

Paul's Example

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2015

Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 00] Well, please do be seated, and I'd be very grateful if you'd turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 20. You'll find that on page 929 of the Church Bibles, Acts chapter 20.

We're going to be spending this evening and next Sunday evening in Paul's speech to the elders in the church in Ephesus. Acts chapter 20, I'm going to read the whole of that speech, and we'll start in verse 17.

Now, from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 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, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, 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.

[1 : 54] And now, behold, I know that none of you, among whom I've gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands minister to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things, I've shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

[3 : 27] And when he'd said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all, because of the word that he'd spoken, that they would not see his face again.

And they accompanied him to the ship. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Question.

What are we supposed to be doing? It's a really useful question, that question. It's generally a great help in life to know what you're supposed to be doing.

And it's a great help in church life to know what church is supposed to be doing. What is the work of the gospel about? That's the question we're going to be asking this evening and next Sunday evening.

No one in church work would ever say we are not interested in the work of the gospel. However, one looks around the world and one sees Christians and churches doing quite different things under that label, the work of the gospel.

[4 : 43] So I ask the question again, what exactly are we supposed to be doing as the work of the gospel? What is that work? What does it look like? It's such an important question.

It's an important question for all of us. It's an important question for you if you're involved in church leadership. What are you supposed to be doing as a leader in church?

What sort of work are you supposed to be promoting in the congregation in which you're responsible? When I was in church ministry, I found I needed to be reminded of that issue regularly because I found I easily forgot what I was supposed to be doing.

It's very important if you're leading a group in church. What are you supposed to be doing in your Sunday school class? What's it for? What are you supposed to be doing if you're a leader in Tron Youth or Activate?

There are so many things you could do for an hour or two with a bunch of young people or children. What are you supposed to be doing? What's the Christian thing to do with them? And it doesn't matter whether you're leading a Bible study group or being a church elder, helping with your Christian union as a student, or merely doing the thing that we all do.

[5 : 53] That is to say, interacting with other people all the time, Christians in church, everybody outside church. The same question surfaces all the time and demands an answer.

What am I supposed to be doing here? The beginning of an academic year is a good time to address that kind of question. And so for these next two Sunday evenings, we're going to be looking at Acts chapter 20 and the great speech of the Apostle Paul to the elders in the church in Ephesus.

Now, I don't know how familiar you are with the book of Acts, but the book of Acts is an interesting book in that most of the important action in this book happens in the speeches.

That's where the real action is. And in this speech, we have perhaps the most straightforward and extended description anywhere in the New Testament of what the work of the gospel involves.

Who is speaking? Paul, the apostle, the church planter, the itinerant evangelist. Who is he speaking to? The leaders of the church in Ephesus, which he has been working in and is just about to leave for the last time.

[7 : 07] Paul has had a long association with this church. Two plus years. He made a very brief visit on his first missionary journey. You can find that in Acts chapter 18, a much longer stay in his second missionary journey.

Acts chapter 19. And a very significant work was done by Paul in Ephesus. Turn, please, to Acts chapter 19. Look at verse 10. This continued for two years.

That's Paul's daily speaking in the hall of Tyrannus. So that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Not only was his work influential in the city of Ephesus, but in the whole region as a result.

And it was a work of great breadth. And notice also is a work of depth. We have in verses 18, 19, 20, a massive public repentance with the burning of magic books of a huge cost.

Now, what is Paul doing in Acts chapter 20? Well, he addresses these elders and he tells them that when he is gone, they are to continue to do the same work that he did while he was still with them.

[8 : 28] He urges them to do what he has been doing. Now, folks, let's just pause for a moment. I wonder if you realize just how surprising that is.

Paul, the apostle, tells the regular leaders in the church in Ephesus that when he's gone, they are to continue to do what he has been doing.

That is a remarkable thing. You see, in so many ways, he is not quite like them. He's God's chosen messenger to the non-Jewish world, the apostle to the Gentiles.

