

The Laborers Are Few

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[0:00] The laborers are few. The laborers are few. If you guys know where that comes from, of the necessity of us to do work, to build the church that God has given himself for.

And here Jesus is saying that, although the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few. And so again, it's this call to be laborers, to be workers.

And are we willing to do the work? Are we willing to be consistent in doing the work? And this was a theme that he had to point out.

And with a plentiful harvest, the last thing you would ever want with a plentiful harvest would be few workers. That's a travesty, right? You're looking out into the fields to say, oh my goodness, look at this.

We got a great harvest here. But I don't have anybody to work it, right? That's not the picture you ever want to see. And yet this is the picture Jesus is painting. He's saying this.

[1:26] He's saying, hey, the harvest, that's not the issue. That's not the problem. And isn't that, how often do we kind of in our mind frame it that way? It's just so hard, you know, just like people aren't getting saved.

You know, it's like we preach the gospel and just doesn't seem to be a harvest. But that's not the picture that Jesus paints, right? He paints a different picture. He says, actually, the harvest, that part of it, it's plentiful.

The harvest is plentiful. The problem is that the workers are few. The problem is that the workers are few. And so he says, pray earnestly into the Lord of the harvest to send out labors into his harvest field.

And we should be praying, God, I want to be that labor. I want to be that worker. But, you know, we love the concept of harvest. We don't always love the concept of work, right?

I mean, the harvest being had, the harvest coming in, that's great. But the work that it takes to get there, that's not always something that maybe we're running to. And that, again, he's saying that that is the case.

[2:30] You know, it's easy to talk about the harvest, but who wants to actually do the work? And it requires work. It requires sacrifice. It requires us getting out of our comfort zone. And this concept of work is really just one of these kind of rules of life that you cannot supersede, no matter how hard you try.

It's the law of reaping and sowing, right? Galatians 6, 7 to 10 lays this out. Again, another familiar verse for you guys. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked.

For whatever one sows, that he will also reap. Okay? And he says, he doesn't just say, whatever one sows, that he will also reap. That's that law that I'm talking about. But before that, he gives that little important point there.

He says, don't be deceived. Or don't be tricked. Don't be fooled. Don't be fooled into thinking you can get something without putting in the work, right? God cannot be mocked.

It's not like you can trick him into changing this law of the universe. Don't be tricked. Don't be fooled. Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, he will also reap.

[3:38] What you put in, you're going to get out when it comes to the work. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life.

Okay? So you can't flip the script. You can't change this. This is the way things are. You, kind of the old adage, you get what you pay for kind of thing, right?

Like if you sow to your flesh, you're going to reap corruption, right? That's the way it goes. But if you sow to the spirit, from the spirit you'll reap eternal life. And then he says, then he gives a practical of what this looks like.

He says then in verse 9, let us not grow weary of doing good. For in due season, we will reap. If, if, conditional statement, if we don't give up.

If we don't give up. Again, this is kind of a law of the universe. This is the way things work. But it's also a promise as well. If you don't get weary in doing good, then you keep going.

[4:45] In due season, you will reap if you don't give up. And then, so then he gives another practical right there in verse 10. It says, so then, in light of this fact, in light of this rule, in light of this kind of law of the universe, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Okay? So in light of this, we got to keep going. We got to, we can't give up. And as someone who's been a part of multiple church plants and knows that those early years are the time when you feel like giving up.

Right? That those early years are the times when you feel like, man, it's kind of weary doing good. It's kind of weary doing the work. I thought maybe it would be a little bit more fruitful.

You know, this whole in due season thing. What is this in due season? Can't we just have it now? Like, can't I just have the result of the work now? But God says no, in due season. The timing is His. But, you don't know when that season's going to be. You don't know when it's going to come, but you do know this. You will reap. You will reap. Not maybe you'll reap. Not hopefully you'll reap.

[5:52] You will reap if you don't give up. That's a promise. Okay? That's a promise from God. You can count on that. You can count on that. Are you counting on that?

