

Opportunity and Empowerment / COB / 12.28.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Good morning! Merry Christmas! I am so happy to see you!
- † The week before our Christmas drama, we were talking about pastor/elders, and by the end of the sermon I was feeling overwhelmed by all the responsibilities! I was getting cranky and feeling sorry for myself. Now, I like being your pastor. But it is a big job, and I don't want to let you down, or let Christ down; so sometimes I get stressed about it.
- It encourages to remember that in the early church, the pastor/elders had a lot of help, because every believer in the church was contributing to the ministry in some way. We lived out that example this Christmas, as we all pulled together for the VBS party, the Christmas shadow drama, and the Christmas Eve service. Almost everyone age two and up was involved, and that's what it takes to carry out the ministry of Christ.
 - Because the reality every week is that I have no hope of fulfilling my responsibilities... unless we all work together as a team. But this is a good thing, not a reason to feel sorry for ourselves. In the church, God offers each of us gifts of opportunity and empowerment, two things we crave in life, two blessings that play a part in our spiritual growth and which allow us to play a part in the ministry of Christ.
 - So open your Bible to the book of Acts, and we will begin there, as we explore God's gifts of opportunity and empowerment. If you are unsure how to find the book of Acts, you can use the table of contents, or rely on what I put up on the screen.

Opportunity for Women

- † **[Slide 2: Acts 1.14]** I want to talk first about empowerment and opportunity for women in ministry.
- When Jesus named his twelve apostles, they were all men [Luke 6.13-16]. And we have seen that the apostolic plan for the church was for only men to be pastor/elders.
 - Yet we know that there were women involved in Jesus' ministry. We think of the women who financially supported the ministry [Luke 8.3]; we think of those who ministered directly to Jesus and his team [Matthew 27.55]; we think of women like Martha, who produced special events for the ministry [John 12.2], though not shadow dramas so far as we know. So let's take a walk through some scripture to see what women were doing in the early church.
- † **Acts 1.14 NET: All these [apostles] continued together in prayer with one mind, together with the women, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.**
- Even before the Holy Spirit came upon them to launch the church into the gospel mission, women were considered disciples of Christ, they were included in the count of 120 believers who gathered together.
 - **[Slide 3: Acts 2.4]** Once the Holy Spirit had come upon them, they went out in public, speaking in foreign languages, and being understood by Jews from those foreign lands. **Acts 2.4 NET: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.** Sometimes the Bible says "all" as hyperbole, but here there were only 120

people, so I think we can take this as accurate: all of them experienced this, women as much as men.

- † The non-believing Jews were confused by this, so the apostles stood before them and Peter spoke for the church. **[Slide 4: Acts 2.16-18]** Part of what Peter said is in **Acts 2.16-18 NET: “But this is what was spoken about through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it will be,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even [yes, indeed] on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”**
 - Peter quoted from the prophet Joel about what would happen in these “last days,” that is, in the period between when Christ ascended to Heaven and when he will return to judge all people. Quoting Joel, who was quoting God, Peter said women would receive the Holy Spirit and prophesy in God’s name just like men.
 - **[Slide 5: Acts 21.8-9]** We know this continued to happen as the church developed. **Acts 21.8-9 NET: On the next day we left and came to Caesarea [Καισάρεια], and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. (He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.)**
 - This is about three decades after the start of the church. A couple of decades even later, Paul mentioned in the letter of 1 Corinthians [11.5] that women were prophesying. So this ministry for women continued as the church developed.

- † **[Slide 6: Acts 9.36]** **Acts 9.36 NET: Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas) [Tabitha is an Aramaic name; Dorcas is the equivalent in Greek]. She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity.**
 - Tabitha served by caring for people and meeting their needs, particularly, we learn, if we read on, by making clothes.

- † **[Slide 7: Acts 16.13-15]** **Acts 16.13-15 NET: On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate [in Philippi] to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman [which means she was not Jewish, but did believe in the Jewish God], listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying [which would be the gospel about Christ]. After she and her household were baptized [they all came to believe], she urged us, “If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord [a true disciple of Christ], come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.**
 - Paul’s team targeted women for the gospel, they did consider women to be believers [disciples] just like men, and they allowed women to serve on the team, in this case through hospitality.
 - Based on 16.40, I think it likely the church in Philippi began to meet in Lydia’s house, which would go beyond personal hospitality to providing and preparing the worship space.

