

STUNTING YOUR CHURCH'S GROWTH

Acts 6:3

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

The church of Jerusalem grew greatly to the point where God said that *"the number of the disciples was multiplied."* This church had gone from adding to the church to multiplying in number. However, something almost stopped the church's growth, and that was the Apostles could not minister to everyone's needs because of this growth. This caused the widows of the church to be neglected. The answer that God gave them was to appoint deacons to help them with the daily ministrations of the church.

However, what if the qualifications of a deacon were not met by anyone in the church; what would have happened to the growth of this great church? The answer is that it would have stunted this church's growth. There had to be people who were qualified to fill the position of a deacon so that the church could continue to grow and reach the lost for Christ.

Many churches today have their growth stunted because of the lack of believers doing what it takes to be qualified to be a deacon. Not everyone can be a deacon, but everyone can do what it takes to be a deacon so that the church is filled with people who can help their church to multiply.

One of the great needs of any church are laborers. The church needs laborers, but it needs laborers who are spiritual. If Stephen and the rest of the deacons were not spiritual, the early church's growth would have been stunted. So, what was it about these men that made them spiritual?

First, they were full of wisdom. Any believer could get the wisdom of God if they walked with God in His Word. You are not going to get God's wisdom and walk with God on a sporadic basis. According to James 1:2-5, God's wisdom comes from walking with God through trials and allowing those trials to have their perfect work in you. A great need in today's church are believers who are full of God's wisdom; it would take away many of the problems that the church faces today.

Second, they were full of the Holy Ghost. Imagine what would happen in our cities if every believer were filled with the Holy Ghost. My friend, the Holy Ghost filling is not just for the preacher, but it is for every believer. God's command to be filled with the Holy Ghost is for the individual believer, and that includes you.

Third, they were full of faith. A church's growth cannot continue when its members do not attempt great things by faith. God always blesses faith, but imagine what God could do through the church that was filled with believers who were filled with faith and attempted great acts of faith. If every believer attempted great acts of faith, God could do the miraculous through every believer, and that includes you.

Fourth, they were servants. God needs servants to multiply a church. A church will multiply that is filled with believers who are willing to serve in whatever capacity God needs them to serve.

Lastly, they were soul winners. A church cannot multiply if its members do not go soul winning. Anybody can be a soul winner. If you want your church to multiply, you need to become a soul winner who daily gives out the Gospel to lost souls.

A SOFT ANSWER

Proverbs 15:1

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

One of the greatest counseling statements I use with people is, "Learn how to give a soft answer instead of responding in anger." Many relationships have been destroyed because of an angry response instead of responding with a soft answer. Relationships are complex, and there will be disagreements in conversations, but that does not mean you have to destroy the relationship with a bombshell answer. Never forget that you may lose the war even though you won the argument through an attack. You may have won in the argument, but the casualties you caused by blowing up and answering through anger is often irreparable. It is always better to learn how to have a soft answer and save a relationship than to blow up and answer through anger and destroy the relationship. Proverbs 15 shows six ways you can answer softly in tensious conversations that can save your relationships from harm.

First, use your knowledge of a person or situation correctly, and not to hurt, but to help. Verse 2 says, *"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright..."* Always know what sets a person off, and you should avoid using it when you are in a tensious conversation with them. Don't use your knowledge of a person or situation to destroy, but use it to avoid causing greater harm.

Second, use words to strengthen and edify. Verse 4 says, *"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life..."* Cursing and yelling never helps; it only causes great damage. Instead of cursing and yelling, answer with words that encourage.

Third, speak truthful words. Verse 7 says, *"The lips of the wise disperse knowledge..."* Be careful that you don't exaggerate situations, and don't use exaggerating words. A phrase like, "You ALWAYS" is a phrase that is not true and only causes harm. Exaggerating situations only cause arguments and disagreements to get worse.

Fourth, speak joyful words. Verse 23 says, *"A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth..."* Negativity frustrates people and leads to angry responses. People get tired of a person who responds negatively consistently. Being positive in your responses can disarm the damage that negativity causes in a tensious conversation. Let your conversations be filled with joy instead of negativity, and you can avoid many arguments.

