
Title: "What I've Learned from the Ministry"

Republic, Aug. 25, 2024

Text: many

I. The frustrations of winning the world:

1. A large portion of the world does not believe in God at all. And, many of them are anti-god, and seem to attack the christian faith the most. Many believe christians are foolish.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For **the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, ...**

2. Most of the world has a totally selfish view of God. Life, to them, is mainly about a belief that God is there to help them.

They may pray some. But they seem to see God as only requiring them to be nice to most people, and be, at least somewhat moral. The rest of their view is for God to help them with various things they face in life, or their family faces in life. The view that is missing is the fact that God wants to be in charge of their lives, and God wants to guide them to do the things HE wants done.

They don't see how wrong they are and probably never will see it because they don't read the bible, and, they don't go to church. *Where are they going to hear that they are wrong?*

The following verse describes them:

Judges 17:6 (NKJV) (*also said again in Judge 21:25; also similar in Deut 12:8*)

⁶ In those days *there was* no king in Israel; **everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

When you live like that verse, you get to make all your own rules. You get to make God into what you want Him to be. You create your own god, which is not the God of the bible.

That is what we have going on in America today. The church has to reach these first two types of people somehow. And, it is not just about the importance of getting them saved, but also understanding that salvation will change who they are and how they think. These are the people who are going to be leaders in the world, making decisions that effect everyone's future. Unsaved people think totally different than saved people.

II. The frustrations of getting people in the church to go the right direction with God

and quit being a part of God's problem.

1. We live in a generation where people do not see church as a requirement, or very important.

They don't see that the commandment of "Keep the Sabbath Day Holy" ([Exodus 20:8](#)) as a commandment that relates to us today. They can violate it, and it's no big deal. Their view totally violates scripture. In essence, they have hand-picked what verses they will live by, and what verses they won't live by and they believe God understands.

God never changed the 10 Commandments. Jesus talked about them, the disciples lived by them, and they still apply to us today. Nothing has changed with those.

One person said it like this: "When church becomes optional to you it will become unnecessary to your children."

So, ask yourself *"Have I made church optional, and as a result of that, do my children see it as unnecessary?"* *Has that statement become true in my own family?*

2. There are certain people who are never going to grow, and be any different, no matter how many sermons you have preached on topics that should have changed them by now.

I have seen many people in the past, whom I preached again and again on a certain topic that they had a problem with. (most of which I didn't know they had a problem with it until later) All those sermons never changed them one bit. They end up becoming a problem in the church because of that area they never grew in, & they ended up leaving the church with something to do with those same attitudes and problems.

3. I have learned that I have no ability to change anyone. I have concluded that the most important thing for me is to pray for people, then keep telling myself I can only do what God wants me to do, or say what God wants me to say. The rest is up to Him and the people themselves.

People are creatures of habit. They may hear a great sermon, and yet never use it. I have no control over that, except to occasionally say something about it in my sermons like "Did you do what God had me preach about 2 weeks ago?" But, I still have no control over whether they ever use what God gave me to preach about. People have to use it themselves. They have to be the ones to figure out HOW they are going to make the changes.

4. I have learned "Once a gossip, probably always a gossip."

Most churches have at least a few of them. Right now, I don't know of any.

They may slow down some in their gossiping, at times, but they seem to never see that it is wrong in what they are doing. They will always be in the background talking neg-

ative about someone. They are a cancer to a church. And, those who get sucked into their gossip need to keep in mind that they are becoming a cancer, too. Remember this "He who gossips to you when one day gossip about you."

5. There are too many professing Christians who are never going to win anyone to God. They will spend their entire lives never helping bring even one person to salvation. And, the sad thing is they think they are okay.

Maybe they have justified it with "I don't have that gifting in life, but I do other good things for God." The problem is, it is not a gifting. It's every christian's job.

Sure, there is a spiritual gift called Evangelist. Billy Graham was probably the greatest in American history. But the bible never says they are the only ones responsible for salvations. If that were the case, hardly anyone would ever get saved because there is never enough evangelists to reach all the people. The truth of the matter is we are the ones who around most people. We are the ones who have the contacts and opportunities.