Is that informing your passion? Your fervor? Your zeal? Your work ethic? Is this promise informing it? Or, are we moved by our eyes seeing the weariness of the work and maybe tempted to give up a little bit?

But, I don't sense that anyone has this, anyone in this room that I've met has this sense of giving up altogether. But, you can kind of give up.

You can give up on little things. You can give up with some of the effort, some of the work, some of the work ethic. And, that's still a form of giving up. It's still a form of letting up from the work that's necessary to reap a harvest.

And so, when he says, don't give up, I don't think it only includes like, don't completely give up. I think it includes somewhat giving up, letting up, kind of drawing back from the work that's necessary.

[7:03] And so, I want to look at this concept a little bit more and really just, there's a, you know, the Bible talks a lot about good works in a more generic sense, but then there's this way more specific phrase that Paul often uses called the work.

Okay? Paul uses this phrase the work. And I don't think he's speaking in generic terms, I think he's speaking very specifically about a specific apostolic work that he was called to, that he had fellow workers with to do to see God's kingdom come on earth as he is in heaven in such a way that churches were established.

Lost people were saved, churches were established, and he was traveling all over the place, and he called this thing that he was doing the work. The work. Okay?

And I think it all started in Acts chapter 13 when God himself called Paul and Barnabas. So in Acts chapter 13, verse 2, we see this language of the work.

It says, while they 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.

[8:15] Okay? And then you see all over, following that, you see this phrase coming up, we're going to look at some of these verses. But, while they 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.

This, that phrase, set apart, I think is important. Anytime you're going to do meaningful work and you actually want to get something done, right?

You have to set apart time to do it. You have to set apart tools to do it. You have to set apart time, energy, talents, manpower, whatever it is.

You have to plan that, right? You know, those, thinking of Michael now when he's, you know, doing electrical work, if he gets a job, that's half, that's half the thing.

Like, hey, I got the job. They hired us. He's now got to set apart certain man, men to do the job. He's got to make sure that the time that is needed for that job is set apart.

[9:14] He's got to make sure the materials are there. He's got to make sure the right materials are there. He's got to, all these things have to be there. Those things have to be done in order for the work to be done and in order for the work to be done well.

And I think sometimes when we are functioning in the work and specifically the work of planting a church and establishing a church, we can sometimes have more of a lackadaisical attitude that just says, oh yeah, you know, doing the work.

Yeah, of course, yeah, I'm doing the work. For sure, yeah. What does that mean? Well, you know, just ministry. Well, no, it's a little more specific than that.

Like, you know, it's, in order for you to catch the fish, you've got to actually put some bait on the hook or throw a net in the water. Like, you've got to get the boat out into the water where the fish are.

Like, if you're on land, you ain't catching no fish. Like, you've got to, we've got to set apart time. We've got to set apart resources. We've got to set apart people to do the work.

[10:16] And, you know as well as I do that if you don't plan to do something, and this could be anything, just, and a great example is just that house project that's been still there for all these weeks, months, dare I say years, that you just think, man, I want to get to that.

You know, I know I need to do it. And, if you don't set apart time for that or resources for that, does it just happen? No, it never does.

Like, you don't drift into work. It's not like, oh, I had no plan to do this work and it just got done. Like, that doesn't happen. And it's no different for the work of the kingdom.

Like, especially when it comes to the difficulty of soul winning. Especially when it comes to the difficulty of building and establishing a family that is called the church.

That's hard work. And especially when you're building something out of nothing. You know, it's one thing to do the work of advancing God's kingdom and preaching to the lost in an established church where everything's kind of dialed in.

[11:19] There's a rhythm. There's an established culture. There's an established group of people. That's one thing. When we're starting at that lower ground level, it requires a lot more intentionality.

It requires a lot more being set apart, so to speak. So, basically, I guess the question I have for you, do you have specific time set apart for the work or are you just giving spare time leftovers to the church and to the establishing of the church and to the mission of Christ's church to seek out lost people and get on mission to people?

