

Apostolic Church Planting

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[0:00] This morning I'm going to talk to you about apostolic church planting. What church is planted in the Bible?

That's really the question. Not that I can't respect different opinions and hear different people out or what they have to say, but at the end of the day, what we really want to know is what does the Bible say about how churches are planted?

Because that will give us confidence then in the way that we're establishing churches. Okay? So we're obviously trying to establish this church on the right foundations. But if you don't know what the right foundations are, if you don't know what the right way is, then how can you have confidence that what we're doing is the right thing?

And if we don't have confidence that what we're doing is the right thing, that opens the door for anxiety, that opens the door for suspicion, that opens the door for us not to be confident in the ways of God. God doesn't just have a will, although most of us are familiar if we profess Christ to say, I believe there are things that are God's will.

Not only does God have things that are his will, he has a way that he wants his will to be done. This is what is referred to in the scriptures as his ways. Hebrews chapter 3 says that he was upset with the Israelites because they didn't know his ways.

[1:36] And so, and ultimately, if you really think about it, can you have God's will if you don't do it his way? It is his will to do it his way. You got me on there? Might be circular logic, but hopefully just making sure you're awake.

You guys here? Good. Okay. So what I want to do is I want to look briefly at some portions of the book of Acts of just kind of a bigger swath here of how churches were planted.

And then I want to look at kind of a real specific implications for us as a church. Okay. So most of you familiar in the book of Acts when Stephen was stoned, right? Up to this point, most church activity is happening around Jerusalem.

Stephen is stoned. And after Stephen is stoned, there is this catapulting of disciples into three different areas of the world at that time.

Okay. And this is in Acts chapter 11, starting in verse one. This is where we're kind of picking up the story. Okay. It says, now those were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveling as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

[2:49] But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad. And he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Okay. So this is kind of the first non-Jerusalem, non-Jewish church expression that we see.

Okay. There's persecution happens after Stephen. And three specific cities or areas Christians go to. Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Okay.

[3:52] Barnabas. Barnabas goes to Antioch. And basically sees all these believers there. And starts teaching them. Starts encouraging them. Starts exerting them. And it's interesting here, you kind of see where Paul gets it from later on when he takes with him Timothy and Titus.

Right. Barnabas goes to Tarsus. Who's from Tarsus? Paul. That's Paul's hometown. Okay. Barnabas goes and grabs Paul and then goes back to Antioch.

And they're establishing this church in Antioch. Okay. Great many people are added to the Lord. All right. But there's three places they went to. Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Antioch. Okay.

Barnabas is from Cyprus. That's where his hometown is. It's an island. Okay. On the way, which would be right off the coast there of Phoenicia. And so these are the three places where you basically have the church beginning.

Okay. And Barnabas is the one who starts this. And then he brings Paul with him. Probably in the same way that Paul brought a Timothy or a Silas with him. Okay. So that's kind of the precursor to what a lot of people refer to as Paul's three missionary journeys.

[4:58] Right. Before that, you have this kind of precursor to that. And you have Antioch. You have Christians in Antioch, in Cyprus, and in Phoenicia. Okay. Then Acts 13, you still have Paul and Barnabas and a bunch of other people, teachers of prophets, in Antioch.

And they're doing their thing there. They're doing, just establishing that church there. And what ends up happening is, it says in Acts 13, 1. Now there was in the church at Antioch, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

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. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Okay. Shortly after the Bible refers to the book of Acts, it refers to Paul and Barnabas as apostles.

This is where they're being sent out as apostles. So we know that it's confirmed that they're apostles. It's not just the 12 disciples that are apostles. You see here in Acts 14, where it's saying that Paul and Barnabas are apostles.

[6:15] All right. And what does that apostolic ministry look like? It says, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. All right. We're going to see now what that apostolic work looks like.

And that's important because the Holy Spirit set apart apostles for a specific work. And I believe he's still setting apart apostles for specific work. Okay. What was that specific work?

Well, they left there and they went to Cyprus. Okay. Now remember, Cyprus is where Barnabas is from. And Cyprus is an island there. Okay. Right in the Mediterranean. And this is, there's already Christians here.

Some of those after Stephen was persecuted, was killed and persecution broke out. Some Christians went to Cyprus. So they go there first on their missionary journey and they preach in the synagogue.

Okay. John Mark is with them. All right. You see them going, preaching the gospel, making disciples, planting churches. This is the work you see. Five churches. And the result of this, the first one is Cyprus.

[7:19] After Cyprus, they go north. Okay. Up into what is modern day Turkey. But in the Bible time, what is referred to as Galatia. Okay. And they go to another Antioch.