It's a unique position. There's no one like him. He's an itinerant and evangelist and pastor and planter of churches. They're not going to be wandering around all over the Mediterranean.

They're going to be sticking in Ephesus. And yet, despite his unique role and despite the real differences in their patterns of ministry, he urges them in this speech to do what he has been doing.

[9 : 35] That is a remarkable thing with huge implications. You see, the heart of the Christian ministry is precisely the same.

No matter whether you're the apostle to the Gentiles or an elder in the church in Ephesus, it's precisely the same. The same work.

And of course, that means that this is a speech not just for Paul, the apostle, and not just for the Ephesian elders, but for us as well.

You see, if Paul's pattern is the pattern for their ministry back then, then it's the pattern for all Christian ministry. You see, there is a shape to Christian ministry and Christian living that is transferable.

You follow the apostle. The elders in Ephesus are supposed to follow the apostle. All elders everywhere are supposed to follow the apostle's pattern. And it's not just for church elders, of course. It's for anyone exercising some sort of responsibility in Christian ministry, which means, of course, that in certain respects, it's for every Christian.

[10 : 46] For every Christian has responsibilities for the work of the Lord with one another in varying measure. There are so many different situations in which the work of the gospel is to be carried on.

From your office, to your home, to your church youth group, the basic work is the same, though the circumstances differ.

This is very important for us. Let me illustrate. One year, when the children were quite small, we went camping one summer holiday in Germany. It was very hot.

Too hot, too hot, really, especially for small persons. And one of the refuges from the heat was the local supermarket. Now, I don't know about you, but I just love foreign supermarkets.

It is such fun finding out about all the weird things that foreign people buy. The most interesting thing about German supermarkets is the sausage counter.

[11 : 48] Because there are so many sausages in the sausage counter. I mean, back at that stage, when we went on holiday, in a regular English supermarket, you found two sorts of sausages, the regular ones and the economy ones.

German supermarkets, however, have brown ones and white ones and pink ones and short ones and long ones and fat ones and thin ones and every combination of all those different variables.

And they're all nicely arranged in neat rows because it's Germany. However, they all have one thing in common, despite their very different appearances.

Slice them open and they are made of pig. It's the basic ingredient to them all. Now, friends, Christian ministries are just like that.

Different people in different situations, working with different groups, different patterns of work, but slice it open. And if that ministry is genuinely Christian, it has exactly the same thing at its heart, never mind its different expressions.

[12 : 56] This passage tells us what the heart is of every genuinely Christian ministry. And so it doesn't matter what your particular responsibility is, whether it's running a home or leading a home group, whether it's being a parent to children or a pastor of a church, whether it's serving in a Christian union or leading a small group Bible study, whether it's being a Christian at work or working as a Christian leader in a church, there is a pattern, an agenda, a way of doing things that everything that's genuinely Christian shares.

Our circumstances in life may differ, but from Paul's example, we will learn the shape of Christian ministry, a shape that every Christian is to promote and be involved in.

Now this week, we're going to be looking mainly at the first part of the speech. And the first part of this speech majors on Paul's example. Next week, we'll look mainly at the second part of the speech.

And the second part of the speech majors on his instructions to the Ephesian elders. But he starts off with his example. And so that's where we're going to start.

Look how he starts the speech in verse 18. You yourselves know how I lived among you. And he goes on about how he lived among them for quite a while.

[14 : 30] Now, folks, we live in an age of self-advertisement. Look at me. Listen to my podcast. Read my blog. Here I am. Love me.

And Paul is often talking about himself and what he did. And one of the things we naturally ask in this age, shouldn't we be a bit suspicious of someone who points to his own example all the time?

Well, we'll find from this speech that Paul does not talk about what he did in order to make people like him. In fact, he's talking to people who are devastated that he's going to be departing from them.

They like him already. No, he reminds them of what he did so that they should be crystal clear in the middle of all the emotion of the departure so that they should be crystal clear about what he was doing and why he was doing it and what they must therefore do when he's gone.

And he speaks about his life and his methods so that they will be reminded that he was authentically following the Lord Jesus. Now, the ideas are packed in here.

[15 : 41] For what it's worth, I think that this is not, I think this is not the full speech, rather a digest of the speech. And we're going to rattle through the detail. It deserves much more time than we can give it.

But first, let me point you to two things the elders know. Verses 18 to 21. You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

He expects them to be able to recall the way he lived. His words imply that he had a consistent pattern of living.

Note the words, how I lived among you from the first day that I set foot in Asia. I've done it all the time. Four things are mentioned in verse 19 about the way he lived.

First, he served the Lord. He reminds them that he was not, first of all, their servant, but the Lord's servant. He was not, first of all, someone who followed their agenda, but first of all, someone who followed the agenda of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 01] This is very important indeed. If your first concern in Christian life and Christian ministry is pleasing people, then there are important, necessary things that you will find it very, very hard to do.

Many people in church leadership want to be liked so much that there are things they just can't do and things they just won't say. But they could remember that he was a servant of the Lord.

There was a higher authority there for him. However, that did not mean that he cared nothing for people or nothing for people's opinion. You see, there are some people who under the guise of serving the Lord are just arrogant and self-centered, unwilling to listen to anyone, not open to correction by people.

Paul was not one of them. Second thing, he did his service of the Lord with, verse 19, all humility. He was not arrogant or proud, not thoughtless, not dismissive of the opinions of others.

He did not consider himself better than others. He served the Lord with all humility. Those always go together. if it's genuine.

[18 : 20] And it's a great combination. Strength, serving the Lord, and humility. I'm no different from you. You are not to serve me. You are to serve him too.

Third, he did it with tears. It cost him. It hurt him. He cared about it. He cared about these people.

And when it was hard, he could not be professionally detached from it. This was not the sort of relationship he had with these people. He was properly engaged with them. It mattered to him what they did.

Notice, verse 19, also, he endured opposition for this work. He mentions this specifically. And with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

He reminds them of what you can read about in Acts chapter 19. He reminds them of what happened to him in Ephesus at the hands of certain people. Now, why does he do this?

[19 : 19] Well, this speech suggests that when he leaves, things are going to get difficult for these leaders. And they need to know that when that happens, it doesn't mean it's accidental.

It doesn't mean that something's gone wrong. When the church starts getting in trouble, it doesn't mean that they're doing the work wrong. Paul's ministry exemplified that from the beginning.

He's always getting in trouble. And when they get in trouble, they need to remember how he handled the difficulties that he got into. Now, why is he calling all of this stuff to mind?

Because if he can make them remember how he did it, the way he lived, the sorts of attitudes he demonstrated, then there is every chance that they will have confidence in what he did and they will keep doing it themselves.

The power of personal example is very important when you're trying to do something difficult. I wonder if you found that yourself, experienced yourself in difficulty and asked yourself the question, what would this person do or that person do or the other person do?

[20 : 42] I remember when I was in London involved in leading a student Christian union, it was the mid-80s, all over London there was some very dodgy but attractive looking teaching going on in the Christian unions and everybody was up for it and I wasn't really up for it but I was on my own in not being up for it in my Christian union and I used to think to myself, am I a real Christian?

Am I really taking issue with the right things? And once upon a time I remember thinking to myself, what about Dick Lucas? Dick Lucas was the minister of the church that I was involved in.

I asked myself two questions. One, am I convinced that Dick is a real Christian? Answer, yes, I'm absolutely convinced of this. The second question I asked myself is, would he go for this?

Answer, not in a billion years he wouldn't. That personal example was extraordinarily helpful to me in a time of difficulty and that is precisely what Paul is giving them here.

Remember how I lived? Remember what I did? Remember what it was like? Remember how I dealt with the difficulty? Do the same thing as me. It's the right thing to do.

[22 : 02] He reminds them of how he lived. Second thing he reminds them of is what he did, verses 20 to 21, the work he did.

Verse 20, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. He taught them. That was his core work. The core work of the gospel worker is teaching people things. What things?

Well, it's described here in a number of different ways. Verse 20, I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. Verse 24, he calls that message the gospel of God's grace.

Verse 27, he did not shrink. Again, he uses that idea. did not shrink from teaching them the whole counsel of God. What I think he's talking about here is the gospel message and its implications.

[23 : 12] He taught them the gospel message and its implications thoroughly. Notice that twice he mentions that he did not shrink from teaching them.

And that implies that there are some things about the gospel message that you might shrink from teaching. Presumably because you think they'll provoke a reaction. Why does he tell the elders this?

So that they will not shrink from teaching the same message that he did. Notice verse 20, he did it in different ways, in different situations, public and private.

In other words, he was at it all over the place and all the time. A variety of circumstances, the same message. One gospel, one method to his work, to declare that gospel, to bring that gospel to bear on the lives of his hearers.

Notice, he aimed for a result, verse 21. There is one response to that gospel. Repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 35] Turning towards God in repentance and trusting the Lord Jesus. That is the start and the progress of the Christian gospel in somebody's life. Paul is not just talking here about conversion, about the beginning of the Christian life, about becoming a Christian.

We often think of the gospel message as a bit like a kind of serial number that kicks off the Christian life. You know, you type the code into your software and it unlocks it.

That's not what the gospel is and that's not the response. Repentance and faith is the right response to God all the way through the Christian life from beginning to end. So if you've stopped being a repentant person, you've stopped responding rightly to the gospel.

If you've stopped exercising active faith in the Lord Jesus, you've stopped responding rightly to the gospel. That's the way you started, that's supposed to be the way you continue.

And notice how Paul aimed for that response in everyone. Look at verse 20 again, sorry, verse 21, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God.

[25 : 46] God. In other words, there wasn't a different response for different groups of people. There's one response for everyone. Both the religious Jew and the pagan Gentile are in exactly the same boat when it comes to responding to God.

The gospel message is a great leveler. Everybody has to respond the same. So there is not a single person in this room for whom more is demanded or less is expected.

There are no classes of people here. One of the things we do Sunday by Sunday is remind ourselves that we are all just the same in front of God.

It doesn't matter what our backgrounds are, the gospel makes the same demands on all of us to turn away from self-centered living, towards God and exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So do you see what he does? He reminds them of two things that they know. What he was like as a person and the work that he did. Next thing, he talks about two things that he knows.

[27 : 04] Look at verse 22. Notice verse 18, you know how I lived. Verse 22, now behold I am going to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city that imprisonment and reflections await me.

Paul knows that for him danger lies ahead. Notice the compulsion of verse 22, I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit.

Back in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Volume 1, which this is Volume 2 of, Luke talks about Jesus setting his face towards Jerusalem.

Well, I think precisely the same thing is happening here. Paul is setting his face to go towards Jerusalem. He doesn't know precisely what's going to happen to him, but he does know in general terms what's going to happen to him.

Verse 23, difficulty is going to come his way. He knows that the pattern of past difficulty will continue into the future for him as a person.

[28 : 19] Why do his elders back in Ephesus need to know that? Because inevitably the same will be true of them if they follow his pattern.

Guys, he says, remember what it has been like for me so far? I know it's going to be like that for me in the future. Therefore, of course, it's going to be like that for you too. Now, folks, we don't all have exactly the same role in the great plan of God, but of this we can be sure that the gospel, when made clear, brings hardship in response.

Sometimes more, sometimes less, but it's always there in the background, in the foreground. It's always there. The gospel, if it's clear, will bring hardship for those who speak it and those who promote it.

It was true of Paul, it was true of the Ephesian elders, it must be true also of us, therefore. If we're going to be obedient to the Lord Jesus personally and corporately, it must bring hardship.

The Holy Spirit testifies to that in the scriptures. Some degree of difficulty is inevitable. And I just want to say, if you're in difficulty now, because of following the Lord Jesus, be encouraged.

[29 : 48] You're in terrific company. You're in the company of the Apostle Paul and the Ephesian elders, and indeed of every Christian group that's ever been genuinely Christian and pursued the gospel.

Paul knows that danger lies ahead. Second thing he knows is, interestingly, that his job in Ephesus is done now. Look at verse 25.

Behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you.

Why? For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. He has done his job. Now, it's a very interesting way of describing because if you talk to any minister, they will tell you that the work of ministry is like a bottomless pit.

They often use that phrase, incidentally. But actually, says Paul, no, my job here is done. It's not that there isn't still work to do here, but I've handed over to you what I needed to hand over to you.

[30 : 59] Why? Because I've explained the gospel properly to you. You know what it is. You know its implications. Now, the responsibility is yours. Notice it's a life and death responsibility.

Look at the terminology. I am innocent of the blood of all of you. He's handed over a serious responsibility to these people.

He's able to look them in the face and say in their sight, you know and so do I that I've not missed an opportunity to show you how the gospel affects your lives and your church.

It's over to you now. Now, that is a big claim, a bold claim in front of people who knew him well, people who have seen him operate on a day-to-day basis.

But he had done it and they knew he'd done it. Folks, it's one of our greatest responsibilities to hand on to others responsibility for life and death issues.

[32 : 13] When you set aside people for ministry, you hand over to them responsibility for life and death issues. When elders are appointed in churches, you hand over to them responsibility for life and death issues.

When you appoint your Bible study group leaders in your Christian union, perhaps to a lesser degree, but definitely, you hand over to them responsibility for life and death issues.

The gospel is life and death for the hearers. We have serious responsibilities as Christians, things. But Paul says it can be properly handed over.

It can be properly done. Well, folks, our time is gone. That's the personal example bit of this speech.

Let me just summarize with four statements. Why do we need this example? because there are things about the work of the gospel that are both counterintuitive and costly.

[33 : 18] There are things that are counterintuitive and costly and if we're not reminded of what we ought to be doing, we easily deviate from it. Let me say four things. One, ministry is about a message and a response.

The heart of the Christian service is the communication of the message of the gospel to people. That, brothers and sisters, is counterintuitive. There are so many things that seem more powerful than communicating a message to people and spelling out its implications.

And there are therefore many distractions from the core business of communicating the gospel to people. But that is the core of the work and it's often neglected for other more powerful or worthwhile looking things.

You can run a good and full church program, a busy one, and not have at its heart the communication of the gospel so that people respond in repentance and faith.

And the people matter, not just the proclamation. The one question you ought to be asking about your area of ministry, whatever it is, is this.

[34 : 36] Are we communicating the gospel clearly and its implications clearly so that ongoing repentance and faith is the response that is being sought from people?

That's the measure of whether it's genuine. The people matter, not just the communication. Let me illustrate. Where I used to live in Nottingham, there was a bunch of guys who would preach the gospel in the town center every Friday lunchtime.

I wasn't usually there on Friday lunchtime, but one Friday lunchtime, I happened past while they were in full flow, and I stopped and watched, and I sat about here, and the preacher was here.

And I sat there for 15 minutes, and I listened really intently. And afterwards, I waited to see if one of them, they couldn't have missed me, and I was that close, I was spitting distance away.

I waited to see if one of them would talk to me. And at the end of the business, they stopped talking, and packed their stuff up, and went away. They could not have missed that I was there listening carefully.

[35 : 50] The issue is, of course, that they were not interested in repentance and faith in me, if I'd needed that. What they were interested in, was speaking words.

And that, brothers and sisters, is not enough. We are not interested in speaking words, we're interested in communicating to people, so that they repent towards God and exercise faith in the Lord Jesus.

That kind of distant unconnectedness is not enough. Paul is deeply involved in these people's lives, and they saw it, and they knew it, and they were sad to see him go as a result.

Are we communicating the message of the gospel to people in such a way that repentance and faith is encouraged? Second, the message is for everyone all the time.

21, for Greeks and non-Greeks, that is to say for the whole world. Sorry, for Jews and non-Jews. Now, again, this is a very simple point, but Jesus is Lord of everyone.

[36 : 56] Everything and everyone needs to be turning around and living under his lordship. No one's accepted from that, and so Paul's ministry is aimed at anyone and everyone. And, of course, his ministry, therefore, is always looking beyond the bounds of where he is now.

That, I take it, is why he's leaving Ephesus. It's not because he's sick of the Ephesians. Far from it. It's because the gospel is for elsewhere as well as work to do elsewhere. Again, folks, this is counterintuitive.

We think some people are more likely to respond to the gospel than other people. We think some people are more in need of the gospel than other people. We like to shore up what we have rather than getting out there to what's not yet been reached.

The message is for everyone all the time. Third, the work is deeply personal. Note the personal language here in this passage. Tears, trials. Note the serious personal note in verse 26.

Innocent of the blood of all of you, deeply concerned for them. 31, he mentions the depth of his concern, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

[38 : 13] Notice verse 37, the sadness of those that he's leaving. It's deeply personal, this work. Painful partings are often part of the gospel work.

It is costly for Paul to move on. It is costly for them to say goodbye to him. They are grieved that they will not see him again, verse 38. It is of course not hard to say goodbye when you've not given of yourself and it is not hard to lose people when they haven't given of themselves.

But Paul had become very important in the lives of these people. Do not underestimate the importance of personal engagement and personal example.

Fourth, the work brings difficulty. All sorts of difficulties here. The personal commitment, that's difficult.

The painful partings, those are difficult. the opposition from outside, that's difficult. Brothers and sisters, it is so counterintuitive to engage in something which is difficult on many fronts, personally costly, involves painful partings from people you'd far rather hang out with, and might bring difficulty to all of you in the future.

[39 : 35] But that is the pattern that the Lord Jesus followed. Personally difficult, painful, bringing great difficulty to him, and that is the pattern that the apostle followed, and that is the pattern that he urges on the Ephesian elders, and that is the pattern for us individually and corporately.

It's very counterintuitive to keep doing that kind of thing, and that's why we need to be reminded of this example. Let's pray together. Let's just have a few moments to respond in the quiet to what God has said to us, and then I'll lead us in prayer for some of these things.

Let's be quiet together. a sort of good to act Thank you.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this speech and its example that it holds up to us. We thank you for this clear description of the pattern of Christian ministry.

We thank you for the Apostles' willingness to engage in this difficult and demanding work. And we recognize that he passes that work on, not merely to the church leaders in Ephesus, but to church leaders in every age and indeed in some measure to every believer as we all exercise some responsibility for the work of the gospel.

[42 : 02] And so we pray, Heavenly Father, that you would convince us individually and corporately of the truth of this way of doing things.

And we acknowledge that this pattern of doing things is difficult and counterintuitive.

There are many things that are more comfortable, many things more straightforward, more impressive looking. And we pray that you would please help us as individuals and as a congregation to give ourselves to the work of bringing the gospel to bear on the lives of all sorts of people, no matter who they are, such that repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus becomes a possibility for them.

And we thank you for those who faithfully passed on the gospel to us. We pray that we might be faithful, passers on, and promoters of the gospel to others.

We pray, Heavenly Father, for our nation. We acknowledge that there are many, many different patterns of so-called gospel ministry in our country and in our world, and not all of them conforming to this.

[43 : 36] And we pray that you would raise up, please, many men and women absolutely convinced that this is the thing to do.

And able, because they believe your truth, to endure the difficulty that will come with this kind of work. Pray that for this congregation as well, Heavenly Father.

Please give us confidence that this is the right thing to keep doing, despite its difficulties. We pray for our world and ask, as we so often ask, that you would send out workers into your harvest field, that all over the world, that all over the world, where different patterns of gospel ministry vie for the attention of your people, that you would please convince churches all over the world that this is the right thing to be doing.

Help us to be convinced of the pattern of ministry that the Lord Jesus has done for us and handed on to us.

Please help us to be faithful in handing it on to others. This we ask in his name. Amen. Amen.