



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

UNSTOPPABLE: God's Work in the World

Getting the Most Out of Sunday – Acts 20:1–16

Tim Badal | January 13, 2019



We're in a series in Acts called "Unstoppable," learning how God is on the move, not only in the first century in this incredible book in the Bible, but also how He is on the move in our world today. If we will be faithful to make Him our priority and look for the opportunities He lays before us, we can be confident that as we obey and honor Him in all we say and do, the work we're part of will change many lives through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We're now in Acts 20, which is a transitional passage, something Luke uses from time to time. In this chapter we'll find a number of mundane items—the names of people and the cities where they traveled. It might seem that this chapter has little for us to draw from. But I want to show you that even in the mundane passages of Scripture, great truths can be gained. There is one exciting thing in our text. A man falls asleep during Paul's sermon and falls out of the window, but I'm not sure how much application we can find in that. If you fall asleep during my sermon, I'm not going to be able to raise you from the dead.

One of the transitions we see in this passage is a record of the personal involvement of Paul and his team with the churches they had established. For the past ten chapters we've seen the repeated stories of Paul and his associates going from place to place in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and Macedonia (modern day Greece). In each city Paul proclaimed the risen Savior and many people rejected his message.

In particular, the God-fearing Jews rejected the idea that Jesus was the Messiah for Whom they had long been waiting. But often the Gentiles would also get upset, because Christianity was an affront to the many gods they worshiped, because they could not accept that Jesus was Lord over all.

Yet despite this pushback, we also saw the unstoppable work of God. In each city, there were some who believed. These believers not only remained faithful, but their numbers multiplied. In many cities, Paul returned to strengthen and encourage the people he had led to Christ.

This season of life for the church was about to come to an end. In Acts 20, the church in the city of Ephesus was the last place where Paul was able to personally minister. Next week we'll read about the tear-filled farewell that Paul had with a group of elders from the Ephesian church.

From this point on through the end of Acts, Paul entered the final chapter of his ministry. No longer would he be able to hand hold the people in the local churches. Rather, he would be moving toward the fulfillment of the prophecy he received when he was first converted: that he would stand before the rulers and authorities to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eventually he would reach Rome, where he was ultimately martyred for his faith.

In our passage today, Paul has left the city of Ephesus, where he had been the cause of a city-wide riot when the silversmiths who made idols were angry because their market share was shrinking as the numbers of Christians grew. When that uproar subsided, Paul went around to area churches to collect money for the needy believers in the Jerusalem church. Jerusalem was not only enduring some persecution, they were also experiencing a widespread famine that brought them severe hardship.

Today we're going to look at some details in this mundane passage that we might not normally think about when we come into church. We'll focus on the question, How do we get the most out of our Sundays? Some of this might seem elementary, but my hope and prayer is that this will stir us to consider whether we're getting the most out of our time together with the people of God or if we're missing a blessing God intends us to have. Or perhaps we'll discover how God has called us to something we weren't previously aware of.

As we read our passage, Acts 20:1–16, I pray that there will be something in these verses that will help us better understand what it means to be Christians who gather together to worship and follow our callings.

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.² When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.³ There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.⁴ Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.⁵ These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas,⁶ but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.⁹ And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.¹⁰ But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him."¹¹ And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

¹³ But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.

¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene.¹⁵ And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus.¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Let us never forget that the mundane things written in God's Word matter, even when we don't understand them. They're good for our teaching and comfort and exhortation.

A couple years ago when my son was entering high school, the local school administration had come up with an idea to help eighth graders transition into high school. They offered a day called "Freshman Orientation" when they could meet some of their teachers, walking through a typical day of classes to give them a snapshot of what freshman life was going to be like. There were also some upper-class students who gave them counsel on how to get the most out of their freshman experience. They spoke of some pitfalls the freshman might encounter, with the goal of making the freshman year as enjoyable and trouble-free as possible.

