

PERSPECTIVE

FEBRUARY 2021

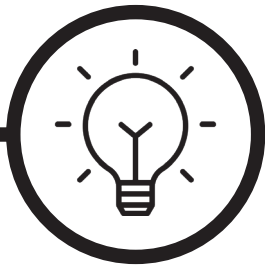


**SERVING
OTHER
CHURCHES**

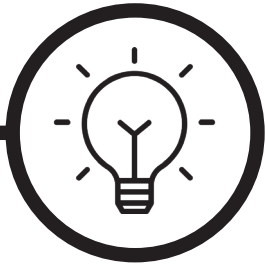
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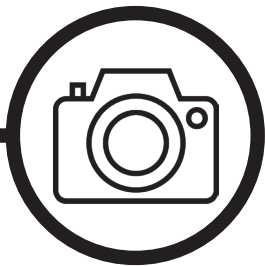
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Serving Other Churches

In last month's *Perspective*, I made the case that caring about other local churches is an essential part of our Christian life. Before his death, Jesus prayed for future believers—that future churches would be one. He prayed for unity. He prayed believers around the world would be united around one gospel (John 17:21). One way we do this today is by serving other churches.

If I had to guess, serving *other* churches probably isn't on your mind very much. You're not thinking about other churches when you receive another email asking if you are available to serve in the nursery Sunday night. You probably aren't worrying about that church across town when you stand up after the benediction and wonder who you're going to talk to. It's unlikely churches around the world are on your mind when you're struggling to not be offended by the friend who walked right by you at church without even saying hello.

Life is hard; it's full, and serving other churches just isn't on our radar.

It should be.

We're to be a Great Commission people—a people eager to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in God's Triune name (Matt. 28:19). To put it bluntly, this isn't the *Great Suggestion*; it's the *Great Commission*. We are all called to this task, committed to this talk, and charged by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to be about the business of seeing his gospel spread from house to house, state to state, and country to country. Do you feel the weight of this? You should.

However, something amazing happens when you read the New Testament. If you read it carefully enough, you realize that though this command has a million individual implications, it is most fundamentally a commission to be carried out by the local church. With few exceptions, the New Testament letters are letters written to churches or networks of churches.

Of course, those churches are filled with *individual* saints who must be about the business of evangelism. When I'm engaged in conversation with my non-Christian neighbor, my default question shouldn't be, "I wonder if he'd come to church with me." No! I need to be saying to myself, "God seems to be opening a door for evangelism here. How can I point my friend to Christ?" We should all feel the individual weight of personal evangelism. If you are a Christian, you need to be sharing the gospel naturally, regularly, and with a sense of urgency.

But isn't it interesting the way Paul commends entire churches for their evangelistic zeal? Consider the way Paul commended all the saints in Thessalonica for their work promoting the gospel, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything" (1 Thess. 1:8). The Thessalonians, *all of them*, had a reputation for making Jesus known. Evangelism and discipleship aren't individual competitions; they're team sports. Christianity is less like bowling and more like basketball. One strong Christian is surely a special gift from God, but a strong church is a windfall of blessing.

If we want to see the gospel go forth mightily in our generation, we better think about more than training up a few select individuals to do the fighting. We need an army of churches ready to make war against hell. Therefore, every local church should have a heart to serve other churches.

What does this look like practically? For the rest of this article, I want to argue from the pages of Scripture that churches serving churches is the biblical model. We serve other churches by knowing, encouraging, strengthening, and sharing all for the sake of the gospel.

WE SERVE OTHER CHURCHES BY KNOWING

It may surprise you to hear this, but most pastors know very little about the churches in their own neighborhood. Given the personal demands of their own ministry and the intentionality such knowledge demands, it often never happens. Sometimes, we're discouraged from engaging neighboring churches due to a lack of theological unity. For example, I've very little interaction with the Episcopal and the United Methodist churches across the street because both have veered so far from the orthodox Anglicanism they once shared. But what about the evangelical churches down the street and around the corner?