The person may think "Well, regardless of what you say, I'm just not that good at it. I do other good things for God." If you are not that good at it it's because you do not care about the things God cares the most about. You do not care about what God wants you to care about. Your main requirement in witnessing is to look for opportunities, then say what God wants you to say. Then pray for the person. God will bring the salvations, not you. This is not a gift you have to be good at. This is about caring to LOOK and HEAR, then say or do what He wants. This is not hard.

When Jesus spoke about the parable of the Vine, He made it very clear that all christians are responsible to bring salvations, or they will be cut off. That is how important it is to God. I won't read the entire passage, but I will point out the most important verses in it.

[John 15:2](#) (NIV)

² **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.**

We have to get it into our heads that it is a very important part of our christian lives to see salvations. If we do not produce, we will be cut off. Even if we do produce, God is changing parts of our personality so we will stop being a hindrance to salvations. He is pruning us so we are more effective in producing salvations.

[John 15:5](#) (NIV)

⁵ **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;**

So, what happens if I do not bear fruit? Look at verse 5. If you are not producing fruit it is proof you are not remaining in Him, because if you are remaining in Him, YOU WILL bear fruit. You are not bearing fruit because you are not remaining in Him.

You don't listen to Him. You are not guided by Him. And, really there is no relationship with Him or you would care about seeing salvations. You would care about wanting other people to know that this is the greatest life they could possibly live.

You might think "Well, Pastor Mike, I don't believe those verses mean new salvations. I think fruit means doing good things."

Think about that for a moment. *What is fruit?* It is something new that comes onto the vine. That is not the same as doing good things. Fruit is something new. Fruit is another tomato, another peach, another blackberry, etc. Fruit is more product, and in

this parable of Jesus it means new people, new salvations. To say it is not salvations is to be in denial about what your job is.

What happens then? If you are not remaining in Him, you will eventually be cut off.

John 15:6 (NIV)

⁶ **If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away** (*verse 2 even said "cut off"*) **and withers;**

(You are eventually going to wither spiritually, have no spiritual life, and that in turn, is also going to effect your ability to hear God. It will get worse until you get cut off)

such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

(What do you think that means?)

Either care about and be willing to witness to others, care about salvations, care about the things God cares about, or realize you will wither spiritually, and know that you are going to eventually be cut off. This is everyone's job.

John 15:8 (NIV)

⁸ **This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

This is what disciples do - "showing yourselves to be my disciples."

It is everyone's job to constantly look for opportunities everywhere they go. And, when they see that door open to them, then witnessing is done by the help and direction of the Holy Spirit. ([John 15:4](#) - no branch can bear fruit by itself) This is not that hard. You just have to care about it and then look.

6. If you asked me what I see as the #1 thing Christians are failing to do is most Christians do not make the effort to allow God to lead them, through His Holy Spirit.

They spend their life coming up with things that they think is best, and make decisions based on that. They decide what to do with their money, or what needs changing, or what to buy, or anything else they come up with. Their life is mainly run by their own

mind on everything.

How are they really any different than this verse that I already quoted?

Judges 17:6 (NKJV)

⁶ ... **everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

When we think of that verse we think of it as they were people doing carnal behavior. I am sure that is a big part of what that is talking about. *But, isn't living life by making your own decisions without God's guidance, the same thing as everyone doing what is right in their own eyes?*

I can preach 20-30 sermons about the importance of listening to the Holy Spirit, and there are always going to be some who are not going to get any better at trying to hear God. They don't give a care enough to try to listen to God. I can even give really good tips about getting better at hearing God, and they are still not going to do it.

Hearing what God wants is what life with God is meant to be. Without it, there is no relationship with God. And really, failing to hear God will result in hardly accomplishing anything that lasts forever. ([John 6:63](#) - it is the Spirit that gives life- forever stuff) Listening to the Holy Spirit, and being guided by Him is what lasts into eternity.