As Luke is sharing a picture of what Sunday at Troas looked like, I believe this gives us a snapshot of what life in the first-century church was like and it may help us orient our own church experiences today. I'll give you two things we need to do in a positive sense, and then one in the negative.

Connect with the right people

First, if we want to get the most out of our Sundays as we gather together, we need to be connected with the right people. It will not do you any good to show up here, walk in and sit down, listen to some good music and good prayers and good teaching, then leave this place and cross it off your to-do list. It will not do you any good if you don't talk or interact with anyone while you're here.

It doesn't take a Greek scholar to recognize that first-century Christianity was not a private matter. We're given the names of seven individuals in Paul's group, some of whom we've never heard of before. There were many others in Troas who were not named, other than Eutychus. But this is a model of Christianity in community. We don't live our faith alone.

Some of you who are introverted may prefer to show up without interacting with others, but God made us for relationships. Christians especially need this so that we can love and care for each other.

Life change happens as we connect with people who are encouraging.

The people in our text were able to encourage one another as they gathered together. Twice we read about how they were encouraging people. In Acts 20:1, it says, *“Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.”* Then in verse two we read, *“When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.”*

Any time we see a word or theme repeated, it indicates something important. Twice we’re told the people of God were involved in a ministry of encouragement. Why would Paul need to do this? It doesn’t take a Bible scholar to realize that these people needed encouragement because they were discouraged. When everything is going well, encouragement is not necessary. We need encouragement when life isn’t going the way we want it to, when we’re concerned and frustrated. We need encouragement when we’re at the bottom of our game. We need encouragement when we’ve failed or when we’re struggling to keep our heads above water.

The people of God in the first century had lots of reasons to be discouraged. They were a minority people. They were hated. Their very existence was causing riots and persecution. Being a Christian wasn’t something they told their family and friends about, because it meant losing status in society. So the one time in the week when these people wouldn’t be discouraged in their faith was when they gathered together to encourage one another.

How badly we need this today. As Christians, we’re now a minority group. We are being maligned and wrongly judged. As we share the good news of Jesus Christ, many times the response we receive is not openness and excitement, but pushback and anger. As in the first century, our gatherings need to be times of encouragement. We need to be reminded why we believe what we do, why we hope as we do, and why we do what we do. For six days the world has been telling us we’re foolish. But on the first day of the week, the early church gathered together to encourage one another, giving themselves strength to live through the coming week. We too should never neglect these gatherings, because they give us the courage to go into the world for another week, standing against temptation. God knows when we’re not together we run into trouble. Apart from the people of God speaking into our lives, we are our own biggest problem.

Notice that Paul gave these people much encouragement. Luke didn’t add that word just because some professor told him to use superlatives. If encouragement is going to work, it needs to be continual. This should be a reminder to those of us who are parents. We tend to point out all the bad things our children do—their grades aren’t good enough or their rooms aren’t clean enough or their friends are problems. I’m there. I’ve got three boys of my own. But while we’re finding all they do wrong, how often are we encouraging our kids in the direction we want them to go. For those of us who have employees under us, are we always looking for the places where they fail or at least need to improve? Wouldn’t it be a better testimony to a watching world if we choose to encourage the people around us instead?

Encouragement involves several things. First, it requires a measure of intimacy. It’s hard for us to encourage or to be encouraged by a stranger. Of course, a compliment from someone we’ve never met before is nice. Yesterday I coached one of my son’s basketball team, and one of the players on the opposing team had a nice game. As we were walking through the line, I stopped and made special reference to something the young man had done in the game. I’d never met the boy before, and I will probably never see him again. But as the opposing coach, I told him I was impressed with his character and passion for the game. “Well done, young man.” It probably gave him a little pep in his step, but I doubt he’s talking about my compliment today. He might have told his mom or his coach, “That big ugly bald guy said something nice to me.”