This one is in Poseidon. Okay. And same thing. They've preached in the synagogue. Here, their persecution drives them out of there in Galatia. It says in Acts 13, 48 to 49.

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. Okay.

So they began preaching the gospel there in Antioch. And the word of the Lord starts spreading. Okay. Persecution is also happening to them. So they had to leave Antioch there in Galatia. And they go to Iconium. Same thing. They go to the synagogue. They preach. And it's here that they attempt to stone Paul. Okay. And so he had to flee.

[8:15] But he's still preaching the gospel. Souls are saved there in Iconium. That moves him. Excuse me. Then he goes to Lystra. You might remember that name Lystra.

Lystra is where Timothy is from. They go to Timothy and they start preaching in Lystra. And they go to Lystra and they start preaching there. This could be the place or the time that Timothy is actually saved.

Okay. Because this is the first kind of foray into Lystra where they're preaching the gospel, making disciples. And here in Lystra, Paul actually gets stoned. Okay. They tried to in Iconium.

But in Lystra, he gets stoned. And it's so bad that they think he's dead. He's just laying there. And then he gets up and goes into town. And he moves on to the next town.

Derby, which is kind of right along the line. And then Derby does the same thing. Preaches the gospel there. He's making disciples. Okay. From there, Acts chapter 14, 21 to 23.

[9:14] It says when they had preached the gospel to that city, speaking of Derby, and had made many disciples. This is the work that's being done. Preaching the gospel, making disciples. Okay.

By establishing the churches in each of these cities. They returned to Lystra. Now think about that for a second. Now you remember what just happened in Lystra.

He was just stoned and left for dead. So he goes to Derby. And then what did he do? Seems like a good idea to go back to the place I was just stoned. How many of you would say, I'm going to go back to the place I was just stoned.

I'm going to go back there. That's what he does. Paul goes back to Lystra. Okay. He returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.

Strengthening the souls of the disciples. Encouraging them to continue in the faith. And saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. I would say you'd probably take Paul seriously when he says through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God.

[10:14] Seeing as he was just stoned and left for dead. Okay. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Now this span of time of these five cities that they went to. Cyprus, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derby. This is a span of two to three years.

Okay. He's going there. He's preaching the gospels. Making disciples. He's strengthening disciples. After he gets to Derby. Then he goes a second visit to all those cities in Galatia there. The three other cities.

Second visit to Lystra. Second visit to Iconium. Second visit to Antioch. And what does he do there? He appoints elders. Okay. So before that. That means there weren't elders before that.

That means that he went there and he started these churches. And he didn't come in with a team. He didn't come in with existing elders. He didn't come in with existing pastors. He came in with Barnabas, another apostle.

[11:14] And they would preach the gospel. And they're making disciples. If there's believers there, they're teaching them to persevere. Endure persecution for the kingdom.

They're establishing churches in all these different cities. Then he would leave. He'd leave. He'd go to the next city. And again, there's no texting Paul.

Right? There's no, you know, calling him up on the phone. There's no hopping in a car and saying, hey, Paul, we got a question. I'll just go meet you for lunch. You know? None of that's happening. There's no contact. Not only is he leaving, they don't have the technology we have. He leaves them. He leaves that church. Not only did he not start them with a team. Not only did he not start them with a bunch of pastors or elders.

He leaves them. But then he goes back. And what does he do? He appoints elders. After what?

Well, it depends. If this was a two to three year span of time, some of them, Derby, he might have appointed elders right away.

[12:14] Because he goes there and he doesn't go there a second time. Then he starts visiting the other cities a second time on the way back through. Okay? By the time he gets into Antioch, who knows? It might have been two years since he was first there.

So they're there that whole time without Paul. No elders. How could this be? Again, this is what the Bible, this is the Bible. And then he comes back and he appoints elders.

Okay? And he appoints elders. After that, they return to Antioch where he was sent out. Acts 14, 26 to 28. They sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

Okay? Remember? Remember that terminology? Remember in Acts 13, it says, They set apart for me Barnabas and Paul for the work. And then, so the question was, well, what is that work?

Well, in Acts 14, it says, They went back to Antioch where they originally sent out and they were commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. They fulfilled it. The work that the Holy Spirit had sent them out for, they fulfilled.

[13:18] What was it that they fulfilled? What did he finish? Five churches were planted. Elders were appointed. Disciples were made. The disciples that were there were congregated into churches.

This was the apostolic work. This is what happened. And he fulfilled that. Okay? And that's the way that he did it. Apostles are called by God for the work.