Is it time set apart or is it spare time leftover? Spare time leftover is not going to do the trick. It's not. And, if some people are giving their spare time leftovers and some people are giving their first fruit set apart time, you know what that's going to do?

That's going to bring division. There's not unity in that. There's not a cohesive moving forward and you could subtly, I hope this doesn't happen, you could subtly even stir up a little animosity in the sense like kind of the Mary Martha kind of thing.

Like, hey Jesus, you want to tell my sister to get to work? Can't you see I'm doing all this and they're not doing anything? You can start to be tempted to that kind of thinking, right?

[12:37] It takes work. It takes work. And, this language that's used by the Holy Spirit is set apart. Well, God, you believe you became part of this church plant from the beginning or maybe some of you knew come here and you're thinking, what did I get my stuff into?

What have I signed up for? Well, I hope you're thinking, what? God set us apart for the work of establishing a church and seeing some people get saved. That means we have to set apart time. That means we have to set apart resources. That means we have to be flexible and not just give God our leftovers. And certainly, Paul didn't do that. Certainly, Barnabas didn't do that. It's not like they were like, well, that's kind of cool, God. That's a cool thing. You know? He just said we're set apart. I wonder what that could mean. Hey, you guys want to come over and watch a show? You know? I don't think that was like his response.

He got out there. He got after it and showed a kind of work ethic that is fairly exemplary, right? As we see in the following scriptures and such in the book of Acts.

[13:39] Okay? So, are you set apart? Not just set apart in the sense you believe that God's called you, but in the practical sense. Are you set apart for the work in the sense that you're setting apart time?

You're setting apart resources. You're setting apart intentional, strategic time to reach lost people, to build family with one another, and to create a context for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Okay? Later in the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 15, we see this phrase again, the work, but here it's in a, we have more of a negative context here.

Acts chapter 15, verse 37, Paul and Barnabas are kind of at this intersection of decision, like how they're going to continue the work, and Barnabas wants to take his cousin, John Mark, with, and the fact that he's his cousin, you see that in some other part, maybe gives you a little insight as to why Barnabas was after him, or maybe it's just because Barnabas is the son of encouragement and he just really has a lot of hope for people, and he's just one of those guys, you know, the kind of guy that is always cheerleading you and has hope for guys, but Paul's not, not really having it, right? It says, verse 37, Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, and then verse 38, Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

[15:07] Uh-oh. So, Paul's like, hey, wait a second, we already took John Mark with us and he didn't, he didn't follow through. He didn't, he didn't, he didn't keep going.

In fact, the language here is that he withdrew. He withdrew from us. When we're in the thick of the work, we're doing the work. John Mark, when the going got tough, John Mark got going.

You know, he was gone. And, um, I think that phrase just even withdrawn and thinking of being, this concept of being withdrawn from the work, I want to ask us too, especially to those who've been with us since the beginning of Christ Church, uh, when you start a church, there's this sense of excitement, sense of, um, expectation, right?

Enthusiasm. And then, over time, one thing that can subtly happen is we can subtly withdraw from the work. And I want to ask any of you, have any of you withdrawn from the work?

I'm not, this isn't, you don't need to raise your hand or anything. I mean, uh, have any of you, um, withdrawn from the work? And I'm not talking about completely. I mean, John Mark didn't withdraw from completely because he was willing to go back with them out in this particular place.

[16:19] But, in this, in this one season, he did withdraw. And, again, no condemnation. Some of this is hard. Gene and I remember many lonely times doing church planning with little kids.

I want to even speak specifically to some of you moms of little kids who are just tired because you're a mom and you're doing the work and you're trying to help do church planning, you know, maybe with your husband and a bunch of littles and you're just thinking, yeah, you know, I, I don't know.

I'm a little tired. Maybe, maybe I've withdrawn a little bit. Maybe I've hid behind the kids or hid behind the sickness or hid behind this or that. That happens sometimes, right? But I'm asking you to consider John Mark here and to consider this here.

