

Themes for a Growing Church

“Paul and the Ephesians: A Portrait of Love and Leadership”

Acts 20:17-38

Today we're going to talk about leadership and how leaders, as of all sorts, can learn from Acts chapters 19 and 20, but especially church leaders who have the opportunity as the outline in front of you has it there stated who, how, how to show how God's love begins with the gospel and then Paul showed fearless love to the Ephesians. They loved him back, and that shows us how we can respond and love the people around us. love. And I'll say hard core service. Not just abstract love, but hard, dedicated, hard fought love. this does come from Acts 20. I'm going to read a relatively long passage, get ready to stand for a little while. but if you want to follow, it's really acts 19 and 20. I'm going to be, sort of covering acts 19 quickly and then expounding from acts 20 here, then God's Word from acts 20, verses 17 to 38, as I read to you...

Now from Miletus, he that is Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews. How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, said, now I am going to Jerusalem. Constrain and by the spirit, not knowing what will happen to be there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me, that in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me, but I do not account my life of any value, nor is precious to myself. If only I may finish the course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole council of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained or purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one of you with tears. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no ones silver or gold or apparel yourselves. Know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me in all things. I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus,

how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he, Paul, had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again, and they accompanied him to the ship.

Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, give us ears to hear as best we can as much as we can of this incredibly rich passage. Minister, trust by your spirit. Open our hearts. We pray.

In Jesus name.

Amen.

What does it require for people to have real and abiding affection for each other? People give various answers. Have been reading Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* of all things, and she says that deep affection grows from gratitude, sincere gratitude for someone's kindness, and also respect. The apostle Paul would agree with that, but he would say much more. That love comes from a sincere desire for the well-being, the interests of others, not just entering a relationship to get something out of it, but truly caring for the people in our relationships.

C.S. Lewis said, you have to have a third thing. You have to have something else a passion, a cause, an interest, something that lights your mind or your heart. That's people together. For Paul, for Christians, that something is the gospel of the grace of God. The word of the kingdom, the life we have together now and forever. Now you may remember that Paul was a Jew who grew up in Gentile territories.

He grew up in a town. He lived in a town or city really, called Tarsus, something of a university town, we would call it today, a place where we could get a great secular education. Paul, a Roman citizen, did get such an education. He could quote philosophers well known and unknown in his letters and in his speeches. It's also true that he was well lettered in the ways of Jews.

He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and he started in Jerusalem, 600 miles from Tarsus, under the greatest teacher of the law of the day, a man named Melville. Therefore he was uniquely equipped by God, by God's providence, to become who God told them to be. And that is the apostle to the Gentiles. He would begin in synagogues, proclaiming in synagogues that Jesus is the Christ, the one that is a promised you to all the covenants, all the hopes of Israel, all the Psalms, all the prophets spoke of him.

And after that was done, he would go into secular places and be equally at ease proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Now it's beautiful. And yet, as he says, the spirit testifies that he'll have

nothing but trouble and imprisonment. In fact, that Paul's minister was so effective that it aroused massive levels of opposition. He says the Jews tormented him.

The Gentiles did too because, you see, he brought a message. The message was Jesus is God incarnate, living God, the one true and living God, who has come into this world. He is fully man and fully God. He lived a perfect life. He died on the cross for our sins, rose again in victory over death, demonstrating his power over the greatest enemy, which is death, and invites you to live with him.

Now, that message might not have been so offensive to his culture, except he also added that your gods are nothing. In other words, if he had gone into the forum and said, hey, you have 265 duties here, I got to tell you, there's 266. And I'm gonna explain that one. His name is Jesus. He's part of the Trinity.

And they weren't. But they might have said, yeah, you know, we've always got room in the pantheon for one more God. But that wasn't Paul's interest. Paul said, Jesus is the living God. And by the way, all the others are idols, dead and nothing and useless. They don't speak, they don't listen, they don't hear. They don't do anything for you.

You made them with your own hands. Come on, think about it. You set them up on pedestals. And besides, if you read their own stories, their own stories say they barely care about you. They're in it for themselves. And they make use of humans. Or ignore humans as they wish. Many people knew in their bones. As Paul said, it's true.