Still, the encouragement that lasts—that moves us from being fearful or discouraged to doing what God calls us to do in the middle of difficult circumstances—comes from a person who knows us, understands our circumstances and speaks something to us that changes our perspective or even our worldview. In other words, if we’re going to be an encouraging church, we need to get to know each other. We have to engage each other at a level that allows us to speak honestly into each other’s lives.

Second, encouragement requires transparency. Now, I don’t know anyone who doesn’t desire to be encouraged. Human existence is such that we need encouragement. But that means we have to be open and honest about the things that we’re struggling with and that are discouraging us. How can someone else help us if they don’t know what we’re dealing with?

Some of us are upset because we're not being encouraged, but at the same time we're unwilling to open ourselves up to others. It's not that the people around us won't encourage us; it's that we're keeping them at arm's length. We don't tell them what bothers or discourages us or what we're broken by, because we're afraid they'll think badly of us. As a result, no one around us will be able to speak into our lives because they have no idea what we're going through. We need to be transparent. We need to say, "I'm struggling with parenting." That will give others a specific way they can help us with the problems. Maybe as an employee we don't feel like we're doing a good job, but when a coworker can tell us, "Man, you nailed it there," that's encouraging to us. It makes us feel we belong.

We shouldn't be like the culture that says, "I'm okay, you're okay, we're all okay." Rather, we should be willing to admit we have issues and struggles. The church should be a safe place where we can be transparent with each other. That way, others can speak truth into our lives regarding our anxieties and needs, lifting us out of the mire we're in.

Third, encouragement requires humility. There are two sides to the humility coin. First, the encourager needs to have humility. You will never encourage someone else if all you're worried about is yourself. When we can look away from our own issues and desires, we can encourage someone else. But if we're only looking to be encouraged, we'll never think about the other person's needs. This can quickly become a problem for an employer who might think, "I'm always encouraging others, but where's the appreciation I need?" It can also be a problem for a pastor who might be thinking, "I give and give and give, but who's giving back to me?" We need to be less concerned about receiving encouragement, because it is better to give than to receive. We'll discover as we encourage others that we ourselves will be encouraged. Over and over, Paul tells the Philippian church to be concerned for the needs of others.

Humility is also needed by the one who is being encouraged. When Paul encouraged the people with "much encouragement," he wasn't just giving them flowery words: "You do a great job! You're awesome." Rather, his words often challenged and admonished them. Encouragement doesn't just make us feel good. Sometimes encouragement is designed to motivate us to new actions.

As a coach of young boys, my job is to encourage the team. But you won't be hearing me shouting from the sidelines, "You guys are all great! I've never coached such a wonderful team! I love you! Let's have a group hug." What you hear is, "Let's go! Find your spot. Defend well. Get your arms up. Let's be aggressive." Those are words that encourage the team to improve their performance. Yes, at the end of the game, the team will hear, "Guys, that was a great job!" But a lot of time the encouragement comes from the fact that I care about them so much, I'm going to be honest with them.

As a pastor, if I care about you spiritually, I'll call you to stretch beyond where you are. I want to exhort and encourage you to be all God wants you to be. But when I admonish someone in that manner, I need to be willing to receive the same admonishment. I need to be open to words of correction.

If we came to church this morning thinking, "I'm going to encourage at least one person," I believe it would revolutionize the way we do church. The struggle is that we come to church not thinking about what we can do for others, but rather thinking about what they might do for us. Some of you will leave today thinking, "No one even spoke with me. I've had a terrible week, but nobody seemed concerned about that." I understand—there are times when I feel that way myself.

But we should realize that during the time when Paul was encouraging the people in Troas, it was also a season of great heartbreak for him. The church in Corinth was falling apart. They had division, there was rampant sin and there was one-up-man-ship regarding their spiritual gifts. Paul had invested an entire year and a half with those people—the longest time he spent with any church—but all his labor seemed to be ineffective.

