

Church Planting

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[0:00] We'll begin our reading at Romans 15 and verse 8 and read through verse 24. The Apostle Paul says, For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy as it is written.

Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles. I will sing hymns to your name. Again it says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples. And again Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations.

The Gentiles will hope in him. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. So that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another.

[1:17] I've written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done, by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Rather, as it is written, those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand. This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain.

[2:51] I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Could you read with me in the book of Revelation chapter 1, please?

You remember that John was on the Isle of Patmos, and the Lord appeared to him, the Lord Jesus, in great glory. We won't read that part.

We just want to start in verse 9 and read to, I think, verse 12 or 13. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches in Ephesus, to Ephesus and to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands. And it's interesting that John did not say that he first saw the Lord.

[4:19] He first saw what the Lord was in the middle of. I saw seven golden, and they were golden, very important, lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man.

And then if we go on in the passage, in verse 20 at the end of the chapter, the Lord Jesus tells John, As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand in the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, the ones we mentioned, those cities we mentioned, local churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

I turned around and saw seven churches, seven local churches that were lampstands. There is nothing really good about darkness.

I can only think of two uses of darkness right now. Maybe you can think of other ones. One is to let you sleep. And sleep is a... something that God gives us for our weakness.

We won't need it one day. And the other thing is to hide things. You do them in the dark when you don't want them to be seen. Otherwise, darkness is in the Scripture a great problem.

[5:44] Darkness is always an image of sin and darkness is a prelude to doom. Always. If darkness stays, there will be doom. If no light comes, there will be doom.

And the Scripture says that local churches are lampstands. And where there are no lampstands, there is darkness. Sometimes in a church like this, we ought to feel like, and I think we do feel like, we are literally bathed in light.

Sometimes when the Lord draws near to us and we see the scene of Calvary and we understand who God is and we're looking at this, God came from heaven to earth and here He is suspended on a cross.

This is God. And I know who God is like. And He's full of love. And it's flowing out. And no man can imagine and feel the greatness of this scene as our Lord on the cross is suffering so.

And He says, Father, forgive them. And on it goes. And we see all of this. And we see the grace that flows from those wounds.

[7:03] And we understand that God is a God of infinite, wonderful, generous, tender, forgiving, loving grace. And our only problem is that we really don't have the words to say it.

What you feel sometimes as a Christian, you just wish you had the tongue of an angel. Because you know something inside. Your mind has been enlightened to see something of the love of Jesus Christ.

And you just want to say, there's no way to tell it. There's no way to tell it. It's a wonderful thing to have light. To have light on who God is and who Christ is and His grace.

And it's a very, very terrible thing where there's no lampstand and where there's darkness. When I was in Africa, I had some Africans' friends, well, we went from village to village at time, evangelizing.

And in these villages in Africa, there was great darkness. There were no churches. There wasn't even electricity. And sometimes in some of these villages, I was the first white man that some of the children had seen.

[8:13] And as soon as they saw my white skin, they ran screaming with fear. They thought I was a ghost. But the really pitiful and awful thing was when your friends take you out because there are no bathrooms and you go out into the forest for your needs and you run upon a tree and the tree's wearing a shirt.

And you ask your friends, why is there a shirt on that tree about this high? There's a shirt. And they say, this is the God of the village. This is what they worship. And then you go into another village and there's a little house.

It looks like a dollhouse. It's about that high. And you say, what is that for? And they say, well, the God of the village lives in that house. And He's a God that one day a year requires every but one to insult everyone else.

The mother insults her son. The man insults his wife because this is what their God wants them to do. To be hateful and spiteful and mean.

And you go into another village and in African village where the mud huts are, there's never a fence. But here there's a fence around one hut. And nobody goes in.

[9:36] Why is that hut special? Well, in that hut, there's a living human sacrifice. There's a man who has to live in that hut.

And he never can come out. They take his food in and there are bones in that hut of the men who have died because that's what their God wants.

And you talk to a friend. He's a university student. He's a smart fellow. And he says, I grew up in abject fear all my life of the gods and the witch doctors, the God in the river, the God in his, the God in that, who were gods that cursed us.

And I was always wearing fetishes somewhere on my body because I crossed by this animal. It might mean a curse. Or this God. I did something that he didn't like.

It's pitiful, isn't it? Here we are bathed in light knowing the wonder of the love of God. And there are people all over the world that live in this sort of darkness.

