

“Building Your Ministry”
By Chris Ulrich
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Earlier this week I was looking up some information on Mother’s Day, and I didn't realize it, but it celebrated internationally. There are different dates throughout the world, as far as what country's there are. It's good to know that mothers are paid homage to. Its sobering. It’s a day with a lot of emotions; I know a lot of people have been spreading, there are a lot of people that their mothers have gone on. There are some that maybe they didn't have the greatest relationship, and our hearts are with you. It's a matter of just trying to reach out to people. I'd like to take this moment and wish you all a Happy Mother’s Day from this pulpit. I'd like to tell you I'm happy to see you, I hope you have a great day, month, year. There's something that our general pastor, Pastor Paine, has shared several times that there's not another group that he'd rather be associated with. I used to hear him say that and I appreciate that. It's genuine, it's something that I believe he means. It was never something that I felt like I disagreed with, but I've reached a point where I actually feel that way myself. It gets to a point where you feel it personally, and there isn't another group I'd rather be associated with. I look at it as God has changes for our lives for the better. We have purpose, we have direction, and I'll say this too, few months back I talked about Jesus isn't glamorous but He will save our souls.

You look around at this economic crisis, and I'll tell you one thing, it's not like it's the first crisis in American history. Ed Howes and I were watching this documentary on some of the things that happened during the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression. It was just tragic. A lot of it was man made but it's true, there were a lot of things that were just unexpected. Some of the sickness is that arose because of that. What I would say is, you have to look at it that God has blessed our lives. We do have something to still be thankful for. We have had hardships, there's no question about that; some more than others. One of the main points is don't underestimate that, or don't underscore it. The Bible talks about weep with those that weep, rejoice with those that rejoice (Romans 12:15). They're going to be times, and I know there are people here in this congregation that are hurting. We may not always know what the situations are, and we may not have the words to express, but it's something that we should be sympathetic, uplifting, and encouraging. That's for sure.

I know that personally, my mom is still alive. She's 72; I was raised about an hour west of Boston. I have a lot of good memories. As I've gotten older and I have fond memories and I look back at pictures and cards and there's some sentimental value to that. I'm proud of her, I'll say that right out: I'm proud of her. I don't call my parents every day, maybe once a week, sometimes twice a week. If I call in the morning, I don't have a set routine, but she instantly says good morning, and I appreciate that. It’s just a small thing, but it warms my heart. So I want to say thank you to the mothers of Christian Fellowship, and our visitors too, but for all the things you do, the acts of kindness; those things are only going to be known by God or they're going to be known in eternity. These are things that everybody benefits from, but it’s not necessary things everybody's going to see, or that they're going to make you a hero. To God you are. I'll say it again, I'm proud of my mom. I just have to share that, I feel like that's the appropriate thing.

The theme of the month is building ministry. Bob preached last week about building a relationship in God. One of the main passages used was from Matthew chapter 7 verses 21 to 29, talking about building our house on the rock and not on the sand. I liked what you mentioned

about building a sandcastle. How many have ever built a sandcastle? If you've ever gone to a lake or river or the ocean, I know we're long way from the ocean but there's a big lake out there. When you're little kids and you build it, especially on the ocean, you think it's going to be there permanently. Then you come back the next day and half of it is washed away. It's like you spent all this time and effort, and there's nothing left. That's the truest way to look at it, if we build our life on something that's not the Rock, the doctrine of Christ, which is to be born again, that's what's going to happen: life is going to gradually erode. I think these things happen to people over time, whether they build up issues, or whatever the case might be. If we have that power in God that we can get that root of bitterness out and keep it out, we're going to have a blessed life. There's no question about it. I also like that he went on to several examples: relationship killers is what he called it. Even Facebook. I'm not a Facebook guy, but I heard where you're coming from. There were other points being mentioned. I would say as far as building your relationship in God, and building your ministry, that's the title of today's message: "Building Your Ministry."

Once the groundwork of building a relationship in God is laid, the next step is to build our ministry and establish a long term plan. A large part of that long term plan is to be thankful that God has called us to His ministry, because if we don't have that, then it's just a matter of time before we start looking elsewhere. We have to ask ourselves if we're convinced that we found the truth in this ministry. I realize that we're not the only ministry that preaches the truth, and I honestly believe that everybody that's out there—everybody—believes they are preaching the truth. What it has to be backed up by is, what does the word of God teach? I know that when I first came here and I was shown what it means as far as being a Christian, it was undeniable and undoubtable and I looked at it and it was like that's it, there's no question about it. So, as time goes by, what are some of those things that could be relationship killers? What are some of those things that might hinder us or hold us back?