We also know that Paul came to Troas after having to leave Ephesus because of the riot he had caused. He had also learned that the Jews in Syria were plotting to kill him, so he couldn't go there again. It was not an easy time for him. But sometimes the best time for us to be encouragers is when we are most discouraged. It's not that people will come to us for encouragement when we're discouraged. Rather, we as Christians need to decide that in our discouragement we can choose to pour into others. It's in these times that we won't be tempted to give flowery words. Rather, we'll be amazed at what God gives us to offer others when we ourselves are weak.

Life change happens as we connect with people who are eclectic.

The gathering in Troas was an eclectic group and it's important for us that we be eclectic as well. We're given a list of seven men, most of whose names are hard to pronounce. The greatest name you could ever give a child, however, is the name Timothy. God bless anybody named Timothy. It's a strong name.

What can we learn from these names? Well, we're not just given names—we're given the places where these men came from. They were from Asia, Macedonia, Berea, Thessalonica and Derbe. This tells us that the gathering included people from different upbringings.

One of the glorious things we experience here at Village Bible Church is that we're not all from Sugar Grove. There are people from Yorkville, Hinckley, Big Rock, Aurora, Elburn, Maple Park, Kaneville, Montgomery, Oswego, Plano and Sandwich. We all come from different places; we all have different stories. We've come to Christ different ways because of our various backgrounds.

The people in Troas also came from different socio-economic backgrounds. Two of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, have names that reveal something about them. It was common in those days to take a different name from the one a person was given at birth. Perhaps the new name would signify something dramatic that happened in their life. We saw this when Saul became Paul. Aristarchus' name was drawn from the word aristocracy, which may indicate his position of power and riches. He either was born into wealth or came into it later. It's unlikely that a pauper would be named "rich and powerful." If he had been named that, people would have likely ridiculed him for being named wrong.

The name Secundus isn't really a name—it's a compound of three things. It means one who is second, one who follows, and one who has found favor. These components lead scholars to believe Secundus was a slave who followed a master, then eventually found favor. Because of his faithful following of his master, he may have been set free or it could mean he found favor with his heavenly Master Jesus and became a follower of His.

I'm speculating—but it's something commentators do, so I'm in good company—that the Thessalonians chose these two men to represent them because it indicated that both the rich and the poor need Jesus. Both slave and free need Jesus. Paul told us in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek. We are all one because of Him. So whether you come from the right side of the tracks or the wrong side of the tracks, whether you're driving a new car or an old jalopy, you are welcome here. None of this matters when we gather together. All that matters is that we're all sinners in need of Jesus.

The group at Troas also included the old and the young. As a disciple of Paul's, Timothy represented the young. When he began pastoring the Ephesus church, Paul told him not to let people look down on him because of his youth. But at that point he wasn't a pastor yet, so he would have been even younger. He was serving as Paul's assistant on his missionary journeys. He might have only been in his late teens. On the other hand, Trophimus was older. We know this because when Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he mentioned that Trophimus was failing in health. The Greek word used there implies that Trophimus was aged and about to die. Thus, we see the group included both young and old.

What does that mean for us? We need to be careful when we gather together that we don't overfocus on one demographic. Some years ago, a famous pastor wrote a book on how to grow a church. His point was that a church needs to decide who they would be reaching. They need to define a specific person who represents their target membership. Perhaps someone who is upper-middle class, a white-collar worker in his early 40s with a wife and three kids, even stating that he travels a certain distance for work. The church would then focus their ministry on this type of person. But with all due respect, that's not a biblical plan. We are to reach all people everywhere, regardless of their age or socio-economic status. They might be white collar, blue collar or no collar. They might have the biggest home on the block or no home at all. The church needs to serve all people everywhere, because that's who God came to seek and save (Luke 19:10). If the church is not doing that, we're a country club, not the hospital God calls us to be. We need to be an eclectic group of people.

Life change happens as we connect with people who are engaging.