That work is church planting through gospel preaching, disciple making, and elder appointing. Also, it's church strengthening and encouraging. Then he went back in and he went to the churches that were started, the disciples that were made.

Okay? And he encouraged and strengthened those churches. That is apostolic work. Why we people think we don't need that same work now is beyond me.

We still need people to plant churches through the gospel preaching, disciple making, and elder appointing. We still need apostles to strengthen the church and encourage the church.

[14:17] Okay? That was the first missionary journey. After that, then, he wrote a letter. You're familiar with the book of the Bible? Galatians, right? This book of the Bible is the letter to the Galatian churches.

He wrote it right after that when he came back into Antioch. Well, what were the Galatian churches? Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Those four churches were the Galatian churches.

So, he's now following up with those churches and he's writing a letter to them. And it's the book of Galatians. This is helpful when you're looking at the book of Galatians.

See, oh, that's who he's writing this to. He's writing this to a people who were being persecuted by the Jews at that time, right? He's writing this to a people that stoned him, right?

He's writing this to a people that four churches were planted in that area. And he's encouraging those churches in a way so that they will be established on the right foundations so that they will last.

[15:17] If you read the book of Galatians, you can see that. He says in Galatians 4.19, My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

It's interesting that when you look at that language and you see who he's writing to, why would he call them his little children? Because these are churches that were planted through him. These are new believers that he led to the Lord, that he was making disciples of, that he spent doing that over the span of two to three years.

So for two to three years, he's laboring in these cities to see converts, to see disciples made, and to see churches established. And he's in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in that.

He's concerned that these churches would be built on the right foundation so that they last.

Oftentimes in church today, we think ministry sometimes is the end-all be-all.

As long as ministry is happening, we should be satisfied. People are being ministered to. Lost are being saved. Church life is happening. But if you look at the scriptures, ministry isn't the goal.

[16:22] And ministry isn't something alone that we should be satisfied. We have to make sure that the ministry that's being done is done in a way that is sustainable for the long haul. If Paul was just satisfied with ministry, then he wouldn't be in the pains of childbirth.

He's in the pains of childbirth because he knows that there is a way to build churches that last, and there's a way to build churches that don't last. That is the difference between apostolic ministry and just ministry.

Apostles are uniquely graced by God to build foundations. If you build anything on a faulty foundation, it's not going to last. If you build something on a faulty foundation, everything built on that is off.

You've heard me tell this story before. I have friends who are builders, and their first house they built, the owner of the house that they were building, they talked them into letting a relative do the foundation, which they shouldn't have done.

Guess what happened? The foundation was off. Guess what ended up being off on the 7,000 to 8,000 square foot house? Everything else. Everything else. And it was the first house they built.

[17:32] Good learning lesson. Foundations matter. Foundations matter in the church. We would say that on the front end, we would say, well, of course they matter, Josh. I mean, of course they matter.

But do we believe it in practice? It rolls right off the tongue to say foundations matter. It rolls right off the tongue to say there is a way to build churches that is the right way, and there's a way to build churches the wrong way.

There's a way to build churches that last, and there's a way to build churches that will not last. We can say that, but do we believe it? Do we believe it to the point of action? Do we believe it to the point where we value the parts of the body that are uniquely gifted to make sure this happens?

Or do we just say, we just want ministry to happen? We just want souls to be saved. But we don't care how those souls are acclimated into a group of people called the church, and that they last for the long haul so that disciples are made, disciples are matured, and Christ is formed in them.

What is important to us? Do we have a generic adherence to ministry, or do we have an apostolic vision for what the Bible says the church is supposed to be? I'm saying we need to care about what the Bible says.

[18:42] And we can all have our opinions. We can have all kinds of thoughts on how the church should function. But again, let's just, why is the book of Acts here? Anytime, if you're thinking about biblical theology, and you're looking at a book of the Bible, you always have to ask the question, why is this book here, and what would we be missing if this book was not in the Bible?

What is the value of the book of Acts? It has a lot of value. But one of the greatest values of it is it shows us how churches were planted. It shows us how Paul's apostolic ministry functioned, along with Barnabas, along with Apollos, along with Titus.

I'm sorry, not Titus. Along with Timothy, Silas. And ironically enough, Titus is not in the whole book of Acts, which is interesting. Okay. After this, you have the Jerusalem Council, where they talk about whether or not Gentile believers need to be circumcised.

Okay. And then Paul and Barnabas come back in Antioch, and in Acts 15, 35, it says, Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. And then here comes the second journey.

