



Learning to Lead – Part 4

Always On Guard

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If you've been around Compass you know that I used three words that help to summarize the component parts of the Great Commission. That is the task of the church. Those words are Reaching, Teaching and Training. They stand for the three component parts that you see in the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Reaching, of course, we have to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ which culminates in baptism. That's an expression of people being reached. Then there's teaching and Jesus put the bar really high, he said "teaching them to observe all that I commanded them." So I got to teach. We have to teach, we have to be about teaching the truths particularly being obedient to Christ. And then, of course, it is all predicated on the fact that he had spent three and a half years training them to do those very things. So we have to be involved in training. Reaching, teaching and training. We use those three words to kind of demonstrate this is kind of the focus, the goal, not kind of, it is the focus and goal of what we are called to do as a church.

I use three other words to describe the context in which a lot of that takes place. There are three words I use to describe what church life looks like if you are going to join in with us to do that. Those words are Attend, Connect and Serve. Attend, connect and serve. If you're going to be a part of the church that is doing that, our church, then you need to attend the church. And I often describe that as it relates to the chairs. The chairs are side-by-side when that takes place, and then you are a part of the worship, you are a part of the teaching of the word, the public proclamation of God's word. And so that's an important part. You say, I got to attend the church. And then, of course, if you're going to be a part of the church, you need to get your chairs face-to-face and start engaging in conversation, knowing people relationally, helping to spur one other on to love and good deeds. So we get our chairs face-to-face, and that's the connecting part.

And then I talk about the chair, in relationship to the chair, you got to get out of the chair. You got to get up from the chair and you've got to get to serving the church. So if we're going to reach, teach and train as a corporate entity, we have to individually be committed to attending the church, connecting with the people in the church, and then we have to commit to serve the church. So we got a chairs side-by-side, chairs face-to-face, get out of the chair and involve yourself in ministry. And by that I mean you're doing something to help other people grow in their Christian life. And as we've been reading in our Daily Bible Reading in First Corinthians Chapter 12, everyone's been given a "manifestation of God's Spirit," he's invested in each Christian to be able to do something, "for the common good."

It might be something as simple as taking someone through the Partners Program, our discipleship program, helping them to learn to pray better, keeping them accountable for their battle in the Christian life, or helping them to understand the attributes of God better. You're leading them, directing them in those things, you're serving. It could be in a formalized ministry. Maybe you're leading a small group, you're teaching one of our programs, you're volunteering to work with the youth in our youth groups or whatever it might be you've got a



ministry post. It could seem like it's task-oriented, but all of those tasks, whether it's working in the sound booth, at the parking lot or part of our Fix-It ministry, it's always in teams and in groups and those you're not just working passively together, you're investing in each other's lives. You're helping to lead other people in the work to benefit the church.

So service is always getting out of the chair and doing something. And that's why when someone says, "What church do you attend?" You should stop them, not really, but in your mind and say, "I not only attend there, I connect with the people there and I serve the body of Christ. And so attend, connect and serve, these are three important words. And in the series that we've been working through on Sunday mornings has been the series that relates to that third word, which is serving, getting out of the chair and serving.

Now, I know that the passage in Acts Chapter 20 verses 17 to 38, this is Paul's address to the shepherds of the church. They've come from Ephesus to Miletus. He's instructing them there. Three words are used "Poemen," is "shepherd," which is translated "pastor" in some cases. We use that word around here. "Episkopos," is "overseers" we'll see that in the passage today and "Presbuteros," is "elders." So poemen, presbuteros the third one and episkopos. So that I know. If I'm preaching at a pastor's conference I'm going to talk directly to those who have given themselves to the full-time leadership of shouldering the burden of church administration and all that goes with it, as we did in our announcements today, as people assume that role, it's the ultimate level of service in the church. They're serving the whole of the church. And I could speak directly to people who do basically what I do vocationally giving themselves to the work of overseeing in the church.

But this is a sermon series where we're trying to glean principles that Paul is directing to the pastoral level within the church that I want to take out of this series to say, well, these principles are transferable into your life when you get out of your chair and you involve yourself in some kind of service. So I trust you have a ministry post of some kind, that you're serving in some way. And it could be you're just getting started in the church. Maybe you're just helping someone through a trial in their life or a struggle in their life. But you're still seeing yourself as a tool or an agent to be useful in someone's life to direct them back to biblical truth, to help them trust God in the midst of trials, to direct them and guide them. That's leading. Some may not be leading in some formalized sense with the title, but it's leading.

So this series, we've called it Learning to Lead. And here are all the principles in Acts Chapter 20 verses 17 through 38 that describe how we should be leading. So that's just kind of an overview of where we've been. Today we get to verses 28 through 32. And really this is the heart of what the Apostle Paul has to say to people who lead in the church. And that's, I hope, all of us. We're all getting out of our chairs to some way serve in the church. It's the heart that brings a concern that we all ought to be very careful about how we do it. So these instructions today, they seem sobering, they seem like warnings. But I pray and I trust that this will become a motivation for you as you do get out of your chairs to serve that you'll say this is the mindset with which I should do it.



Matter of fact, some of you may not be connecting and serving, and it would be my hope that even this sermon would motivate you to get there, because this is what church life is all about. And I trust that even the words we talk about today would not only inform how you do it, but maybe get some of you to start to do it for the first time in our church and that would be awesome. So let's look at this passage I want to read verses 28 through 32. And this is kind of sobering, paying attention, be careful, watch out. I get that's the wording of it all. But there are some great truths in here that are not so, like foreboding. They're very encouraging for us to be excited about the work that we do because it's important work, whatever your role might be in our church.

So let me read it for you. You follow along. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Let me read these few verses starting in verse 28. Are you ready? Verse 28, "Pay careful attention to yourselves." He's talking to people who are serving in the church, albeit in a pastoral role. But you're serving the church, I hope, and I would say pay careful attention to yourselves as people who get up out of the chair to serve in some way. "And to all the flock," particularly whatever aspect of the flock that you're influencing and serving and ministering to, "in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." Now, you may not be an overseer of the entire scope of the church but you have some oversight. It could be just in one brother's or sister's life in the church and you're trying to help oversee where they're at and moving them forward toward greater godliness or Christ-likeness. That's great.