We also need to be an engaged group. How were the people in Troas engaging? Each of the men had been given a job. They were to leave their homes to do a specific thing. We read in 2 Corinthians that Paul had asked the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Asia to take a collection for the Jerusalem church that was struggling with the famine. These men listed in Acts 20 came from their local churches with the money they had collected for the church in Jerusalem. In other words, all of these men were serving God.

New Testament Christianity is not a spectator Christianity; it's an engaged Christianity. Studies are showing that when Christian young people leave high school and go to college, many of them leave their parents' church and never engage in church again.

Many of these studies suggest that part of the problem is that youth ministries tend to separate young people from the activities of the adult church. Instead, the emphasis is on feel-good programming designed mainly to keep their attention; then when they

turn 18 they are faced with an abrupt transition into real church. They are never asked to serve in some way, so they cannot make the adjustment from entertainment to engagement.

That's the reason our junior high and high school students are here in this room with us this morning. You'll also see them serving throughout our church. They help you park. They open the door for you. They're teaching younger children. They're involved in the hospitality ministry, the outreach ministry and the discipleship ministry. We want to be like the first-century church where all members, both young and old, are engaged in the work of the gospel and impacting other lives in the church. When these students then head off to college, when they get married and move on from Mom and Dad and this church, they'll start looking for another church. They'll also know when they enter that church that it's not about their being served—it's about how they can serve others.

As our church gets bigger, it's easy for many of us to become spectators, watching other people do the ministry, but I assure you that you're missing out on your Sunday when all you're doing is receiving and not serving. The men in Troas knew there were people counting on them. Something is wrong with your experience on Sunday if you can come here to receive and leave, but you haven't impacted a single person. You've not done what God has called you to do.

There are so many "one another" commands that we can never accomplish if all we are is spectators. We need to be a church doing what we're called to do. We're called to encourage, to be a diverse people and to engage in meeting one another's needs.

Commit to the right priorities

If you think about it, the priorities we just mentioned—encouraging, eclectic and engaging—are a good way to describe our approach to our upcoming Super Bowl parties. I want people to encourage my catering business with comments like, "Tim, this is the best Super Bowl party ever. Your food is great. The atmosphere is great. The TV color is perfect. What an awesome party!"

We also want an eclectic group of people. We want men and women, young and old. Who will tell the old Super Bowl stories about how great those teams were if there aren't old guys there? But we also need the young because their excitement brings the party to a new level.

And we want people to be engaged. There's nothing worse than a Super Bowl party where people aren't paying attention to the game.

If the church is only a group of great people coming together to do something awesome, then we've missed the point. The church was created for some specific purposes. What are the purposes and priorities which, if we haven't done them, mean we haven't really been the church? What did God really intend the church to be? If we aren't asking this question each Sunday, we'll be out of step with the blessing God created the church to be.

A church must be committed to gathering.

The first way for the church to show its commitment to the right priorities is for it to be gathered. Twice we're told in Acts 20 that these men gathered: verse seven, "*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread,*" and verse eight, "*There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.*"

The Greek word for church is *ecclesia*. It doesn't refer to a building; it speaks of an assembly. It's odd therefore to ask, "Where do you go to church?" It's not a "where"—it's a "who." Whom do you gather with? I gather with the people of Village Bible Church. This building could be gone, but we would still be a church.

I want to mention a couple things I think are also important in our 21st-century church model. First, it seems that gathering was a priority for the Christians in Acts. What did it take in those days for those people to gather? It meant that after a long day of work, in many cases manual labor, they would be with God's people instead of resting for the next work day. Back then they didn't have weekends. The Jews in the region might have had a synagogue which allowed for a Sabbath, but most Gentiles didn't even have that. So the days they gathered were simply average work days for most of them and the gathering cost them their personal time at home to rest or do other things.