[10:43] Who live and grow up and have distress and die. Lambstands are a wonderful thing.

So we're going to talk about planting lambstands, planting local churches. And I'm going to go to several different passages in scripture. If you want to turn with me, you can.

The first one is in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 10. We'll begin in verse 8. Paul says, To me, though I am the very least of all the saints.

And he's not exaggerating here. There's a reason why he says that. This grace was given to preach to the Gentiles. And really, the word Gentiles doesn't quite get it.

To preach to the pagans. The people who worship trees with shirts on them. And demons. To preach to the pagans.

[11:43] Yes, the pagans. Those people. The unsearchable riches of Christ. And to bring to light for everyone what is plain of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

So that through the church, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God in the plan of salvation might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Even in the cosmic spiritual world, it will be through the church that God makes known His great glory in salvation.

salvation. So, God has a plan. God has a mission today in the world. He's always had it and He is now pursuing it through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The King has come. The Kingdom has come. The Kingdom of God. And that Kingdom is spreading. And that Kingdom is going to cause all things one day to be summed up in Jesus Christ.

[12:55] All things. There will be a judgment and God will redeem a new world unto Himself. and He will change everything. Everything. His kingly power and His kingly grace will be spread abroad.

He'll be like the dew upon the mown grass everywhere. Christ and kingly grace will fall like the dew upon all men and all creatures that make up that redeemed world.

And that's what God is doing. He's doing it now. And all these places all over the world. My friends in the south of France and in certain parts of Africa that work specifically with Muslims have told me in the last several months we are seeing more Muslims come to Christ in the last five years than we've seen since the year 600 until five years ago.

There are mass, there's a massive movement to Christ going on in North Africa and Algeria right now. Ted Tripp who you might know told me that he was in northern India which has historically been a bastion and a fortress of Islam.

Very difficult to evangelize in northern Africa in India. And he tells me that he was there and the news from there is that great numbers of people among these Muslims are turning to Jesus Christ.

[14:15] Now you're not going to hear about it in the media because even the people who are there are keeping it down. They're not, they don't care if it's publicized. It will be publicized one day before God's face.

But these things are happening. I spoke to a man in the south of France, I stayed in his family over the weekend and he told me that he thinks that in the last eight years he's heard 500, he's personally been there to hear 500 testimonies of converted Muslims in the south of France in meetings that they're holding called Oasis meetings.

They rent out a big hall, they invite Muslims, lots of Muslims in the south of France here, and they have a converted Muslim come and give his testimony. Just really amazing.

So God is at work and the scripture teaches that it is through the church in this verse. We see it very well that the great wisdom of God, the saving wisdom of God will be made known even to cosmic angelic beings and is in this very moment the church is God's means for accomplishing this worldwide, universe-wide, cosmic purpose of glorifying his name and making his name to be known is great.

In the New Testament, the church, big C, the universal church, is expressed and manifested on earth through local assemblies, also called the church.

[15:54] Now, you may have noticed this interesting thing that in the book of Acts and other, in the epistles, when scripture is referring to local churches, it doesn't call them part of the church.

It calls them churches. They are ecclesia. They are the ecclesia in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus.

Now, my hand is not a body. I can't call it a body. The reason why is it doesn't have all the organs and members that a body has.

All by itself, it's just a hand. But a local church can be called the church. Do you know why?

Because it has all the different parts that make up a church today.

God gives gifts to every local church. Every local church is a charismatic fellowship. It has gifts from God.

[16:55] Every gift that he's giving today bestows upon local churches. Those churches have pastors and elders and deacons. People with a gift of mercy and of giving and of ministration and of teaching.

And every local church, for all the people around who don't know Christ, every local church is a microcosm through which anyone who doesn't know about all these things can see what God is doing cosmically in building a glorious church.

But they can already see it by seeing a local church. In the book of 1 Timothy, Paul gives directions about how Christians are to behave in the local church in Ephesus, because that's where Timothy is.

He's in Ephesus. Paul's left in there. And he gives them in three chapters directions about how to run the prayer meeting, and how to choose elders, and how to behave in the local church. And then he says an interesting thing in chapter 3 and verse 15.

Maybe you want to turn there and just take a second. Verse 14, he says, I hope to come to you soon, but I'm writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

[18:14] You see, he's talking about this local church, but he refers to it almost as if it was the church, how to behave in the church of the living God, the household of God.