7. In my experience most people do as little for God as they can get away with.

And, it usually gets worse as christians get older. Quite often they develop this attitude "I have served my time." Then they stop doing anything, or at least they do very little. I actually heard a man say those words when Laurie and I attended Lebanon church.

My mom is an exception to that. She is doing as much as she can to win the family to God. And, she is careful how she is doing it so as not to offend anyone.

8. Most of the time we don't need more preaching about God's grace, & how we don't have to do anything. What I have seen is we need people to actually care more about doing God's will, and not finding more reasons to do nothing.

9. Most christians seem to reach a point where they never change. Most of their changes happened when they first got saved. After that, they seem to get stuck and never grow and change anymore. They may learn more things about God, or more things about bible characters, or the bible, but they, themselves, do not change. They get stuck.

Why do you think I ask you, at least once every 6 months, *look at your life over the last year, how are you any different?*

III. How I view my role as pastor and why

1. My job is to find, and do, God's will in my own life. Next, that will also help me find and do God's will for the church. That is the most important to me.
2. My 2nd job is to find out how I can help everyone to be all that God wants them to be. I want to be led by God to help make effective followers of Him.

So, I'm constantly evaluating "*How I can help that to happen?*"

It is a big part of how I "word" things in the sermons - focussing on being more effective for God.

3. My 3rd job is to try to preach sermons God wants me to preach every single Sunday. He knows what people need to hear, and when they need to hear it. I don't.

So, I have to hear from Him on what He wants. That is very important to me.

But, while I am doing this, in the back of my mind I am also thinking this:

- I want to preach on topics that no one ever thinks about, or others don't preach about.

I had an elderly, long time christian, who noticed that. Emma said to me one Sunday "You preach about things I have never heard any preacher talk about." I said "Good."

But, what I should have done is asked her if that was a good thing.

Why is it on my mind to preach on topics others don't preach about? Because I'm convinced people get stuck in some area of their lives that keeps them from being all God wants from them. A lot of Christians are in denial about how strong of a christian they think they are.

They may be a strong christian, but their personality constantly criticizes. They are a strong christian, but their personality ticks people off a lot. They are a strong christian, but they don't get it yet they are supposed to be representatives of what God is like.

If they could just get a different perspective, a different way of thinking, see how they need to change, see where they are ineffective, see how much more effective they could be.

So, my thinking is "If I do not preach about things people never think about, how are they ever going to know they are stuck, and then get past it?"

I have met lots of christians in other churches who should know certain things about how to be more effective, yet they don't. I always ask myself "*Does their pastor ever preach about such-n-such (whatever their issue is)? Or, is he just preaching the same old sermons over and over again?*"

- My constant questions to myself are "*How can I help get people past being stuck? How can I help them get more effective for God?*" "*What do I see that is holding them up?*"

I am always thinking about that.

You see, I want to see results. I am not here to get complimented. I am here to try to live for God, and help other people do the same. I see things in people's personalities all the time that would definitely limit them ever seeing many salvations. That is why I like to preach on all different things, especially things that will help them get out of denial and become more effective.

4. My 4th job is to try my best to create an atmosphere at church whereby the people come early, and maybe even stay a little after, in order to learn & care about the lives of others.

My questions for myself is: *"What can I do, or what can I say, to help create an atmosphere that we all need to make this our 2nd family?"* I work hard on that.

5. I also try to include "how to's" in my sermons. Pastors are really bad about preaching only about what people should do, or should not do. I try to think *"What can I say that helps people know "How to do it?"* I try to give suggestions on how to get where you need to be.

So, I try to give some "how to do this" or "how to change this."

6. I try to help people to learn to constantly evaluate themselves about whether their thinking, talking, or actions are "humble or prideful"?

Is my thinking right now humble thoughts, or, are they prideful thoughts?

When I handled a certain matter was it humble or prideful? We are not always going to succeed in this. It is so easy for pride to slip back inside of us. But, we have to keep evaluating ourselves about it, keep trying to stay humble, keep trying to get better at it.

Constantly evaluating ourselves based on those 2 words - humble or prideful, is crucial to being consistent in doing God's will. I mention this often because of how important it is.