Second, gathering with the church meant they became socially marginalized and targets for persecution, the loss of property, or other forms of harassment. Today when we left our homes, no one picketed or threatened or screamed at us. No one will have taken our house from us before we return. We live in a country with incredible freedom to worship and when we return home,

nothing will have changed. For the church in Acts, gathering was such a priority that they were willing to risk great loss in the process.

This poses a question for us: if they could gather despite such hostility and opposition, why can't we gather with nothing really on the line? One phenomenon I've observed in my 15 years of ministry is both a cultural issue and a church issue. We've seen church attendance by evangelical Christians plummet. You might think our church isn't a normal evangelical church but let me tell you how normal we are. Back when I first started pastoring, our average rate of attendance was around 80%. If you were a regular attender, you were here 80% of the time. Fifteen years later, we're at about 55-60%. Something has changed. It could be that we as a church are not doing a good job. Maybe the preaching isn't where it needs to be and I'll own that if that's the case. We've asked people what's going on and we're told, "No, we want to be there, but there's this and this and this." In the first century church, they could have done the same thing and their "this or that's" would have had a lot more teeth to them.

We've made the decision that gathering with the church is not a priority. After all, we can listen to preaching on the radio or TV. We can sing worship songs in our cars. We don't really need to attend church. But yes, you do—and the church needs you. When you think that way, you're devaluing what the Bible has said about the church—that the church is the foundation of our faith.

We need the church to grow us. Not the building or the organization, but the body of believers. We need people we gather with regularly to love and encourage and care for us, to speak truth to us and admonish us. We need the church to comfort us in times of difficulty. But our new habit says, "I can have these things when I need them, but I can come and go." That wasn't the case in the first century. They were a gathered people.

A church must be committed to growing.

Second, they were also a growing people. We read back in Acts 2 that the early believers devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching, and this is what Paul gave to the men at Troas. Verse seven says Paul "*prolonged his speech until midnight.*" Oh, boy. Then in verse nine we read about a young man named Eutychus who was listening to Paul until he "*sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer.*" Later it says Paul "*conversed with them a long while, until daybreak.*"

While this doesn't indicate I should talk hour after hour, it does show us that the focus of the people wasn't to think about getting done, but rather they were hungry to hear the Word of God. They knew they needed that Word to direct their paths in the days to come.

Listen carefully. You have no need for anything I've said today if you have no intention of directing your lives according to Scripture. You've wasted your time here if you do not intend to live out what you're learning here. But how hungry we would be if we knew that what we're hearing—from the pastor or from another believer—would make our lives more effective for Christ than we were the week before.

Paul was teaching these people at length because he knew he would probably never be with them again. We should also be aware that each time we gather might be our last. There are many who were with us in years past who are no longer here. No longer can we minister to them or be ministered to by them.

A church must be committed to giving.

Third, being part of a church provides us an opportunity to give. First, the believers in Acts gave financially. The men had come from their various churches with gifts for the church in Jerusalem. We, too, need to be generous in this way. Our goal isn't just for the church to accumulate wealth. Rather, we need to support the care of others.

There was another sort of giving that took place in our story. Verse seven says the people "*gathered together to break bread.*" That probably involved the communion meal, which we do when we take the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of every month in remembrance of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet they also shared what was called a common meal, or what we would call a potluck. I'm in the catering business along with pastoring, and when I cater I bring everything, and you just get to enjoy it. But at a potluck, everybody contributes. In the early church, the common meal was a gathering in the name of the risen Christ, and everyone had to bring something.

Ask yourself honestly, "What did I bring today? What did I bring to minister to someone, to fill them? What did I bring that would allow someone to leave here a little more encouraged than when they came in?" If you brought nothing, that's like coming to a potluck empty-handed.

For our visitors, of course, welcome and enjoy the potluck. You're our guests. But after a few more weeks, if you continue to come just to eat other people's casseroles, at some point it will get a little awkward. As you're in line filling your plate, someone might come up with a "word of encouragement" and say, "Hey, bring a green bean casserole next week." You need to bring something to the table.