- † **[Slide 8: Acts 18.26]** **Acts 18.26 NET: He [Apollos, a young disciple] began to speak out fearlessly in the synagogue [he was preaching about Jesus to the Jews in Ephesus], but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately.**

- Apollos needed instruction on Christian doctrine – he believed in Jesus, but did not understand the nuances of theology – so a husband and wife team, both mature believers who had been mentored by Paul, ministered to Apollos, we might say “mentored” him, together.
- † **[Slide 9: Titus 2.3-5]** The apostle Paul said that older women should be teaching and mentoring the younger women. **Titus 2.3-5 NET: Older women likewise are to exhibit behavior fitting for those who are holy, not slandering, not slaves to excessive drinking, but teaching what is good. In this way they will train the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, fulfilling their duties at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the message of God may not be discredited.**
- This is not to suggest that women generally did not love their husbands and children, but they needed to learn God’s ways of loving, to learn God’s way of living, so the older women, more mature in life and faith, were to teach and train – to mentor, really – those who were younger.
- † You might ask, didn’t Paul forbid women to teach in the church community [1 Timothy 2.12; 1 Corinthians 14.34-35]? No. **[Slide 10: 1 Timothy 2.12]** An example of what he said is found in **1 Timothy 2.12 NET: I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.**
- I take this to be part of the rule about male pastor/elders who are responsible for overseeing the church and preaching under the authority of the apostles – and I would say women should not mentor men on their own – but Paul does not say that the women were otherwise limited in how they could serve in the ministry. In fact, he empowered women like Lydia and Priscilla to do ministry in the church in the name of Christ.
- † **[Slide 11: early lit.]** In the early church literature outside the New Testament, we find women were teaching other women and children, and baptizing female new believers [*Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4.3; Parable 9.26.2; [Pliny the Younger, *Lib.* 10.96, *Plinius Traiano Imperatori*; *Didascalia* 16].
- So my conclusion is that, beyond the restriction about being a pastor/elder, God has great expectations of using women in his ministry just like he uses men, and so we in the local church should empower and recognize women in ministry, just as we do men.
 - In this church, we have women who lead worship and others who serve on that team; we have women who are teachers in several different ministries; we have women who are small group leaders for other women and youth; we have a woman who oversees the children’s ministry and provides administrative support; we have women who are doing evangelism, counseling, and encouragement; we have women who have served on teams for the pastor search, remodeling the sanctuary, special events, supplies, decorating, refreshments, care, and even mowing the lawn. In this church we empower and recognize women in ministry.

Opportunity for Average Believers

- † **[Slide 12: early church participation]** The next question is what opportunity can every one of us – male or female – find in the church?
- When we were tracing the development of church ministry structure three weeks ago, we saw that all believers were involved in the ministry.
 - They gave generously of their financial resources. You remember that? Some were even selling their property and giving the money from the sale to the church!

- They were serving in whatever way was needed. Sometimes this was in organized ministries that developed, like meeting the needs of widows; other times this was just being hospitable and generous with each other.
 - Every one of them went out and shared the gospel with non-believers. Some were very bold, standing in the market square or in the Jewish synagogues and declaring the truth about Jesus as the Messiah-savior. But others shared the joy of knowing Jesus in the context of daily life, as they interacted with people. They were so excited about the identity of Jesus proven by the resurrection and the salvation offered by Jesus proven by the indwelling Holy Spirit that they were infectious, people wanted to know what was going on with them that they could have such joy, peace, and willingness to love.
 - We also saw that average believers could develop to teach and prophesy in the church.
- † That’s the example given by the scriptural account of the start of the church. You might ask, can this be true for us? So let’s look now at a few passages that show both our opportunity to be involved and our responsibility.
- † **[Slide 13: 1 Peter 4.10] 1 Peter 4.10 NET: “Just as each one has received a [spiritual] gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God.”**
- We discussed spiritual gifts and serving in the church back in September. If you missed those two sermons or forgot them, you can hear them on our church website.
 - For now, let’s be clear, that we are all called to serve one another. You have opportunity in that God has blessed you with spiritual gifts, natural abilities, time, money, and other ways he has equipped you to be able to help people, and that means you have responsibility because being a good steward of those blessings means finding ways to use them to help others.
- † **[Slide 14: Philippians 2.3-5] Philippians 2.3-5 NET: “Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had.”**
- We are to care for each other, being actively concerned about the interests of each other. And opportunities abound: so we visit Jack in the rehab facility; we bring a meal to Hilma; we offer Mark a ride to church; we babysit so parents can go to small group or development classes; we contribute to ministries for the common good, like keeping up the gardens and the building. Look around and you will find ways to bless each other.
- † **[Slide 15: Colossians 3.16] Colossians 3.16 NASB: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...”**
- You know, when our children learn something new in church, they immediately share that information with others, especially when they think someone needs to hear it. So everyone of us can learn something in church or Bible study and begin sharing that with others.
 - As we develop more biblical understanding, we grow to teach in other, more formal, ways, such as in small group Bible studies, development classes, our ministries to children and youth, and counseling and encouraging each other.

