

Sermon Title: Be Ready To Minister (Part 1)
Scripture Text: Acts 13:1-2 (Acts #29)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-19-23

Our venue is Acts Chapter 13; that is where we return to the Book of Acts this morning. We are going to see the church in the city of Antioch, and how it was used to launch the international outreach to Gentiles led by the Apostle Paul.

I told you when we first mentioned Antioch that this is why that ministry that we have been involved with for 20 years now is called "The Antioch Initiative"—because this is the first Gentile church to train, equip, send, support, and receive back missionaries. And of course, Paul's emphasis was on the "Gentiles" (Rom. 1:5; 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7)—and, well, *that's us*.

Our passage takes us back there; Saul and Barnabas are back there at the beginning of this chapter. Remember: They were there, and then they were warned by a prophecy from God about a "famine" that was coming (Acts 11:28), and the church at Antioch took up an offering and sent it by means of Saul and Barnabas to the church at Jerusalem. Now, they have come back, and we are at a turning point in the Book of Acts.

Last we saw Peter, he was on the lam from the goons of Herod Agrippa I, who wanted to find him and re-arrest him after God sent an angel to free Peter from prison just the night before Agrippa had planned to mock him and have him put to death in public. We are going to see Peter only *once more* in the Book of Acts. *Now*, we turn to the ministry of the one that we call the Apostle Paul—Saul of Tarsus, *gloriously* saved and transformed back in Acts Chapter 9.

In the passage that we come to, this is not a Gospel passage. This is *presuming* that we *know* the Gospel—"that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is for those of us who belong to Him. This is the historical record of the launch-pad, if you will, of the ministry that has eventually led to *us* being in Christ. This passage is rife with applications that we here at Heritage Bible Church, and every other church in the world, *should make* concerning how we minister.

I have about ten more verses until I can quit fumbling and stumbling every time that I try to remember to call him "Saul" instead of "Paul." You are going to see when he first came to be known as "Paul."

There is kind of a section here that goes from Verse 1 through Verse 13; and as I started studying, I realized, "You are *not* going to get to the end of that," but it is still a unit, so we will call this a "Part 1"—and we are going to cover a whopping *two verses* today.

Now, don't forget: I have given you *whole chapters* two weeks in a row, so we are showing our versatility here. Today, we are going to marinate a little bit.

And I want to suggest to you that as we look at these verses—which are not *commands* to the Church, they are the historical record of what *actually happened* when this ministry to the Gentiles was started—I am going to suggest that a "swarm of Be's" will help you learn and remember how to apply this for us.

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What do I mean by "a swarm of Be's"?

1. Be In The Right Place
2. Be Ministering
3. Be Willing To Go
4. Be Ready To Work Hard
5. Be Prepared For Opposition
6. Be Ready To Stand Strong
7. Be Ready To Harvest
8. Be Ready For Discouragement

We can extract those very valid principles to apply to ourselves today. So let's start with: Be In The Right Place. Acts Chapter 13, Verse 1—"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Now, let's pick that apart a little bit. Two groups are mentioned: "prophets and teachers." "Prophets" played a significant role in the first generation of the church. The New Testament had not been written, and God gave to the Church gifted men called "prophets" and others—see that in Ephesians Chapter 4, Verses 11 to 16 (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28). These were preachers of His Word. Not only did they *proclaim* the Word, *sometimes* they received new revelation (1 Cor. 14:30; Eph. 2:20; 3:5). For example, it was a prophet named Agabus, who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, who told them about that famine that led to Saul and Barnabas going to Jerusalem to help knit together Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ; we saw that back in Chapter 11.

Prophets faded from the scene as the Apostles faded from the scene. "The signs of a true apostle"—as Paul called them in Second Corinthians 12:12 (cf. Heb. 2:3-4)—were phased out, as were the Apostles (e.g., 2 Tim. 4:20). And as the New Testament was completed, the fullness of the revelation that God intended for His Church is completed, and there are no more "prophets" in that sense (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18).