This reminds us it's better to give than to receive. If we've called this place home for any length of time, we need to ask ourselves, "What did I bring today to minister to those around me?"

Be careful of the pitfalls along the way.

What pitfalls keep us from this type of serving? I see three possible pitfalls we can encounter.

Stagnation

Stagnation happens when we do something over and over again until it becomes stale. Our church gatherings can fall into this. We see the same people doing the same things, then eventually it gets boring. But I think we can avoid this by becoming active in ministry ourselves. There are always new opportunities, new people to minister to, new places where we can serve.

If we're always doing the same thing in the same place, it may not be because we know God has called us there, but because it's comfortable for us. A good church is always shaking and pushing the people of God to something greater. These seven men who traveled from their churches had left their comfort zones because they had been asked to accomplish a goal. Healthy churches remove the stagnation by giving people opportunities to do something new.

In your bulletins today you'll see a couple ways to get out of your stagnation. We have camp opportunities and short-term mission trips. These are places where you can step out of your comfort zones to serve and encourage people in ways you've never done before. Please don't become stagnant.

Slumber

Second, don't allow slumber to encumber your ability to receive all God has for you. The young man Eutychus was listening to Paul go on and on, like some of you are this morning. He was fighting to stay awake, so he went near a window to get some fresh air. The oil lanterns made the air in the room hot and stale. His exhaustion got the best of him, he fell asleep and fell out of the window, landing on the ground dead. Paul then went out to him and resurrected him.

What's the application for us today? Don't fall asleep in church or you could die. I don't know any other way to read that. But here's what I do know. I don't want to read too much into a physical situation, but I have a question that might be appropriate. How many of you are slumbering? By that I mean you're present in body, but you're not really aware of what's going on around you. You're present, but you have no ability as a slumbering individual to be aware of and care for the needs around you.

Let me ask you, as a modern-day Eutychus, "How many of you are oblivious to the needs of those around you right now, whom God may be calling you to encourage or speak to or serve?" You're present, but you're asleep at the wheel. You have no idea what your place in the church is. Modern-day Eutychuses are unaware of the good the church is able to offer. Maybe you'll leave today saying, "I didn't get anything out of the service." Now, that may be on me. I've got to stand before the Lord and before your guiding elder team, being held accountable for that. I am responsible to keep my sermons relevant and timely. But some of it is on you. Are you asleep before you even got here? Are you asleep to the needs of those around you? Are you struggling with the Eutychus syndrome because your walk with Christ isn't as important as it once was? Or perhaps you're in a charade where your walk with Christ is really nothing at all. Be careful that you're not slumbering.

Success

Finally, don't let success keep you from giving what God wants from you. In verses 13-16, this young man has just fallen out of the window. Hearing him fall would change your Sunday, wouldn't it? He's dead on the ground. Paul scoops him up and prays or does something that results in the man's coming back to life. It was a pretty dramatic event.

If that had been here, we would be tempted to stop and enjoy the miracle. But what did the people there do? Verse 11, *“And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.”* Paul didn’t linger in the success of raising someone from the dead.

Some churches say, “What we’ve got going on is so good, let’s just bottle it up and keep it for ourselves.” No, a healthy church would do what those people did—they departed. All the good things that happened on that Sunday weren’t something they wanted to keep to themselves. Instead, the reason they gathered together—and the reason we gather together—was so they could leave and go out into the world.

Wherever we go, we are to minister and love and encourage those with whom we have contact. We gather to be sent out to do the work of God, so He will be glorified and people will be saved. That’s what we need to get out of a Sunday.

As your pastor, along with the staff and elders, I hope and pray that we are laying the groundwork for you here in this service. But you can’t be simply a spectator. I pray that next week we’ll come in with a new mindset and a new goal, to do as the New Testament church did. We’re going to seek out and love and care for others, because it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).