And really, it can be summarized with the next word here - to care. You're caring for those people. "Care," he says, "for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." So the Triune God, of course, the second person of the Godhead now has done something to obtain them in a special, redemptive way. He's forgiven them of their sins by dying on a cross. So, this is all parenthetical, that section here about "in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." But I'm supposed to pay careful attention. Why? Here's why. Verse 29, "for I know that after my departure." Now, remember, he's leaving. He's going to go down and sail from Miletus down the Aegean, out into the Mediterranean, go back to Jerusalem. That's where he's headed. So he's leaving them after three and a half years, much like Jesus investing in the disciples for three and a half years, Paul has invested in this church for three and a half years, and he's going to leave them. And he says, I just know this. "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you."

So we carry on the metaphor here. You're shepherds, right? You're caring for people. And those people are like my sheep, my flock. Right? This is the Church of God, the flock of God. And there can be people who are going to come in, who are going to be like wolves to a, you know, a flock of sheep, which is not what you want coming into the flock. You don't want wolves because the wolves are going to be, in this case, fierce wolves that are not sparing the flock. They're going to mess this church up. They're going to come in and threaten the well-being and the health and the unity of this church.

"And from," verse 30, "among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things." Now we've gone from a wolf that doesn't speak, you know, picturing them eating, you know, a



lamb. Now we got, okay, now we're out of that metaphor and we're talking about what's the real problem with people in the church, coming into the church, or maybe even them could be from their own group of leaders. But they might start speaking twisted things, things that aren't biblical, things that aren't true. And ultimately, here's a very important phrase, "to draw away the disciples after them." Listen to me. Listen to my little tweak on things. Listen to how I interpret this. Listen to my view on this. Listen to my directions as to how to live the Christian life.

Verse 31, "Therefore be alert remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone," now, here's something interesting, "with tears." It's not that he's just some, you know, sentimental preacher who always breaks down in the pulpit. He's thinking about the problem of the wolves coming in and messing this up. He's going to leave them and he says, man, I sometimes when I admonished you on this I was crying. It was heavy and a burden to think about the threats that are going to come, that might come to this church.

But he's going to be hopeful here with a verse that's packed full of things. As you see on the worksheet there, there are a lot of sub-points here under number four on your worksheet. When I say number four is a point, and then I talk about sub-points in it, you know this is going to be a challenge for your pastor, so pray for me. But here, look at this verse. Let me read it for you. He says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance," not just you, but "among all those who are sanctified." That's rich. We'll deal with that when we get to the end and pray I won't be talking extraordinarily fast at that point. I'll just manage the whole thing. If I don't waste a lot of time with sentences like these.

But let's start with how he starts, which is basically a parenthetical statement. He gives the warning, hey, be careful, pay attention to yourselves and to the flock and appointed by God to oversee. But he talks about this being the Church of God obtained with his own blood. So there is a statement about the people whom we serve. Now, these guys were the ultimate sacrificial servants of the church, as pastors, as elders, as overseers. But everyone who takes on a role of ministry is ministering or serving a particular group, maybe a block of people within the church, maybe even one or two people within the church. But you're serving, you're out of your chair to serve now, to help. And what this does is it elevates the value of those people who you're serving.

I make an announcement about serving in Awana, and you might think, "Well, I don't know, what am I doing Thursdays? Maybe I could be a part of that." And all I'm telling you is when anyone asks you to serve the people of God, the Church of God, just remember this: these are the people of God that God has sent his Son to shed his blood to make them his own in a redemptive way. He's forgiven them by having his Son die and bleed on a Roman execution rack. So that just says wow, wait a minute. This isn't like asking for help with your homeowner's association or seeing if you can serve in your community or can you do some extra thing for your company picnic and set up or whatever. No, this is like the people of God, the Church of God.



And what that does is it emphasizes the first thing we've got to emphasize in our thinking when we think about getting out of the chair to serve. Number one, you have to "Consider God's Value of Christians." God has a particular value on Christians. As Exodus Chapter 19 said about the Old Testament Israelites, he says, these are "my treasured possessions." These people, they're my people. They're my people who I see as a very special group of people. They're my treasured possessions. And of the New Testament Church, that's not an unfamiliar concept.

As a matter of fact, let me have you turn to this one, if you've written that down, First Peter Chapter 2. Listen to the way he speaks of the Church. It carries over this concept of the Israelites being this special group of people whom God has set his special, redemptive love on. He says in verse 9 of Second Peter 2, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." Now, all those phrases, by the way, if you think about the Church, we're not one particular ethnic group. We're not one particular nation. The Church is an international organization, but every outpost of it, it's like in contradistinction to the rest of the world. This is a special group. Look at this phrase now, "a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You were once not a people." You were all scattered in all different kinds of groups of people. But now you're brought together under the banner of this thing called the Church. "Now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." How did that happen? With the death of Christ on the cross, the mercy of God looking at you without reference to your sin. You and I have sinned this week. God does not see that sin in a judicial way. It is out of the way because it's been atoned for by the death of Christ on a cross. And that is this group of people and their kids are going to run around Awana game circles on Thursday nights and they need someone with a whistle around their neck to help them do that. And I'm saying when you do that, you're serving the people of God. That's a big deal. This is the flock of God. You ought to care for the flock of God because this is God's flock. These are God's people. This is God's Church.

And God went so far as to show you how much he loved this particular group of people. As Jesus himself said, "No greater love has anyone than this that a man would lay down his life for his friends." Just think about that. How far did he go to prove that this particular group of people he loves so much that Christ died to forgive them? It's not like any other request you get for your time or your effort or your attention or your money. There's nothing else like this. These are God's people. As we said last week, this is an eternal investment in people who you will rub shoulders with for eternity. And if they need service, that they need you to get out of your chair and to serve them, it's like, okay, there should be no question that everybody in this church should have a ministry post, should be serving in some way because of the importance of the people.

So Paul starts with this as he talks to servants in the church, these pastors in the churches. He says you got to remember who these people are. How precious is the Church to God? It's so important that you ought to see yourself as nothing more as one who facilitates the people connecting with their Shepherd. Right? John 10 he says, "I am the good shepherd," Jesus



said. "My sheep they hear my voice." Well, how do they hear his voice? Well, the under-shepherds, they have to give the information, they have to direct the sheep to listen to Christ. They have to give people the truth and the word of Christ so they might follow him.