The idols are dead. They don't do anything. They don't care about us. And many, many believed. In fact, so many believed that it caused upheaval, which we'll study in a few moments. Now, when Paul said idols are dead, he did so in other places, but in Ephesus, Ephesus was a city, the third biggest city in the Roman Empire, about a half a million people.

Just a lot of people in an ancient city that had a gigantic temple to Artemis. Artemis. Sometimes people say, Artemus of the Ephesians. Her temple was bigger than the Parthenon that people visit when they go to Athens, and then its middle and its core. There was an alleged image of her that had fallen down from heaven. Paul says she doesn't even exist if she does this.

Guess it's because you made her with your own hands. Now, one of the things the Bible says is that idols don't exist. In first Corinthians chapter eight, Paul says, you know, you can you can eat meat that's been offered to an idol. Because here's why. When you offer meat to an idol, you offer it to nothing. If you present it to an idol, you presented it to nothing.

So it's not defiled. You didn't even do anything. Idols are nothing. But he also says, the Bible says that idols are dangerous. They're dangerous because they are mental constructs and social constructs that people put their trust and think about communism. We don't. Probably nobody

here thinks that communism is a good ideology, but we all know that communism has kept millions and millions of people, even billions of people in its thrall.

They believed in nothing, and that nothing was used by Satan himself to addict them, to the hope of prosperity in this world. So it was with Artemus. She was the goddess of the hunt and prosperity, and an animals that give birth and safety for women and much more. She was basically God of wealth and pleasure and security. And Paul challenged all that.

And Paul actually went to Ephesus three times or twice, and once nearby he had a short visit that's described in chapter 18. He spoke in the synagogue briefly. He said, I'll be back, Lord willing. And he laughed. And three people known as called Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila, planted a church and started to grow. And then Paul came back, as he had hoped to do.

When he did, he returned to the synagogue where he had already been proclaiming that Jesus is the hope of the Old Testament. He's the Messiah you've been looking for. And they heard him for a while, and he made many converts. And after a while the leaders of the synagogue said, thank you. We've heard all that. We need to hear from you.

You may leave. He left and went to a place called the Hall of Tyrannus. Now, you probably know that Tyrannus has a connotation, and you know Tyrannosaurus Rex is the tyrant lizard king of the dinosaurs. Tyrannus means tyrant. His name was tyrant. They went to the home of the tyrant. I don't know about you, but I'm just guessing.

He was a pretty demanding teacher. But even the most demanding teachers realize that in Ephesus, which is a very hot and dry place, you probably aren't going to get many people in your classes. Nowhere. Conditioning right from 2 to 4 in the afternoon. And that's where Paul taught 2 to 4 in the afternoon, and people would come and listen to him.

And he taught believers, and he debated with non-Christians. And Ephesus was a city of trade. And many roads came through. And eventually it seemed like almost everybody in Ephesus either heard Paul or heard of Paul through that, through that lecture dialog, debating time. But the city of Ephesus had another feature to it. They lived for wealth and for trade, and they also were a center of the magic arts, dark arts.

We would say today people learned incantations. They bought expensive magical scrolls that told you what words to use to control other people. They're very interested. We would say today in power. And God in his providence gave Paul power. He performed extraordinary miracles while in Ephesus to demonstrate to the Ephesians are interested in power that he is describing the God of power, the God of power, empowered him.

There is one scene that is unfortunately been imitated falsely. Many times in the history of the church. There's one scene it briefly describes in chapter 19. It says, you know, Paul worked with

leather. He made tents for a living. He supported himself working in the morning, and he would teach in the afternoon. In the evening. It's hot work.

It's hard work. And so we had aprons and he had cloths that he would use to wipe his hands off. And it says in acts 19 that if people even touched his aprons or touched his clothes, they would be healed. This wowed the Ephesians. God does not ordinarily do this. So if you hear about a televangelist that's going to charge you \$1,000 for a prayer cloth, that'll make their diseases go away, they've really missed the point.

Paul did not charge it. It didn't happen all the time. It happened on this occasion, as Paul condescended, or God condescended to Ephesians, who were power hungry and said, your power hungry. I'm going to speak your language. Let me say it very differently. When I was a brand new Christian, I was 18 years old, college freshman, and I was a basketball enthusiast.