Fifth, speak considerate words. Verse 26 says, *"...the words of the pure are pleasant words."* Speak words that consider the thoughts of the other person. In other words, think before you speak. Speaking your mind always leads to anger and causes you to say damaging words that can cause irreparable damage. Being considerate is one of the greatest ways to offset a tensious situation.

Sixth, speak healing words. Verse 28 says, *"The heart of the righteous studieth to answer..."* Don't be afraid to apologize. Stop pulling up the past. Relationships are not about who wins, but they are about doing what you can to help the other person win. Both ultimately win when you let the other person win in a tensious conversation.

My friend, a soft answer is much better than using words that destroy relationships. Life is short, so use words that build relationships so that you don't find yourself a lonely person because of all the relationships you destroyed through angry words.

THE OBSCURITY OF LIFE-BUILDING

Acts 15:37

“And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.”

When we talk about important people in the New Testament, it is easy to think of the prominent names of those who seemed to do great works. It is not hard to think of Peter, the disciple who was one of the inner-three disciples, and who was used to preach on the day of Pentecost. It is not hard to think of the Apostle Paul, who was responsible for penning over half of the New Testament.

But maybe, the most important man in the New Testament other than Jesus Christ was Barnabas. We hear of Barnabas, but I don't believe we understand his greatness. It was Barnabas who took interest in a young Saul and helped him to become the great Apostle Paul. It was Barnabas who took interest in a quitting John Mark and gave him another chance to do something with his life. John Mark did do something with his life, and God used him to pen the book of Mark. Had it not been for the obscurity of Barnabas in the Scriptures, we would not have over half of the New Testament. Barnabas understood that he didn't have to have the limelight to serve God, but he would rather build lives and let those lives and God determine how to honor him.

Most life-builders will not live in the limelight, but they live in obscurity working with people who most would disdain. We may not know the names of these life-builders, but they will most certainly be honored at the Judgment Seat. Life-builders often come in the form of a Sunday school teacher or bus worker who builds a life that most don't want in their church. However, these great life-builders who work in obscurity are the ones who provide future Sunday school teachers, bus workers, missionaries, pastors, and full-time servants that will minister in the limelight.

To be a life-builder, you must be willing to work in obscurity and have a vision of what God can do through broken lives. The life-builder sees in a person's life what others cannot see. They see in the life of the addicted a person who is clean and grows in the LORD until God calls them to do something mighty. They see how God can take a broken life and remove those sins that break this life and turns them into mighty tools of the Gospel. You will not be a life-builder until you can see beyond the brokenness that sin causes in a life.

Moreover, to be a life-builder, you must believe in those who others quit on. Paul quit on John Mark, but Barnabas still believed in him. Many will wonder why you still work with someone, but as a life-builder you never give up on people. Life-builders work with the people who others give up on and no longer want around. You will never become a life-builder if you are not willing to be misunderstood as you work with people.

Furthermore, to be a life-builder, you must be willing to do the hard and dirty work it takes to build lives. It is not easy building lives; in fact, it often becomes frustrating. However, the life-builder doesn't let their frustration in a person's regression in their walk with God stop them from continuing to work with people until they become a trophy of grace.

Let me ask, do you have what it takes to be a life-builder? You may not get noticed much on this earth, but the rewards of building lives will be rewarded by seeing the great impact those you have worked with make with their lives.

WHY YOU SHOULD BE HOLY

Leviticus 11:44

“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

The call to live a holy life would never be a strenuous command to follow if you understood why you should be holy. God does not command you to be holy because He wants to make your life miserable; He wants you to be holy to give your life joy. Sadly, many believers look at holiness as a disease instead of a blessing, and they miss out on the greatest blessing of being holy, which is that you get to walk side-by-side with your holy God. Looking at the verse above, God shows several reasons and benefits of why you should live a holy life.

First, holiness is a call to be close to God. You will notice that God says, *“ye shall be holy; for I am holy.”* God is saying that He wants you to be holy so you can be close to Him. You have to understand that God is not going to lay aside His holiness to be close to you, but He commands you to be holy so you can be close to Him. All God is saying when He commands you to be holy is that He wants to have a close relationship with you. What can be so grievous about this?