So what we need to understand is that Paul says that God is achieving and accomplishing his cosmic glorious purposes to redeem man, and as John read in the Old Testament, to make the greatness of God's name known among men and make them rejoice in who God is and his sheer greatness to be their greatest joy.

Well, God's accomplishing that purpose through the church, capital C, and that means on earth through the churches, local churches, because that's the expression that God has willed for the church, the universal church to have now.

So let's think about how local churches accomplish God's purpose of bringing the gospel to the world. We read in Revelation that God's lampstands in the world to bring light where there's darkness are local churches.

There are seven lampstands in the book of Revelation because there are seven local churches in different towns. Now, what is a lampstand? A lampstand is a source, is a fixed source of ongoing light.

[19:41] Is that a good definition? A lampstand. It's a fixed, it's not a flashlight, that's a mobile source of light. It moves around, okay? A lampstand is a fixed source of ongoing light.

Isn't that what a church is? It's a resident, fixed, localized source of life-giving light to that locality where it is, ongoing. And a local church can do what nobody else can do and nothing else can do to bring the gospel to people.

Here's a reason, a couple of reasons. Well, you may say, well, Paul went around preaching, he brought the gospel to a lot of people, and he wasn't a church. He could do that, it's true, but Paul can be in one place at one time, and Paul's going to die, isn't he?

Paul gets old and he dies. But you know, the churches that he planted, they don't live one generation like Paul or any other evangelist. A church goes on from generation to generation to generation if it's faithful, doesn't it?

The church of Charles Spurgeon, built in London, is wonderfully preaching the gospel today. It's outlived many of its generations, what, three, four?

[20:57] Those people have gone on as individuals, but the church, the local church of Jesus Christ, is a glorious living entity that you just can't make the thing die, except we can by unfaithfulness.

So it can be a fixed ongoing, and I mean ongoing, for generations and generations, men and women and little children in the London region have been enlightened by metropolitan tabernacle.

And today, I think they're busing in a thousand children from unchurched families every Sunday. They must have the biggest Sunday school program in the world.

A lampstand. A local church can do what nothing else can do. There are other reasons for that, because it's only in the context of a local church that individual Christians will be built up and strengthened and given wisdom and maturity that they didn't have as young Christians, so that they will be effective, more and more effective witnesses.

If you stick a Christian out in this town by himself and let him stay there for 20 years and witness, it's not at all going to be the same thing. If he's living in the dynamic, living atmosphere of God's household, where God dwells and said, where two or three are present in my name, I am there in a special way.

[22 : 28] And that Christian in that context, he will grow and become a witness in ways that he could not without. Ephesians 4 is the passage of Scripture that teaches us that.

And it says this, it says that God, in verse 11, gave us apostles and prophets in the past, and evangelists and pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

And so, in the last verse, verse 16, rather 15, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

You see, there's something that happens in a church that brings strength and equipping and makes that light shine brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter.

Another thing that can't happen outside the local church is that we cannot get an adequate mirror of the love of God, the love within the Trinity, the love of God for men.

[23 : 56] Jesus says this in chapter 13 of John about evangelism. It's an interesting verse and we must take it to heart as local churches. Perhaps we don't do it, we don't think enough of this, but Jesus says this.

I'm reading verse 34. Verse 34. Verse 34. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

Another passage would be John 17 and verse 21 where Jesus says that they, he prays that we might be one, that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I in you that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

There's something about Christian unity and Christian love about what happens in a local church when you're living together in love. You cannot find anything like it on earth.

[25 : 15] You can't. It's impossible. And when unchurched people come into a vibrant and loving church they go, oh how they love one another.

Oh how they love one another. This is unworldly. This is otherworldly. And this is one of the great things that shines a light into men's minds and says there is something greater than this world.

I've seen it in this church. There are other reasons. I think I'll cut off some of them. But you can see some of the reasons why a local church is special.

God has formed it and it's different. It has hands, it has eyes, it has ears according to 1 Corinthians 12. And with all those different capacities it can do things that a hand can't do by itself.

That an ear can't do by itself. And for all of these reasons the light shines out from the local church in a special and powerful way when that church walks close to Christ.