The earliest churches worked very hard to know each other. Consider how Paul sent Tychicus to tell the Colossian church about his own missionary work, "Tychicus will tell you all about my activities (Col. 4:7). Three times in verses 7–9, Paul said he wants the Colossians to know what he's been doing, and we can assume he wanted the Colossians to know how the young church plants are getting along.

Paul didn't merely want to be known; he wanted to know the state of other churches. When finishing up his first letter to the members of the church in Corinth, he expressed a desire to spend extended time with them, "For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1 Cor.

16:7). His apostolic ministry involved more than doing the hard work of evangelism. It included the relational work of simply knowing how other churches are growing.

This ministry of “knowing” went beyond Paul. Thus, at the end of Romans, he could inform the churches in Rome of the caring warmth of other congregations: “All the churches of Christ greet you” (Rom. 16:16). These bodies, scattered throughout the Mediterranean, knew enough about one another to send genuine, heartfelt greetings.

In the twenty-first century, there is literally a world of churches to know. We should praise God for that! His name is spreading. But let’s also admit that churches in recent history have done a lot more work building their own kingdoms than making sure they know what the Lord is doing in neighboring lands.

I hope you notice at Mount Vernon how much effort we take to inform you about God’s work in other parts of our city or world. Whether by having a guest preacher from a sister church, a missions dessert with an international pastor, or simply an update on Sunday night, we want to be a congregation that is warm to our sister congregations’ successes and trials around the world. Simply put, we serve other churches by knowing who they are and how they are doing.

WE SERVE OTHER CHURCHES BY ENCOURAGING

Knowing what’s going on within another congregation and actually encouraging a church are two different things; though, in Scripture, they really are two sides of the same coin. Take Ephesians 6:22, for example. Paul assumed we get to know others *in order to* encourage them. Once again, he mentions why he sent Tychicus, “I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that he may *know* how you are, and that he may *encourage* your hearts.” It’s hard to truly encourage a person (or a congregation) unless you first know them.

Paul thanked the Corinthians for sending three brothers to encourage him: Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaius. Paul told the church these brothers blessed him: “they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.” Paul finished his thought with a word of exhortation: “Give recognition to such men” (1 Cor. 16:18). In other words, take special note of the kind of Christians who bring encouragement to the church body.

Philemon was *that* kind of Christian. He encouraged not only Paul but a whole church as well. “For I derived much joy and comfort from your love,” Paul tells him, “because the hearts of the saints

have been refreshed through you” (Philemon 1:7).

True churches are united by sound doctrine and a shared mission of bringing the gospel to all people. Nonetheless, they come in all shapes and sizes.

- Some churches have long and storied histories; others came into existence just a few months ago.
- Some churches have pastors who have faithfully served in one pulpit for nearly a generation, while others have recently installed a pastor right out of seminary.
- Some churches have walked through scores of counseling cases about marriage; others are dealing with their first.
- Some churches minister in suburban Atlanta’s comfortable environs, while others meet in homes among refugees in Central Asia.

In a moment, I’ll point out how churches in the New Testament shared resources for the sake of the gospel. But first and foremost, let’s observe how they simply *knew* and *encouraged* one another. They didn’t take their relationships for granted. Taking a trip to spend some time with a fledgling congregation *is* ministry; it is an invaluable part of missions. Knowing how you can both pray for and encourage an inner-city or rural church is a New Testament ministry we dare not ignore.

In January, a young pastor about to serve a nearby church decided to join us for a couple of Sunday mornings. He’s about to begin a challenging work, and he wanted some time to be fed by someone else. While he was with us, even for just a couple of Sundays, he engaged in conversation with us. He shared lunches with us. He paid attention to our singing, our love for sound doctrine, and even our heart for missions. He made sure to tell me how encouraged he was by what he saw. What he didn’t realize is how encouraging it was for us to have him and his family in our midst! Simply by pointing out evidence of God’s grace at Mount Vernon, this young brother encouraged the saints at Mount Vernon. We need more of this. Serving other churches can be as simple as encouraging other churches.