And Paul was, Paul was pretty emphatic about this and said, hey, Barnabas, I, I don't think, I think it's best not to take him with us because he had withdrawn from us in Pamphylia and had not gone with us to the work.

And, um, Paul knows how to build churches, right? Paul has apostolic wisdom to do this in the sense that he's concerned about the danger of a withdrawing that can happen and the effect that it has on the work.

[17:31] And, uh, I think it's an important point. I think it's important for us to ask and do a, a good just kind of looking at ourselves and said, hey, if I, if I withdrawn a little bit, if I withdrawn literally from the work, if I withdrawn just in my heart, if I withdrawn with my enthusiasm, if I, you know, uh, maybe had the sniffles and, you know, said I was really sick and maybe I wasn't really sick, I just kind of was, you know, checked out a little bit.

If I, if I like just withdrawn from the effort, if I showed up to meetings but not really showed up to meetings, you understand what I'm saying? Like, I'm there, I'm physically there, but I'm not there, engaged at the heart and really going at it with the work.

Maybe I was more enthusiastic on the front end of this thing and now, you know, uh, almost two years into it, maybe the enthusiasm has waned a little bit. Maybe I'd hope the things were going to be a little different.

Maybe I'd hope that we'd see more souls come to Christ and, you know, maybe, maybe I'm a little bit more withdrawn, okay? And he, he, he criticizes this and it's a, it's a thing for us to ask the question of, okay?

First Corinthians 15:58 says, and he says, therefore, so the part, the part before this is describing the return of the Lord, it's describing the time when death will be swallowed up in victory and he says, basically, therefore, so in light of this return of the Lord and death being swallowed up in victory, he says, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[19:07] So again, speaking of the work, he says, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, okay? So it's a sense of like, I'm going to give myself fully. I'm going to give myself always.

That's the kind of commitment that is necessary to do the work of the Lord. Always and fully in the work of the Lord. Now, you can't do that on your own. There's no way you're going to always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord unless you're always thinking about the consistent, steadfast love of the Father in Christ Jesus.

1 John 4, 19 says, we love because he first loved us, right? We love because God first loved us. You have to be fueled by the things we were saying this morning that no one's ever loved us the way he's loved us.

No one has pursued us the way he's pursued us. When you live in that awareness, it puts a fire in your belly. It puts a persistence and a steadfastness in you to say, I know that my labor in the Lord is not in vain because the Lamb who was slain is worthy.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy and to receive the reward of his suffering. And, you know, by God's grace, I am to be that man who gives myself to this work.

[20:23] By God's grace, I am to be that woman who gives myself fully. And yeah, I'm going to be tired. I'm going to be worn out. Most certainly, these people in the scriptures were as well. But I'm going to fulfill God's command to always give myself fully to the work of the Lord.

Why? He says, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Brothers and sisters, do you know this? Do you know this today? Like, do you know it in your gut? Do you know it in the sense that I'm not going to give up?

I know that my labor in the Lord is not in vain. Do you know this? When you know it, then you persist. You persevere. You strategize. You set apart.

You get equipped for the work. Ephesians 4, 11 to 12 says he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up of the body of Christ.

Okay? And it's not just generic ministry. It's specifically the building up of the body of Christ. Are we utilizing and experiencing the benefit of the different gifts that we've been given in the church?

[21:26] Are we utilizing them in the sense that we're equipped? Or are we maybe taking for granted certain gifts that are among us? Are we taking for granted some of what's given to us? Do we have a sense of maybe a little bit of arrogant independence that says, you know what?