Now I choose my words carefully. I was not great at basketball. I was enthusiastic about basketball. I was pretty good. I was a pretty good pickup player and I was a pretty good shooter, especially if I was open under 16ft. I became a Christian. And I declare to you that for five weeks I could not miss a shot.

Now, why could I miss a shot? I believe it's because God knew that I cared inordinately about basketball, that I wasn't a really good shooter. But once in a while I'd go eight for nine in a game, and he gave me about 14 games where I hard to miss a shot. I knew better than to think it would keep up.

I said, you know what? I think God knows I'm the kind of guy that's going to wonder if I really did something, if anything really changed. And he's giving me this, this crazy song that I do not offer to other people as they come to Christ. I'm not saying if you become a Christian, you're going to become a better shooter.

I'm saying God speaks our language as we need.

The Ephesians came. The Ephesians came listening to the message. They understood that the gods are nothing, that they really don't do anything for you. They can confessing their sins. They came giving up their magic books. And the passage says, acts 19 says that they didn't sell their magic scrolls describing the dark arts. They burned them. Which is the right thing to do.

Let me put it this way. If you see anybody here today who owns a meth lab, burn it. Don't sell it, burn it. You can keep the house. You can keep the grounds, but don't keep the meth. Smash whatever accouterments are necessary to make meth. I know nothing about this. Fortunately.

They repented. They believed they yielded their entire life to God. The gospel and his kingdom, his reign. So many people believe that it caused trouble. Specifically in Ephesus, a great number of people came from the region to worship Artemis, and they did it in part through silver images

that were made and sold, sometimes presented in the temple, sometimes taken back to facilitate, worship or adoration or pleading for wealth and prosperity.

And so many people came to Christ that the silver trade, the silver image making, started to waste away. And the leader of the silversmith, a man demagogue named Demetrius, called together the silversmiths and said, Paul is ruining our livelihood. He's saying the gods made both hands don't exist at all. And he's denying us our deity. And he's besmirching Artemus.

And you know that we have a business here. I'm quoting him at the moment. We have a business here. We have our wealth. And this Paul is saying that God's made with hands silver images are no gods at all. And he was skilled enough as an orator and was enough of a challenge to the finances, the region that he gathered, a crowd that swelled over.

In acts 19 it says 25,000 people, although not even not everyone knew why they were there. City of 400 and 500,000 25,000 people gathered its tents. Its. I'm sorry. It's dense and people could hear and they rushed to the amphitheater and for two hours straight they chanted, great as Artemus of the Ephesians, great as Artemus in Ephesians. Somehow the crowd laid their hands on two of Paul's lieutenants, one named Gaius, one named Aristarchus, and kept them there.

And Paul found out what was happening and came. It was about to enter into the amphitheater. Some of you probably been there. It's still you can still see it. It's an amazing, amazing structure. And there's a hallway, you might call it, or an entryway. And Paul wants to go in is he's thinking, I've got to defend my friends Gaius and Aristarchus.

We can understand that he loved them. There was teammates and hey, 25,000 people in one place. I'll defend myself and explain what I'm doing and why. In fact, God's made with the hands our gods. And I'll tell you about the true God. And his friend said, don't go in there. We're not going to allow you in. They'll tell you to pieces.

That's the story in chapter 19 of acts. He was there for 18 months, 24 months. By that time he was there three years all together, one of his two longest stays in his missionary journeys, Corinth, 18 months of Ephesians in Ephesus for three years.

It's a passage almost every pastor loves. It's a passage describes the spread of the gospel pioneering work and its fruits and its dangers. Now Paul left in time. Acts 20. We have Paul coming near Ephesus for the third time. He's actually in a town called Miletus. It's my job to tell you that it was about 62 miles from Ephesus by foot.

Now you think to yourself, 62 miles. That's nothing. How far is Gadsden? I don't know, it's. It's kind of like that. Drive. Take. What does it take? 45 minutes. An hour. But sorry, in those days, people walked in. 62 miles is a four day journey. So Paul sent a messenger who knows how long

that took. Paul sent a messenger and one of his previous, and he said, Get to Ephesus and tell the people I'm going to be in my leaders to meet me there.

