



34 | ACTS 20:13-24

A MODEL OF SUPERNATURAL MINISTRY

Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing.

Outline

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A Satisfying Sacrifice

Call to Worship

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. —Lamentation 3:22-23

Songs

Psalm 23 (I am Not Alone)
He Will Hold Me Fast
Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah
Lord I Need You
Jesus Strong and Kind

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

It is Mother's Day, and I was thinking of things I would never hear my mother say.

"Let me smell that shirt—Yeah, it's good for another week."

"Please just leave all the lights on...it makes the house feel more cheery."

"Go ahead and keep that stray dog, honey. I'll be glad to feed him and walk him every day. You don't need to worry about anything."

"Don't worry; you don't have to brush your teeth today."

I heard about two children who ordered their mother to sleep in on Mother's Day. She woke up at her usual time none the less and looked forward to breakfast in bed **as the smell of bacon and eggs** floated into the bedroom.

She waited for a while, but then her curiosity got the better of her, and she went downstairs to check what was going on. Once in the kitchen, she saw them sitting at the kitchen table, eating breakfast.

When they saw her, smiles spread across their faces as her son said, "As a surprise for Mother's Day, **we decided to cook our own breakfast.**"

Seriously though, I think of John Wesley who said,

I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England.¹—John Wesley

One of the biggest and most significant tasks facing the church today is to **raise the next generation of strong believers**. Is there a more pressing task than for us to leave behind an army of theologians—our own daughters and sons—stronger than we proved to be? It is a task to which every woman and man in the church is called and which demands the best from us. **Some of the toughest theological questions are asked between supper and bedtime.**²

One of the things that bothers me the most is that parents think that if you send kids to church, they are going to **go in a sinner and pop out born again**. The church is not a **toaster oven**. I don't think anyone would actually articulate it that way, but it is seen in how little mothers and fathers spend in family worship. Can we all agree that we need the Lord to build our homes?

Psalm 127:1 | Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

My heart today as we consider what Paul says to the Ephesian elders, is to realize that the greatest pastoral ministry happens in the home, and **the greatest missionaries are missionary mom and missionary dad**. The following is from the 'Farewell Sermon' of Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening in New England.

Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family

¹ John Wesley in Carolyn Custis James, "The Dreaded T-Word and Why Women Avoid It," ed. David A. Powlison, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Number 3, Spring 2003 21 (2003): 77.

² Ibid, 78.

education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, **all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.**³

Did you hear what he said? He said if you fail at family worship, “**all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.**” Edwards said, you’ve got to lead your children personally to God, or all the other stuff you do for them—Sunday school, children’s church, Bible memory—it’s all vain. Sounds like

Now let me give you some encouragement. You cannot do what only God can do, but you can lead your children to God. We can’t just bring our children to church or have them memorize a Bible verse and they be saved. They need to learn from you what it is to worship God.

The Ephesian elders learned from Paul’s daily example. He led them in worship, and he led them in life. So let’s consider this morning Paul’s understanding of ministry. For him anything divine that happened in the life of another was a miracle. **We can’t give our sons and daughters new hearts.** God has to do that.

The **church of the living God is a living organism** created by the Spirit of God. The congregation of the saints is a miracle group of people that have been touched and built up by the Spirit of God. We are the army of dry bones that God told to live (*cf* Eze 37).

The Lord must build his church. **Man cannot reproduce what is supernaturally birthed.** What can we do? We can follow Paul as he follows Christ. We are not talking about methodology, but his dependence on God to birth the church. Consider the words of Spurgeon.

Key Thought: Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without the wind, branches without sap, and like coals without fire, we are useless.
—Charles Spurgeon⁴

We see in Acts 20 how the birth and growth of the church looked in Paul’s life and ministry. What was his view of ministry? How does this kind of Spirit-enabled, supernatural ministry take place? Supernatural ministry occurs with a radical surrender to service to God.