I don't need these other gifts. I don't need these other people. Like, I got it figured out. I don't need to be equipped in these things. God specifically gave these gifts to the church. Apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. He gave them to us so that we can be equipped. Are we leaning into them? Are we taking advantage of them? Are we taking advantage of those that we know in our life that we see that these people, these people who are gifts to the church, are we taking advantage of what has been given to us? Or are we saying, no, I got this. I'm fine. I don't need that. And then we're trying to do the work of ministry unequipped. We're equipped to do that work with these gifts. Okay? And essentially what he was saying, again, in that verse we started with at the beginning, he says, send out laborers into the harvest field. You know, Paul told to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, 5, he says, it's for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, and do the work of an evangelist. [22:39] Fulfill your ministry. Okay? Do the work of an evangelist. Paul also said in Philippians 4, 3, yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with comment and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

Okay? The laborers are few. We've got to get strategically into the harvest field together. He said, who've labored side by side with me in the gospel together, doing the work of an evangelist. Our missional communities can't be communities with just a side of mission. Like, that's never going to work. That's never going to be what God wanted us to be as a people. A people who are living for his glory by doing what Jesus did, seeking and saving those who were lost. Seeking out lost people and saying, hey, it's not okay that we just have our life together and then sprinkle in just a little bit of mission.

Like, oh, that'd be cool. Hey, look, there's an unbeliever. We should, you know, preach the gospel to them. Missional communities, those missional communities, the groups that we, those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, our church, pretty much the only thing we have as a church is we organize the people in our church together in what we call missional communities. [23:54] And a missional community is a small family of believers on mission to specific people and places. Now, nobody drifts towards mission. Nobody, no church drifts towards mission. And any church that's not on mission is a church that's dying.

That's a fact. That is a fact. Mission has to be pushed. Mission has to be reminded. Mission has to be organized. Mission has to be not just something we do out of obligation, but it has to be a passion of ours because of our love for Jesus and our knowledge of who Jesus is. We have to be a missional people because God is a missional God. Right? And when we know that, we don't just organize ourselves into communities of people and that are just communities and then, oh yeah, we'll do a little mission here and there.

Mission must be at the forefront. Okay? And if we don't build that into the culture of our church, the church isn't going to drift that way over the years. Please listen to me when I say that. It will not do that. Right? If there's any apostolic wisdom in me, I'm asking you to listen to this. We must have a pressed into, intentional, at the forefront of these communities that aren't just communities, but missional communities that we are on mission together. [25:12] And it can't just be a group of people who are on mission to individual people in their lives with no cohesive togetherness. That's not a missional community. That's just Christianity. Every Christian needs to be on mission to people.

But the church is more than that. The church gets on mission together. If you look at the New Testament, you look at the book of Acts. Were they just doing these little communities and then mission was a sprinkle on the side?

No. You don't see that. You won't see that. This was at the forefront. This was the tip of the arrow. Where the church went was where mission went. They were constantly expanding.

Paul's like, I gotta go to where Christ hasn't been preached. I have to go to lands where Christ hasn't been preached. We have to seek and save people who are lost. We're gonna send people and equip people into different cities, into different places, and they were constantly pressing into seeking lost people to hear the gospel, to give people a hearing.

And we must also. Okay? That has to happen. And so, those of you in missional communities, whether you're leading them or you're partners, members inside those missional communities, there has to be a planning together of how are we gonna get on mission and who are we gonna get on mission to.

[26:27] That question cannot go unanswered if we're to be a healthy church. It just can't. And I know you've heard me say this before and you say, well, Josh, you keep saying this.

Yes, I am. And I will continue. It would be apostolic malpractice not to. Do you understand that? It would be church planting malpractice not to.

It would be unloving and unglorifying to God to have in any way, shape, or form the thought of building a church that isn't primarily orientated towards mission for the glory of God.

You cannot have a church be healthy if it is not one that is orientated towards lost people. Because if it's not, it's inward and ingrown and selfish.

And that will rot from the core. It will rot from the core. There's no healthy church that ever thinks or acts that way. And so, that takes all of us together to do that.

[27:29] We all have to say, this is not optional. The work that needs to be done, one of the main aspects of the work that needs to be done is good old-fashioned evangelism. And some of you might say, well, I'm not very comfortable with evangelism.

Well, I have a word for you from the Lord. Get comfortable. Because you're a Christian. For Christ's sake, get comfortable with preaching to the lost.

Like, this is what Christians do. If you've been, if you've lived some form of Christianity that didn't have evangelism a part of it, you were sold a bill of goods.