We're just going to go over the, he had three journeys that he did, but we're just going to look at these two. Second journey starts in Acts chapter 15, verse 36. And where Paul and Silas are sent from Antioch, they're eventually joined by Timothy and Luke.

[20:07] Before this happens, Paul and Barnabas have a little bit of a disagreement, right? After some days, this is Acts 15, 36, Paul said to Barnabas, Let's return to visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are.

Again, apostolic ministry. Now, Barnabas wanted to take with him John, called Mark. You know, we'll pull an Adam here. Do you know who John Mark was related to?

Barnabas, his cousin. That's Barnabas' cousin. But 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.

So when they had done those five church plants before, remember they went to Cyprus first? And then once they left the island of Cyprus and went up into modern-day Turkey, which is Galatia, right when they got to that area, John Mark abandoned them.

And so Paul's saying, I don't think he should come with us to the work because he withdrew from us. There arose such a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him, which is his cousin.

[21:11] Colossians 4, 10 shows us this. And he sailed away to Cyprus, which is where Barnabas is from. And then Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Now that's an interesting phrase right there because we never heard of any churches in Syria and Cilicia. Remember, we got Jerusalem, we got Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

And then he goes in Galatia and plants the four churches up there. Nowhere does it say anything about Syria and Cilicia. But he went to strike the churches there. How did those churches end up there?

I don't know. Doesn't say. Obviously some other disciples made their way up there. Maybe some other apostles made their way up there. But what did Paul and Silas do? They went and strengthened those churches.

Okay. One of those might have been Troas. I'm sorry, not Troas. Tarsus. Which there is a possibility that Paul, before Barnabas grabbed him in Acts 11, that he might have actually planted a church in his hometown.

[22:11] Because that is in that area. Possible. We don't know for sure. But where did Paul and... So this is the second trip. Where did Paul and Silas go? No. They go to their second trip to Derby. They go back to Derby.

And they take their third trip to Lystra. Again, where Paul was stoned. Talk about a glut for punishment. Right? He went there the first time. Didn't go so hot. He goes back a second time. Now he's going back a third time.

Guess what? Spoiler alert. In his next trip, he goes back a fourth time. Okay? He keeps going back. Which is awesome, by the way. Okay? Acts 16.5, it says, So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

So Paul's going with Silas, are going into these cities. They're going back to Galatia. He's in Derby. He's in Lystra. Okay? And the churches are strengthened in the faith, and they're increasing in numbers daily.

This is apostolic ministry. Then he goes through his third trip to Iconium and Antioch. So all four of the Galatian churches he visits. And the Spirit's leading them. In Acts 16.6-10, it said they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

[23:19] That would have been the next logical geographical location to go in if they would just continue their trajectory, right? Now they're going to hit Asia. But it says the Holy Spirit forbid them to speak the word in Asia.

It's interesting. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Okay? So the Spirit is directing them where to go.

So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas, and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we...

Whoa, whoa. What's all this we talk? There was no we talk before this. Who's that all about? Who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. Right? So apparently Luke must have joined him at this point, because now all of a sudden he starts saying we.

So he doesn't say that Luke joined here, but if he's saying we, Luke's there. Okay? So now it's Paul, Silas, and Luke. Okay? But they also picked up...

[24:25] And they also picked up someone in Lystra. They picked up Timothy as well. So Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. All right? It says, When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So they sail on over to Macedonia. Yeah? And he had this vision in Troas, which is also called Alexandria, which is where Apollos is from, by the way.

And in Titus, it also says in 2 Corinthians 2 that Paul was looking for Titus in Troas. Paul met Titus a long time ago, if you read earlier in the book of Acts. He must have had a really good relationship with him.

Because in Corinthians, he's always looking for Titus or really pumped when Titus gets there. Okay? So I think Titus was his guy. Like, he really liked Titus.

All right? So he's looking for Titus. He doesn't find him. 2 Corinthians 2.12-13 says, So setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samathitras, an island, and the following day to Neapolis in Macedonia.

[25:39] And from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia in a Roman colony. So now we're in Europe. This is the first time the gospel is going to Europe. Okay? They're out of Turkey.

They go across. They sail over to Europe, to Greece here, basically. And then Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke, what do they do?

They continue the apostolic work. Five new churches. Another five new churches. Right? First one's in Philippi. That's where they end up. In Philippi in Macedonia in Acts 16.

They go to a prayer meeting where Lydia is there. Lead Lydia to the Lord, her whole household to the Lord. Okay? And then they get thrown into prison. When they're in prison, they're preaching the gospel in prison. They're winning people to Christ in the prison.

And then they're asked to leave after that. First of all, they were persecuted illegally because they're Roman citizens and they were treated without a trial. Okay? Which Paul was gladly making appeal to that he was a Roman citizen and then they asked him to leave.

[26:38] So, oh, by the way, but before they were thrown into prison, their garments were torn off and they were beaten with rods. Okay? Okay? Garments are torn off. They're beaten with rods and then they're thrown into prison and then they're asked to leave.

All right? So then he goes on to Thessalonica. Okay. Thessalonica in Macedonia. He's there for three Sabbaths and he's preaching in the synagogue. First Thessalonians 2 verse 2 says, In Acts 17, 6-7 here in Thessalonica, it says, When they could not find them, they dragged looking for Paul and Silas.

These people who were persecuted and were looking for Paul and Silas. And they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

And Jason has received them. They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King Jesus. Okay? So this is, again, what they were preaching.

They're preaching another King. The unbelievers are saying they had turned the world upside down. You might think, they turned the world upside down? What did they do? Did they introduce some kind of new economic system?

[27:54] Did they introduce a new government? Did they have a new political way of reaching Europe at that time? No, it was apostolic ministry.

They planted churches. They preached the gospel. They made disciples. And what was said of them from unbelievers? They're turning the world upside down. By doing what? And you think of all the things that we try to do to impact the world.

What turned the world upside down then? Apostolic ministry. Gospel preaching, disciple making, church planting, strengthening and encouraging churches. That's what they were doing.

Preaching that there is another King. His name is Jesus. And the brothers sent Paul and Silas away because there was an angry mob looking for them.

Okay? So they went to Berea. In Berea, they were received much better. They preached in the synagogue. But eventually, the people who were persecuting them in Thessalonica followed them there. And they sent Paul and Silas away to avoid the Thessalonians.

[28:55] And Timothy and Silas stayed there. Okay? Paul goes to... But he preached the gospel in Berea and Thessalonica and Philippi. And disciples are made in all three of those places.

Okay? Seems like a church is starting to be established in all those places. Then goes down into Athens. Preaches in the synagogue. He talks to the Areopagus about the Lord.

He said, Therefore, when we could... In 1 Thessalonians 3, 1-2, When we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind in Athens alone. We sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith.

Okay? So Paul is sent back to Thessalonica to establish them and exhort them in their faith. Again, apostolic ministry. Churches are trying... They're trying to establish churches where the faith would be strong and that these churches would last.

He then leaves... We don't know if the church was actually planted in Athens. It doesn't necessarily say. But then he ended up going to Corinth after that. Okay? So he's at Corinth and Achaia in Greece.

[29:56] Preaches in the synagogue every Sabbath. Needs fellow tent makers Tressila and Aquila. And Acts 18, 9-11 says, The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision. Remember, all before this, he's got his clothes ripped off, beaten with rods.

An angry mob threatens him in Thessalonica. Follows him to Berea. Okay? He makes it to Athens. Gets to Corinthians. He's probably thinking, Okay. Am I going to... I mean... Remember, back in Galatia, he got stoned.

So now he's in Corinth. He's probably thinking, Am I going to be able to make it through here with my life? And God very kindly says to him in Acts 18... Sorry, where am I?

Yeah, Acts 18, 9-11. The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you. For I have many in the city who are my people.

And he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. Okay? A year and six months. Remember, Thessalonica, he was there for three Sabbaths. He's there three weeks. Then Corinth, he's there for a year and six months.

[31:01] Okay? So each church, there's no set pattern of how long he's staying in these churches. It's all different. Corinth, he's there for a year and six months. And he's teaching the word of God to them. He's trying to establish the church there.

Not only won people to Christ and preached the gospel and made disciples, but then he's teaching them. He's establishing a church. Okay? In that place at Corinth, he ends up writing a letter to the Thessalonians.

You know, you've read this, right? First Thessalonians, second Thessalonians. He's writing a letter to the Thessalonians and he's encouraging them. He says things. This is what he says in First Thessalonians 1.1. Paul, Silvanus, which is the other name for Silas, and Timothy.

Okay? And in verse 6, he says we, remember this letter is being written by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And he says we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

So in his letter to the Thessalonians, he says that him, Silas, and Timothy are all apostles. Okay? So if you're wondering about that, now we know. He just wrote two, kind of seemed obvious because they were functioning like apostles.

[32:01] Apostles. But in the letter that he's written, while he's in Corinth to the Thessalonians, he says, we apostles. We could have made demands as apostles of Christ. And then in chapter 2, 7 to 8 of Thessalonians, he says, but we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel, but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. He then says in chapter 2, 11 to 12, for you know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. This is the way he did apostolic ministry, as a father, even with the heart of a mother. That's different, right? But that's what he's saying. He said, I was like a nursing mother.

In other words, these churches were in their infant stages. My job is to care for them so that they can stand on their own, so they can be churches that can last. And I did this with affection, affectionist desire for you.

It wasn't just some professional thing he was doing. You know it's not a professional thing. He endured much persecution and he kept doing it. He said, I wasn't just interested in sharing the gospel to you.

[33:13] This isn't just, I'm not just some ministry machine, but I actually shared our very lives. We shared our very lives, Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And he said, for you know how like a father with his children, we exhorted you each day.

Paul's ministry was one of a father. Paul looked at these churches as his children, and he wanted to see them grow into maturity and be churches that would last. Next, he went across the sea, out of Corinth, and went to Ephesus.

Okay? We see in Ephesus, when he goes back again to Ephesus later in Acts chapter 19, that there was already disciples there. So again, we don't know how those disciples got there.

We don't know if Priscilla and Aquila had led those people to Christ. We don't know if other people have. There's disciples there. All this to say that both in Cyprus and Antioch and in Ephesus, he's not going into a place where there was no Christians.

There was actually Christians there. And so that also gives you precedent that not all church plants have to be this team of people going and just winning new people. They can gather the Christians that are in that particular area and establish them as a church.

[34:22] And that's exactly what Paul did. Ephesus is no different. Cyprus is no different. Antioch in Syria is certainly no different. So Priscilla and Aquila are there. Disciples are there. He preaches in the synagogue.

And then he returns to Antioch after his second missionary journey. And Apollos then ends up going, in Acts chapter 18, ends up going to Ephesus and Corinth.

And it says of Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3, 4 to 10, it says, For when one says, I follow Paul, another, I follow Apollos, are you not being nearly human? What then is Apollos?

What is Paul? Servants to whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. Paul's saying, I planted Apollos water. Okay, so Paul planted the church in Corinth, planted the church in Ephesus, but then Apollos went to Corinth in Ephesus in Acts 18.

And he's saying, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

[35:28] For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me. So according to the gift of God given to me, grace, the word grace is where we get the word charity, charis.

Okay, so according to the grace of God given to me or the gift 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.

Okay, this is apostolic ministry to lay these foundations. The church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. The apostle is the expert builder. The prophet is like the building inspector that's looking and seeing at things being built according to the ways of God.

And like a skilled master builder, he's building on it. And then Apollos is building upon that. What was Apollos? Well, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, the next chapter, it says in verse 6, I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us.

Okay, who is he speaking of? And it says in verse 9, for I think God has exhibited us apostles as last of all. He's speaking of Apollos. He calls Apollos an apostle as well.

[36:40] So again, Apollos is going to Ephesus in Corinth. What is he doing? He's also doing apostolic ministry because he was an apostle. So why am I reading all this?

Why am I, why are we going through this? Well, first of all, it's the Bible. Second of all, it's like these, this is the way God plant, God was planting churches in here. You see apostles being sent out.

You see mobilizing people together to establish churches. The gospels preach. Disciples are made. Those disciples are taught. Those disciples are encouraged.

Those disciples are built together into a house of living stones where the, where the spirit dwells.

Okay. That is the apostolic ministry that happens.

The way that is, the things are being built. He says, be careful how you build. So sometimes you're, you're building those foundations. Sometimes someone's building on that foundation. Sometimes someone's planting. Sometimes someone's watering.

[37:36] Sometimes it's three weeks in a city. Sometimes it's a year and a half. You know how long he spent in Ephesus? Three years. Two years. He spoke in the hall of Tyrannus, but before that he was spending other time in Ephesus.

So he was in Ephesus for three years. Eventually there was elders in Ephesus because we see in Acts 20 that he calls the elders of Ephesus to come, but they weren't there originally. So you have all these different churches are started and they don't start with elders.

They start with apostles and then elders are eventually appointed. Elders could also be referred to as overseers or pastors. So these are pastorless churches for a while, but once they get established, pastors are appointed, overseers, elders, they're appointed and then they're shepherded and then they have a church that hopefully is built on the right foundation for the last the way that it's supposed to do to be.

So the question is, as we seek to see this church establishes, are we building the right way? Are we building according to the pattern and the way that we see in the scriptures?

That's the question. It's a good question. It's a question we should ask often. It's a question that we should ask and compare to our opinions and make sure, hey, is my opinion in consistency to the word of God?

[38:47] Okay. In that sense, there's five things that I've been challenging us to do as a church from the beginning. Five things that for the last almost 15 years at the church that sent us out to plant this church that we've tried to do that I want to exhort us to do.

And part of those, the reason those five things exist is because of what we see here when the churches were planted here in the book of Acts. Okay. These are things that are missional communities, which our church, if you're not familiar, we organize our church into what we call missional communities, which are just small families of believers on mission to specific people and places.

When I say families, not natural families, but like spiritual families of people together or on mission to specific people and places. Okay. And those missional communities should be doing five things. One, number one, and I think two of these five things, I think we're doing a pretty good job on. The other three, I think we could use more work on. Okay. Verse two, build relationships.

Okay. Building new and existing relationships, targeting unbelievers and unchurched professing believers. Okay. Luke 19, 10 said, for the son of man came to seek and save those who are lost. And you see Paul and Barnabas and they're going to these cities or Silas or Timothy, what they're immediately going to where people are.

[40:06] And in those cases, they went to where they knew people were going to be there and they were going to be seeking. They went into the synagogue. That was the specific place they were on mission to. Okay. When, uh, you know, um, Paul went where Lydia was, right?

He knew there was a prayer meeting there. I'm going to go there. I'm going to reach there. And he leads Lydia to the Lord when he's in prison, he leads people to the Lord in prison, wherever they were going, they were building relationships, believers or unchurched Christians.

And they were seeking to build them into the church, right? Son of man came to seek and to save those who are lost. I think for the most part, our missional communities are doing a good job thinking, how can we reach new people?

How can we get out there and build new relationships with other people? And that's awesome. We need to keep doing that. Okay. Number two, preach the gospel, preaching the gospel to strangers. And those we're building relationships with.

And we preach the gospel with words and we back it up with our, with our conduct. Romans 10 says, verse 14, how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

[41:10] And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? How are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.

Again, I think we're doing a decent job of this as well. We have to preach the gospel. How will they hear unless someone preaches the gospel? We can't have intentions to preach the gospel. We can't think that the gospel is great and then not preach it.

We have to preach it. Okay. A church that's not preaching the gospel is a church that's dying. A church that's only preaching the gospel when it's convenient is a church that's dying. Okay. A church that is going to thrive, a church that is going to last, is one that is intentional to preach the gospel on a regular basis, isn't just waiting for opportunities to happen.

They're making opportunities happen. Okay. A lot of times I've heard over the years in Christianity, people are like, well, I'm just waiting for an opportunity. No, you make the most of every opportunity. That's what it says in Ephesians.

You make opportunities. You look for people who are lost. You look at the existing relationships you already have. You don't have to add a bunch of new things to your life. What do you already have in your life that you can just do with more gospel intentionality?

[42:16] And you look for areas, people, where you can preach the gospel. And it must be preached. It can't just be shown with our lives. That whole phrase that is attributed to St.

St. Um, what is his name? Francis? Uh, which a lot of people say he didn't really say it, but it's a bogus phrase. Preach the gospel always, and when necessary, use words.

No. It's always necessary to use words, because if they don't hear, how can they believe? Okay?

Now, that doesn't mean you don't have to have gospel conduct as well, but you always have to have the words. And so if you're afraid to preach the gospel, uh, I got good news for you.

God sent his spirit to give you boldness to preach the gospel. And everyone can be filled with his spirit. And when you're filled with the spirit, you go from being afraid of the gospel and ashamed of the gospel, like Peter, and go to being someone who's bold about the gospel.

And if that's you, you can be filled with the spirit and be bold about the gospel. You just need to be filled. And when you're filled with his spirit, you will be bold for the gospel. If you're not bold with the gospel, and your doctrine gets in the way of it because you don't believe in the filling of the spirit, you got to ask the question why you're so afraid and ashamed to preach the gospel.

[43:28] Maybe your doctrine's off. Maybe you need to believe in the filling of the spirit, because it's not optional to not be bold about the gospel. We must be bold about the gospel. Third, we have to pray.

Okay? We have to be praying for the people that we're on mission to. We have to be praying for the laborers who are going out and being on mission. Right? Luke 10, 2 says, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, pray earnestly for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. So we need to be praying for the laborers to go out. Ephesians 6, 19 says, Pray also for me that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 3, 1 says, Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you. Now, we might have find that in a missional community, not the whole missional community goes out on mission on a particular day or night.

Maybe just a few people go out and are doing cold call evangelism. Or maybe a few people are on mission to a specific place or people. The important thing is that the other people who aren't on that particular tip of the arrow for the mission, they need to be praying for those other people.