WE SERVE OTHER CHURCHES BY STRENGTHENING

Last month, when the elders of Mount Vernon met for a one-day retreat, we were joined for a session by Tony Carter, the pastor of Eastpoint Church right here in Atlanta. For over an hour he fed us from the Word of God. He discipled us; he strengthened us. What

a joy! By Tony pouring into the elders of MVBC, he poured into the body of Mount Vernon. We need more of this kind of camaraderie, now more than ever!

One of the most surprising results from a careful reading of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts is how deliberately he returned to established churches in order to build them up. At the close of his first journey—his last stop in Lystra—Paul turned around and re-visited Iconium and Antioch, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Having just been stoned at Lystra, Paul knew a thing or two about tribulation!

We know Paul encouraged these young congregations with sound, apostolic teaching, but how did he strengthen them? Although encouragement and strengthening are siblings and not distant cousins, it does seem like Paul did more than simply exhort them to fight the good fight of the faith. He must have provided instruction in the nuts and bolts of daily church life and leadership since, in Acts 14:23, Luke reported, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.” Paul strengthened these established churches by helping them establish biblical leadership.

Did you know Paul didn't start his second missionary journey by pioneering a new movement? No, he first returned to works which had already begun. Having split off from Barnabas and subsequently chosen Silas as his new traveling companion, Paul took him “through Syria and Cilicia, *strengthening* the churches” (Acts 15:41).

Mount Vernon's Feed My Sheep conference (the 15th of this month!!) is an opportunity to serve other churches. Even as we try to serve others by hosting this event, we are fed by outside speakers. Our souls are refreshed. Our hearts are encouraged. We are challenged by another voice to walk more faithfully with the Lord.

Could this kind of inter-church encouragement have been on Paul's mind when he wrote to the “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2)? In other words, Paul did not write Galatians to an individual but to a network of churches in the region of Galatia. When Paul urged them to “bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), he may have had more than 1-1 discipling relationships in mind. He may have known that entire congregations would need one another over time to persevere through difficult days. I don't deny exhortations like this can be taken individually. I am certainly to carry the burdens of brothers and sisters

who are the members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church. But, again, given Paul's choice of writing a letter which would circulate among the churches established during his first missionary journey, couldn't the Apostle have been encouraging them to think beyond themselves and care for the well-being of sister churches? I think so.

WE SERVE OTHER CHURCHES BY SHARING

So far, I've argued that churches in the New Testament era knew, encouraged, and even strengthened one another. All this comes under the umbrella of gospel cooperation. Their shared mission, warm friendship, and theological like-mindedness made it easy for them to *share* resources with one another too. Those resources included financial aid, personnel, and missionary support.

The most profound example of church cooperation in the New Testament is found in the relationship between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. Jerusalem was the mother church, the first church, a church filled with apostles and the most experienced teachers. After persecution forced several Christians out of Jerusalem, they fled to Antioch and established a church that quickly became a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers.

When the leaders in Jerusalem heard about Antioch's growth and need for a pastor, they sent Barnabas (Acts 11:22). He served there faithfully, recruited Paul to help him (Acts 11:25), and together the two ministered for an entire year. Because Jerusalem was willing to “share” its best with an established church, Antioch's believers grew spiritually.

When trouble hit the financially poorer believers in Jerusalem, the saints in Antioch stepped up: “So the disciples [in Antioch] determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). This became a pattern. As churches throughout Macedonia heard about Jerusalem's need, they eagerly sent support (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8, 9). Jerusalem may have been poor financially, but the church remained rich with personnel and happily again sent one of their own, Silas, to serve with Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:31, 40).