You were sold an experience that is not consistent with the New Testament. You have been sold a church experience that is not apostolic in nature in the truest sense of what the Bible says about it. We must be a missional people and a missional people gets to work. It takes work. It takes time. It takes failure and then persistence to push through the failure.

[28:30] Like the quote attributed to Winston Churchill that true success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. Okay? That's church planting. That is church planting.

Okay? I love that quote. That's part of the reason I know I'm probably called to church planting because I'm a glutton for that punishment. But I also get weary in that and I know you guys do too sometimes.

But that, we have to go from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. We're going to fail. But man, if we fail because we're trying to reach lost people, praise God, that's the best kind of failure.

And Winston Churchill, if it was him, some people say it wasn't. I don't care. It sounds like him.

Okay? He said, success is not final. And failure is not fatal. It's the courage to continue that counts.

Okay? Success is not final. And failure is not fatal. We just got to keep going. We got to keep going.

And so, I get fired up when I see you guys just getting out there and trying to do evangelism.

[29:32] I get fired up when I see you guys doing that together. I get fired up when it goes bad and you guys don't lose heart. I'm like, yes, this is apostolic. This is how churches get planted. This is how healthy church culture gets built with this grit that says, hey, I'm not stopping.

I didn't come here for some little bless me club with a bunch of people who I could be close to and be friends with and our kids could be friends with for the rest of our life where we wouldn't have to be burdened by some big church where it's too overwhelming.

I didn't have to do that much work. That's not what I signed up for. I signed up for a nimble, apostolic team of people that would go into the world and seek and save lost people to get saved.

I signed up for earnest prayer for God to send workers into his harvest field. I signed up for my schedule to be inconvenienced. I signed up for me to be losing sleep sometimes because it's required to stay up late to do the work.

I signed up to do things where I have to sacrifice hobbies and things that I want to do because that's what God's calling me into to establish the church.

[30:37] And that's what God's called everyone into who's ever established a church. This isn't some newfangled thing for Christ's church. This is just good old fashioned apostolic work that God has called us to do.

My question is, are we up for the work? Will we put in the work? And any church that you've experienced in the past or seen that has been established, that was built on the backs of people like, look around like you and me who do the work.

It's those kind of people. And there's never, there's never been any shortcuts. Now, I know that there's all kinds of marketing shortcuts that people do. I'm not talking about that kind of church. I'm talking about real grassroots doing the work of evangelism, doing the work of discipleship, doing the work of earnest prayer to see lost people saved and to see workers be sent out.

That's the work God's called us to. And you know why it's exciting? Because you will reap a harvest if you don't give up. Not you might, not hope I will, not, oh, I hope this isn't for nothing.

No, you will reap a harvest if you don't give up. And so you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. You know what's disheartening? Thinking, oh, my labor that I'm doing, it's in vain.

[31:43] It's not worth it. It's not accomplishing what it was set out to do. You don't have to worry about that. If you are always giving yourself fully to the work of the Lord, you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

That's what it says. That's what it says. And I want to ask you, do you know that? Do you know that and believe that? If you don't know that in the depths of your soul, if you don't believe that, you're going to pull back.

You're going to withdraw. You're going to, you're not going to, you're not going to persevere when the, when stuff gets tough. You won't. That's why you got to believe this.

That's why it requires faith for us to be able to do this kind of work. But the faith that's required is just believing that God is who he says he is. But it costs.

It costs for sure. Paul describes this kind of cost in Philippians chapter two, verse 25, on to verse 30, when he talks about a fellow worker of his name, Epaphroditus.

[32:45] He says, I thought it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister to my need. Epaphroditus has one of the coolest resumes in the Bible.

Okay. I don't know of anybody else who's got those kind of, you know, titles behind his name. Epaphroditus, he's my brother. He's my fellow worker.

He's a fellow soldier. He's a, your messenger and minister to my need. I mean, this dude's a legit dude, right? This guy's, but he's got a title that we could all have and that's fellow worker.

For us to see a healthy church established here at Christ Church, we've all got to be fellow workers and we got to put in a similar level of work where we're, there's a shared level of responsibility, a shared level of the weight to say, I'm not going to let that, I'm not going to, and that's the difference between just a group of workers and a group of workers that's family.

See, a group of workers that is family says, I'm not going to let my brother or sister carry too much, right? I'm going to do this with them. Not to mention, if they're my brother and sister, I'm not going to let them hog everything either.

[33:56] Like, we're going to share this, right? We're going to share the venues as well. We're going to do this together. That's what true brothers and sisters do. And that's what we need to be with one another. Just say, listen, I'm not going to let this weight fall on other people because I'm checking out lazy or being selfish.

I'm not going to let this weight fall on other people because I have different priorities than the rest of the other people even though I agreed to have the same priorities of seeking first the kingdom of God. That's not fair to everybody else and it's certainly not glorifying to God.

God is looking for a people who are bought in, sold out, like Epaphroditus. And it says, it goes on to say, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed, he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him and not only on him but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am more eager to send him therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. The cost of the work is important. [35:05] It requires risk. It says, he nearly died for the work of Christ risking his life. Let me ask you, what are you risking for this church life? What are you sacrificing for this church?

Epaphroditus was sacrificing even his own life, willing to risk even his own life for the church in Philippi. Okay? And that level of sacrifice and risk and cost that he offered up caused them to have a level of relationship where there was longing for one another.

Do you see the language that was used there? That's real church right there. That's just not, you know, superficial hallelujah Christianity or what Mike Knott calls happy smiles and half sympathies, you know, where everybody's just, you know, singing lies to one another on a Sunday morning.

This is real deal love for one another, longing for one another. When everyone, when there's equal buy-in, when there's equal sacrifice, it says, hey, the Lamb who was slain is worthy.

And so, I'm in. I'm bought in. And I have fellowship with my brothers and sisters because I know they're bought into. They're my fellow workers. They're my fellow soldiers. They've risked their life to complete what was lacking.

[36:19] There's a cost to the work. That's why even when you look at 1 Corinthians 3 when Paul's kind of laying out this apostolic picture of church planting and building the church, he says in verse 10 that according to the grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation and someone else is building upon it.

Let each one take care how he builds upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. Now, you might have an opinion of what it looks like to take care of how you build, but Paul has a very specific application of what that care looks like.

The care involved with building has to do with the materials that are used. You ever buy a house or go look at a house and maybe on the outside you saw the pictures online and you're like, wow, this house looks amazing.

Then you get inside and you're like, man, did they use the bad materials. It looks like they're kind of covering up some stuff here. It's like, this is cheap, man.

That picture has looked amazing. But then you get in there and you're like, this is a cheaply built house. The materials matter, don't they? Right? So when he says, let each one take care how he builds in verse 10, he then goes in verse 11, he says, no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

[37:31] And then he talks about the materials that are used to build upon it. In verse 12, he says, if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw, okay, now before I go on, you notice the difference between those two?

We've talked about this before, but I want to remind us again. What's the difference between wood, hay, and straw and gold, silver, and precious stones? The cost. The cost, right?

Gold, silver, and precious stones are expensive. They're not only expensive to have, they're expensive to get. You have to mine them from the ground. Wood, hay, and straw are all above the ground.

They're easily procured and they're cheap. Okay? They're also easily burnt up. In verse 13, he says, each one's work will become manifest for the day will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

[38:38] So God has laid a foundation in this church for us to be building upon. I want to ask you a question. What are you building with? What materials are you building with?

Are they costly? Or are you just giving some cheap materials to the church? Your time, your talents, your treasure. Are you offering cheap stuff?

Is it wood, hay, and stubble? Or is it gold, silver, and precious stones? To take care how you build means to take care that you are using expensive material. And you might say, man, this is too expensive.

Yeah, to build something worthy of the king is expensive. When David built the temple and when David built his throne worthy of King David and then the temple worthy of the king, God himself, was he using some, you know, cheap material?

No way. And yet sometimes, even though Christ came and died for the ungodly while we were yet sinners, while we were enemies, reconciled us to him and justified us in Christ Jesus, would we dare have the audacity to offer up to him cheap materials and not take care how we build?

[39:53] We've got to take care how we build. We've been given a precious gift and we didn't deserve it because he did it to us while we were yet sinners, he died for the ungodly, and he reconciled his enemies.

That means none of us were qualified, earned, or had any merit to receive this love of the Father in Christ Jesus. But he says, let each one take care how he builds.

Are you taking care? Are we taking care? You know, in Hosea, is it Hosea? I think it's Hosea, when he rebukes them when he says, you guys pay all attention to your house but my house is in ruins. It's easy to pay attention to ourselves, to our leisure, to our careers, to our own homes, and what we do at our own homes, and then not give costly material to the building of the house of the Lord, to the work that God has set us apart for.

And we should be giving costly materials in proportion to what Jesus has given us in Christ Jesus. And it's incalculable what he's given us in Christ Jesus.

[41:03] Last point before we conclude. 1 Thessalonians 5, 12 to 13 in speaking of the work and the labor, he says, Paul says to the Thessalonians, we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. Esteem them very highly because of your work. Let me ask you a question. Is there any question about your apostolic work ethic?

Is there any question about your intentionality and track record to do the work to build God's church for his glory? People, you might say, man, I wish people respected me more.

Well, what do people respect? It says right here, people are respected very highly. Why? Because of their work. Because of their work. You want that respect, that comes in the church?

Well, it comes for the people who are doing the work. When you're doing the work, the respect is there and you respect those who labor among you. Are you laboring among the people? Are you laboring among one another to say, I want to build the bond that we have in Christ Jesus?

[42:12] I want to build us closer together. I want to build a framework of people that are on mission to specific people and places in the context of our missional communities. That our missional communities aren't just places where we come and enjoy the scriptures, which is awesome, and encourage one another, which is awesome, and bear one another's burdens, which is awesome, but that we come together as a family on mission and get out where the lost people are and preach the gospel and build relationships with unbelievers.

We expose them to the family of believers and we preach the gospel to them and pray they get saved and make them disciples. And then we rinse and repeat over and over and over again. And we keep doing that over and over and over again.

That's work. And there needs to be a labor among us in that. And there's a respect that comes from that. There's a certain level of esteem that comes from that.

And especially those of you who esteem to be elders in this church, you've got to do that work.

You've got to labor amongst people and win the respect of people because of your hard work, because of your work in the doing of the things that a lot of times, frankly, people don't want to do. The level of service, washing people's feet, so to speak, and getting in there and getting your hands dirty. In conclusion, 1 Thessalonians 1, 2-3 says, We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[43:42] What a beautiful trifecta that is right there, right? Your work of faith. All this work I'm talking about, I'm not asking you to pull yourself up out of your own bootstraps, get hyped, get on the hype train and just start building God's church.

That's totally lame and not sustainable. I'm asking us to get on the gospel train, believe that Jesus is who he says he is, believe that Jesus did what he said he would do, and be moved in the depths of our soul by the power of the gospel to do the work of faith, to do the work of faith and a labor of love where we, out of the love that God has shed abroad into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the love that he poured into our hearts, we end up loving one another and loving the lost in such a way that it induces real genuine heartfelt labor, a labor of love.

And it's all grounded on the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Do you believe that? Do you believe it to the point to persevere?

Like, I'm not discouraged.

I hope you hear me. I'm not saying this because I'm discouraged. I'm trying to rally the troops in a holistic, gospel-founded way and just say, we got work to do. And I told you this at the beginning of the year.

I'm telling you again, it's more work than you think. I don't think we've anticipated how much work it is and I don't think we've bought into the level we need to. I'm calling you guys and I'm telling you as a church, we got to dive in.

[45:06] We got to embrace that work. But here's the encouraging part. We will reap a harvest if we don't give up. And our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Amen? Amen. Let's stand.