- † **[Slide 16: Matthew 28.19-20]** **Matthew 28.19-20 NET:** [Jesus said] **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”**
- All disciples of Jesus are to share God’s truth with those outside the church so they come to believe and be baptized, and to share God’s truth with those inside the church so they grow to be mature disciples who will do the same.
- † **[Slide 17: James 5.16]** **James 5.16 NET:** **“So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.”**
- I mention this because prayer is a real and important ministry in which you all can participate. Ask for a church directory and take time every week to pray for the people in this church.
 - And if you have friends here who need to talk through their spiritual struggles, please be open to hearing that confession with an attitude of love and acceptance.
 - There are many verses that speak to opportunities we have to serve each other by engaging in Christian fellowship – we talked about that back in August – and all of us should be involved in those things, in the forty-something one-another commands.
- † **[Slide 18: Sanctification]** The opportunities for serving in the church, for being on Christ’s team, exist today just as they did in the early church. Should you desire these opportunities? Yes!
- This year we had eleven sermons about spiritual growth, what theologians call progressive sanctification, because God is at work progressively sanctifying or purifying us, to be like Christ, to become the image of God that we were created and saved to be.
 - Part of the vision for spiritual growth is for you to become like Christ so that you can succeed in representing God to the world. If you are following Christ, trying to be like Christ, you will be doing what he did, assuming his priorities and values; that means you will be doing ministry as you pursue the positive commands of scripture.
 - If you are representing God then you will be ministering to others in God’s name. So becoming more and more involved in ministry is one result of spiritual growth. If you are not serving or growing in your service over time, this would be a cause for concern.
 - Part of the process of spiritual growth is helping you become equipped to do ministry, so that you can serve others well and thus serve Christ well. So you should pursue ministry skill development just like you pursue Bible knowledge and relationship with Christ.
 - And part of the process of growing you is that you do ministry at progressive levels, because God will grow you through those experiences; you will grow in faith, character, maturity, and ministry ability as you do ministry. As you serve to help others, God will be blessing you.

Empowerment

- † **[Slide 19: structure]** Let’s talk now about empowerment, because opportunity – as wonderful as it is – can be frightening if we are not empowered to succeed.
- Just before Christmas, we learned the apostles developed a structure for the church, with Christ in total authority at the head; his chosen apostles in complete authority under Christ through the scripture they left; a senior pastor/lead elder guiding a team of pastor/elders to represent

the apostles as they lead each local church; a supporting cast of deacons and other spiritual leaders to help the pastor/elders; and the entire church body engaging in ministry work.

- Deacons are a special case, so we will talk about deacons next week in the adult development class. Today, we are talking about all believers, which includes all believers growing into spiritual leaders.

† **[Slide 20: Ephesians 4.11-12]** Ephesians 4.11-12 NET: It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and [other] teachers, to equip the saints [believers] for the work of ministry...

- What we want from this today is that the church has some people – men and women – who are serving as spiritual leaders to help develop and equip everyone else for ministry work.
- My hope, my job, is to develop and empower others in this church to become spiritual leaders, who are mature in faith, Christ-like in character, and equipped for ministry to others, so that they will work with me to repeat the process of equipping more believers.

† **[Slide 21: offerings]** The empowerment we offer can take different forms with different intensities. It is not a one size fits all thing. Some churches try that, but it does not work well. So please understand you can find the type of empowerment you need for your next step.

- Mentoring is working together every week, to accelerate spiritual growth and equipping for ministry. With our teachers and small group leaders, I am more of a coach than a mentor: I don't meet with them every week, but I always am available to help them and I periodically offer them additional training for ministry.
- Together, those of us in ministry leadership offer everyone in the church growth opportunities, like small group Bible studies, Sunday school development classes, biblical counsel, and ministry programs that bless both the people receiving the ministry service and those involved in it.
- And you, you, can have personalized training! As you take each step into deeper involvement in church ministry, those of us already doing the work are eager to come alongside you with encouragement and training, so you grow more capable and confident, so you have the empowerment to seize that opportunity to serve Christ.
- So if God is calling you to teach, let me help prepare your first lessons; if God is calling you to work with the youth, let us pair you up with someone experienced who can walk alongside you. If you want to help visit people in the hospital, we have people who will go with you the first time and offer insight into that ministry. Whatever your next step of involvement is, you don't have to take it alone.

† Another form of empowerment is authority. In the early church authority went with responsibility. God gave pastor/elders the ultimate responsibility for doctrinal purity, spiritual growth and health of people, and oversight of the ministry; so God gave the pastor/elders the ultimate authority in the church, under the guidance of Christ's apostles in scripture.

- But as the pastor/elders delegate responsibility to you – as you take responsibility in ministry – the pastor/elders delegate authority to you, so that you can accomplish those responsibilities.
- For example, two women in our church are responsible to ensure the church has the building and ministry supplies it needs. So they have authority to make decisions and purchases as necessary to carry out that responsibility; they don't have to come to the pastor/elders for

constant guidance or permission. They are under the authority of the pastor/elders, but they have authority from the pastor/elders to carry out the work and fulfill their responsibilities.