1. SERVICE TO GOD (20:13-19)

When it came to serving God, Paul counted himself as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). **Paul was totally committed to serving God.**

Commitment means different things to different people. Consider the **young man who waxed eloquent in a love letter** to the girl of his dreams, saying,

My dear, I would climb the highest mountain, swim the widest stream, cross the burning desert, die at the stake for you!

P.S. **I will see you on Saturday if it doesn’t rain.**

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1* (London: F. Westley & A.H. Davis, 1835), 418.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon. “A Revival Promise” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, volume 20 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1874), 18.

Paul was not like that! Paul had a total surrender in his service to God.⁵ How do we daily, consistently, have that heart of surrender to God.

SERVE WITH A HEAVENLY MINDSET

Paul's highest desire was to "**serve the Lord with gladness**" (Psa 100:1). He could have said, "**the joy of the Lord is my strength**" (Neh 8:10). He said he had worked harder than all the other apostles, and I do not doubt him, especially since the Holy Spirit inspired his statement (cf 1 Cor 15:10). But what drove Paul to have such power and energy and perseverance in his service to God? He made sure **his heart set on heaven**.

Paul decided to **travel separately** from his team. It seems, more than anything, he needed time with the Lord, **time to reflect and pray**. Paul said, "I fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor 15:32). He had just raised the body of a slave boy in Troas. He needed some time with the Lord. So **Paul went separate from his team** going by foot instead of by ship like the rest of the team.

Acts 20:13 | But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, **intending himself to go by land**.

The distance between Troas and Assos was about **twenty miles**, about **a day's journey on foot**. Paul determined to walk that distance. It seems he wanted to be alone. The others agreed to meet Paul at Assos, boarded a coasting vessel, and sailed away.⁶

Imagine Paul walking that day as he climbed from the coastal plain into the low hills and walked on the common highway. By midday, from the mountaintop road, he had one of the superb panoramas of Asia Minor: On his right hand across the narrow strip of sapphire water of the Aegean Sea. From the heights of the mountains, **he could see several of the cities of the seven churches of Asia Minor**. His heart went out to them.⁷ Most of all, he had some solitude with the Lord. As he walked, he reached the final crisis of his life: **whether to turn back or to press forward**. Undisturbed except by sheep with their bells, guard dogs to bark at him, and donkeys and a camel or two, he was able to learn his Master's will and reach the conclusion that he "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." I can just hear him praying alone that road on the mountaintop along the Aegean Sea. Maybe he spoke the words he had written to the Romans.

Romans 8:35, 37-39 | Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul needed to get alone so he could maintain his heavenly mindset. One of **the problems of a busy life** is the **lack of time to be alone** with God. Paul evidently felt the need for spiritual renewal. This third missionary journey had been extensive and strenuous. Do you have a heavenly mindset?

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 276–277.

⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 20:13.

⁷ John Pollock, *The Apostle: The Life of Paul* (John Pollock Series) (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 232-33.

Colossians 3:2-3 | Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

You cannot be effective in supernatural ministry unless you have your heart and mind set on the supernatural. We have died to this life, and we need to be living not in this age, but in the eternal age that has already begun. You are here on earth, but your heart should be always with Christ. Indeed, God has **“seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Eph 2:6).

Some struggle with being **more concerned about job and money** than meeting with God’s people on the Lord’s day or about daily helping each other grow and change. **This is a fleshly mindset that grieves the Spirit.** Many of God’s people are living without the daily joy and encouragement of the Spirit’s ministry. A lot of our problems in life will be solved when we fully surrender and submit to the new life and the Spirit’s ministry of joy and love and fullness will overcome us.

SERVE WITH A HEART FOR PEOPLE

Paul had **God’s heart for people.** How did Paul do so much in so little time? He did not stress about many things. Instead, it seems he was very orderly in his planning. He boarded the ship with Luke and Timothy and others and took time to reflect and to consider his plans and priorities. He let God guide his heart to kingdom priorities. **Paul travelled through five port cities in about five days** and landed at Miletus.