[26 : 24] Well on the missions field in Africa and in France I have seen and all missionaries have seen that if there is in a locality, in a town, in a village, in a city, if there is a local church that is a living and fruitful church, then that means there is a light and a witness for Christ going on that's totally different than if the missionary is making occasional trips into that place and trying to evangelize.

Once we get a local church planted and it's a wonderful thing to go and evangelize in a place and God does wonderful things, but when there is a church, a whole church of people who are living for Christ and loving Christ and reaching out, we all go, whew, because we know now, now, there is a lampstand planted there and it's fixed and it's ongoing light and it's wonderful for that community.

It's just what they need. Nothing can compare to it. I know you are convicted. I know you are saying, whew, our church needs to be more of a lampstand.

Okay, that's fine. But you can be by Christ's grace, can't you? And you're already being more of a lampstand than you probably think you are. But the Lord makes all of his churches into lampstands. Ephesus, Smyrna, all of them. Well, another thing that we might look at in order to see how important it is to plant local churches is the passage John read at the beginning.

[28:05] So if you'll turn quickly with me to Romans 15, we'll just consider one other short thing as we wrap up this part and then go on. Romans 15.

Now, you may remember, if you know the book of Romans well, that Paul said as he began this letter, he said that he had long yearned to go to Rome.

And he said he longed to go there that he might obtain some fruit there as he obtained among the rest of the Gentiles. Paul knew if I go to Rome, people are going to get converted.

Well, it's nice to have such power, isn't it? He was an apostle, a great power. But he said that. He said, I know that if I come there, there will be a harvest. But you know what?

He didn't go there for five years, ten years, fifteen years. How many? The center of the Roman Empire, the strategic place, and he never takes the pains to go there.

[29:10] Why? What could be so important for the apostle that Rome was relegated to second place? And he explains why he didn't get there in this passage.

He says in verse 20, and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.

But as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand, this is the reason why I have been so often hindered from coming to you.

But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, and he says that he's going to finally make it.

Now, in another place, Paul says, as a master builder, I laid a foundation and others are building upon it. Paul said, I am a missionary church planter, and a missionary church planter has a specific job to do.

[30:14] That's just to lay the foundation. Now, a foundation is not a whole building. Once the foundation is laying, I've done my job, someone else is going to build the building on top of it. that's why I'm leaving Grenoble soon.

I need to lay some other foundations. My job is not to build the whole building. Someone else will do it. But there are too many places where Christ has not been named. He's never been sung.

He's never been praised. He's never been seen and heard with the eyes of faith. And so we've got to get to those places. And we've got to do what? Lay a foundation.

And in the context, that means the foundation of a local church. That's what Paul was about. I can't get to Rome because there's already a church there. There are all these places where there are no lampstands.

None. You have one in Rome. I'll get you eventually. The first thing is planting lampstands. And he says, since I have no more work in all of these regions, he's speaking about the regions near in Albania and Yugoslavia where he was, in Asia Minor, and he says, there's nothing left for me to do there.

[31:27] There's nothing left for me to do. What? Did you share Christ with every single person in that whole region? No. But he did plant several local churches in each region.

His habit was to plant two or three local churches in an area, a region, and then move on because his job was done. Because they were lampstands. And that's how God brings the gospel to the world.

by local churches. So that's what Paul was all about. That was his calling. God calls all churches to be involved in the work of spreading the gospel near and far through planting other churches. churches. We could see many things to underline this, but think with me just briefly about the whole book of Acts. Sometimes there are big lessons and we miss them because we're right in the trees and we didn't see the forest.

Now if we take the whole sweep of the book of Acts, what is happening in the book of Acts? God is bringing the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and we see, that's exactly the progression we see in the book of Acts, and he's doing it by having a string of local churches planted all the way through Asia Minor on all the way and up to Rome.

[32:47] And as the story unfolds, we see that Jerusalem gives a church planter. His name is Philip. He's called an evangelist. He evangelizes in Samaria and he moves off and we find him planting a church in Caesarea and then he settles in and lives there and he has four daughters.

One church planter. Then we go on and we see the church of Jerusalem giving another man. See you later Barnabas. Go up to Antioch. There's something happening up there and people are coming to Christ.

Help them start a church. Barnabas leaves. He's up in Antioch. Then Antioch is strong enough and God says to them, they're praying one day in Acts 13, the leaders of the church and the Holy Spirit says to the leaders, set apart for me Paul and Barnabas for the work I have appointed them to and off they go.