Then the other group is "teachers." "Teachers" is the office that remains *to this day* after the "prophets" faded from the scene. Now we know *what* to say—it's in the Scriptures—all we have to do is *say it* (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2). And in Ephesians Chapter 4, in that "gifted men" passage it uses the expression "pastors and teachers" in a grammatical construction that links the two words together. "Teachers": those who teach; "pastors": those who shepherd—"teaching pastors" or "pastor/teachers." That's why we use that terminology in our Heritage Bible Church documents—"Pastor/Teacher" or "Teaching Pastor"—to distinguish the one or the ones among the elders who especially labor in the Word and "teaching" or "preaching" (1 Tim. 5:17).

It is interesting that not only did he mention "prophets and teachers," but the Holy Spirit deemed it important to have Luke record the *list* of these primary teachers and preachers and prophets in the church at Antioch. I think there were more elders than this, but these men are listed. Look at the names:

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"Barnabas"—well, we have met him already; he was introduced back in Chapter 4. It tells us he was also known as "Joseph," although the only place that "Joseph" is used for "Barnabas" is in the verse that says that he was also known as "Joseph": that's Chapter 4, Verse 36. So to us he is, and always will be, "Barnabas."

We also know he was a "cousin" of John Mark (Col. 4:10), and John Mark is going to play a significant role on the page of our Bible that we are looking at, when we get there.

Barnabas has already appeared several times in Acts. It was started when he was one of the role models among those who actually liquidated property and assets to minister to the needs of other believers. And Chapter 4, Verse 36, where we met him, tells us that he was a member of the priestly tribe of the Levites, and he was a native of Cyprus. Now, that's more information than you probably realize it is. The priestly tribe—well, obviously, he was a Jew. He was a "Levite"—they were the ones who served in the Temple and in the Tabernacle. But he was also from Cyprus; so he was a Jew, but he was not one of those Judean Jews; therefore, he was a *Hellenistic* Jew—a Greek-speaking Jew. He was from the island of Cyprus, and as you are going to see: Guess what the *first stop* on the missionary journey of Saul and Barnabas was? Cyprus. So God used that connection to launch this whole ministry.

Then, there is "Simeon who was called Niger." "Niger"—probably more accurately "Nee-GEHR," or something like that—means "black." That wasn't his name, but that is how his brothers in Christ referred to him. He might very well have been an African. He might have been a dark-skinned Middle-Easterner, or possibly some combination of both of those.

And then there is "Lucius of Cyrene." He is another one about whom we know nothing except his name that is listed here. "Lucius" is *not* another form of "Luke." Luke is the author of this book and the Gospel of Luke. There is no connection between this Lucius and a "Lucius" in Romans 16:21. So all we know is that he was from the city of "Cyrene." Well, that means *he* was a North-African.

And then there is this man "Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch." Now, what does *that* mean? Well, "Herod the tetrarch" is "Herod Antipas," the Herod that you read about in the Gospels. "Herod the Great" was the one who died right after Jesus was born; he is the one who tried to kill the baby Jesus. And someday in the Book of Acts, I'll break out the Family Tree of the Herods (see back of this transcript), which is like a master train-wreck—they are all problematic. But the one you see in the dealings of the life of Jesus—that is Herod Antipas.

The word that is translated "had been brought up with" could also be translated something like "foster brother." This guy had been reared *in* Herod the Great's household along with Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas. Now, wouldn't you like to know the rest of *that* backstory? Can't wait to get to Heaven—I'll ask him! My best guess is that this man—or his parents, more likely—were servants in the household of Herod, so they came to be regarded as family. Servanthood—slavery—was not *then* what we think of it.

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And whatever the case, it is clear that this first predominantly Gentile church was *not* composed of a bunch of people, all from super-strong spiritual backgrounds. God is turning to the Gentiles—and *right away*, we have Gentiles who have *already* matured to the point of spiritual leadership in this church.

And of course, the last in the list of teaching and preaching leaders in Antioch is "Saul." Of course, that is Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul. He will be the main character in the rest of the Book of Acts.