Acts 20:14-17 | And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵ And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. ¹⁷ Now from Miletus **he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.**

Paul knew **Ephesus was not safe** to return to at this time. Yet he was able to rest and plan for the next steps. The coasting vessel Paul boarded at Assos would have traveled along the inner sea lanes so that Paul could see the shoreline. Paul was a veteran traveler, but **the peace and beauty of the voyage must have been balm to his soul.** We can see him sitting on the deck in the shade of the great mainsail, **enjoying the breeze and the sun,** drinking in the scenery, thinking about what would be doing next.⁸

He wanted to return to Jerusalem and **bless the saints** with the offering from the churches, but there was something he needed to tend to first. The holy land had been going through a famine, and the believers there were in dire straits.

But something perhaps **worse was happening at Ephesus.** There were **false teachers starting to enter into the Ephesian church.** He called for the **Ephesian elders** to meet him in Miletus, about 30 miles from Ephesus. Paul could be safe and still address and instruct these elders. God loved these elders, and so did Paul.

How vital it is that we truly learn to love the body of Christ, and to care for one another. Paul cared for the church at Ephesus and made it a priority to meet with them. It **takes a heart of love** and commitment to people to be intentional and responsible to encourage others in the body of Christ. So he **arranged a meeting** with the Ephesian

⁸ Ibid., Ac 20:14–15.

elders, to bid them a **final farewell**. Paul served with a heart for people, but he went a step further. **He trained godly men** to shepherd God's flock.

SERVE WITH HONORABLE MEN

Acts 20:17 | Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

Paul always had a team with him, if possible. He was careful to find the faithful, honorable men and train them for leadership. He did this for three years at Ephesus. His audience is variously described in the passage as **elders, pastors, overseers, or shepherds**. The word "**elder**" is *presbutos* in the Greek ("presbyter") and refers to a mature person who has been selected to serve in office (14:23). These same people are called "**overseers**" in Acts 20:28, which is *episkopos* or "bishop." They were chosen to "**feed the church**" (20:28; cf 1 Pet 5:2), which means "to shepherd." Paul called the local church "a flock, (20:28–29), so these men were also pastors. (The word *pastor* means "shepherd.") Thus in the New Testament churches, the three titles *elder*, *bishop*, and *pastor* were synonymous. The qualifications for this office are given in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.⁹

Paul had ensured that a **plurality of elders** were appointed in the churches he planted (see Acts 14:23), men who would look after the people as shepherds look after sheep.¹⁰ Speaking of these leaders in the church, the writer to Hebrews calls on Christians to follow the ministry of their elders.

Hebrews 13:17 | Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Paul told the Ephesian elders that he **was leaving Asia Minor**. He had completed his missionary activity there and was entrusting the future of the church at Ephesus to the bishops and elders, the pastors and shepherds of the people there, and he gave them various instructions. At this time, **Paul's heart was heavy**, as were the hearts of all assembled, because they recognized this as Paul's farewell address.¹¹ Paul was telling them that they had a heavenly responsibility placed upon them for the lives of the saints. If God saves people, and he does, and **he appoints men to oversee the souls of the saints**, and he does, then there should be a mutual accountability for all believers in Christ's local churches.

God builds the church, and **he commands all true believers to be a part of a local church**. It's not an option. It's not just a "nice thing" to do. It's a command. We are called **never to neglect the assembling** of ourselves together. We are called to live life as a body, being **equipped by the teachers and pastors** (cf Eph 4:11–12; Heb 10:25). Because of this, elders have a very high and holy responsibility. Consider the words of John Calvin, one of the reformers of the sixteenth century.

So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of his church that he considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 486.

¹⁰ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 576.

¹¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 424.

from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments. —John Calvin¹²

We are all called to do the work of the ministry. **We cannot live the Christian life as lone rangers.** We need the entire body to function (Eph 5:11-16; 1 Cor 12). **God called Paul to raise up godly men** to oversee the growth of the Lord's church.

SERVE WITH HUMILITY

We say, **"To God be the glory, great things he hath done."** Truly, there is no room for boasting except in our great and compassionate God who gave his Son for us. When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, he was clear about **how lived among them with humility**, not taking any credit for what was done among them. God deserved all the honor and glory, for he had done great things.