Study the New Testament epistles, and you will find so many examples of individuals, rooted in one congregation, giving of themselves for the sake of gospel growth in another congregation. Consider Epaphras, a member of the church in Colossae, who assisted Paul and shared his labors with other congregations. Paul writes about how Epaphras “worked hard for you [Colossians] and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis” (Col. 4:13). Long story short, the church in Colossae shared their best, Epaphras, with others.

Examples like this abound. Names like Phoebe (Rom. 16:1); Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:3); Luke and Demas (Col. 4:14); and Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:19) come to mind.

Don't you feel like this is happening at Mount Vernon? As we prepare to send off Jesse and Delaine to the United Arab Emirates, we are losing some of our best. But it's not a loss, not really. It's a gift to a sister church overseas, a church in need of a shepherd to hold their hand and help them follow Christ, a church that will be blessed by the heart and service that Delaine can bring. This is generosity: being joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of those we love, and we love other churches. We serve other churches by sharing.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

Going back to Jerusalem and Antioch, why did these congregations share financial provision and gifted personnel? They did it for the sake of the gospel. They cooperated in giving not only so that the gospel would go forth but so that the world would see them united in a great mission and know that the Father sent his Son for the salvation of the world.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to fund Timothy for the sake of the gospel: "So let no one despise him. *Help* him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers" (1 Cor. 16:11). Paul told the church to support Timothy so the younger brother could rejoin Paul's apostolic mission. He did it for the sake of the gospel.

The Philippians provided similar support directly for Paul. They received Paul's thanks:

Yet it was kind of you to *share* my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into *partnership* with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me *help for my needs* once and again (Phil. 4:14–16).

John, in his third letter, instructed a local church to support those doing the work of traveling and planting the gospel:

You will do well to send them on their journey in a *manner worthy* of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to *support* people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth (3 John 6b–8).

New Testament churches sought to know each other, encourage each other, strengthen each other, and share with each other for the sake of the gospel. In the Bible, we see an interconnected web of relationships;

all local church members united in their efforts to spread the gospel, as churches, far and wide.

I'm convinced churches should aim to plant new churches and revitalize old churches. Yes and amen! But a closer look at the New Testament tells us that faithful cooperation must be cultivated before this kind of fruit will be born. We have to pay attention to the root: serving other churches. We serve other churches by knowing, encouraging, strengthening, and sharing all for the sake of the gospel.

– Aaron Menikoff

Anger: *Calming Your Heart*

Written by Robert D. Jones

We all get angry. Maybe you would label yours as mere frustration, irritation, or annoyance, but it's all anger. Anger can be a particularly insidious sin that is difficult to fight. Robert Jones, a professor in biblical counseling, has given us an amazing resource in his small, easy-to-read book, *Anger: Calming Your Heart*. To help us in the fight, Jones provides thirty-one short devotions that are rich and digestible with practical homework to help us to use God's word to root out the sin of anger in our lives.

I appreciate the amount of time Jones takes laying a foundation before tackling the actual outworking of our sinful, angry responses. He helpfully wields Scripture to show us the grievousness of our sin but contrasts that with the all-sufficient grace available to us in Christ. Jones helps us examine the righteous anger we see in the life of Christ and the Psalms and contrasts that with our sinful anger. He delves into why we get sinfully angry and shows us how a truly repentant prayer might sound. Only then does he begin to discuss the different ways our sinful anger might manifest itself and provides biblical replacements for those angry responses.

This book greatly helped me, and I highly commend it to you. I came away from reading it with a much better, biblical framework for understanding my anger. I also came away with a stack of Scripture note cards posted around my house, lists of probing questions to ask myself when I am tempted toward anger, and lists of practical steps to take when I begin to feel angry. This book will lead you to Christ, and it will equip you with biblical ways to fight the sin of anger with hope.