[44:40] How are we doing on that? Are we making sure we're letting people know, Hey, I'm going to do this. Maybe a few ladies are going to the library to reach out to some people. Please pray for us. Maybe some guys are going to UMKC and preaching the gospel.

Hey, pray for us. And then you go back to your missional community and report back how it went. And then you pray about the specific people that there was fruit with or that seemed like there was some stirring there.

And you pray into that. And you pray that God would save people. You pray that doors would be open before they go. When they come back, there's a report. And your whole missional community is doing that together.

If we're just going out here and there discriminately, not connected to our missional community, we're aborting one of the most powerful forces that we have on mission. And that's prayer.

We have to be praying for each other and rallying together as a missional community to pray for the specific people we're on mission to and to pray for lost people. Number four, we have to do this together.

[45:38] Okay? Everyone together. We need to expose the people we're on mission to, the family of believers. We need to say, hey, as we're on mission to people, we're reaching people with the gospel, trying to, we want to introduce them to people in our church.

You want to bring them in to, if you're out going to UMKC and preaching the gospel, and your wife's at home with the kids, well, maybe look for an opportunity to bring, invite someone over to your house.

Have the wife and kids meet. You know? You're looking, you're meeting people, you're getting to know people, and this, Abner, this. You're going to the library, you're reaching some ladies there. Expose them to the family of believers.

Have to see, how can we connect them to other believers in the church? Right? Matthew 5 says, you're the light of the world. City on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

But they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men so that they can see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. When you expose people to family of believers, they see your good deeds, and they glorify God.

[46:36] Right? John 13, 35 says, this is how we know that they are Christians, by their love for one another. Our message of the gospel is powerful. Then when we bring those people into the family of God and show them how the family loves one another, that's a game changer.

That's a game changer. Okay? Just hearing a story the other day of someone preaching the gospel to their mother, talking to their mother, and then a whole bunch of Christians ended up helping the daughter move.

And that just blew things wide open. I can't believe how well people loved you. I can't believe how all these people helped you. Who are all these people? That opens the door, again, to glorify God, who sees your good deeds.

They see your good deeds, and they praise your Father who is in heaven. That's something we could do a little bit better, bringing the mission that we're doing together with the rest of the church, the rest of our missional communities, and saying, hey, how can I incorporate the rest of my missional community?

How can I bring them in on this? How can we do this together? How can we not just have people going out here and people going out there, but let's do this together? And then lastly, we make disciples. Okay?

[47:42] After people get saved, we've got to teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded. We've got to make disciples. We've got to teach them the ways of God. We've got to train them. We've got to encourage them. We've got to say, hey, this is how you walk out this.

This is how you do parenting. This is how you teach your children how to sit. This is how you be a godly man at work. This is how you stop looking at porn. This is how you have a good marriage. This is how you be a godly single person.

This is how you do these things. We have to teach. We have to train. We have to get in each other's life. Some of us maybe do a better job of this than others, but I think we have to have it on our radar.

Again, we just don't want to do indiscriminate ministry. We want to say, hey, once we're bringing people in, we have to make sure that we're teaching people how to be His.

How to follow Jesus. How to obey His commands. So He says in Matthew 2, 19, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I've commanded.

[48:39] So these are the things we want to do. Okay? And we want to keep doing this over and over again. We're going and we're targeting specific people in specific places. If you would ask your missional community, this should always be this way.

Who are you on mission to? You should be able to say, these are the people and these are the places we're on mission to. Okay? This is what we're doing. We're not just a consumeristic, it's all about me, little club of people.

No. That's a great way to build a church that won't last. That's a great way to build a church that doesn't reflect the heart of Jesus. That's a great way to build a church that fosters selfishness and independence.

That is not the kind of churches you see built in the New Testament. We have to be building relationships with unbelievers and unchurched believers. We have to be preaching the gospel. We have to open our mouth and speak it. We've got to make opportunities. We've got to be praying for the laborers going out. We've got to be praying for them when they come back. We've got to be praying for the report of the people that we're reaching out to.

[49:36] Pray that God will move in them and save them. We've got to do it together and incorporate the whole missional community, young, old. Okay? The men and women. It's not just the guys.

It's not just the ladies. It's not just the young. It's not just the old. It's not just the mature Christians. It's not just the immature. It's all together. How do we do this together? How do we do this together? And then we together make disciples of those that are brought in. Rinse and repeat. This is what we've got to do to the end. And you see this done all throughout the New Testament. Amen? Amen. Let's stand.