But every time you do something to help in that regard, the counsel you give, the advice, you give, the direction you give, the things that you do to help them have an experience at church that is bettered, as it's put in First Corinthians 12, for the common good, verse 7, then I'm just saying that is something you're doing to the most special group of people you could ever do anything for. And that is where this becomes priority. And I can give an announcement about a Thursday night need that we might have and you might think of all the other things you can do with your Thursday night. But I'm just telling you there's nothing you could do that is more important in the world than for you to say, I'm going to do something for the chosen people of God who Jesus shed his blood for. It's a priority-building concept. The people of God.

In that regard turn to First Peter Chapter 5 of this passage. I'm basically trying to direct and lead and counsel and do something to better the experience of the sheep as they relate to their Shepherd. And therefore I see myself as just a servant of this great Chief Shepherd, as it's put. Look at verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you." Now again, you could say well this is particularly to the pastors. It involves anyone by principle and extension who's going to serve the church. Of course, pastors serve like full-time, but you're going to serve maybe on Thursday night.

Well, you ought to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion," not because I have to, I guess I have to, "but willingly, as God would have you" not for yourself, "not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over them." It's not about you getting on a power trip because you have some ministry post, "but being examples to the flock," servants to the flock. Why? Because I know one day the real shepherd, "the chief Shepherd is going to appear," and he's going to give rewards to those who are serving and busy about the work as he said in his parables about the people who are serving and working and feeding the people.

When the master comes back, the chief Shepherd comes back, he's going to come back for his Church. And all of us who have been out of our chair trying to help the Church, man, he's going to reward those people. He's the chief Shepherd. Even pastors, they take the word "pastor," which means "shepherd" they're just under-shepherds. The real deal is Christ. These are Christ's people. All I'm trying to do is help them connect with him. Key concept. How important are they? They couldn't be more important. This is the flock of God, verse 2. Care for, shepherd, serve, eagerly serve the flock of God, the Church of God redeemed by Christ himself. Sacrificially redeemed. He couldn't love these people more than he does.

I think of that Ephesians 5 passage. We make people memorize it in pre-marital counseling about husbands and wives. One of the most instructive texts in all the New Testament about husbands ought to love their wives. But after it's all done, he ends it with this. I'm really not talking about marriage here. I'm talking about Christ and his Church. Right? Now we can learn a lot about marriage from the passage. But Paul's trying to say I'm just trying to demonstrate



for you how important the Bride of Christ is to Christ. And when Christ says my bride needs something, there's a way to serve the bride. There's something you could do for the common good of this particular outpost of the Bride of Christ. Right? That's a call to service that should be elevated to the top of the priority list for us.

Back to our passage, Acts Chapter 20. Now, look at verse 29. We're going to get to the heart of the matter. What's the problem? I've got to pay special attention to myself and to the flock. Why? Well, because "after my departure," Paul says, "fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Now, that's all part of the analogy. Somehow the Church is going to be threatened by people who are going to come in who are labeled here as wolves. But what does that look like? Verse 30, "And from among your own selves." There are going to be people who go to your church. It could be one of you. It could be someone who's been there for a long time, or it might be someone who is new, it could come from any direction. They're going to "arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."

So if I said what is identified in this passage as the problem, you'd say, well, the problem is the twisted things. Twisted things, just like we see everywhere from the beginning of the Bible to the end, the problem is not people coming in saying, "Go worship Satan." It's about, "well, yeah, you can have God, but you got to do it in a way that's a little different than what God said." It's like Eve, you know. "Did God really say..." It's like, well, the tempter is always going to tempt in a way that has enough truth in it to kind of get you inoculated to think it's okay, and then pull some things in that are twisted, they're not quite right. And what Paul is saying is you got to be careful. You're going to hear things in the church that are going to be wrong. It's going to be twisted. It's going to be not exactly what Christ said to do. It's going to be compromising the truth.

And here's the motive. It's going to come from people who are going to draw people it says, bottom of verse 30, "draw disciples after them." So I want to really focus on the motive because I can tie this together all throughout the Bible. But the motive of saying unorthodox things, saying things that are not true, they really come back to the problem of myself wanting and seeing myself in the equation as more important than it should be. In other words, I want to tell you something that really is not biblical. And the reason I want to compromise the biblical truth, what God has wanted you to do, the reason I want to take the voice of the Shepherd and change it is so that you'll like me. You'll think that I'm a good guy. You'll think that my teaching or my leadership is better than his leadership or what they're saying.

And I'll prove this to you but I just want to get back to what the core problem is. What are you guarding against? Well, you're guarding against twisted words. Well, that's true. But really, the motive for that, the fountainhead of that is people who are seeing ministry, not the way they ought to see ministry, as that it's all about the chief Shepherd, but somehow their interests have gotten involved.

So let's give it this title. It's a very familiar word and let's jot it down and let me unpack it. Number two, we need to "Guard Against All Forms of Selfishness," all forms of selfishness. When I say, hey, we've got to get out of our chairs and we need to serve. Right? When we



think, okay, I want to do that. Service, just by definition is I'm trying to serve you with the clear agenda of the chief Shepherd in my heart, in my mind, in my thinking. So all I'm doing is a go-between between God is I'm trying to explain, expound, help you apply, whatever the Shepherd says so the sheep can follow the Shepherd. Because that's all I want.

At some point I get out of line with that and I start getting over here and saying, "Well, I'm going to say something. It's a little twisted and why don't you follow me over here? There might be other people saying what God wants you to do, but they seem so hardcore and it's too hard or it's too difficult or you know what? If they're going to struggle through this concept in giving you something and it doesn't quite jive with, it doesn't gel, it doesn't seem like it's really the kind and nice and loving, so follow what I say." And you know what? That is always going to be motivated by you liking me as a conduit of a truth that is not quite as hard or difficult or uncool or ancient or fuddy-duddy or restrictive or judgmental as telling you what the judge really said.

Let me prove this to you. Go to Galatians Chapter 1, look at two passages in Galatians. But let's start with Paul here talking about, you remember this if you know the book, about the problem of the gospel being twisted and contorted. There are people who are talking about the gospel to the Galatians churches, which is, yeah, it's about Christ, it's about trusting him, it's about repentance, it's about all that. But really, if you want to be right with God, there are a few other things. Let me tell you what those are. And the few other things are we got to keep the customs of our culture, which are things like circumcision. Right? Now in a Jewish culture that was the pressure of the culture. And they're saying, why don't you just do what the culture is wanting us to do, what our families are wanting us to do, what Grandma wants us to do? Let's do those things. And so let's twist the truth of the gospel. And why don't you listen to me instead of the Apostle Paul?