— RECOMMENDED BY EDEN HUTCHINS



ROBERT D. JONES

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Gaze on the Christ who graciously took the divine hit that you deserved. Praise him for averting the wrath that you earned. And let the merciful sacrifice of Jesus soften your heart and incline it toward showing mercy to those who offend you. Defeating your anger is not dependent on you; it's dependent on Christ."

— Day 8, p.34

2

"Yet provocations are not causes. [...] Scripture resists the reductionism, determinism, and dehumanization that the above explanations assume. The causation for our anger lies inside us."

— Day 12, p.44

3

"What do we need most in times when we are concealing our anger? To draw near to the Lord and imitate him. We must know him as the one who loves us, not hates us, in his heart, and who commands and enables us to do the same in our hearts toward others. He bears no grudges against us but in Christ brings us his unending, inexhaustible riches."

— Day 21, p.64

Understanding Baptism

Written by Bobby Jamieson

What's the big deal about baptism? For starters, Jesus commands his disciples to be baptized. Yet, for many, questions still remain. In this short book from the Church Basics series, *Understanding Baptism*, Bobby Jamieson reminds us what the Bible says about baptism and answers common questions within evangelical circles. Jamieson makes a convincing argument for believer's baptism as a response to repentance and faith in Christ.

As Jamieson draws our attention to various texts throughout Scripture, he illustrates what baptism is and is not, who should and should not be baptized, and how churches should practice baptism. He opens the book by addressing what true baptism means in light of the gospel and how the whole church is involved. To help further navigate difficult questions, the majority of the book focuses on 'Who Should Be Baptized?' and includes a separate chapter devoted to infant baptism. Jamieson gently but firmly addresses the topic of who should be baptized and does so with conviction—being sure always to point the reader back to the Bible. He also has a chapter that addresses the question 'Why [...] Baptism Required For Church Membership?'. The book concludes with a topic we may not give much thought to: 'How Should Churches Practice Baptism?' J

I would recommend this book to church leaders, church members who have questions about baptism, and others who may just want to be better equipped to disciple others about baptism. I found his chapter titled 'When Is Baptism Not Baptism?' especially helpful when talking to other brothers and sisters about their baptism.

— RECOMMENDED BY KEVIN VAUGHTER



Excerpts From the Book

1

"Second, it's important to recognize that baptism isn't a mere human tradition. It's not something the church invented. It's not something we Christians only happen to do and could just as well not do. Instead, it's a command from Christ that is binding on all believers in all places at all times."

— What is Baptism?, p.14

2

"Baptism is a sign of a believer's union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4; Col. 2:11-12). But infants are not united to Christ. All people, even those born of Christian parents, must receive Christ by faith in order to be joined to him by the Spirit."

— What About Infant Baptism?, p.25

3

"Baptism and the Lord's Supper ratify the covenant relation which is church membership. Therefore, there is no such thing as membership without baptism. To speak of membership without baptism is like speaking of marriage without vows."

— Why is Baptism Required for Church Membership?, p.49

FEBRUARY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

February 1	1 John 3:1–10	February 15	1 John 3:11–4:6
February 2	John 8:12–30	February 16	John 10:1–21
February 3	John 8:31–47	February 17	John 10:22–40
February 4	John 8:48–50	February 18	John 11:1–16
February 5	John 9	February 19	John 11:17–44
February 6	Psalm 2	February 20	Psalm 133
February 7	1 John 3:1–10	February 21	1 John 3:11–4:6
February 8	Daniel 1	February 22	1 John 4:7–21
February 9	Jeremiah 13:15–27	February 23	John 11:45–57
February 10	Jeremiah 24:1–10	February 24	John 12:1–11
February 11	Jeremiah 25:1–14	February 25	John 12:12–26
February 12	Jeremiah 29:1–23	February 26	John 12:27–50
February 13	Ephesians 3:20–4:6	February 27	Leviticus 19:1–18
February 14	Daniel 1	February 28	1 John 4:7–21

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Kyle Buck



Laura Swann



Carianne
Whitlow



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH