



9/15/26

I've been thinking about that statement from Tim on Sunday, "Live your life in such a way that you're a blessing to those around you, and that your absence leaves a big hole when you're gone." I was thinking how the beauty of the gospel is that Jesus didn't leave a hole. Not only is He alive, but when He ascended to heaven, He filled that hole with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills us from within, and He sealed that hole from the outside. We are never alone, never forgotten, never not loved. Amen.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Acts 20:28-38

Paul had just told the elders of the church at Ephesus that he wouldn't see them again, and he wanted to give them some last minute encouragement and instructions as they led their Kingdom Outpost as examples of what it is to be a worthy witness.

Vs. 28-30 ~ "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in 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."

Yikes! It's really important to pay close attention to our own hearts in conjunction with paying attention to those under our care. I can't give from what I don't have. Whatever role I've been given, I need to remember that I'm given special gifts to serve the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit's power and guidance. The leaders of the church especially need to remember that they are in their position because of the sacrifice that Jesus made through His own blood. This is HIS church.

What do we need to be on the lookout for? Why pay close attention? Fierce wolves will come in, masquerading as followers of Christ, but deceptively trying to destroy the flock... the sheep... the believers. They don't care who they hurt. It takes discernment to recognize them.

Are they speaking the truth of the word? Are their lives modeling the truth of the word? Even when conflict comes? They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes and ages... and I think some of them don't even know how destructive they are.

The leaders also need to pay attention because there are people IN the church who twist scripture to draw people away from the church and to themselves. They are about making a name for themselves and not for Jesus Christ.

Anytime anyone speaks of the leading of the Holy Spirit without making sure they align with scripture and refuse to tamper with the word of God in any way... they should not be listened to or followed. The leaders need to be aware so that they can protect the people in the church. The people in the church need to be aware so that they can stand firm in their faith. Both the leaders of the church and the followers in the church are responsible for their own decisions. The leaders have a greater responsibility because of their role in leadership, but all are responsible for their own walk with God.

Vs. 31 ~ "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears."

We need to use Paul as our example. See how he continued to speak the truth without apology for three years... with tears. He did not take his role lightly, and he was not apathetic to their faith. He lived the example of the book about how leaders should lead... They Smell Like Sheep. It meant that the leaders should be relational, not transactional... relating with and caring for the "sheep" in the church to the point that they smell like the sheep.

Vs. 32-35 ~ "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 ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have 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.'"

Paul was handing these leaders over to the Lord and to His grace so that they might continue to carry on the ministry, building up the body of Christ and having the confidence of knowing that they were going to receive their inheritance of heaven among all those who are "sanctified." The mission God gives us is greater than ourselves. But by the grace of God we're able to accomplish the work He has for us to do. We never do it in our own strength, only in His.

Paul modeled what it is to be a servant leader, not demanding from the believers in the church, but giving so much that it cost him much. He taught them to work hard to help the weak. Let the strong HELP the weak but not enable the weak. Help them so they can grow strong, but don't do so much for them that they stay weak and depend on you. The whole point is always to serve and to lead so that they are more and more drawn to Jesus. The greater blessing comes

from giving, not receiving. So help them so that they can grow stronger in their faith and experience that great blessing of giving by helping the weak who come up after them.

Vs. 36-38 ~ "And when he had 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 he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship."

Paul again modeled leadership to these leaders by kneeling down and praying with them. We can accomplish nothing if the Lord is not at the center of it. We need to be in conversation with God to always leave room for Him to lead.

I can see that there was such a sweet love between Paul and the elders because they were all in tears. Paul truly lived that example of being a blessing to those in your path but then leaving a big hole when you're gone. They were grieving his loss even before they said goodbye.

O Lord, I pray that I will learn from Paul's example. Please help me to pay close attention to Your word by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit so that I, first of all, am never guilty of twisting Your word. And also, so that I can gently and lovingly warn others when I am concerned about possible wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. If I know something, please help me to speak up. Though You've given me a role of leadership in this church, I am not in charge. Instead of being an armchair quarterback, please help me to pray for the leaders who are in charge. For the leadership I do have, please help me to be a servant leader, always recognizing that this church is Yours. This ministry is Yours, not mine. The name to be lifted up is Yours. Please help me to be a blessing to the people You place in my path and help me to be an encouragement to all the blessings You've brought me through other people. All for Your glory. I praise You that the sadness we feel over the holes left in our lives is temporary. Someday we will receive our inheritance with You and all the pain and sorrow and tears will be gone. Until then, please help me to serve faithfully, remembering the pain and suffering and tears and blood You shed for me.