Second, holiness is comparing man to God and not God to man. God is the measure of holiness. Notice that when God called man to be holy, He had already shown man what holiness is by revealing that He is holy. In other words, God was telling mankind to look up to God to define holiness and not to look down to man to define it. Holiness is not determined by man’s definition of holiness, but holiness is defined by who God is. There is nothing grievous about God inviting you to be like Him. In fact, that is a great honor that God would want you to be like Him.

Third, holiness is man living to God’s standard and not God coming down to live to man’s standard. God’s call to holiness was to bring man’s lifestyle up to God’s standard of living and not to bring God down to man’s wicked style of living. To bring God down to man is to take God’s deity away from Him. God will not change just to have fellowship with you, but you must change to have close fellowship with Him.

Fourth, holiness does not change to cultural changes. Cultural standards always change, but God NEVER changes. Therefore, to say that standards of holiness change according to culture is to say that God is not God. The fact that God is God means that He never changes. God could not be God if He had to improve; therefore, stop letting culture define holiness and let culture look to God to determine what it should live like.

Fifth, holiness shows your appreciation to God for saving your soul. According to verse 45, God brought Israel out of Egypt to be their God; therefore, to live a holy life is only showing your appreciation to God that He would save your soul from Hell. There is no greater way to show your appreciation to God for your salvation than to live a holy life.

My friend, holiness is a call to be close to God, a command to be like God, and a commission to tell others about God. Simply put, holiness is answering God’s call to take on His yoke to serve with

Him so you can better reach a world for Christ. When you look at holiness through this viewpoint, you will see that holiness is a wonderful way to live your life.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE

Acts 24:16

“And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

One of the boldest statements that Paul made was that he lived his life to *“always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”* Living your life without offense towards God and man is to live your life without regret or having to look over your shoulder. A life without offense towards God and man is a life of mental peace where worry has no place to live. Though this was a bold statement for Paul to make, it is an achievable action for any believer. Paul was saying several things with this statement.

First, Paul did not say that he had done something wrong towards God and man. The fact that he said that he exercised himself to live without offense towards God and man meant that he had times where he had an offense towards God and man. You are going to have times where you have offended God or man, but you don't have to leave that offense there.

Second, Paul was saying that he had gotten right with anything wherein he had an offense towards God and man. Paul knew that living under a cloud of having something wrong with God or man was a life of turmoil. You cannot live in peace and hold onto something that you have done wrong towards God or man.

Third, Paul was saying that his goal was to keep clear of offenses toward God and man. To exercise yourself not to have an offense towards God and man was a goal. Your goal should be to end every day with everything right between God and you, and man and you. You are not going to live your life without doing something against God and man, but you can live your life with the goal to get it right with whatever you did to God and man.

Fourth, Paul was saying that he made it a practice to get offenses right. Paul was saying it was his habit to get right when he said he exercised himself to *“have a conscience void of offence.”* Making it a habit to quickly get right when you have done something wrong to God or another person is a great habit to establish. You don't have to live with a guilty conscience if you choose to make your habit to quickly get right or apologize to the one you have wronged. One day of living with an offense towards God and man is one day too long.

Fifth, Paul was saying that it is better to keep a clear conscience than to carry an offence toward God and man. Living with a clear conscience with God and man is the best way to have a testimony for God and to be a great witness to man. When God nor man can point their finger at you and say you have not gotten right about something is the best way to make a great impact for God on the lives of people.

Sixth, Paul was saying it is the individual's choice to live their life void of offense towards God and man. My friend, you choose whether to carry the offense or to get it right. You never know when you are going to face God or the individual that you have wronged; therefore, the best time to get the wrong right is immediately. When you can look at anyone you have wronged and say that you have

gotten everything right with them is to live life without regret, and to live life in peace. It is your choice what you do, but I admonish you to make the choice to remove any offense you have towards God and man.

WHY YOU DOUBT YOUR SALVATION

Romans 8:16

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:”

One of Satan’s greatest goals is to get you to doubt your eternal salvation so that he can keep you from living by faith. If Satan can get you to doubt your salvation, he can take your confidence away which helps you as you witness for Christ.

Every believer must settle their salvation so that they can be a better servant for Christ. One of the ways that you settle your salvation is to realize that God did not pay for some of your sins, but He paid for all sin. Not only did He pay for all sin, but His gift to you was eternal life. It is critical that you understand that God did not give you “conditional” life. God wants you to understand that works had nothing to do with saving you, and works will have nothing to do with keeping your salvation. Once you get saved, you are assured that you will always be saved. If works keeps you saved, then works is what saved you. Always understand that works has nothing to do with saving you or keeping you saved.