They walked four days. Maybe they had four hours, six hours, eight hours with the Apostle Paul, and they walked back four days. This is how devoted they were to each other, giving up nine days of their lives. And Paul says, let me tell you how to conduct your ministry. Let me tell you about a healthy church. Now, just your comment.

This is a healthy church. This church is a healthy church. It's healthy because of love of the gospel, love of the word because it leads to love of each other. Every church has problems. This is a fundamentally healthy church. The church at Ephesus was fundamentally healthy as well. And Paul says, this is how you live. This is how you conduct yourself in a fundamentally healthy church.

The first thing he says is you need to serve you. Leaders need to serve the people you love. These are his words in chapter 20, verses 18 and 19. You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time. From the first day I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, he says, I am humble and leaders are humble.

This is a passage about church leaders, but it applies to all leaders everywhere business leaders, educational leaders. It applies to everybody. It's good to be humble. Now, for Paul and Christians, we have an extraordinary reason to be humble, and that is we know we're sinners. This passage says that Jesus obtained us with his blood. That means. And we read this earlier from Deuteronomy chapter six, and Jay mentioned it also in the Scripture he read at the beginning, we've been ransom, we've been obtained.

It means we're in a status something like best described as slavery. Like God redeemed you from slavery in Egypt. You're enslaved to sin by yourselves. You're enslaved to death by yourself, and Christ obtained you. That's a cause to be humble. Now there's a special challenge to be humble if you're a leader. And the challenge is leaders are leaders because they're skilled, because they're good, maybe even very good at something.

And therefore they can be proud of their abilities, of their of their expertise. And so Paul says, we need to be humble. Why are we humble? We're humble because we're sinners, but it's also good for us. George Whitfield, a name you've probably heard was the most famous preacher, certainly in English language, in the 18th century. He came to America a number of times, 1730s, 40s, 50s.

And he had a friend. His friend's name was Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin was not a Christian. Whitfield knew that they formed a friendship, and Franklin was just amazed at his oratorical skills. And he was also, you know, a mathematician. And so he said, you know, I'm just

astonished at your vocal power. And he calculated that if Whitfield stood in an open field, no amplification, no help of any kind, and people were quiet, he walked.

How far? How long can they hear his voice? He said 25,000 people could hear George Whitfield if they were quiet. And by the way, they were quiet because there was no amplification. And so everybody could hear him. And he was also eloquent. He was trained as an actor when he was younger. And as a consequence, when he would preach, people would come up to him and say, your voice is like the voice of an angel.

And they would commend him so highly. They would say things like, you're so wonderful, you're so eloquent. And Whitfield would reply, thank you very much. The devil just told me that one minute ago.

Be humble. Every leader knows they're saved by God's grace. They're sinners. Saved by grace. It's a great starting point for leadership. You don't know everything. Humble yourself. Next, Paul says in verse 19 that he wept. I'm always amazed when I read this passage that it says at the beginning Paul wept at the end they were all weeping. In the middle it says, they wept three times.

It says they wept. Why would Paul weep over the church? The people of Ephesus? Lots of reasons. You can weep over those who reject the gospel. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem have longed to gather you under my wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks. I longed, but you would not have it. Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

He weeps over unbelievers today. If you're an unbeliever today, he weeps over you. He calls you and he grieves. Empathy for people who are hurt, wounded. He had empathy for his people. I think probably he wept for joy at times, but for joy. People seen their lives turned around by faith in Christ. Paul wept but also endured. Verses 19 and 20 say, he said, every day I got up in the morning and made tents so I would take care of myself with my own hands.

And in fact, even people who are with me were helped by the work I did making and selling tents. And then he worked all afternoon teaching and often at night teaching some more. And furthermore, he did this despite imprisonments and beatings and threats. And the Jews treat him bad, treated him badly, and the Gentile treated him worse. He endured.

He was also convinced that he had to say whatever was helpful or whatever was profitable, not what was popular, but anything that was helpful, he says. He did this publicly and privately. What he said publicly and privately were one and the same in those days. Many teachers, many religions, had two sets of books. There was the public teaching for the masses.

And then if you become initiated to pay more money, you can find our secret documents. We'll tell you the truth, the hidden mysteries. Paul said. There is no discontinuity between what I said in public and in private, just as we hope that we're the same person in public and private ourselves. Paul said it was the same one message, but I said it publicly and also said it privately.

I said it from house to house, meaning he knew people now as a church grew group probably lost the ability to know every body in the church just to big, but as much as possible pastors then and pastors now, I remind you, we have about 20 pastors in this church. You may not get to know the lead pastor, but you can know pastors in the church and care for them.

That's what the church does. It knows people one by one. Leaders know their people. Paul says in verse 21, he spoke to everyone. He spoke to Jews who gave him a hard time. He spoke to Gentiles who also gave him a hard time. It says he spoke to Greeks and barbarians, educated and uneducated. He spoke to everybody. And the last thing he says is he spoke the whole council of God.

Now in our circles, in case you didn't know, this is a Presbyterian, reformed, Evangelical Orthodox Church. In our circles, the whole Council of God often means what we sometimes call the doctrines of grace. That is, God is sovereign over all things, even over salvation that he calls sovereignly. And people who resist will eventually come to him. His grace is irresistible, and he will preserve us to the end of life.

Once we trust in him and so forth. That's what we often say. That's the whole counsel of God. And I don't disagree with that. I mean, those are at this part of the Council of God, but the whole council of God means, as I said, whatever needed to be said. If I came across something in the word Paul says and all good pastors say, I didn't ask, how will this land?

I didn't ask, what if people don't like this? I better not say this. He proclaimed the whole council of God. One of my friends once said, if you want to know what God is saying to the church today, go check out the parts of your Bible and your friends Bibles that are not underlined. The things nobody seems to hear.

The whole council of God. That's Paul's ministry. Now. He says then that his conscience is clear. He spoke by all means to all people, in all ways. He could say, my conscience is clear, I could. I did everything I could do in those three years. And I want to ask you this. Can you say something similar? Can you say, my conscience is clear?

I have done what God gave me to do. I'll tell you candidly that as I was preparing the sermon and I came to the spot, my conscience is clear. I ended up making a list of people I needed to talk to. Nothing major, nothing major.

But I thought, you know, I don't feel quite right about the nature of my relationship with somebody whenever a conscience is clear with our neighbors. But more than that, we want to have a conscience. That's clear before God. And Paul says, my conscience is clear. He means I discharged my duties to the Lord. And we should say the same.

Now, if you're an unbeliever today, and I'm just going to say there are probably unbelievers here and there, probably even more unbelievers online, we're glad you watch. But, you know, it's a little bit safer to be online because you can always turn it off if things get a little bit too close to home. So if you're a man or woman with a child, with unfinished business, with God, you want to have a conscience.

Clear? Don't wait. Start to pray, read the Bible, talk to somebody, a believer, a pastor, a friend you know who's a believer, and finish your business with God. So you can say, my conscience is clear with Paul. It is glorious but arduous to be a disciple of Jesus. And so Paul says candidly, wherever I go, imprisonment and affliction await me.

Savage wolves are going to come. Friends, it's a beautiful thing to follow Jesus, and it's a hard thing to follow Jesus. Paul knows this. He says this. It's beautiful and it's hard sometimes to stand up for the truth, to tell people what you know, what you believe. Paul says, I did it. I proclaimed the kingdom. I proclaimed the gospel message.

I ran the race. I completed the task. I finished the course I did. I proclaimed what was given to me, to proclaim the gospel of God's grace. He says it twice. I proclaim God's grace, that is to say, salvation by faith. Apart from works in Jesus Christ and in him alone do I stand.

His final charge. I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will ever see me again. If I watch the church. Wolves are coming, deceivers from your own midst. He's telling them how to take care of each other. Let me. Let me walk you through the structure of the passage for a moment, he says, first of all, pay close attention to yourselves and all the flock.

Why? Because the Holy Spirit himself appointed or made overseers, take up your task. He's saying, if you're a leader, the leader's charge is to care for or shepherd the Church of God to see it, see the needs, take care of the needs. Why? Because Christ bought the church with his own blood. It's a heavy price to pay. Make use of what he's done.

Guard what he's given you because savage wolves are coming from the outside and deceivers are coming from the inside. They will rise. So watch, be on guard against these things. So leaders first responsibility in the church. And again I say, if you're a leader anywhere in the world today, see how you can apply this yourself. The first job of a leader is to protect the flock from deceivers from the outside.

False religion, wolves trying to destroy the church, God haters, but also people who twist the truth that come up from within. Why? To gather disciples after themselves. To make the faith easier or more attractive, or gain followers or gain money, whatever it might be, we would call them heretics or liberals or people who pervert the gospel one way or another.

Expect these things, Paul says. Expect trouble. Now. Not everybody does. Some people are terrified, I see, oh my goodness, I'm going to live in fear. And other people can't imagine evildoers arising within the church, people attacking the church. My mother, my mother was an extraordinarily naive person. She thought that no one ever did anything wrong on purpose in the history of humanity.

There was always a reason, and they never really meant it. She wasn't the best theologian, good woman, believer, defective doctrine of sin. My wife sometimes says when people talk about evil doing in the world, I am so naive. I'm so naive. And I say to her, it's fine to be naive. It's okay if you don't know about the evils that people perform in the world.

I'm glad you don't know. I'm glad that it shocks you. I'm glad that it shocks your conscience. But I will tell you this in a marriage, it doesn't help if both the husband and the wife are naive. Somebody has to know. This world is a dangerous place, and there are people who are bent on evil. And in the church, it's fine if we have hundreds of people who are naive about the dangers of the world.

But leaders cannot be naive. They have to know the savage wolves will attack and the people will arise from, even from within the church to harm the church. So Jesus says, Paul says, watch, guard the flock. Leaders should watch themselves. Paul says, now there are good and bad ways to watch yourself. In Jude, it talks about shepherds who only shepherd themselves.

There are proper and improper forms of self care. Just a general assembly for the PCA and we had a good time. But I ended up in a couple of conversations about how many pastors don't quite end well. There's a lamentation. Watch yourselves. There are pastors who tell everybody else they need to have a day of rest, and they never rest.

There are pastors who tell everybody else to read the Bible, and they think I study the Bible all the time and they stop reading it. Devotionals. There are there are leaders who tell other people to pray and they hardly pray. Watch yourselves. The Apostle Paul says, one of my friends, a pastor of a church much like ours and sorry, an elder in a church much like ours, said this.

He said, pastors are a lot like politicians. They start with a sincere desire to reform the system and end up being compromised by it. Every friend is a politician, he said to me, Congressman, almost never become corrupt through somebody offering them a bag of cash. Instead, someone offers them a cheeseburger and some fries and they ask for nothing in return.

But somehow a tiny bit of a sense of indebtedness arises, and they end up years later doing something they never would have imagined they would do. Watch yourselves. Watch yourselves, Paul says. Let me say it personally. I was a pastor for some years of a church much like Brightwood and much like Brightwood. We had an evening service on Wednesday nights with dinner in advance and a little bit different from Briarwood, where I actually did get to eat with you on Wednesday nights at the church I pastored.

I'm going to say four weeks out of five. I never actually got more than 1 or 2 bites in my mouth. On Wednesdays, and people noticed. They also noticed I was losing weight. They said, when do you eat? I said, well, you know, maybe 9:00 or so. And they said, you know what? We're going to bring you a meal.

We're going to bring a meal to your desk at 510 so you can go down and just hang out and talk to people. At 530. I thought, oh, that's so kind. You are so thoughtful. Thank you for bringing me meal. And the first 10 or 12 weeks that they brought me a meal, I thought, this is incredibly kind.

And then about week 15 or 18 or 20, nobody brought me the meal. And I was resentful. I had come to expect a meal. It's so easy to begin to think this is normal. This is natural, I expect this, I expect privileges. A man said to me when I became a leader for the first time, age 41, a man, a really old leader of the PC, a 61 years old.

He was really old, let me tell you. He said to me, Dan, you are now an important person. I said, I always I thought everybody was important. He said, you're now an important person. You're working harder and people know how hard you're working. They're going to want to do things for you. Let them. And I thought, I don't know if that's true or not.

I mean, I get it a little bit. Run off these copies because something went wrong. Okay. But serve I'm not sure. Going. Gotta be careful. Watch yourselves. Watch yourselves. Paul says now he tells what he did. He says, I have not coveted anyone silver or gold. Besides that, I worked to supply my own needs so nobody could say I'm getting rich by preaching the gospel.

I'm not. I don't have a selfish motive here.

How do pastors love their people? How do elders and deacons and women's ministry team leaders and people who lead junior high and senior high and children in various ministries, camping ministries, ballet ministries, Sunday school classes? How do we take care of our flock? We expect trouble. We proclaim the gospel, the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ and in Christ alone.

We declare that Jesus obtained or purchased his people for himself, that we were like slaves, like the Israelites in Egypt, in bondage to sin and bondage to death. We proclaim the gospel and

we watch ourselves. And we watch the flock. I am totally convinced, utterly convinced that Frank Parker and Harry Reeder watched the flock and cared about the flock.

And I believe that Scott Red bull, too. And I've done my best in my brief tenure with you, and I want to make sure we know that there are right now about 20 other pastors in this church, and they're watching and they're caring and there are over 100 elders, and there are discipleship makers and they're watching. They're carrying, they're praying.

They're looking out for the benefit of the church, for the gospel, for a way of life. At best, leaders do what we love for people whom we love. We see that in acts. Paul sent a message to the elders to come to him in Miletus four days, one day with him, four days walking back, rugged roads. We see it.

When Paul tried to enter the amphitheater, he said, I want to get in there. They said, no, you're not. We see it. When he wept, when they wept. I can hardly read this passage without falling close to tears myself. Especially hate to do it in public.

He knelt down. He prayed with them. Embrace them. They kissed each other. What grieved them the most was the statement he would never see them again. And then as he as he gets onto the ship, they say, you know what? We're going to walk you all the way the ship. We're going to walk you until you're on the ship.

We're going to have those last moments with you, and then we're going to start our journey back. They loved him so much because of the care he gave them, the proclamation of the gospel, and then the love, the shepherding he gave them in the gospel. Please, my friends, know that this is the desire of all of your pastors, all of your elders.

They want to live this way. Pray for them elders, leaders, deacons, women who lead groups, pray this and seek this for yourself. Leaders in business and industry seek God's grace to watch over your people and love them so that love comes back to you. Now in all this, I'm talking about Paul and the Ephesians and us. But please know that Paul only lived this way because he had become united to Christ by faith in everything we say about Paul and about leaders was true of Jesus first, serve with humility.

Jesus took on human flesh. Jesus lived as a a poor carpenter in a nowhere, a nothingness of a place in in the Promised Land. He so humbly died on the cross, didn't even defend himself when accused, serving with tears, he wept over Jerusalem. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How I longed to gather you under my wings. He wept. When Lazarus died, Jesus served with tears.

He also served with power. If Paul's power is impressive, how about Jesus power raising the dead, healing, feeding thousands of people, preaching, teaching publicly and privately. That's

Jesus first thousands of people. Sermon on the Mount. Thousands of people. Sermon on the plane. Thousands of people fed and privately look at the Gospels. His public and private teaching are the same.

There's no difference. Regarding his people, yes, directly and indirectly, through his servants. Bringing change. People burned their books worth millions of dollars because they knew it was dark. It was evil. There's no way to live. We don't live to control it. We live to love. That's what Jesus taught. That's what the apostle Paul taught. And that's what we strive to live by the gospel of grace.

Let's pray. Heavenly father, thank you for this amazing, potent word. These scenes from the life of Paul, these instructions on how to live as a leader in the church, for the church, I thank you that we can look back and see decades of fidelity, and look forward to dedicate future decades to you as well. Maybe watch ourselves, watch the flock. Ever remember that you obtained us the price of your own blood? So, Lord, we ask that you would keep us close. And Lord, again I pray that if there is someone here who does not yet have a clear conscience, as Paul did, that they would find their way to that. If there's any sin in us, even now, and above all, the need to have a clean conscience through faith in you and knowing you and trusting you and living in light of the gospel of grace and the kingdom that you bring. We prayed in Jesus name. Amen.