Acts 20:18-19a | And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ **servicing the Lord with all humility.**"

The proper demeanor of a servant is **humility**, and Paul frequently pointed to that quality as a major hallmark of the Christian life (Phil 2:3; Col 3:12; Eph 4:2). Humility is important, of course, because **the opposite of humility is pride**, and pride is a great danger for those who are in prominent positions of church leadership.¹³

The man of God must understand that **the church of God is built by the Lord.** There is no room for pride in skills or eloquence. Paul insisted on boasting in his weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9 | He [Jesus] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast **all the more gladly of my weaknesses**, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

"Isn't it amazing," Paul might have said, "that God could do such great things through **people like me who are so weak**, barely making it because of suffering and persecution?" Paul gloried in his weakness. Most of all, Paul gloried in the cross of Christ, which, by the ministry of the Spirit, is what did the work to build the congregation of the saints across the world.

Galatians 6:14 | As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Humility is a complete God-dependence and a self-forgetfulness where you are fully aware of the transcendent presence of God. It's not thinking less of yourself, but it is not thinking of yourself at all. It is a magnification of the Lord in all things, so that there is no room for self.

SERVE WITH HARDSHIP

Our ministry takes place in enemy occupied territory. Christ builds his church in the territory where Satan prowls, seeking to destroy every effort.¹⁴ Paul

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1012.

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 344.

¹⁴ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 580.

reminded the Ephesian elders of his trials through the plots of the Jews and how he never gave up on them despite the intense suffering he endured.

Acts 20:19 | Serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

You cannot serve the Lord effectively without great suffering.

2 Timothy 3:12 | All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Paul, as a good and qualified shepherd, was **willing to suffer in order to rescue and protect the sheep**. He served with many tears and stood firm against the wicked one's distractions and discouragements. He **didn't let the pain of ministry harden his heart**.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 | We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

We are going to have to persevere in hardship as the saints. We are all ministers of the gospel, and that requires **thick skin and a big heart**. **Don't let the discouragements** of the wicked one make you **jaded or bitter or cynical**. Keep a soft heart toward the saints despite the suffering you have to endure. How else does supernatural ministry occur?

Paul served the Lord with joy and gladness. He never slowed down. Supernatural ministry comes when we realize that we serve God, but God must give the increase.

1 Corinthians 3:6 | I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

We do serve. We do plant. We do water. But God has to do the miracle of growth. Paul's first way of supernatural ministry **was service to God**.

2. TEACHING FOR THE CHURCH (20:20)

Another way supernatural ministry occurs is through **the teaching of the word of God**. As we preach the word with the Spirit's power, we will God's power to transform resting in the hearts of God's people. This is why Paul would not shrink back from teaching the word.

The **word is profitable**. It conforms us into the image of Christ. Paul held nothing back of the word of God in his teaching. He saw clearly that his obligation toward the church was to teach. As he wrote in Ephesians 4:12, the primary task of leaders in the church is "to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ"—a goal that can only be accomplished through the consistent, thorough teaching of God's word.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD TEACHING

Acts 20:20a | How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

Paul reminds the Ephesian leaders that he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable. **Shrink** means “to draw back” or “to withhold.” **Paul held back nothing of the wise counsel** and holy, sovereign purpose of God; he withheld no doctrine, exhortation, or admonition that was profitable.¹⁵ Remember Paul’s charge to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 | I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

We are not to fear man, but God and to preach the whole counsel of God’s word.

Acts 20:27 | I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

We are not called to edit the word. We are called **to declare it.** We are called to “guard the deposit” of the word (2 Tim 1:14). We are to lead with the word, not the culture or the constantly shifting values and morals of this age. It is the Spirit through the ministry of the word that transforms people. If we want a supernatural ministry, we have to be committed to the **supernatural word** which is able to transform us (*cf* Jas 1:18).

I don’t have a choice in declaring the whole counsel of God. God requires it of me. God’s going to ask of us as pastors and elders,

“What did you keep back?” What were you afraid to preach? How much of my counsel did you declare to the people under your care? It was your task when I consecrated you to **hold nothing back**, to proclaim the whole counsel of God.”¹⁶

Pray for your shepherds. We don’t want to hold anything back.