However, just because you are saved does not mean that you won’t doubt your salvation. There are many who have been saved that struggle with the doubt of their salvation. The verse above says, *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:”* When the believer is yielded to the Holy Spirit and does the works of the Spirit, you will find that the Holy Spirit working through your life is what keeps you assured that you are saved. If you doubt your salvation, even though you can point to a time when you got saved, you are doubting because you are doing things that hinder the Holy Spirit from bearing with your spirit that you are saved. There are a few ways that the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved.

First, the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved when we are reading God’s Word. You will struggle with doubts about your salvation if you are not reading God’s Word daily. The Holy Spirit reminds you that you are saved when you read the Scriptures.

Second, the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved when we pray. According to verse 27, our prayers engage the Holy Spirit in our lives; thus, He bears witness with our spirit that we are saved. You can resolve doubts if you spend time with God in prayer regularly.

Third, the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved when we stay clean from sin. Sin always causes doubts because it quenches the Holy Spirit. You will find when you stop living in sin that the Holy Spirit has the freedom to work through your life which will allow Him to bear witness with your spirit that you are saved.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved when we are faithful to church. The Holy Spirit always works through the preaching of God’s Word. Therefore, you receive confidence that you are saved as you hear preaching.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit bears with our spirit that we are saved when we go soul winning. Nothing reminds us of our salvation more than telling someone about Jesus. Every time you give someone the Gospel, the Holy Spirit reminds you of the day that you received Christ as your Saviour. Having

an assurance that you are saved is as simple as letting the Holy Spirit lead you in life, and His leading assures you that you are saved.

GIVE PLACE

Romans 12:19

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”

One of the great secrets to not hurting relationships is to “*give place for wrath.*” Not to give place is to make room for it. In other words, wrath needs space so that it doesn't hurt those that it is around.

Let me illustrate for you what it means to give place. I love dogs, but some dogs I give place to because if you get too close to them, they will bite you. I have learned that some dogs are unstable, and you must stay away from them if their owner is not near. Giving place to that unstable dog is what keeps it from biting you and keeps you from having to experience the hurt of the bite.

Giving place is also very similar to how I deal with snakes. Those who know me know that I am afraid of snakes. I don't like seeing them in pictures, and I definitely don't want to be near them in person. In fact, I will avoid the reptile section when I go to the zoo because I just don't want to see a snake. People often chuckle when I say this, but I have learned that if you give place to the snake, it has no power to bite you and poison you if it is a poisonous snake. The only person that a venomous snake has bitten is the one who didn't give place to that snake.

Likewise, the only person who has been hurt by wrath is the person who doesn't give place to wrath. Let's face it, we all get irritated at times and have opportunities to blow up on a person, but that never makes the situation better. Many have hurt precious relationships because they don't give place to wrath. So, if we are to give place to wrath, what does it mean to give place to wrath?

First, it means to walk away until you cool down. When one gets angry, it is best not to blow up, but get away and cool down. If you are a passionate person or if you are married to a person who is passionate about the things they do, they will have the tendency to get heated in disagreements. The best way to keep the heated disagreements from becoming a time where wrath can cause damage is to take a walk so that you have time to cool down. I have always made it a practice in my life that when I know I am getting heated, I take a walk and pray so that I have time to cool down to keep myself from saying or doing something that I will regret. When you find yourself becoming heated, it would be best that you take that walk so that you give place to wrath and allow the walk to cool you down.

Second, to give place to wrath means that you need to distance yourself from wrathful and angry people. You must remember that anger always comes before wrath; therefore, if you distance yourself from angry people, you are giving place to wrath so that it doesn't hurt you. Just like I avoid snakes, you must avoid those who are quick to anger so that their bite of wrath does not hurt your spirit or life.

My friend, always remember that every time there is a blowup that there will be collateral damage, and often that collateral damage is to the people that are nearest to us. If you don't give place to wrath, you will find yourself wanting to live your life trying to get back at people for

everything they do for you. Many good relationships have been destroyed because someone didn't give place to wrath.