1st Timothy 1:12-14 ...He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry...

We have to thank God that He put us in the ministry. That's what it is, it's a calling of God, and it makes a difference. I like what Parrish shared a few months ago, it is a big deal. We all are definitely going to stand before God and it comes down to a matter of are we ready or are we not. Because, alternately, the Bible talks about save yourself from this untoward generation. It's true that we have a support group, but what are we going to do with it? We could just set it aside... The Bible talks about the parable of the sower, and there are a lot of different directions that we can go. There are a lot of different options that we have. We have to have genuine respect for the ministry, and it's not always easy. We are human and we're subject to failure and sometimes we reap the rewards, both good and bad, of our predecessors. I'm going to say that again, sometimes we reap the rewards, both good and bad, of our predecessors. I know that that can mean a lot of different things. It could mean that there are those that went before us that really did well, or those that did poorly. You look at the examples of the Cain's of the Old Testament; most of those did not do well. But if you look at the benefits that the children of Israel reaped as a result of those that followed got with your whole heart, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, but then you look at the examples of those that did evil in the sight of the Lord, and there are some extreme examples, where it is hard to believe that God would have allowed it, but it wasn't God's fault. Another thing that we hear, whenever there's some kind

of a failure or a misfortune, then we have to point to God. That's not the case. Sometimes things are going to happen unexpectedly, and, again, we weep with those that weep. It's difficult, but sometimes we're going to have to be that shoulder to lean on. We have to understand that the ministry is built on a doctrine of truth, otherwise it's not going to spiritually stand the test of time. Don't get me wrong, I understand there are a lot of other churches in a lot of other religions, and this isn't to bash other churches. There are false prophets, and there are false doctrines taught. It doesn't take long to understand that when we look around we see. Jesus said many shall come in my name and say, "I am Christ," and deceive many (Matthew 24:1-5). That was the first message that Christ taught when they asked Him what should be the signs of the end of the world. We're in the last days, but how long can it last? 50, 100, 200, 300? It might last that long, or it could happen tonight. Could I envision it getting worse? I'm sure we all can. Do we hope it does? We don't. We're not gluttons for punishment to say, "Oh yeah, come on, bring it on." It's not like that at all. I hope it's easy. I will tell you this much, there times when it does seem to get better, but there are times when it seems to worsen. We have to look at it from the perspective that we have to brace and prepare for whatever unexpected situations may arise. Christ warned us not to let any man deceive us, but unfortunately there are lies being taught and they are being perpetuated year after year, generation after generation. It's not like we wonder why does that happen. It would seem like God would just snuff it out when it first happened and not allow it to happen. God has basically given this world over to the devil. God gives us the power to get through it; that's why the Bible says love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for all is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, is not of the father but is of the world (1 John 2:15). God has promised things that are greater. Sonya talked about the sound of birds singing in the morning. I like that sound. Seems like I only hear it certain times of the year. I'm not like Brent, I don't know a lot of different bird sounds-- that's a cardinal, that's a blue jay, that's a mourning dove—whatever it is, it sounds good. Christ said if He is lifted up—and that's part of our ministry—that He'd draw all people to Him (John 12:32). We should be convinced enough in the word of God, and where God's placed us, that we don't feel we have to blow other people out of the water in doctrinal warfare. God's going to back us up. If God is for us, who can be against us (John 8:31)? We have to realize that we have to have that confidence, that strength in God.

2nd Corinthians 6:1-3 ...Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed...

A good portion of our ministry is the ability to encourage and to edify. We also have to look at it as what does it mean to blame the ministry. There have been times when I've heard people say blame the church, blame the pastor, blame the Bible. It really comes down to the fact that we have to have a personal accountability. I mentioned earlier that sometimes we're going to feel the benefits or the repercussions of her predecessors. We have to look at it from a perspective that a lot of times we will make decisions that after the fact will say I wish I hadn't done that. I'm not talking about serving God, I'm talking about things like a decision regarding real estate or I shouldn't have watched that movie. The phrase that the ministry be not blamed

refers to a perfect doctrine, a perfect word of God—the ministry is bigger than any one person. People make up the ministry, but, God's will is that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Peter 3:9). Where are going to be those that don't make it, but those of us that have heard and those of us that have endured we have to make a decision that we want to continue. I want to make sure that I make my calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). We have to be strong ourselves, but how many have felt strengthened after helping someone else? I would say that I don't know how God does it, but He does it. There is a verse that talks about the fervent charity shall cover a multitude of sins. That's important spiritual point, because if I'm showing fervent charity, which I should be, but the Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, I'm not talking about if I since six times and do eight works of charity, then I'm up plus two... If we seek God and continue to pray to God, if we are able to have that attitude about it, we will be successful.