To do what? To plant churches, local churches. And so Paul and Barnabas are sent off. And then a church on their second missionary voyage, another church gives a man for church planting.

His name is Timothy. He's in the town of Lystra and the churches say this is a man who's being used here and in Iconium. He's already going over to another city or another town to help out and he's got gifts.

[34:02] Paul, take him. Take him. There's only two churches in the whole region. Take him. Take him. And Paul takes him. Timothy, we find him everywhere.

He's in Ephesus. He's in Philippi. He's going here with Paul. He's being left behind by Paul somewhere else. And he's involved in church planting. The churches are in different stages and Timothy helps him out in different ways.

Then the church in Jerusalem sends Silas with Paul. Paul goes back to Jerusalem and they have some discussions about a matter. And Silas at first he's just going with Paul to deliver some letters. And he ends up staying with Paul.

And some of Paul's missionary epistles are sent from Paul and from Silas to the church at so-and-so. And he ends up being a missionary. So the church at Jerusalem has sent out another one.

Now if you'll look with me at Acts 20, I want to show you how prevalent this is in the book of Acts. Paul had been in Ephesus, there had been an uproar, there had been riots, and in verse 1 of chapter 20, we find this, after the uproar ceased, Paul sent the disciples and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

[35:25] When he had gone through those regions and given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

I'm not sure how to pronounce all these words, but so Peter of Berea, remember there was a church planted by Paul in Berea, so a man from that church accompanies him.

So Peter of Berea, the son of Pyrus from Berea, accompanied him, and of the Thessalonians, that means of the Thessalonian church that Paul planted also, Aristarchus and Secundus and Gaius of Derbe, because there was a church there too.

Remember, Timothy was from that area, and Timothy, and the Asian, Tychius and Trophimus, these went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

You see all these people, all these churches are giving men, and what are they involved with? Paul, and what does Paul do? He plants churches, and so we find a man like Aristarchus again and again, and in the epistle to Philemon, Paul says, Aristarchus, my fellow worker, my fellow worker.

[36:44] So we know that at least some of these men, if not all of them, were long time church planters with Paul. Some of them might have been on a short-term project. There had to be some collections taken up and given and taken certain places, but certainly some of these men ended up, like Silas, just staying with Paul and planting churches.

So we see all sorts of churches giving up men to church planting. It seems like all the churches are doing this sort of thing. And this is how the book of Acts goes. From one city to another, from one place to another, all across the Roman empire, what's happening is the planting of churches.

And everywhere they're planted, there's light. There's ongoing light from then on, as long as the churches are faithful. In a new way, stronger way, than Paul could give just by himself.

And this is God's way of bringing the gospel to the nations. So much so that we have to get instructions sometimes in the New Testament epistles about how to handle all these people who are doing this work.

in 3 John, beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testify to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

[38:01] Give them some financial help because these guys are bringing the gospel to far lands. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these that we may follow, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

And because this is so prevalent and happening so much, we've got to write letters and tell people how to support these missionaries when they're coming through. And this is the way it happens. Well, I think that's enough to show us that this is indeed the New Testament way of bringing the gospel to all peoples. I want to just end up by saying a few things about a few directions for you as a church that wants to plant other churches, to be involved.

And you already are involved to continue your involvement. Number one, realize that church planning is a spiritual work and warfare. Jesus says, I will build my church, and that means through local churches, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And the gates of hell will try to prevail against the founding of any local church in any place where there is only darkness. darkness. We may be absolutely sure.

[39:19] So, no methodology conceived by man adequately reflects the depth, and I'm reading a quote, of the spiritual nature of church planting. Those who involve themselves in this work regularly stand in awe of the power of God and the truth expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 16.

I will build my church. So, that's the first thing. Second thing is realize that a congregational prayer life oriented toward the worship of God and oriented toward missions is the greatest force for church planting.

You see, in Acts 13, we find out that this is where the greatest missionary endeavor that ever happened in history started in a prayer meeting.

A congregational prayer meeting that was oriented toward the worship of God's greatness and oriented without a doubt toward the issue of missions.

Now, there were in the church in Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, he was a black man, Lucius of Cyrene, Manion, a member of the court of Herod, the Tetrarch, and Saul.

[40:26] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands upon them and sent them off.

It all happened in a prayer meeting. And that's a very important thing. We should look and pray for men who have the desire and qualities needed to be church planters locally or cross culturally. We should pray for them. We should pray that men would be raised up with those qualities. Give us church planters, Lord. Give us men who are lampstand planters. That should be a common prayer in this church.

So I've said realize that it's a spiritual work. Realize the importance of the congregational prayer life oriented toward the worship of God and missions. And then on the local level, as your church grows, you should be looking to see if God's providence is preparing the ground for a church planning effort.

You should keep your eyes open. Are there any special providential opportunities in some place near Bremen or some place in this locality where there is need for a church and and where something is happening?

[41:46] The church in Antioch was planted that way. Some people were moved up to Antioch because of persecution. And once they got up there, they just started telling other people about the gospel and people started responding.

You know what happened next? Jerusalem has its eyes open, the church there, and it says we got to send a church planter. Barnabas up to Antioch because God is providentially making stuff right for a lampstand to be planted in that place.

Was anything happening in a community near here? Are people coming, a lot of them from this place or that place, seems to be interested in the gospel?

That's a sort of situation that we want to look to. What do we do? Well, we could begin Bible studies in those places which would touch people that don't have enough spiritual interest to drive all the

way to Grace Fellowship.

But in that little town over there where we have some of our church members, we could have a Bible study, they come to that. Perhaps you could have a series of special meetings in the local hall that you would rent out.

[42:52] Make them really adapted toward non-Christians who don't know much. Hit those questions that non-Christians out. Well, if there's so much suffering in the world, could God really exist?

Is there any meaning to life? Is the Bible the word of God? What is the gospel? And have some special meetings and get these folks to invite their friends, see if people will come.

There are all sorts of things that we could do for local church efforts. Another reason that might make our eyes pop open and say, well, here's a need for a church plant, is this question.

Is there a populated center where resident gospel witness is lacking? This is another thing in the book of Acts.

Philippi was identified in the scriptures as a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. For some reason, the Holy Spirit makes a specific point of commenting that this was a leading city, an important city, and Paul goes there.

[43:57] And this may not be so much the case in America, but this is the case in all over the world, that where there are populated centers and no strong, vibrant, resident witness, we must go there, even if nothing's happening.

We must go there and make something happen by God's grace. That's a sign that church planting needs to be done. Where are they? Do we even know? We need to find out. A third question is, is there a place where fellow believers need your help in carrying on the work of God begun among them?

Well, that's how the church in Corinth was founded. There were people there. Also, a situation in Ephesus.

There were these 12 men who were disciples of John the Baptist, didn't understand everything right, but Paul lands up there and he asks them questions and he finds out God's been at work here. A church needs to be planted.

I need to help these guys to further things. Is there a sort of situation? Is there a church planted? Is there a small church somewhere that's faithful and that's struggling along and you need to say, we need to help this church.

[45:06] We need to help this church because our work is not only planting brand new churches, but we also need to be strengthening lampstands that are faltering. In fact, Al Mohler, who is an important leader in the reform world, said, give this warning about church planting.

He said, at the same time, we also need this generation of young pastors to go into established churches and revitalize a gospel ministry through expository preaching and energetic leadership. Giving up on the established church is not an option. Some young pastors see church planting as a way of avoiding the challenge of dealing with the people and pathologies of older congregations. This is an abdication of responsibility. That's interesting, isn't it? And we need to love and know and help establish congregations that we can.

Some of them might not even be Calvinistic, but we can help them. Twenty years ago, Steve Martin, the pastor of my sending church in Fayetteville, and I used to attend a pastors meeting.

[46:11] The pastors from the area would come and Steve and I were the only Calvinist in the group. The only Calvinist. When I came back this time, he told me, you know what? All of the men are Calvinists.

Now some have left, but there's a good group of men and every one of them has become a Calvinist. The Lord has used that brother. He's given away more books than probably Baker Bookhouse.

He's just constantly giving out good books to these well-chosen books to these men where they needed something. They needed something, not the five points of Calvinism, but good books. And then maybe as things went along, they said, can you give me more about this guy?

Well, I'll give you this one. You know, it's what I believe. Take it. You like the other ones. And God has really worked. So we need to help other churches. We're strengthening the lampstands also.

The last thing is we need to be praying that God would send workers to the foreign field from your church. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see men, I use the plural on purpose, sent out from this church

to faraway lands and lampstands planted and to know that there's a sister church in this country and in this country.

[47:30] And God gave us the privilege to plant that lampstand for Jesus Christ in that place. And we need to look for men with the certain qualities of cross-cultural church planets and pray that they would have these qualities and help them develop them.

We need people, we need men who adapt well to other cultures because Paul said that the way he won men was I become Jews like a Jew to the Jews. I become like Gentile to Gentile.

I become like one under the law to those under the law. I become, I adapt, I embrace different cultures in order that by all means I may win all.

And people who can't adapt to other cultures never make it in cross-cultural church planning. When they're sitting there saying, yes, but in America we do it better, it never works. I've seen missionaries leave the field because they couldn't make it there.

I had a good friend, I lived with him, he was a missionary, and he just couldn't handle the fact that in the African culture time is not handled in a different way than here. Most people don't have a watch.

[48:34] Certainly their fathers didn't have a watch. They gauged by the sun. And it's in the mentality that if you're supposed to be somewhere at two o'clock and just before you're leaving, a friend arrives at your house, you invite him in, and you'll get to your meeting whenever you get there.

And when you get there, your African friend will understand, oh, you had someone stay. You had someone come by and you stayed with him for two hours and you're two hours late. Of course, that's fine.

That's what you had to do. You must be hospitable. But this fellow, he was looking at his watch all the time. He was an accountant. And he was always frustrated.

Always. But we need men who can adapt to different cultures. We need men who connect well with people, whatever their age or background.

They know how to connect with young people and old people and people of who come from different backgrounds. They're not so into their books that they they're saying things in a way that only the Puritans from the seventh century, 17th century could understand.

[49:41] They've got to be people who don't just preach at people, but relate to them and talk to them. And you have the feeling that you're being talked to by the preacher because he really is thinking about you, not what's on his paper.

We need men who gather people well. They have to have good people skills and attract people to themselves. If you send one, someone to another land, someone who people don't enjoy being around, guess what's going to happen?

So men need to have these certain qualities and work on them. None of us have them perfectly and we all bemoan the imperfections that we have. But we need to send men who lead well, who are leaders.

They can start from nothing because that's what church planning is in a foreign country. They don't need rails already laid down for them that they just tell me what to do and I'll do it because sometimes a lot of times there's nobody to tell you what to do, but you still got to do it.

They need to be people that take initiative and find out how to do things that they don't know, who think and search out the scripture and people see them as leaders and are very willing to follow them.

[50:56] That's the sort of people we need. We need to pray for those sort of people. We need men who can flex and change their ways of doing things. They're versatile.

They can do new things, abandon old ways of doing things. They don't say, well, I do this in this way and if you want anything else, you'll have to get someone else.

There's no way. There's no way that will work. Paul could speak, says one writer, as opportunity occurred to Hebrew theologians, pagan idolaters, cultured philosophers.

His words were always suited to his hearers. He could adapt himself with ease to the work of witnessing to all sorts and conditions of men, be there counselors, soldiers, sailors, ministers of religion, Roman officials, men or women.

This quality, again, is most useful to the missionary and the absence of it accounts largely for the want of sympathy often observed between the foreign worker and those to whom he ministers.

[51:55] Versatility. And then we need men who are tenacious, men who stick with it. If there's anything that's sure to be needed on the mission field, it's perseverance. You've heard the stories about people like Adoniram Judson who didn't see one convert for the first seven years.

By the time he left, there were thousands of converts. In Burma. But one man, an Irish missionary in Persia, modern day Iran, wrote back home saying this, I am not reaping the harvest.

I can scarcely claim to be sowing the seed. I'm hardly plowing the soil, but I'm gathering out the stones. That too is missionary work.

Let it be supported by loving sympathy and fervent prayer. And then I did have one more point. In some situations, more in the third world, church planters need to be men who can figure out a way to get practical things done.

They need to have practical ability. And in Africa, I saw this with amazing men who knew how to build church buildings. They knew how to repair cars that broke down.

[53:04] They knew how to rebuild bridges when they were on the dirt roads and the bridge was out. They could do incredible things. And sometimes you have to have that sort of practical ability.

But sometimes we find people that are alongside us that can help us out when we can't do that so much. But that's what I wanted to share with you about church planning. There are some of the glories of church planning, the absolute necessity of it, and the things we need to be thinking about in terms of being a church planning church ourselves.

And may the Lord bless you as you continue to seek to serve God in these ways.