7. Too many people see the church, or pastor, as needing to chase after them. They have it in their minds all the things that the pastor and church should be doing. For them, everything is about what everyone else in the church should be doing. Basically, "If the church or pastor does everything I think they should do, then that is a good church, and I will bless them with my presence. But, if they don't, then I am going to get mad, quit church, because those people are so messed up. I know what a good church is and ;I know what a good pastor should be like."

What I have seen is rarely do these kind of people see themselves as needing to do much in return.

Here would be my questions to them: *Who are you checking on? What are you doing at*

the church to make the church a greater place? How is the church better because you attend here?

For them it's all about what the church should do for them, because in their minds they are like the permanent new visitor.

I refuse to cater to that. I refuse to feed a one-sided, self-centered, way of thinking. I refuse to be so worried about gaining more people, that I will cater to that just to keep them. Unless God forces me to do it, I will let them walk, and go to another church.

I try to create an understanding that if you go to this church, you need to do things too, even if it's small. Everyone helps. And, if you consider this your 2nd family, then you should care about everyone here.

I also think it is a good idea to let us know if you are going to be gone. I certainly don't require anyone to do that, because I don't want to give off the impression I am trying to control anyone. I just feel it is a respect thing that shows the church that you care. It is the same way that a person should do with their own family.

No one is the permanent visitor that the rest of us cater to, while they do nothing but give us a good score on their scorecard. I want no part of that. We are a team who are here to do God's will together. Then we will rejoice together as God does things through each of us, or all of us.

8. I am somewhat of a repetitious pastor. I say many things over and over again.

Sometimes, I will re-preach certain sermons, as God leads me, every 3-7 yrs or so. And, a lot of times I take the same topic I preached on before, but this time talk about it from a totally different angle. *Why do I do that?* Because I am not so naive to I believe the first time I talk about a topic, everyone is actually going to do it. I believe people need repetition.

In secular management, there is an entire belief that if you mention something to your employees, you need to compliment them when you see them do it. With that, you also need to get onto people when you them not doing it. The idea is if you are never repeating, or reinforcing what you feel is important, the people there will not see it as important.

These are the reasons you hear a lot of similar things over and over again.

9. I am always going to be me. I'm not perfect, but I want to be as genuine as I can be. I try not to act like a typical pastor. I am not even close to the personality of a typical minister.

I actually do not like being called Reverend. I hear that mostly when at funeral homes. I understand they are trying to be respectful. I just want to be a strong christian who happens to be the minister, God's authority at the church without pushing that authority around. What you see, is who I am. I don't want to act holier than anyone else. I would rather be seen as a common person, just like you, who hopefully, is one of many here who try to be

an example of the way we all can live.

The problem with my view on this of being "very real" and being myself is it becomes easier for people to find more fault in you. It is easier for them to criticize you because they see more of you. You really take more chances the more open and real you are.

I could be serious every Sunday when I greet people, or more serious when I open the service instead of being laid back, and joking around. I could be 100% serious in every sermon. But, I am not a 100% serious person.

I believe I can be an even better example of what a christian is like by being down to earth, being an example of what anyone could be, rather than try to act like this "super, perfect pastor." I personally believe my way of being myself is a better example to the people. The ones who probably won't like it are ones who are too opinionated about what I should or shouldn't be doing. But, I also think they are the ones who need to change. I am going to be who God made me.

10. I have learned that there are certain people who are never going to fully appreciate the pastor. There will be some who do not like how he preaches, and others may even not like who the pastor is, as a person. Those people have labeled his way of preaching sermons, or labeled the personality of the pastor. When people label others they negate the person. (Philosopher Kierkegaard) I personally think that would make an excellent bible verse to learn from, because it warns us to not label people, and then negate people.

When christians label people "Well, they are like this" it can be a form of judging, and it can definitely be prideful. Granted, I have noticed that people do tend to do the same things, almost like a pattern, some of which I am not real thrilled about. But, as christians we have to be careful not to negate them, to put them in a category and relate to them differently. *Why?* Because it effects our relationship with them. It can even lead to us gossiping about them. It can lead to having bad attitudes about them and then justifying it because they are like such-n-such.