The last section we're going to talk about is maintaining your building. What are the most critical elements of our life in God is, examining ourselves periodically. We need to make sure that we're where we need to be. Are we reading the Bible? Are we praying to God? Are we fasting? Are we giving? Are we casting down vain imaginations? Are we inviting people to church? Are we not being judgmental... The Bible says judge righteous judgment (John 7:24). But I mean, if we haven't heard the whole matter, do we instantly jump to conclusions? So, after we've checked off those boxes, are we living a holy life? Are we forgiving as we should? Are we loving and caring for people? If you do more than that, that will cover everything, right? That covers everything? We've got about 10 points? That's not the case. There's never a point where we can just say, "I've finished it." Yes, there is a point where the Bible says when we've done all we can do but stand, to just stand (Ephesians 6:13), but then you have another day to face, and another day to face. There's something that I've got to share, that I think about from time to time, Pete Shepherd shared something about 6 months ago, about how you face each day, you wake up each morning saying, "Oh lord, it's morning," kind of defeated, but after a while it changed to, "Good morning, Lord." I use that, and I have to say it works. It really made a difference, just to have a better outlook. I know that there's going to be curve balls were going to have to face, things are going to come along unexpectedly, sometimes things are painful, sometimes things that are genuinely tragic. It's not a laughing matter. It's one of those things where I just can't see how God has his hand in that. We still have to keep going.

2nd Corinthians 13:1-5 *...Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith...*

That's something that we have to periodically examine ourselves, we have to periodically check to make sure that we're where we need to be, that we're what God wants us to be. God knows that we're all going to need a shoulder to cry on how ourselves at different points. Are we willing to lean on others, and are we willing to be leaned on ourselves?

Titus 2:1-7 *...In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works...*

We have to have a pattern of good works, and that's something that God expects. I mentioned earlier that the ministry is bigger than any one individual. I know that there's a topic that has been on my mind, it's not a study or anything, but it really comes down to is are we leading or are we following? We really need to get on his word. Bob mentioned last week that we really need to be supportive of whoever's in charge, but we also need to be supportive of who's in the middle or who's new in the faith. I think when we do that we have a clear conscience towards God. For those of you that were here last week, Jim Ottoson was up here from Virginia. I think this year Jim Ottoson will have been baptized 40 years or maybe it was last year. He mentioned that, and then he made a really simple statement... I'm going to get to that in a minute, but I know that for myself, this year makes 25 years of being baptized in Jesus Name. I thank God for that. I feel like it's a milestone, personally. Have there been ups and downs and trials and tribulations? Oh yeah. Have there been victories? I can't count them. I don't feel that I've lived a tragedy filled life, or a cursed life. It hasn't been just one anguish after another. There's been down falls, there been troubles, there been struggles; there have been difficulties; there have been deaths in the family, but I would have to say that overall... We sometimes hear from people that it seems like they've got a chip on their shoulder, they just feel like they have suffered more than anybody else, and my answer to that is God can change all of that. I know that God has kept me, but the statement the Jim made—it was just a simple statement: “Don't give up.” I've got a quote: I know there was a pretty well-known college coach a few years ago; how many remember Jim Valvano? He coached at North Carolina State, and actually they were a surprisingly major underdog that came to a national title in '83 or '84 maybe. Few years later, I'm thinking 1993, he was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of cancer, and he was up for an ESPY Award. He had been given a couple of months to live, and he wasn't going to go, but then some people talk him into going. When he was giving his acceptance speech, he used the same words, “Don't give up.” He talked about his chemotherapy and there was a guy in the back saying finish your speech, you've only got so much allotted time. It was very emotional and impassioned speech, and he said the same thing, he said, “Don't ever give up.” I want to tie that was what Jim said and I want to say the same thing after 25 years don't give up. I know some of you have been around longer, some of you not as long, but I would say it's worth it. I would say in recapping, just be encouraging, examine ourselves, have a long term plan, and again I want to say Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers out here. God bless. Thank you very much.