Now, two notes about this list that I would like you to see:

As we look at that list in Verse 1, *they were all different*. It included Jews and Gentiles. It included people of different ethnicities, people of different linguistic backgrounds. Now, Ephesians 2 would not be written until about 20 years later, but as it says in Ephesians Chapter 2, it was clear that in Christ, that "middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile, as Paul describes it—that's been "broken down" (vs. 14, KJV); it has been taken away. *All* of the things that would divide people are taken away in Christ, and we are "one in" Him (Gal. 3:28; cf. Jn. 10:16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11; Rev. 5:9). "The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" was *very much* at work here in Antioch from the beginning (Eph. 4:3).

The second thing that is significant about this list is that *it's a list*—there were *several* of them. This is an *early* glimpse at something that will be fleshed out later in the New Testament—the principle that we describe, in shorthand, as the "Plurality of Elders" in each church (e.g., Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; Jas. 5:14). That means that there is more than *one*. And notice that these men are "prophets and teachers," so the silent implication is that there were likely *others* who were recognized in that church that we would call "elders" (1 Tim. 5:17) or "overseers" (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1) or "shepherds of the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2). Those three words are used interchangeably: "elder," "overseer," "shepherd." Stay tuned for when we get to Chapter 20, and you will see some wonderful things that Paul said there to the elders of the church at Ephesus.

So, the first lesson to learn about being ready to minister is to hang out with the right people. Or, I call it: "Be In The Right Place." Put yourself where there are godly teachers and servants of Christ (cf. Prov. 13:20a). It is *not insignificant* that all these men with such diverse backgrounds are all mentioned here, and they were all ministering with *one* mind in *one* place.

You know, the idea of a "parachurch ministry"—ministry outside the church—you will not find that *anywhere* in the New Testament! Now, that's not to say that parachurch ministries are all bad, as long as they are *para-church*; "para"—the Greek word *para*: "alongside"—the "church." There may be some sort of organization that can come and *assist* local churches—for example: missions organizations, like we work with the Slavic Gospel Association and Spread of Grace Ministries; there are other ones who serve local churches by providing resources and services that go beyond what any one church could do. That is a legitimate kind of a thing. But *any ministry* that is not *intimately tied* to the local church or churches is *suspect*, and I do not recommend *ever* supporting them!

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Because we know *the one thing* God is doing on Earth these days: He is "building" His church" (Matt. 16:18; cf. Acts 2:47), and we want to be a part of that. Any ministry that does not require its leadership to be members of local churches, and endorsed by the elders of those churches—that's a recipe for *disaster!* If you want to be part of what God is doing in the world as He builds His "church...the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; 5:23; cf. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24), start with being as deeply rooted as possible with the local church.

Now, I have said *countless times* over the years: You do not need a church in order to be saved. As a matter of fact, "church" *cannot* save you. Being "saved" (Acts 2:21; 4:12; Rom. 5:9; 10:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5)—being "forgiven" (Rom. 4:7), being "born again" (Jn. 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:3)—that is purely a matter of "hearing" (Rom. 10:17) and "believing the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13), putting your faith in Christ alone (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5), by "faith" alone (Eph. 2:8-9), based upon the Bible alone (2 Tim. 3:15); *that* is how you become a Christian; *that* is how you get saved.

But I have said an *equally countless* number of times that *once you are saved, you cannot practice Christianity apart from the local church* (Heb. 10:25; cf. Prov. 18:1; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:22), because the *instant* that transformation takes place, the Holy Spirit *places you in* the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), where He gives you spiritual gifts—and we *all* need *all* of those gifts (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:16; 1 Pet. 4:10), and we become "members of one another" (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). It's *significant*—this little list here!

So, let's move on. First, as the "Be's" begin to swarm, is: Be In The Right Place. Then: Be Ministering.

And here comes the launch of the worldwide ministry to reach Gentiles. Verse 2—"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' "

Now, relax—I know there are eight "Be's" in the swarm here; we are only going to get to these two today. So, let's see what we can draw from this.