We are here on earth to have a right attitude toward everyone, whether we agree with them or not. We are here on earth to represent God, not negate people.

I have experienced both the labelers, and the constant criticizers.

In regards to just being me, I could switch my approach and be that pastor who hides himself to where you never really know me well. I could always act serious, always act perfect, and by doing so create a mystique about himself, whereby its hard for people to see my faults. Those kind of pastors can actually get more respect from people. But, that is not the kind of person I am, or want to be. It is not the kind of person I respect either. I personally like people who are real, so that is how I try to be.

I believe that is a better example to people to be myself than trying to be "Rev Always

Serious, Perfect Pastor."

11. I have also learned that we are going to occasionally disagree, maybe even butt heads, or at least not like something, but that it is vital that we:

- never make it worse by continuing a wrong attitude toward each other,
- never make it worse by treating them different than we did before,
- and, we have to get past it and continue a good relationship with them, because God expects us to treat people like God would treat them, and God wants us to treat them.

Without doing those 3 things, we just give Satan a chance to work in our lives, and in the church.

12. I am finally getting through my head that all my interactions at the church, not just sermons, must be a form of constant teaching and reminding. I have to do a better job of that. I have found that sometimes I get frustrated, when instead, I should be teaching & reminding.

IV. The Incredible Positives of How Life in the church can be

1. Although churches, or people in the church are not perfect, it is still the absolute best place to hang out, and to have close friends who are true friends.
2. There are some very loving, wonderful, Christians that are fun to be around, who actually live their life with the personality of God, and the qualities of God.

They are genuine, (not perfect) but they are the ones who make your life more enjoyable, and restore your faith in humanity.

3. What helps me feel good is at least there are a few Christians who figured out what the most important thing in life is, and that is for them to be like God. They realize their job is to think like God, see life like God sees life, see people like God wants them to see them, and see what God wants from them. They also want to treat people like God would treat them.

These people look for ways they can help people, rather than get annoyed at people. They refuse to allow their mind to go around trying to find fault with people or things. They keep their mind on being like God to everyone and in all situations. These are the ones who truly try to listen to God. And, they are the ones who are a real blessing to other people's lives, who inspire other people the most.

What these people have done is abandoned the life of attitudes, the trying to find out what is wrong with people, or their church. Their mind no longer looks for those things. They have retrained their minds on things above, not on earthly things. ([Colossians 3:2](#)) They realize

they have died ([Colossians 3:3](#)) and now their life is hidden with Christ to do the things He wants not what they want, to look at everything and everybody like God wants them to. They are focussed on being like God, seeing like God. They have given up being on earth to criticize or critique things. They just want to help others the same way God would help others.

They are rare, but when I see them I love them. Being with them is refreshing, just like it is when being with God. *Why?* Because you can see God all over them. *Why else?* Because you do not feel like they are trying to find what is wrong with you so they can talk about you later. Instead, you feel God when you are with them. They truly represent what God is like.

If I could work along with God to create 30 of them in this church, from now until the day my ministry is done, I would view it as having accomplished a great task through God. It would mean way more to me than pastoring a church of 500 or 1000 who have very few who live like that.

Summary -

I have never done a sermon like this one. *So, why talk about all of this?* I definitely felt this is what God wanted me to talk about for some reason. I think it shows the problems we face, as well as the big picture of why we do what we do, why I do what I do, and another big picture of a church atmosphere that can be like an early heaven.

We talked about 4 parts to all of this:

I. The frustrations of winning the world when they have wrong views about God.

How a lot of our world is anti-God, and seems to attack christians or anything biblical, the most. Also, how most of the world, if they do believe in God, have a very selfish view of God.

II. The frustration of getting people in the church to go the right direction with God, and quit being a part of God's problem.

III. How I view my role as pastor and why

IV. The incredible positives of How Life in the church can be

When people get past their foolish, worldly ways of thinking, then get ahold of what God wants from them - for them to be exact examples of how God thinks. Then they start acting like God acts, that atmosphere in the church can be like an early heaven.