THE APPLICATION OF TEACHING

Acts 20:20b | How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

Paul wasn’t concerned that the people just have a better life, or great Bible knowledge. **Paul was concerned that the people knew how to walk profitably in the word of God.** We are called not to be “hearers only” but “doers” of the word, walking in the word and applying it to our lives (Jas 1:22). The word of God is sufficient and powerful to change your life and transform your heart (*cf* Heb 4:12).

2 Timothy 3:16-17 | All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We believe the Bible is sufficient. While understanding science and psychology and personality types can be fun and helpful, we don’t rely on any of that to achieve the Lord’s purpose for our lives. We are called to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ

¹⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 213.

¹⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 346.

in our hearts and character, and only the word of God by the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit can bring that about.

Psalm 119:105 | Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We believe that the heart change God wants for us can only be experienced through applying the word of God through faith, believing God and knowing him in a personal way as he reveals himself in his word. You cannot know the true and living God outside of his revelations of himself. **The whole purpose of your life is to know God and to be changed into his image as you love and worship him.**

Everything we experience in life—every trial, tribulation, and test—every victory and joy—they are all meant to conform us to the image of Christ as we gaze on his glory through the word of God (Rom 8:28-29).

THE ARENAS OF TEACHING

God's word is not just to be taught **publicly** on the Lord's day, but also **privately** from house to house.

Acts 20:20c | And teaching you in public and from house to house.

Paul did not just teach the word to people in **public**. He was concerned with the saints' everyday lives in **private**. Paul did not go to people simply as a scholar instructing them in theology; his heart was with them. He wept and prayed with them and endured all manner of attacks and suffering from hostile hands for their sakes.¹⁷ He taught them both publicly and personally. He had "refrigerator rights" at their homes. Whether in public or in private, the servant of Jesus Christ does not fail to declare the profitable truths of God's word. How else does supernatural ministry occur?

3. EVANGELISM FOR THE LOST (20:21)

No view of the ministry is complete that fails to have a proper perspective on reaching the lost. Paul saw himself as an evangelist, having a mandate to reach sinners with the truth of the gospel. So intense was Paul's concern for the lost that he cried out, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).¹⁸

THE RECIPIENTS OF EVANGELISM

Acts 20:21a | Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks.

No one is excluded from the gospel. **Pagans are welcome. The religious need Christ too.** Christ's body is made up of every culture. God wants his churches to look like heaven.

Revelation 7:9 | I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes.

Our **King's marching orders** were:

¹⁷ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 346.

¹⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 215.

Mark 16:15 | Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Acts 4:12 | There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

God's "**commands all people everywhere to repent**" (Acts 17:30). He's "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Every nation under heaven is called to come to Christ. Remember the striking words of Ezekiel to Israel.

Ezekiel 33:11 | As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

If you don't know him, turn to him. He has no pleasure in you perishing apart from his favor forever. He wants his heaven full! He says,

Luke 14:23 | Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.

THE RESPONSE TO EVANGELISM

Acts 20:21b | Testifying... of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's method of visitation was not just to leave a cheery greeting and an invitation to church. His purpose was to confront people with the claims of Christ, with the need for repentance and regeneration. It did not matter to Paul if it was a Jewish home or a Gentile home, a pious home or a pagan home. His message was to the point: repent and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹

A biblically sound gospel presentation must contain two components repentance and faith. First, it must include **repentance toward God**. *Metanoia* (**repentance**) is a rich and important New Testament word, meaning "to change one's mind or purpose." It describes a change of mind that results in a change of behavior; it is the conscious act of a sinner turning from his sins to God.²⁰ **Repentance means to have a complete and radical change of your worldview, how you see everything.** This is not possible through human means but is a gift from God.

Faith means to entrust your soul to Christ, believing he substituted himself for us, to satisfy the wrath of God, and that he rose again and gives us his Spirit. We now live the life of faith since our heart is God's abode.

