble and love the people. vs. 19

Church leadership – leading a ministry – leading a ministry team – must never be solely a matter of decision making and impersonal interactions.

Even good decisions – made without regard and concern for those involved, will bring harm.

Our example is always Jesus. (Philippians 2)

His leadership was always thoughtful – and considerate of the people involved.

This doesn’t mean everyone always like His decisions – or that Jesus concurred with every opinion or suggestion.

Paul had a humble heart.

He was always dumfounded that not only did God save him, but that God was using him.

Paul admitted:

“...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” – 1 Timothy 1:15

“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women...” - Acts 22:4

“For I am... unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” - 1 Corinthians 15:9

“...I am of the flesh, sold under sin.” - Romans 7:14b

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” - Romans 7:15

“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” - Romans 7:19

Leaders need to have spiritual humility.

Paul didn't have an inflated image of himself.

He knew God chose Him according to God's plan – not due to Paul's accomplishments or merit.

At the same time, Paul understood what God had called him to do – and to be.

An Apostle of Christ – which brought with it a measure of authority – on behalf of God.

This is where many get all crossed up.

When someone has a position of authority – it's very easy to let that boost your ego – and humility disappears.

vs. 19 - “...serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me...”

Paul served with humility – but he also loved the people he served and led.

Remember what love is.

Love is not a warm, emotional feeling or sentiment toward someone.

Romantic love – *Eros* – may include that – but not all the time.

Love is putting the other person first.

Love is serving others – without them returning the favor.

Love is wanting the best for the other person – possibly at your expense or loss.

Paul genuinely loved those he served in the many cities where he planted a church.

Look at what he wrote to the **Corinthians** – in his 2nd letter to them.

2 Corinthians 2:4

“For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.”

The church or ministry leader must serve with humility – and they must love those they lead.

Leadership Principle #4:

The leader must proclaim the Gospel, even when its unpopular or dangerous. vs. 19b-21

No matter what – Paul always declared the gospel – with great clarity.

He didn't 'massage' the message to appease anyone.

Read vs. 19b-21

Paul never hesitated to share the truth.

This doesn't mean you simply blot out the truth – without tactfulness or as Peter tells us, with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

Paul says, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable...”

We might wonder – *what is profitable?*

How do I know if something is profitable?

If it's in the Bible – it's profitable.

Just because something's in the Bible doesn't mean it always applies to the situation you're in.

But everything in God's Word is profitable.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Paul taught in public – and he taught in private.

“...from house to house”

He was consistent – saying the same thing:

vs. 21 - “...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He didn't change his message depending on the crowd.

His methods changed – but the message of “...repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” never changed.

Apply it...

1. We want to build ministry teams to sustain ministry.

Equipping others – building teams is important because of the unpredictable nature of our modern life.

People move – get sick – leave the church – change to another ministry within the church.

All sorts of things happen.

The one constant is change!

Paul knew he wouldn't be around forever – and he knew there was no way he could lead these churches from another city.

So, he raised up leaders who would be able to lead the church without him.

If you're currently leading a ministry – make sure you are training others to do what you do.

We need to work at developing a 'bench' within each ministry so the ministry can be sustained over many years – because we know there will be many changes in the coming years.

2. You are an example of Christ.

This is not just for leaders.

It is imperative for leaders.

But it's also imperative for every Christian.

Your greatest witness / testimony for Christ is how you live – your attitudes.

Your worst witness / testimony for Christ might be how you live – your attitudes.

What do you post on social media?

Does it reflect Christ?

Our lives – how we live – is validates or invalidates what we claim to believe.

3. Live with humility and love.

Humility and love are traits our culture craves!

A humble and loving leader is like a cold drink of water in the desert.

4. Proclaim the Gospel – always.

We need to be intelligent – tactful – “gentle and respectful” (1 Peter 3:15)

Closing prayer