In that situation—while the miraculous gifts were still operating, before the New Testament was completed—it simply says: "The Holy Spirit said." We are not told *how* (cf. Acts 10:19; 16:6-7). Obviously, He put it in the mind and the heart of those "prophets." Obviously, they came to one mind about it. And first in that list of the leaders of the church were those "prophets," and this is one of the times when, obviously, the Holy Spirit gave direct revelation to the church through those men.

Very simple, very clear instruction: "Set apart for Me..." "Set apart" is the same word for "holy"; it means "distinguish them" (e.g., Ex. 8:22; Lev. 27:21; Deut. 10:8; Jos. 16:9; Ps. 4:3; Rom. 1:1)—"Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." It was specific, and it meant that "Barnabas and Saul" were to be in charge of the team that would carry out these instructions—a very specific thing God had called them to do.

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And we know what that thing was, because remember: When Saul got knocked silly and made blind outside the gates of Damascus, God sent a man named Ananias to come out from the city and greet Saul and bring him in; and Ananias was, not surprisingly, not *thrilled* to say, "Oh, sure, I'll go out to the street and meet that guy who is coming to town to *kill us all*"—he had some misgivings about that! So, back in Acts Chapter 9, Verses 15 through 16, we found out what God was going to do with Saul: "The Lord said to him"—to Ananias—"Go, for he"—referring to Saul of Tarsus—"is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." There is a two-verse summary of the next 15 chapters—and other things beyond that, actually. "The work" was to take the Gospel to Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire. We are going to be exploring that—city by city, event by event. And notice, Paul always went to the Jews first—we will see that (e.g., Acts 13:46; 17:1-2; cf. Rom. 1:16)—then he would go to the Gentiles.

But for our consumption today, the second lesson for us to learn and apply together is: Be Ministering. Look again at Verse 2—"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said..."

First, let's tackle that word "fasting." It is interesting. It means: going without food, or even a certain *kind* of food or a certain *class* of food—something like that. It is *always* associated with spiritual crises or momentous events or crucial decisions, when we see the people in the Bible practicing it. There is *no place* in the New Testament where we are *ordered* to fast; and only *once a year* was it *required* for Israel under the Law, and that was to be on "the Day of Atonement" (Lev. 23:27)—Yom Kippur. The Pharisees turned that into: It is *absolutely mandatory* that you "fast twice a week" (Lk. 18:12). We will see some of that as Paul's testimony when he had been a "Pharisee" (Acts 26:5).

But *all other cases* of fasting in the Bible—other than the Day of Atonement, and that does not apply to us because we are in Christ, who is the "once for all" atonement (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18)—all other cases of fasting are *voluntary*. Jesus spoke some *very strong words condemning* people who make a *show* of fasting: It is in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, Verses 16 to 18. And the instruction there is not: "You must fast." The instruction there is not about *when* to fast. Jesus says, "*If you choose* to fast, do it *privately*, between you and God, and let God reward you as He deems appropriate."

I thought somebody was spoofing me one time—this was back a long time ago when you used to get stuff in the mail—and I opened the mail, and this was on a pastors' mailing list, and this was [an invitation] to a "Fasting Conference." "Let's all get together and fast." I did not see Matthew 6 on the breakout sessions for this "Fasting Conference." "Let's all get together and *show everybody* how we fast!" And I kid you not: The *first* event was the "Welcome Lunch"! We can mess things up pretty good, right?

They [the "prophets and teachers" of Antioch] were "fasting" because they were doing the work of the Lord, and it was their desire to just set aside everything else. So don't get snagged on thinking you must be a spiritual failure because you don't practice fasting. That *is not* the point of the passage. It just means they were *very serious* about what they were doing.

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The important takeaway for us from here is that if you want to be ready to minister in more and more fruitful ways, Be Ministering. So, we are going to park here for a moment. I can *thrill* a few people in the room who have taken New Testament Greek. Are you ready for this? The rest of you, just pretend you know what's going on. "While they were ministering" is in a Greek participial construction known as "genitive absolute." Greek can do something that English cannot do, without several words. This describes "what was *going on* when the other thing happened." It is in the present tense also, which means this was the *ongoing* activity in this group: This group was "*ministering*." They were *constantly* "ministering." That's what they did—"ministering."

So, what do we mean by "ministry"? Well, it is the Greek word that is used *many* ways outside the Bible, but when it is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint—it describes priestly service; in other words: *specifically religious* activities that serve the people who are there.

Now, that is not to say that these men considered themselves Old Testament priests—they did not; or that they considered themselves in some way to be *mediators* between God and man—they understood that is Christ, and Christ alone (1 Tim. 2:5). But it *does* mean they *took very seriously* that their ongoing, everyday responsibility to teach people God's Word and to serve them any way that they could for spiritual growth—that is what they were all about (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 4:2).

The life of a Christian is to *be* a life of "ministering" (Heb. 6:10; cf. Matt. 10:42; Matt. 25:35-36; 1 Thess. 5:11; Philem. 7). The second "Be" in the swarm is: "Be Ministering." And the life of a spiritual leader is all about ministering in a fashion such that others are built up to be ever-better able to minister to one another (Eph. 4:11-13).

And would you notice another little morsel here: "They were ministering *to the Lord*." Wait a minute! What does *that* mean? The Lord *God*? What does *He* need? How do I "minister to the Lord"? I know that if *you* need food, I can "minister" to you by giving it. If you need encouragement, I can "minister" to you by doing that. How do you "minister *to the Lord*"?

Well, here's how that works. I promise you, you will make yourself crazy if you try to be a Christian and you don't catch on to what it means to "minister to the Lord." Our ministry is poured out on *one another*—we teach, we preach, we pray, we admonish, we encourage, we practice "the fruit of the Spirit" toward one another (Gal. 5:22), we "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), preach the Gospel to anyone that will listen. And if you invest like that in the lives of other people around you—starting with your church family, but also in your biological family and your overall sphere of influence, whatever you have in the world—if you invest like that, *God will use you*.

But, if you *do* that with the motive of *wanting to be liked*, or even *wanting to be accepted*, or *wanting people to serve you in return* (Lk. 6:33)—if that is your motivation, it won't take long for you to become discouraged, disillusioned, and *profoundly* disappointed (see Gal. 1:10). The *only* kind of ministering that truly matters, and that lasts for the long haul, is "ministering *to the Lord*."

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Let me give you an illustration: You are familiar with Ephesians Chapter 5, Verse 18—"Be filled with the Spirit," and then he says other things that go along with being "filled with the Spirit," and the last of those is: submitting to one another as to Christ (vs. 21). Then he says, "Here's a 'for instance': Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*. Husbands, love your wives *as the Lord loves His Church*." In other words: You *do this for "the glory of God"* (1 Cor. 10:31). You cannot fix your husband—he's a jerk! He's *depraved!* And *so are you*, and he can't fix you! But he can sure "love" you "as Christ loved the Church," and you can "submit" yourself to him *because* you are submitting to the Lord—who is at work in him and who is at work in you. That is "submitting *as unto the Lord*." That is like "ministering to the Lord."

If you want to be used more and more fruitfully for the glory of God, pursue falling deeper and deeper in love with the Lord Jesus Himself, and seek opportunities to serve Him by serving His people in the church.

These men whom God used at this crucial juncture in His plan to build the "Church" with His Son, Jesus, as the "head" (Eph. 1:22)—they are described as "ministering to the Lord." They wanted, more than *anything else*, to please God (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thess. 2:4). It is a *joy* to serve with people like that! They found joy in sacrificing their time and energy for each other, and for the church in general. It was never their own agendas that mattered (Acts 20:24). It wasn't *defending* their "turf" (e.g., 3 Jn. 9-10). They did not say, "Well, Niger is the representative of this clique over here, and Manaen is the representative of these others." No, they *all* wanted to glorify God.

When we dedicated this building, we came up with something; it's on the window outside the office up there: "The Seven Commandments..."—I didn't want to do ten; I didn't want to be in competition—"The Seven Commandments For The Things That Happen Here," and it's all about things like not staking out your "turf," always beginning what you do calling on the Lord. That is "ministering to the Lord."

That was the circumstance in which God lit the fire under these crucial men to take the next step of launching Barnabas and Saul. Don't expect God to lead you if you are not *already* ministering in pursuit of serving Him!

Someone once told me the cliché when I was a young Christian, and the cliché is true: "Even God cannot steer a parked car." Ever tried to turn the wheel of a parked car, even before the days of locking steering wheels? Doesn't do any good—you don't get anywhere. But get that car *moving*, and a little bit of pressure will guide it. Be Ministering!

And my friends, I decided to park here and finish it here, because this is something that changed *my* life—this concept of God leading when you are "ministering to the Lord" was quite foundational to my development as a Christian. Godly men *challenged* me to do things, and that was *good*. And as I *did* things, I learned more about how to *do* things, and how to relate to people, and all of that. *This passage* was one of many that God used to show me this in the Bible.

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Now, as I study and preach books of the Bible, I always read ahead; I want to make sure I know where it's going, so I don't say something in Chapter 1 that I have to apologize for in Chapter 4. I read ahead. I also read commentaries. Sometimes I like to listen to sermons from other expositors that I appreciate and trust.

And looking to this passage, I listened to John MacArthur's sermons on it. They are from 50 years ago, when I was at Grace Community Church. It was the end of my second year of seminary. Marsha and I were just about to celebrate our first anniversary. And prior to that, when I finished college, when I entered seminary, the elders of that church had asked me to serve part-time on the church staff. I went to John MacArthur and I said, "Hey, do you know anybody in the church that maybe needs somebody part-time, where I could just earn enough for my gas and my tuition? I get to live with my parents while I'm in this year of school, and I just need a way to make it through." And he said, "Um, let me see if we can find something for you to do around here." And they came back, and they offered me this part-time job. I wondered what they were smoking to choose *me* to serve in that capacity, but I did.

And at first, my duties were very basic: I drove buses; I called first-time visitors to the church to follow up and speak to them; I set things up every Sunday; I took things down after every Sunday. The year before that, I had served in the Sunday School teaching junior high boys; that was at the urging of the youth pastor, who was one of my seminary buddies, and he convinced me to do it—well, for one thing, he was very persuasive; another thing is that he provided me with the curriculum because he knew that *I* wasn't ready to write anything on my own. And God had mercy on those poor junior high boys, and I don't think any of them apostatized because of me. But I found out how much I loved teaching junior high boys, and went elsewhere.

So then, we got married. And I said, "You know, I can't make it on this little bit of salary. Thank you for this year of experience; it's been fantastic." And *again*, my friend John said, "Well, let's see what we can do," and they found a few more things for me to do, and the *big one* was: They put me in charge of their cassette tape ministry, which had been all-volunteer before that, and it was burning out volunteers at the rate of about one every three weeks.

By the way: That ministry has now become "Grace to You Worldwide." When I was starting there, we had put together a brochure to explain this *incredible* new technology called "cassette tape." It was a *big deal*! You can *take it with you* wherever you go! We have *battery-operated players*, and all of that.

Well, they put me in charge of that, and the first good decision I made was to hire Marsha. "We need to have a lot more tapes, a lot more cassettes on hand, because there is so much demand now." So, she and I had the privilege to work together in that behind-the-scenes ministry.

And I remember *hearing that sermon* on this passage. And in the midst of it, John mentioned the value of seminary. And he was right—there were several of us attending seminary from that church.

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Scripture Text: Acts 13:1-2 (Acts #29)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-19-23

Now, you *can*, on your own—and you *should*, on your own—read and study Scripture (Deut. 32:47; Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; Jer. 15:16; Acts 20:32; Col. 3:16). It is food for your soul (Matt. 4:4; 1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Pet. 2:2); and the better you can *self-feed*, the more healthy you will be.

But, seminary is like learning to use *power tools* to build the house, rather than hand tools. You know, if you are strong and young and know a little bit, you could build your own house from scratch. With a hammer and a hand saw and a pulley and a lever, and maybe a friend here or there, you could do the whole thing. But you could do it *a lot faster*, a lot more *efficiently*—possibly even *better*—with power tools. It doesn't change the *meaning* of anything, but it makes you more efficient in the process.

So, when he came to this portion, my pastor-friend John mentioned that the value of seminary training is *greatly enhanced* by being given responsibility for systematically ministering in the local church. And I suddenly realized that *my* position as this fledgling young member of the church staff *was not* merely an act of compassion so that we didn't starve; it was *more* than just paying our bills; it was an *essential* part of God's plan for *my growth* toward a lifetime of ministering.

And ever since then, as I look back, I regard the excellent theological education that I received, and the experience I gained working with other pastors and elders and volunteers—we had *dozens* of volunteers in that tape ministry, and I had to guide them—and working with them and all the flock: *That was of equal value* to the education! One plus one equaled about *nine*, in that case. The education and the experience, the experience and the education—they came together (see Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 10:1-9; Acts 16:1-3; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; Phil. 2:22; 1 Thess. 3:2).

Seminary is a great blessing, a great stewardship for those who go through it. But that's for *a few*. Ministering is *not* for a few, it's *mandatory for everybody*! A Christian *not ministering* is an oxymoron! We are *ministering*—that's *the context in which* we have the leading of the Holy Spirit! Yeah, it's not prophets telling us who to send on a mission field, but that is how the Holy Spirit works: it's among people who are ministering!

So, if you want to be used by God to the fullest, follow that swarm of "Be's":

Number 1: Be In The Right Place—where their spiritual leadership is valued and respected (e.g., Phil. 2:25, 29; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17).

Number 2: Be Ministering any way that you can. Look and listen for something that needs to be done, and see what you can do to help. And that is how you learn what you are good at; that is how you learn what blesses *you*; that is how you learn where you have the most joy in service; that is where you find out what is best left to others.

Just do that for a decade or two—you'll get a pretty good idea of how God has gifted you.

Or, you can just sit on the sidelines and let everybody else do the work, and you will *never* know the full joy of serving by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Do you want some ideas for opportunities?

Well, when this church service is over, the Food Pantry Ministry launches for this month. Pitch in! They can always use more hands.

Ask about helping our finance committee with counting and accounting and budgeting—there's always work to do *there*; and, you know, it is pretty important to pay the bills so we have lights on, and stuff like that.

Become an assistant to any of our children's ministries teachers. Volunteer for the "Twos and the Threes"—last I heard, the waiting list is not long to get a position to work in the nursery or the "Twos and Threes."

Or, hunt down Larry Howell, our Facilities Manager, and ask him if this 45-year-old building needs anything done. I think he will hesitate for a millisecond, and say, "Yes."

Go to our men's or women's Bible studies; listen to the prayer requests there, and ask the Lord if there is some way you can help with being an *answer* to one of those requests.

Or, read through our weekly Prayer Guide, and make it part of your prayers to ask God how you might help someone that you pray for along the way.

Go on a short-term missions trip; we are dispatching Pastor Scott twice in 2024, Lord willing. See if you can tag along. Or, we may put together a team to go somewhere and do something. Russia is sort of like not available right now, or I would take you with me there.

Volunteer for the upcoming Christmas outreach. Dirk and Kerry put on this *incredible* Vacation Bible School, and then every Christmas they do a one-day version of that. It's a good place to test the waters. Ask them if you can help in December. Or, go with them to the convalescent homes that they visit on Sunday afternoons.

Do you get the point? "While they were *ministering*"—that's when the Holy Spirit began to move.

And we will stop there before we look at the other six of that swarm of "Be's."

Let's pray:

Father, thank You for showing us how You led in these early days of this ministry to the Gentiles. Have Your way with us as we accept the baton and carry it on through our generation to the next generation of believers in Christ. Grant us much fruit, we pray. Grant us courage and boldness and stamina and joy along the way, as we seek to minister as You would have us to do. You know each of our hearts. You know each of our needs. Deal with us in whatever ways will bring You the most glory. And give us wisdom to discern that, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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