- Trust me, as your senior pastor/lead elder, I don't want every decision to come across my desk. I would drown in obligations and the church would be very limited that way. What I want is to teach, train, and motivate you to be ready for involvement on the ministry team, so that I can hand off some responsibility with authority to you, and we can work together to carry out ministry in Christ's name.

Application

- † **[Slide 22: what is God calling you to do next?]** So the question for you is, what is your next step? Because there is plenty of opportunity and empowerment for you in this church. You can find a way to serve right now and you can aspire to grow into effective spiritual leadership.
- Let's consider various phases of growth you might experience. You might not believe yet, you are a seeker of truth, but you could grow to become a believer in Christ; if you are a new believer, you can grow into a committed member of the church; a committed member can grow to be a mature believer; a mature believer can grow to be a spiritual leader; and even spiritual leaders can grow to be multiplying disciples.
 - **[Slide 23: Phase I]** If you are a seeker: step one is to learn and believe the gospel about Jesus; begin daily quiet time with God through prayer and Bible study; develop your relationship with God [learn to know him and relate to him]; receive water baptism. Even if you are not a believer yet, you can help out around here if you want, and God will bless you through it.
 - **[Slide 24: Phase II]** If you are young in your faith: step one is to see whether you are missing any aspect of what we just discussed for the seeker, and then start there; but assuming you have been baptized and are having quiet time, then now as part of your Bible study go through our new devotion on the core beliefs of the church; commit to participating in worship and church community; begin taking communion; become a voting member of the church; join a ministry team in the church. Every believer should be involved in church ministry, it is part of your growth process. There are plenty of entry-level ministry opportunities here.
 - **[Slide 25: Phase III]** If you are past that stage and want to continue growing: step one is to continue growing in prayer and Bible study; read through the entire Bible; participate regularly in a small group; become consistent in giving, serving in various ways [including on church ministry teams], and sharing the gospel. Your involvement intensifies a bit.
 - **[Slide 26: Phase IV]** The mature believer is ready to become a spiritual leader for Christ: let us equip and train you, walking beside you, so you gain confidence and experience; learn more about theology and Bible interpretation; receive training in evangelism, mentoring, teaching, and leading; start leading a ministry team and taking ownership of what needs to get done; help lead a small group. You are not a spiritual leader if you never lead, and the path to becoming equipped to lead is to get involved and let someone train and teach you the way.
 - **[Slide 27: Phase V]** Those of you who are already spiritual leaders [including women] can continue to grow in your ministry to become a multiplying disciple: lead a small group; help teach in various contexts; mentor others; get involved in strategic planning of the church. This should be the goal for every believer, because as you become like Christ, activities like teaching, mentoring, and leading teams just seem more appropriate for your life. This is true for all

personalities and even for introverts: how you do these things will differ based on those factors, but you will find ways to serve Christ as a multiplying disciple.

- So figure out where you are and what your next step of growth involves! And don't be afraid to ask for help. Remember the responsibility of existing spiritual leaders in the church is to equip everyone – even other spiritual leaders – to take those next steps.

† **[Slide 28: dream]** Here's my dream: that a few years from now, we will be able to flesh out the chart of ministry structure the apostles left for us.

- We will have several pastor/elders passionately working together to lead the church. We will have a wide variety of spiritual leaders who will assist the pastor/elders. All these spiritual leaders will continue to invest in their own spiritual growth and becoming further equipped for ministry.
- Some of these spiritual leaders will be small group leaders or mentors for women, men, couples, or youth.
- Some will be formal teachers for our children, youth, or adult classes.
- Some will be leading people through special events for young adults, youth, and outreach through the Point.
- Some will be leading ministry teams for yard care, gardens, cleaning, maintenance, supplies, musical worship, audio/visual support, drama, children, short-term missions, local outreach efforts, and care through meals, visitation, appreciation, and the PCCO.
- That's a lot of spiritual leaders, that's over fifty leadership opportunities in this church! But that's not enough. Because every one of those spiritual leaders will be teaching, mentoring, training, and leading teams comprised of everyone else in the church, so that God can bless more and more people, better and better, through the work of this church.
- And as we develop each believer through the five phases, the church will develop and grow also. That's my dream; it's a biblical dream; so the question is, what is your next step? What does God want you to do as your next step of growth? Please be praying and come talk to me about how we can edify and equip you and how you can contribute to the ministry of Christ.
- I have a list of all your names and I am praying about your next step, even about what I think might be your next step, but I would rather pray with you about the next step God is bringing to your heart and mind. So please pray about this and then talk with me about it!
- Let's close now in prayer...