

Title: How to Lead and Be Led pt.1
Text: Acts 20:17-24
Theme: Leadership comes from within
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The beautiful Spirit synergy of a gospel-community

Communion explanation

Read Text:

The church in Ephesus was a good church and it was a good church for a fairly long time. It was the kind of people whose life together created a community that was defined, kind, committed, trustworthy, organized, and humble. You knew that if someone was a member there, they would be taught well, cared for well and would be challenged. In short, you could almost assume that if a person was a member of that church that they would have a level of maturity, involvement, love and holiness that was not always the case elsewhere. If a person came to your church from that church, perhaps passing through on a visit or after moving from there to your town, you would be glad to receive them because you would know the caliber of church they had been part of. But when Paul arrived in Ephesus, there was virtually no gospel influence. A few short years later the entire region has been penetrated with the gospel and much of that is due to the influence of the church of Ephesus. The church at Ephesus was like ground zero for that area and was instrumental in reaching other communities like Colossae, Hieropolis, Laodicea, and more. Clearly, this was the most fruitful season of ministry that Paul experienced. This church had a wonderful influence on its entire region. There was good, gospel fruit and even though the believers experienced tension with some of the unbelievers in the community, the church itself was a healthy congregation. This text gives us some insight as to why that was the case. And the insights are for both leaders and the congregation.

Now, Paul is heading to Jerusalem and he knows that when he gets there, he may die. He is concluding his third church-planting trip. In that sense, his journey to Jerusalem looks like and feels like a repeat of when Jesus headed to Jerusalem knowing that he would indeed die. Therefore, this address that Paul gives to the elders in Ephesus feels so much like the upper room discourse that Jesus gave his disciples before he died. They both have a “final words” weight to them and therefore, we ought to slow down and feel the weight of each word. As we do, we get a picture of why this church, this gospel community was such a beautiful thing to be part of, and why it was so important to protect her.

I. **A gospel community thrives when good leadership is valued.** (17)

My son is the pastor of a church in KY. I've listened to a couple of sermons and I am really encouraged. Cornerstone, you helped to raise a good pastor. Well, this week he received an anonymous letter from someone listing 12 things they wanted changed in the church. He called me and asked me how he should handle that. I told him to throw it away and to try to forget that you even read it. I told him that early on, I adopted that policy from the beginning. It was not because I did not care for the church, it was because I did. Anonymous communication is sinful and unhelpful. I am not going to encourage sinful and unhelpful behavior, in fact, I am not going

to even give it oxygen to breathe. Jesus gives a clear path to the church for how to solve problems and we follow that path if we care about Jesus and care about one another. I told my son that when you help your people follow Jesus, it helps them learn how to care for others more than they do themselves. And when you have a community of believers who care about one another, it is sweet. It is delightful. But, caring for one another begins with leaders who care for one another.

A. Good leadership begins with leaders who care for one another.

Paul sends for these men and they are willing to come, even though the trip is 30 miles one way and all told would probably take about 4 days round trip. Paul could have gone to Ephesus himself (v.16) but chose not to because it would have cost him too much time. His goal was to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, if possible. The ship he is on stops in Miletus from which he summons the elders of the church at Ephesus. This final meeting between Paul and these men is one of the most important scenes in the book of Acts. These men are the sweet fruit of several years of gospel ministry on the part of Paul. These men have come to faith in Christ under his teaching and have been trained by his theology and example. Paul loves these men and they love him. This is clearly displayed in vv. 36-38. Even though Paul leaves, these men remain in place in order to care for the church at Ephesus by feeding them God's Word and leading them to follow Jesus. Leaders set the mark and the congregation keeps the pace. A congregation will eventually reflect its leaders. In order for a congregation to love one another well, it begins with leaders who love one another well. Loving one another is not easy. In fact, loving one another is very unusual, in fact it is supernatural. But, the church (true church) is not sociologically normal. It is a supernatural gathering formed by the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God and held together by the sticky gospel of God.

This week, it was announced that Jack Welch had died. Jack was infamous in corporate America for turning General Electric into an enormously successful company. One of his strategies was to fire the bottom 10% of his managers every year. That would have a way of keeping the culture competitive, right? But the leadership of GE is not the same as the leadership of a church. In fact, in many ways they are going to be fundamentally at odds with one another. The church does not take her leadership ideals from Jack Welch. Leadership in the church does not start with doing, but with being. Good leadership is going to be marked by men who love God and who love each other. That is clearly displayed here. But, is it enough to have leaders who care for one another? There is more.

B. Good leadership involves a good structure (policy).

Elders is translated from the word, presbuteroi. Later in v.28, these same men are called "overseers" which is translated from the word, episkopoi. Elder, overseer, bishop, and pastor are different terms that refer to the same office. Notice that the church (singular) in Ephesus had a plurality (more than one) elder. The local church is not designed to be run by one man. The leadership is to be shared. Amongst the elders, there may be one whose primary role is preaching, teaching and providing vision and direction, but that role is subject to the oversight of the rest of the elders. I think it is important that we see the pattern for gospel expansion in the book of Acts. The gospel is preached publicly and explained privately in places that had no

gospel witness. The result of this public and private ministry was people who came to faith in Christ and those people who came to faith in Christ were then baptized by immersion and by doing so they identified themselves as being part of a church (a regular, defined and committed gathering of baptized believers) and in order for that church to be formed and to function, godly men were appointed to lead the church and those men were called the elders. When I help men plant churches I want them to see that they are not ready to call the gathering a church until there are at least two qualified elders. That is the NT pattern for a church. There is to be a plurality of elders who lead the congregation. But look at what kind of leaders these men were. Here in Acts 20, these elders loved Paul. They loved this godly leader and this godly leader loved them. They learned from him first as men who were part of the congregation that he established. They learned as members of the church what it was like to be loved by good leadership which elicited a response of love from them. Leadership that loves and cares for one another and that together loves and cares for the congregation and that in turn is loved by and cared for by the congregation is one of the most beautiful treasures in all of the world. When that is happening, the gospel is displayed attractively, beautifully and powerfully. That is so attractive, so beautiful and so powerful, that the enemy of the gospel wants to do everything that he can to destroy it. Cornerstone, God has given us a good church. We are not perfect, but there is much good here that we need to guard and grow.

A thriving gospel community is going to be marked by leaders who love one another. There is no place for creating little power blocks, for running another leader down, for talking behind backs, for unresolved issues, etc. If you were to be a fly on the wall of the gatherings of the elders, missions and finance team, ABF teachers, these are to be gatherings marked by a lot of love for one another.

II. **A gospel community thrives when it has good leadership.** (18-24)

These verses tell us so much about the culture of the leadership at the church in Ephesus. There is so much food for thought here. Good leadership in a gospel community is a harmonious combination of living and teaching. How a leader lives has to support and illustrate what that leader teaches and leaders have to teach and they have to teach what is right.

Last week, we looked at how encouraging Paul was and how his ministry was characterized by encouraging others and one of the results of that is that he always seemed to be surrounded by people who wanted to be with him. We cultivate leaders by creating a culture of encouragement. There were good leaders in Ephesus because Paul was a good leader. Here is what good leadership looks like.

A. **Personal and transparent** – how I lived (18)

Paul's life was not a mystery to them. They knew how he lived. That is part of the beauty of the church. This is why you can learn information from good preachers on the radio and internet, but that is no substitute for the church. You cannot see their life and they cannot see yours. You observe the life and the families of the leaders. You see over time what their marriage is like, what their kids are like, how they handle adversity and blessing. You see them on the basketball court, and in the restaurant, the gym and in their home. One of the reasons why one of the

qualifications of an elder is hospitality is so that people have the opportunity to see how you live. You can impress people with a well-crafted sermon, a witty and engaging lesson, an organized and “successful” event, but none of those things will have the long-term impact of being able to watch a life that is open to observation.

1 John 1.5 – 10 (explain)

God is light. What you see is what you get. That is how leaders are to be. What you see is what we are, because that is how all of us are to be. But, when you get up close and look at a leader’s life, what should you see?

B. Servant-based and humble (19a)

The word that Paul uses for servant is the word for bond-slave. Paul is saying that you know that my life is not about me. It’s not about my ministry, my reputation, my accomplishments, my successes. I don’t have to have my name on everything. I don’t have to have my own parking spot. Listen, if you have to demand respect, it is because you haven’t earned it. When someone is driven by their vision for their ministry, then other people become the means for them to accomplish those goals. But serving the Lord as one who has no rights is what fuels this humility that marks Paul’s life. Paul certainly had goals, but they were different. It’s not that he said, that we were going to start so many churches, reach so many people, raise so much money, etc. Those things happened as the fruit of his goal to faithfully serve, humbly live, encourage and share the gospel. There are plenty of people who can accomplish things and make things happen, but good leadership in the church looks like Jesus. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Paul followed in those steps and these elders were taught to live as Paul lived. He was also...

C. Faithful through trials (19b)

Has anyone ever threatened you? It can be upsetting, very upsetting. Paul had threats made against him and experienced people making good on those threats. The result of those threats and plots were tears and trials for Paul. And yet, he did not quit. You may remember Mack Stiles who spoke here last year. Mack pastors a church in Irbil, Iraq. He was in the states, planning to return to Iraq, when word came that our military had taken out one of the top leaders of Iran. Iran launched some rockets at our bases, one of those bases being in Irbil. Mack was in church, his granddaughter next to him, his friends counseling him not to go back because it was too dangerous, when they sang.... He knew that he and his wife had to return. And they did that week and Mack said, you will never know the impact that their return had on their church. They knew he loved them. Mack can and should preach about faithfulness, but being faithful through trials puts people on notice that this is for real. That is what these elders were able to see in Paul and what he wanted the congregation to see in them.

D. Faithful in teaching (20-21)

Paul was faithful to teach what they needed to hear. When he says, “I did not shrink back” it is obvious that there would have been times when he was tempted not to say certain things because

of how they would or would not be received. But, he was faithful to preach and declare everything that the congregation needed to hear and these elders got to see that example. Here was a leader who did not skip the tough truths or run from controversial subjects. If it was needed, he addressed.

And he did it all the time. Whether it was in the public setting of the hall of Tryannus or the private settings of home or home meetings, Paul's teaching was consistent as it was constant. The content of his teaching was faithful and he was faithful to teach. Teaching was not a job that he had to do, it was a passion that came out of his pores.

And he would teach everyone, because Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) needed to hear the gospel. And the gospel involved both repentance and faith. It can be tempting to tell people only that they must believe. But the coin of conversion has two sides. Genuine belief in Christ means to turn to Christ and you cannot turn to Christ without turning from your sin. Repentance means to turn from your sin. That is, there is a fundamental change in your appetite for sin. When you repent, what used to be attractive to you is now repulsive. And being repulsed by and sickened by your sin, you run for shelter, for healing and for forgiveness in Christ.

E. Powerful in example (24)

Look at v.24. Notice the word "account." "But I do not account my life of any value or as precious to myself..." Paul literally uses an accounting word that speaks of identifying what the actual value is of something. Here Paul gives these elders and us a really powerful example when he says that (look at the rest of the verse) my life has value only if I am testifying to the gospel of grace of God. Can we just stop here for a second? How many of you want to get to the end of your life and be able lay your head on the pillow and with a smile, nod your head and say, "this has been a life, well-lived."? Is there anything more valuable than that? How do you know if your life has been well-lived? Got a new truck? Made it to retirement? Went on a cruise (well, not now – right?) Saw the Tigers win the World Series again, Lions win the Super Bowl, Wings win the Stanley Cup again and the Pistons win the NBA championship? Is that it? No! Here it is. I weigh the value of my life on the scale of my faithfulness in sharing the gospel. If that is the scale, are you living a well-lived life?

The way Paul counted his life freed him from panic. It freed him from fear. It freed him from wrong expectations and aiming at the wrong target and going down the wrong road. Do you see how this works? If you take a class on financial planning and you create a budget and you live within your budget, then next year at this time, you may have paid off credit card debt and have some money in savings. If you join a weight watchers class, watch what you eat and are more faithful in exercise, then next year at this time, you may be down a few pounds, sleep better and feel better. But, while both of those things are commendable, the angels in heaven do not rejoice when we lose a few pounds or save a few dollars. They rejoice when people hear and respond to the gospel. The gospel is ultimate worth which is why Paul said that he measures the value of his life on the basis of being able to share the gospel. That is why the threats that are before him, do not shake him unduly. All he wants to do is share the gospel, because that is what matters.

Years ago, a college student, Al, was part of our church family for a summer. While he was here he was diagnosed with stomach cancer and he died. Al relentlessly shared the gospel, like Paul, no matter what. One afternoon he was in the hospital when the chaplain came in to see him. The chaplain, seeing his age and his condition said something like, "I am so sorry, and turned to leave." Al said, "Is that all you can say?" The chaplain said, "What do you want me to say?" Al said, "I wish I had your job. Come over here and sit down." And then Al proceeded to explain the gospel to the chaplain. Al died very early, but he lived a better life than some of you. Look at Paul's example. These elders did and the church was better for it.