Even Peter was falling to this as we learn in the Galatians Chapter 2 by going back to kosher eating because he didn't want the heat and the pressure of standing up for what Christ had said in the New Testament so he's compromised. He's starting to twist the truth when he's in certain company. So in Galatians Chapter 1, he says this just to summarize the end of his argument in verse 9, he says, "As we've said before, we now say again." Are you with me on this? Galatians 1 9. "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel that is contrary to the one you received," like circumcision means nothing as he told the Corinthians. Right? That was a ceremonial law, just like dietary restrictions. They dealt with Leviticus ceremonial law. It is now passé. It's obsolete, as the book of Hebrews says. Now, if anyone's trying to teach you, you've got to do that, then listen, "let him be accursed." He's twisting the truth. Okay?

Now, here's the motive. Those are the twisted words, here's the motive, here's the "drawing disciples after themselves." He counter-distinguishes that by talking about his resolve. Verse 10, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?" Okay? Listen to what he's implying there. People who are telling you to do something that might get the applause of your Jewish grandmother that's really them wanting you to like what they're saying and they're making it something that conforms to the culture or maybe your impulses or your tradition. They're telling you something that's not quite right and they're getting your approval. And you



know what? Here's the thing. They like your approval. They're seeking your approval. "Am I seeking the approval of people or am I seeking the approval of God." Or am I trying to please people, please man? If I were still trying to please man I would not be a servant of Christ.

Now, if I'm going to serve, get out of my seat to serve the church, we've got to so clearly recognize that I am here to please the Shepherd because it's all about God's Church, God's people, God's flock. I just want them to connect with God. That's it. If I get in between and I start saying, hey, let me help you with that, it better be exactly what the Shepherd wants you to know. As soon as I tell you something that may be more of what you want to hear, well, then all of a sudden I become a pretty valuable person in your life because I'm talking about God and trying to tell you how to please God. But I'm telling you things that you kind of like. It jives with you. It's in sync with you. It lets you fit in at work better. And so you'll like me.

Here's the thing about false teaching, twisted words. It's always motivated by people who really want to be seen as the good guy. Now turn to Chapter 4 of Galatians. Let me just put it in words that now I hope to bring this all together. Paul is going to give the unmitigated, unvarnished truth. Should we speak the truth in love? Absolutely. But speaking the truth in love doesn't mean we don't speak the truth. You might want to speak it in a way that's not like being a jerk about it, but you've got to speak the truth. And so Paul is speaking the truth. Even Peter was now compromising the truth. But Paul says this after he speaks the truth to these Galatian Christians. Look at it now in Galatians Chapter 4. Look at verse 16. Let's read a couple of verses here. "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Some of you have been out of your chair long enough in serving the church you know what this feeling feels like, right? Someone says, "Well, can I get a divorce because of this situation? Or can I do this or can I not give because I got this situation or can I, you know, whatever. Can I preempt some thing that the Bible says because of my circumstances? Or I'm getting a lot of pressure here. Do I really have to do this part of the Christian life? Is this really what God expects?" And you say, "yes," and then they don't like you. And you could say what the Apostle Paul said. You're trying to counsel, you're trying to lead, you're trying to direct.

I mean it could be silly and simple and small as someone you take through Partners says, "I don't want to memorize the verses. Do I have to memorize?" You say, "Well, I don't know, it seems pretty legalistic so you don't have to memorize verses." But even in the discipleship relationship the whole point of it being set up to memorize verses is to do what we've been reading about in Psalm 119 in our Daily Bible Reading that the whole point of us keeping our way pure is to hide God's word in our heart. And this is all a part of meditating on God's truth. And so, "I liked it when I went through Partners with you because you didn't make me do that. You didn't make me go out and share the gospel. You didn't make me fight this temptation, this gray area. I didn't even have to think this through because you were cool at the way I was doing it."

But someone who's going to tell the truth and sometimes those are things that do not comport well with what I want to do. But then all of a sudden it's like, wow, "I don't like you." And then



you respond with, "have I become your enemy because I'm telling you the truth?" Do you have to give? Yes, you have to give. Guess what? I've made a lot of enemies just by saying every Christian should be giving to their church. They should be giving a portion of what God gives them. We read that in our Daily Bible Reading today. I have to, right? Everyone should be sharing their faith. Everyone. "Well, I'm not gifted." Everyone should be sharing their faith, right? I can easily become your enemy by telling you...

Now I can say it to you in a way that's jerky. I want to speak the truth in love. I don't want to be a jerk and I'd like to be liked by you. But my job is to preach sermons. And your job is to get out of your chair and serve in the church so that God is pleased with what you're doing. And to have God be pleased with you is to make sure you're not twisting any of the truth. And sometimes you risk this. People think you don't like them because you're telling them the truth. Some say, "Now, there are other options out there."

This is how the church gets all divided and messed up. Verse 17. Are you still in Galatians 4 verse 17? "They make much of you." They make much of you. They make you feel good. They make you feel important. They pat on the back. There's a lot of back-slapping going on in the leadership of the churches of Galatia. "They make much of you, but for no good purpose." They want to shut you out from us. "They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them." Do you see selfishness poking its head in there? People who twist the truth, and this is the axiom, this is the principle here, they twist the truth because they want to have disciples follow after them. They want you to like them. If you're going to read a Christian book I'd like you to read the Christian book that I write. If you're going to listen to Christian radio, I'd like you to listen to my sermons. If you're going to take someone through Partners, I want to be the person people want to take them through Partners.

All of this, if it starts to become selfish, I want to make much of them, it's usually because you want to be made much of. And again, that's a weird way to put it. Those are Bible words, but you know exactly what I'm talking about. When selfishness creeps into any kind of service you now become compromised, heretical compromise waiting to happen. You become the twister of the truth. It's going to happen because your goal is no longer to please God in your service. Your service toward people is about pleasing the people. Do you think I could preach sermons that could be more popular than the sermons I preach? "Oh, Pastor Mike, could you ever. Your sermons aren't popular. I'm getting a lot of heat from my friends even saying I'm going to Compass Bible Church because they know what kind of Bible-thumper you are. You're a hateful preacher. They don't like you. And I don't know why I'm here." I understand that. I hear it all the time, right? What a terrible preacher I am because I'm always so hardcore. They ask, "Can't I just relax and cool down?"

Listen, all I'm telling you is I understand that there's another way to preach, there's another way to teach. And all of us can be telling you things that make much of you. And guess what? The preachers and the ministers who do that, whether they're preaching or serving the people, start making much of them. And it's just a sad temptation. And Paul says, "Oh, it's always good," verse 18, "to be made much of for a good purpose." There's no problem slapping someone's back, there's no problem encouraging people, but it better be for a good



reason, a good purpose. "And not only when I'm present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" That's my concern. I want you to be like Christ. I want you as a sheep to follow the Shepherd. I want you and the Shepherd to be close. And if the Shepherd wants you to give, if the Shepherd wants you to evangelize, if the Shepherd wants you to pray, whatever the Shepherd wants you to do that's my goal in my counseling and my encouragement and my service and my work. And does that please everyone? No, it makes a lot of enemies. But I want to speak the truth in love because the truth is what matters. The twisting of the truth, I just need to be careful. Selfishness is the thing that's going to tempt me to do that.

Isaiah 30 verses 9 through 11. If you're taking notes at least jot it down, if you're not quick in turning there, don't turn there but here's what he says. If you're quick to turn there look at it. The problem is often much like it is in Second Timothy 4 verses 1 through 3 when Paul says, you know, "There's a day coming when people just want to hear what they want to hear, they have itching ears and they want to surround themselves with teachers who will tell them what they want to hear." "But as for you," this is how it started, "in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus and his coming kingdom: preach the word in season and out of season," whether it's going to make friends or whether it's going to make enemies. You preach the word. That's your job. In light of your coming evaluation, that's all that matters. You be a faithful minister.

When you get to your chair to help someone, help them connect with the savior and he is a holy God. He's a God who has got a righteous kingdom. And all of these things are what matters. We don't feed them what they want, even though they have itching ears, they want to hear what they want to hear. Here's what Isaiah 30 says, not a new problem. "Rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord." This is exactly what Paul said in Second Corinthians where there are plenty of people who would much rather hear what they want to hear and the problem is if you go and you want to hear God's stuff there are plenty of people who are going to dish it up. But they want God's stuff but they don't want all of it. They want it twisted.

Verse 10, "And they say to the seers," the seers is another word for prophet, "don't see." Tell me what the holy God of the universe thinks, but don't tell me all the things that the Holy God of the universe said. Right? "And to the prophets, 'Well, don't prophesy what's right.'" I don't want to hear that. But here's what I want. "Speak to us smooth things." Are you reading that passage there? Smooth things. I'd like it to go down easy. Can you just back off? Can they be a little shorter? Can they be easier? Can they demand less of us? Do you know how many times... I don't even want to get personal on this, but how many times do I just... Twice this week I heard someone say, "I'd leave your church because it's just too hard. It's too much to think about. I don't want to think on Sunday morning. I don't want all this work." I'm just like, okay, right?

If I thought there was a better way I would give you that better way. But I'm trying to present truth. I only get you for an hour a week. I want to give you the truth. And sometimes it's got sharp edges, it's not smooth. And unfortunately, there's plenty of appetite among people who profess Christ to say, "Give us smooth things, prophesied illusions." Can you twist it? Can you



do it differently? "Leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel." We're tired with all this hard stuff. Verse 12, "Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, 'Because you've despised this word...' Right? You have not really listened to what I said. All I want to be in ministering in the church, whether I'm counseling, encouraging, helping, comforting, directing, building, whatever it is, I got to always remember selfishness is the enemy of faithful ministry, always. And I've got to root it out in my life. I could go on and on, but let's leave it at that for the sake of time.

Back to our text now. Acts Chapter 20 verse 31. This is an interesting twist on all this. He steps back and autobiographically, he says in verse 31, "You've got to be alert therefore, 'Therefore be alert.'" He started in verse 28, "Pay attention." You got to watch yourself. You got to watch the people in church. You got to watch the new people in your church. Be alert. Why? Well, because there are wolves that are going to twist the truth because selfishness is driving it. And you got to remember this, "For three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears."

Now, the "therefore" that starts verse 31, that word "therefore" clearly ties whatever he's explaining here to what he's just said, and that is he knows what's happening. I know what's going to happen. There are going to be people who are going to draw disciples after themselves, they are going to give more palatable truths. They're going to twist the truth so that they can have a following. And he says, "I admonished you for three years with tears." So I know what he's crying about. Right? It's not because his illustrations are so moving. He's crying about the fact that he's envisioning the threats to their faithfulness to Christ. He's concerned with the apostasy that can take place in the church.

So I just want to say it would be a good way for us to be motivated to always get out of our chair to do ministry and say I have to be faithful because I fear, number three, I really have "Pondered the Cost of Apostasy." What happens if our church is filled with people speaking twisted things that aren't faithful to the Bible, that aren't faithful to what God said? What's going to happen? Well, lives are going to careen off the path. And when they do, what the Bible calls that apostasy, they turn away from the path of righteousness. And the Bible says that's a bad thing on several levels.

Let's start with level number one. Turn with me to a passage just to look at level number one. Go with me, if you would, to Second Peter Chapter 2. Second Peter Chapter 2. The problem is apostasy is when people have a good moralizing, quote unquote sanctifying experience with being a part of a Bible-teaching church and then they start to careen off the path. And I hate to say it, but often it happens with one person giving them one bit of advice that just is a lot more palatable than what they're hearing in the rest of the church. They like that a lot and it starts to say, I can tailor Christianity to be more comfortable for me, that fits my expectations. And then they start this path careening off the path. That's called apostasy.

And what I'm going to contend here in a passage like this, it speaks of this reality as people have experienced benefits from being a part of the community of Christians. And I've been doing this in South Orange County now for 35 years in preaching week after week after week



after week. I've seen plenty of people bring their neighbor, their friend, their family member. They come to church and their vices and their alcoholism or their drug addictions or whatever, they start to clean up their lives because the culture and accountability and the teaching and everything starts to really affect the externals of their life. They have a kind of, quote unquote, conversion experience from the outside. Right? They change their behavior. They start parenting their kids differently. They start living a more disciplined life. They do a lot of things that the Bible says Christians should do out of a converted heart, but they don't have a converted heart. And they eventually start getting the selfish teaching of some counsel, small group leadership, someone takes them through Partners or whatever, but they start to get that sense that you can have your cake and eat it too in Christianity and eventually they careen off the path.

This is what I think it's addressing at the bottom of Chapter 2. Look at it. Verse 20, "For if after," this is Second Peter 2:20, "they have escaped the defilement of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Their life got cleaned up. They got into the right environment. It's a Christian environment. There's accountability, there's pressure to do right. And then "They are again entangled in them all the things that defiled them before and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first." I hate to say it, but having trafficked around and doing all the things I have to do getting gas, eating, going out to dinner, you know, shopping, the things that I see in people who I meet that I knew got their life cleaned up by coming to church for five, ten years and then they go back to their old life and they're just as entangled in all the things before, I would think I would say their new life of defilement is just like their old life of defilement. But this text says, no, it's worse.

Why is it worse? Here's why. Verse 21, because of the judgment they're going to receive, "For it would have been better for them to have never known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." It's all about an internal repentance that changes your heart from the inside out. They conform to the pattern and the morality of the church. They got their lives cleaned up and it benefited them much like the book of Hebrews continually says. They sat there as a part of the community benefiting from all the community benefits and then they went back to their old ways.

And the sad thing is someone getting out of their chair to do ministry with a selfish concern to give people what they want to hear often is the off-ramp to start going back to the path where they were before, never converted and the last state is worse than the first state, because now that they sit there in the same decrepit, debauched lifestyle they had before, they have this ten-year span or this five-year span where they knew and heard sermon after sermon, They went through things in our church programs. They read Christian books. They know all about what Christ has done for them. But in the end they reject it and they've rejected all the morality that goes with it and the judgment is going to come is horrific.

And he illustrates it with this gross proverb. He says in verse 22, "What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallowing in the mire.'" And the sad thing is you knew what it was to get all that junk out and now you're diving back into it. You knew what it was to be cleaned in your life, and



now you're back to it because your heart is the same. You're still, I mean, pardon the analogy, you're still a dog, you're still a pig. You still haven't had your heart regenerate. And unfortunately, that happens all the time. There are people in the church today who sit through sermon after sermon, improve their lives through all the programming of our church, but they never have a right heart with God and they end up apostasy. How bad is that? It's bad for them. It's bad for them because they get judgment for every sermon they've ever heard. They're held accountable for all that.

Number two, it's bad for the church because as they're finding off-ramps to go back to their old life they're doing it through ministries or disciplers or small group leaders or people who are doing ministry in the church who are giving them a different brand of Christianity. I've seen it up close. It's bad. It destroys churches. It starts to divide churches. It's got one pastor over here teaching this and one pastor teaching that and one group teaching this and another group teaching that. And they're not on the same page about what it means to be faithful to the Shepherd and so you get all these options. You get all this division within the church.

One more passage, let me turn you to this one. The end of Romans. Romans Chapter 16. Just this will tie a lot of things together. It feels like a potpourri of stuff like the cafeteria that spilled everything on the floor, this is going to pick it all up for you right here, this one passage. Let me turn you there. It ties so many elements of what I've been trying to say all morning together. Romans Chapter 16, look at verse 17, we'll start there. "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions." Because in the church that's got some bad ministry going on, I've said the identifying motive is selfishness, it's going to cause pockets where you can hear kind of different brands of Christianity. They "create obstacles." Why are there divisions and walls between different groups in the church? "Contrary to the doctrine that you've been taught." Because they've compromised and twisted the teaching of Christianity.

Well, "avoid them." I mean, don't feed them. Cut off the blood supply to this. Do not let this group grow. Don't let this happen. Just stay away from it. Why? Because "for such persons, they do not serve our Lord Christ." Now they say they are, they're in ministry positions, they're doing things, they are giving counsel, they're directing people, they're leading groups. Well, they're not serving Christ. They're actually serving their own appetites. Really, it is about them. They want to be the popular person. They want to be the go-to person who gives advice that's really palatable and smooth. Well, here's the word, verse 18, middle of verse 18. "And by smooth talk," there's that reference to Isaiah 30, smooth talk, "and flattery," they make much of you so you'll make much of them, "they deceive the hearts of the naive." And there are plenty of naive people who don't have the wisdom of God because their heart has not had implanted the word of God. They're not regenerate and they get brought into these sub-pockets of the church where people are telling them "there's a little easier brand than what you're hearing on Sunday morning. Let me just give it to you here." And all I'm telling you is that causes division and that's a bad church to be in.

And Paul is dealing with that throughout the book of Romans trying to talk about these pockets within the church that are still putting things in place that are different than what the



Bible teaches, what he's been teaching, what Christ has been teaching, and he says this is causing a bad experience for everybody. There are factions and battling, the book of First Corinthians deals with that at length, the divisions within the church. So it's bad for the person that apostasies, it is bad for the church because you go to the church you realize this church is not on the same page. Thirdly, it's bad for our testimony.

I want you to think about how many people who give smooth talk. Now, this is an extreme example in Christianity at large. How many people have dismissed your discussions about Jesus? They don't want to hear about Christianity because they point to people who are in Christianity for their own selfish means, right? The example of you trying to invite someone to a Bible church, let's say we are on the same page and we're teaching the word and we're giving the words of life to people to get right with God and then to live that out and they're pointing to the televangelist who is bilking old ladies of their money and getting on private jets and flying around and gambling and getting drunk in Vegas. You say, look at that. That blasphemy that comes upon the church, which means they take and think less of what we're doing than they should. They take sacred things and think they're ridiculous. They point to the hypocrisy of selfish teachers, selfish ministers. And so that's a huge black eye for all of us.

So why in this church do we want to be vigilant about serving the Shepherd and not ourselves in whatever ministry we do? Well, in part because we can envision how bad this could go for the one who turns his back on it, for a church experience that's filled with pockets of contrary teaching. And not only that, but for what people think of Christianity because they meet people in our church who have a bumper sticker on their car but they live a self-indulgent life because they're listening to people within the church who are telling them, "Hey, there's an easier, smooth way to live this thing, and don't worry about all that tough stuff you hear on the weekends." I don't know. That's a lot of components. Are you gathering some of this? I know it's another sermon that's making you think. But we have to think through these issues.

Ponder the cost of apostasy, number four. Here's a passage as time slips away for us to try and get some sub-points here. This is a rich verse. Verse 32 Acts Chapter 20. Here's how he ends this. Such an important text. This says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you THE inheritance among all those who were sanctified." So he's tearful about what might happen. He knows selfishness is the problem, people drawing people after themselves. He knows to compromise the truth is the tool to get people to make much of them. And he says, I just don't want you to see any of your service as something that would allow this in your life because you realize the importance of these people. You want to be faithful to the Good Shepherd. These are God's people, God's flock.

And he says, Now here's what I hope that if I commend you to these things hopefully you can stay on the right path. So verse 32, there are four things here, but let's call them this, number four. We've got a "Major on the Keys to Faithfulness, and he gives us four in this passage at least. Now, there could be a lot more, obviously, if we were to go through the New Testament and look at what are the keys that are emphasized as keeping you faithful to God and faithful to minister in the way you ought to selflessly for the good of the good Shepherd.



Well, here's four. The first one is and I'm going to have to pull an application out of this but let's look at this. "I commend you to God." I commend you to God. I commend you to God. I hope that you, as you minister, leaders in Ephesus, those of you who are serving out of your chair, that you would connect with God. "I commend you to God's care." I want you and God to be tight. I'm trying to emphasize this because what kind of practical application can I take out of that? To use the words of Christ, I want you to think of the analogy. He's my Father. He's the farmer. He's the vine dresser. "I'm the vine, you're the branch." And here's the verb that he uses: "abide in me." The Greek word "Meno," is "remain in me." Be tight with me. If you're tight with me, if the branch is tight with the vine, well then you'll bear fruit.

If you get cut off, right? If you're not abiding, well, then you're never going to bear fruit. So you've got to abide. If I asked how does Christ, by way of example, abide with his Father? Well, he's always taking time out to be with his Father. How can he be with his Father? His Father's in heaven and he's on earth? Well, he goes out early in the morning and he prays. When they think he should be teaching he's out there in a private place and he's praying. He's seeking the Lord in devotional relational prayer. He's not just saying, I want to be a great minister. I'm just working on my homiletic skills. I just want to practice one more illustration. He's praying. He's connecting with the Father.

I mean, no one was more commended to the Father than the Son, and he's saying, "I commend you to God." So let's just pull out this first one, Letter "A," verse 32a. We need to pray. We need a life of prayer. Here's the key to faithfulness, pray. You cannot be active in ministry and think you're abiding with God if you are not having a rich devotional prayer life. Right? I mean, that's just, I hope that's a convicting statement because it's true. There are a lot of people doing a lot of stuff in the church. They have ministry posts but they're not praying. Well, you know what you end up with where Ephesus ended up being, and that is by four decades later, when Jesus uses John on the island of Patmos to give a report card to Ephesus, he starts with Ephesus in Revelation 2 and he says, here's the problem. You got a lot of good things going for you, your doctrine, you're busy about the work of church but here's the problem. I have this against you. "You have left your first" what? "Love." You left your first love.

I would venture to say right now, I know this is one step removed from, "I commend you to God." But I would venture to say one of the main staples of the Christian life that would have kept you from leaving your first love is a vibrant prayer life. Would you agree with that? I mean, we've got to be praying. If your prayer life is lacking I don't care how much ministry you're doing I doubt you're connecting heart-to-heart with God. You've got to connect with God. And that's going to happen with the prayer life. Your prayer life is a good thermometer as to whether or not you're doing well in abiding in love with God. The branch has got to abide with the vine so you've got to be connected. And I'm saying prayer is one of the main expressions of that.

Number two, and "I commend you to the word of his grace." Do you see that in verse 32? "To the word of his grace." Anytime we get that word "word" put in a sentence, you start to think



about the propositional teaching of what God has said. Now, thankfully, we have the 27 books of the New Testament, the foundation of the apostles and prophets and their work codified and you got 27 books in your leather-bound Bible and here we have that word of grace. Now, you had it depicted in the 39 books of the Old Testament as we foresee it, but now we have it. So you got all 66 books, and I can say today, 2,000 years after this, I could have said it within a few decades afterwards after this, here is the codified propositional. You can read it in the language of your own mind. Here's the word of grace, what God says about himself and how you rightly relate to him by the grace of God, it's the Bible.

Now, this sounds like an old, you know, old geezer sermon, but the old geezers were right. You need prayer, Letter "A." Number two, you need Bible study. You better be studying the word. You better be meditating on it day and night. You ought to be going to know what is right by reading the book, not just by figuring out whether that smooth sermon sounds like a good one to me or not. It doesn't matter what your gut says. What matters is what the Bible says. Prayer and Bible study. Two of the main staples that'll keep you on the path. The word of grace.

So much endurance, so much perseverance comes from your involvement in the Scriptures, right? If I'm supposed to help people hear the voice of the Shepherd, I better get the word of God, the words of the Shepherd, and I'm utilizing the Bible in my own life. So I'm sure to reflect the biblical truth. Prayer to God. Bible study. Biblical input. How about the third part of this passage, "which is able to build you up"? There's the strength part, "to give you THE inheritance among all those who are sanctified." The inheritance.

I don't want to repeat last week's sermon because we don't have time for it, although I'd be willing. It's all about the "then and there." It's about me storing up for myself treasure in heaven, it's about me keeping "my mind set on things above" to quote Colossians Chapter 3 verses 1 through 4. I want to have my mind set on those things. I want to wait for the blessed appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. I want to see the faith of my Christian life be made sight. I want Christ to return. I want the kingdom to come. I want the future. I want the inheritance. The inheritance is coming. We don't have the inheritance yet. We're just qualified for the inheritance. But we're going to get the inheritance, "then and there."

Number three. Let's put it this way, Letter "C," we need an eternal perspective. I cannot tell you how connected it is to have an unselfish ministry mindset if you have an eternal perspective. Prayer, Bible study, an eternal perspective will keep you from twisting the truth. Because truth twisters are always thinking about the "here and now." I mean, just think about even, I use the prosperity preachers, the televangelists as an example. No one could be more focused on the "here and now" than those guys. All I'm telling you is keep that eternal perspective and you'll worry much more about God's approval than whether or not you get the applause of people. And you'll fight the temptation of a selfish ministry to make much of them so they don't make much of you. Because all that'll matter for you is what you're going to hear from the Shepherd when he comes back to evaluate your work. Did you follow that one?