THE REWARD OF EVANGELISM

Acts 20:21b | Testifying... of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our reward is that the lost can know the Lord Jesus Christ. What is it that we preach? Redemption in Christ. Cross-shaped, Christ-centered preaching is vital. Paul had a cross-shaped ministry. What does that mean? **It's not my works that gain me heaven.** It's

¹⁹ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 20:21b.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Acts.*, 216.

Christ. It's not my church attendance. It's not my perfect life. No, it's Christ alone. Jesus said,

John 14:6 | I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Ephesians 2:8-9 | For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The way through the narrow gate is to come through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He takes our robe of shame and sin, and we get his perfect record. Isn't that amazing! Put your faith in Christ and his work! He said, "It is finished." There's nothing left for you to do except to hate your old life and receive Christ and his eternal life. How else does supernatural ministry occur?

4. SACRIFICE OF SELF (20:22-24)

Supernatural ministry comes as we **give all of our selves in sacrifice for the Lord and his church**. Paul was all about the supernatural ministry of God. He knew nothing depended on him, but it all depended on the Lord. He was willing to give all he had for the Lord to use him, but the Lord had to do the work. All believers are called to give our lives away for Christ.

A SPIRIT-LED SACRIFICE

The world is all about take, take, take. But Paul wanted to give **everything** for the Lord, even if it meant his own death. When the Spirit is leading, **you have God's power to do the hard things**. You can do whatever he calls you to do!

Acts 20:22-23 | And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, **constrained by the Spirit**, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Paul was constrained, or literally "bound," by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. The prophecies were clear: great suffering and imprisonment would await, but the Spirit was leading Paul to anyway.

How was it possible that Paul could go to Jerusalem, which would lead to his death in Rome in 67 A.D., not to mention close to ten years of imprisonment in various locations? It's the Spirit of God that led him to give all. Let the Spirit lead you, for **when the Spirit leads, he also empowers!**

A SELFLESS SACRIFICE

Paul sacrificed all for Christ, even his comfort and eventually his own life.

Acts 20:24a | But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself.

What happened to him was of no consequence (cf 21:13) when compared to the high and holy call on his life. John the Baptist said it well, “**He must increase, but I must decrease**” (Jn 3:30). My life is worth anything only as I reflect Jesus Christ and am conformed to his image.

A SATISFYING SACRIFICE

Paul was constrained by the Spirit to finish his ministry.

Acts 20:24b | If only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Dear saints, one day it’s all going to be over. The race will be done. Only one thing mattered to Paul: to finish the work God had given him to do. And what was the product of Paul’s life? He wrote thirteen books in the New Testament, and seven of them were written from prison. He makes his testimony clear to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:7 | I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Whatever your pain or sacrifice for Christ is, it will not be wasted. What about you? Do you realize that whatever pain and suffering you go through, it’s worth it to be a part of this **supernatural ministry**? Jesus says,

John 15:5 | **Without me, you can do nothing.**

That you is a “ye.” It’s plural. It means the church can do nothing without Christ.

Conclusion

Oh, mothers (and fathers), we want you to see the work of supernatural ministry in your home. If you will surrender to the Lord, you can’t even imagine what influence you will have on your child. And by the way, children grow up don’t they?

First Lady Laura Bush recalls one overnight visit with her husband in the home of his parents, the former President and Mrs. Bush.

George W. Bush woke up at 6 A.M. as usual and went downstairs to get a cup of coffee. He sits down on the sofa with his parents and put his feet up. And all of a sudden, his mother Barbara Bush yelled, “George, Put your feet down!”

George’s dad replied, “Give him a break, Barbara, he’s the President of the United States.”

And Barbara said, “I don’t care. I don’t want his feet on my table.”

The president promptly did as he was told. What’s the point of that story? Mothers have a profound influence on their children, and **even Presidents have to listen to their mothers.**

Dear mom, lead your children to Christ. **You don’t have to be an Ephesian elder or an apostle to do so.** You have all the means of grace at your fingertips in your well-worn Bible.