Last one. "Among those who are sanctified," right? You're going to get the "inheritance among those who are sanctified." Sanctification, that word, that Latin word "Sanctus," which translates to the word "Hagiasmos" in the New Testament. That means "holy." Holiness, this really is the word if you're looking at your Greek New Testament, the word "holy," among all those who have been "holied." What does that mean? Sanctified. They're in a process of continually reflecting on the outside of the life what they have in the inside of their life which is a new heart. The problem is you're wrapped in this thing called the flesh and there's always, as Peter said, this battle of the desires and passions of your heart against your core desires. That's a battle.

When Paul got to the end of his life he said, "I fought the good fight" because it's a fight. Again, I don't think there's anyone who is going to be tempted in a selfish ministry to twist the truth if they know, I know the Christian life's going to be hard and it's a battle and it's a fight. They're going to call people to suffer hardship with me as a good soldier. Not, well this advice, this counsel, this ministry, it's going to be easier for you and make your life a little easier. We just know the Christian life is not going to be easy. So the fourth thing that's going to help you, that key to faithfulness, number four is battling temptation. It is all about saying, I know the Christian life is a battle. I'm expecting a battle between here and the time I can say on my deathbed I fought, past tense, the good fight. Because I'm going to fight it between now and then. That's what sanctification is all about. The sanctification is the process.

Of course, there is a positional sanctification. My justification is a way to speak of my positional sanctification. I am made holy as a child of God in a judicial sense. But now my life has to reflect that and that's the battle of sanctification, ongoing progressive sanctification. And all I'm telling you do you see that as the mindset, as the weather forecast of your Christian life between now and the time you die? You keep that in mind with prayer and Bible study and an eternal perspective and fighting the good fight of faith. If you keep those on the forefront you'll care less about whether or not your churches grow or your ministry grows. What you'll care about is being faithful to the Lord and hearing from him, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Now, Elijah was a prophet of God, a powerful prophet of God, and he served the people of God and he was a servant of God. He served the people of God with a real view on getting the approval of God. And we can applaud him as a great and powerful man of God. But I tell you, in First Kings Chapter 19 he was failing. And the reason he was failing wasn't because he'd never gotten out of his chair to serve God. He had gotten out of his chair to serve God. But sadly, he got so beat up and so bruised and so persecuted for doing that he said, I'm done.

And it's kind of telling in light of our little analogy about getting out of the chair the way that First Kings Chapter 19 puts it. It says "he went a day's journey into the wilderness," here it comes, "and he sat down." He sat down "under a broom tree." Which, by the way, look it up. A broom tree is a nice, tightly knit set of branches. It creates a nice little canopy of shade. So he finds a shady spot and he sits down and he's done. Jezebel is chasing him down. The bad



guys from Jezebel and Ahab's administration are coming after him. He's in the desert and God shows up and he says this. These are biting words. "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Now the omniscient God knows the answers to all that. But he says, what are you doing? Elijah responds, "I'm sitting down under a broom tree. What do you think I'm doing." No, what are you doing? You're sitting down. You're right, you're sitting down when I've told you to get out of your chair and get to work. You're sitting down. And so Elijah has got an answer, and he goes and argues with God about the fact that "I'm the only one and everybody's after me, and I'm down and there's nobody else. And it's terrible and Baal's winning and I'm losing and I'm just tired. It would be better if I'm dead."

And God says it again a second time. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Implication click. You shouldn't be here. You shouldn't be sitting down. You should get back to work. An old Scottish preacher put it well when he's preaching on this text and he added some color and commentary to the words of God. And let me read it for you as he preached this sermon so many years ago. He says, "What are you doing here, Elijah? The sword of persecution has been unsheathed. Jezebel is out to get you. I get it. But my bleeding flock has been left by you to the ravaging wolves. Get up." Then calls him this, "You lazy shepherd. What are you doing? I know you're beat up. I know you're tired," and he calls him cowardly. I mean, I won't even quote the rest of the sermon. Cowardly shepherd. The flock has been left by you because you're tired of being out of the chair. You want to sit down in the shade.

I know this sermon I'm hoping to motivate people who are new to the church, who don't have a ministry post. I'm hoping to encourage people who have a ministry post. If you don't have a ministry post, I want you to have one. But there are people sitting here today, I know for sure, who have had the ministry post, they've done it for years, they're tired, they got scars, they just want to coast. Maybe they're coming to this church because they got beat up at the last church. They think, "I just want to just sit down in a shade. I'm fine with chairs face-to-face. I'm fine with chairs side-by-side. I just don't want to get out of the chair."

Let me encourage you. It is worth it because the sword of persecution has been unsheathed. It's time for us to recognize that every servant needs to be ready to serve. All hands on deck. What the church needs in our day of persecution as the walls of culture continue to close in on us is for everyone to grab their ministry post and unselfishly represent God with untwisted words. Straightforward upright words that aren't trying to be smoothed to get the applause of people. We want to be faithful to the Lord. We need servants. I hope you'll be a servant.

Why don't you get out of your chair right now, let's stand up and I'll dismiss you with a word of prayer. Pray with me. God, we need this sermon. I know we need it because there's a day of frustration and fatigue that all of us seem to have after serving. And we need reminders as to why this is important. Some people in this room, I'm sure, like me, have been tempted. Maybe just because we feel like we're making too many enemies by telling the truth, to try to soften the truth, maybe to compromise, somehow just to change things up and slow things down and smooth things over. Just help us, God, to be faithful to you. Let us always speak the truth in



love. But we want to speak the truth. We want to represent you well. Whatever our service is, whatever our task is.

And for those who don't have a task, maybe they're not even in chairs face-to-face yet, I pray that they would get not only in chairs face-to-face, but even today they might consider how they might serve. I pray that by the time anyone goes to that Awana table, they'll say hey we're overwhelmed with workers. We got people from the first two services. God, I pray today though that we look for a place to serve, even if it's just starting through the Partners Program and helping one other Christian grow in their Christian life. Maybe it's hosting a small group. Maybe it's doing something that you'd have us do and then to not grow weary because we're always in your word, we're always on our knees in prayer, we're always looking to the finish line, and we recognize how important it is to continue on in this work, to understand this work as something that you one day will evaluate and we want to hear from you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." So, God, we are grateful that we have a battling challenge of sanctification and we want to fight that all the way to the end. Encourage our people here today in this church and be pleased as we work in the day of difficulty for your glory in this place.

In Jesus name, Amen.