

CELEBRATING PARTNERSHIPS

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

1. Partnership in Mission

2. Partnership in Message

- Acts 18:24; 1 Corinthians 3:10, 1:23-24

3. Partnership in Method

- Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

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West Valley Church
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2/18/18

Celebrating Partnerships¹

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

As many of you know, Shelly and I recently took some vacation time. This was our first time in three years that we took an extended vacation. My parents have a time-share in Kona, and they invited us to join them. We really looked forward to this trip: to the warm tropical sunshine, especially when the weather here in January was getting colder and colder! We'd been there in the past and seen a lot of the sites, so other than a couple of excursions, this time we planned to mostly relax at the beach and at the pool. I even brought along a few books to read, one of which wasn't even about work!

We arrived late on a Wednesday night, and the next morning we got up and planned to hang out by the pool. First, though, we enjoyed a relaxing breakfast with my parents on the lanai, having Kona coffee and Hawaiian bread toast with lilikoi jam. The birds were singing and the little geckos were skittering by. It was already warm but there was a slight ocean breeze. It was serene. It was our first morning there, and we were already relaxing.

Suddenly our serenity was shattered by the shrill sound of our cell phones shouting an alarm. All four of our phone alarms went off at the same time! I picked up my phone and read the text:

**"BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT
INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK
IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS
IS NOT A DRILL."**

I think it even said, "Imminent impact within minutes." Well that wasn't very relaxing!

My first thought was that it was probably from North Korea headed to Honolulu, and we were on a different island, so I wondered how far a nuclear explosion would travel. I knew we couldn't run anywhere...we were on an island! We all moved inside the condo, but right away I was thinking, "Something isn't right." I had recently read that Hawaii was using their old air raid siren system as a tsunami warning, and that they would use it for missile threats. But there were no sirens. I texted the boys, then started searching the news, and there was nothing. The AP had nothing, Fox News had nothing, CNN had nothing. I started checking twitter,

¹ Resources: Ed Wood, *A privileged partnership: 1 Cor. 3:6-9*. William Greathouse, "Beacon Bible Commentary: Vol. 8." Kenneth Chafin, "The Communicator's Commentary, Vol. 7." William Barclay, "Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Corinthians." John Lang, "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, 1 Corinthians." John Barry, "Faithlife Study Bible." Kenneth Schenck, "1 & 2 Corinthians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition."

and within about ten minutes, twitter was lighting up saying that it was a false alarm.

We didn't experience any of the widespread panic that happened in Honolulu, though. People over there were abandoning their cars on the freeway, dropping their children down manholes, and stampeding into buildings. About a half hour after I saw the twitter feeds, there was another alarm on our phones with the message saying that it was indeed a false alarm.

I'll tell you I wasn't panicked, although I was a little annoyed that our walk to the pool had been delayed! But I will also admit that, when you first read a message like that, you quickly take stock of the condition of your soul! I had to wonder if my life was over, had I done everything with my life that I was created for? I don't know about you, but getting a text message announcing your imminent death in a mushroom cloud of thermal radiation has a way of waking you up.

We later learned that the reason for the false alarm was that the Hawaii Emergency Management was doing a drill, but there were several mistakes made. One of those mistakes was that the alarm system didn't have any redundancy built into it. In other words, the worker who clicked the button on his computer that said "Drill" or "Not a Drill" did not have anyone looking over his shoulder so the message did not need confirmation by anyone else before it was sent out to everyone with a cell phone on the islands. In other words, the computer button-clicker-guy had no partner. And the result was wide spread panic and the loss of the clicker-guy's job, among others. He had no partner. *Partnership* means we get the job done and we get it done right.

In the month of February as a church we are celebrating our partnerships. We know that we can't do Kingdom work alone. We are all in this together. So we've partnered with other ministries in town like Madison House, Rod's House, the Union Gospel Mission, PrimeTime Ministries, and Love INC, with Wide Hollow Elementary and with Mountainview Elementary, with Mission Agape in Wapato, and with the Victoria Nazarene Church in Guyana. And we are encouraging each of us to consider making a commitment of giving over the next year to continue to support our church's partnerships.

So today I want to talk some more about how important partnerships work.

I'd like to read a short passage from the Bible, and it's in the Apostle Paul's first of two letters to the church in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. We'll explore the context more in a minute, but let me first say this: In this letter, Paul is addressing many very serious issues that the church has. In this particular passage, the people are dividing themselves over loyalty to their first pastor, which was Paul, and their current pastor, Apollos. Some said they would only follow Paul, and some said they would only follow Apollos. Of course, neither Paul nor Apollos wanted people following *them*; they wanted people to follow Jesus! But still, people were choosing sides.

Have you ever seen that? Man, *I* have; let me tell you, there were some people who left this church when I got here because they liked the previous pastor better than

me. I'll be honest: in many ways *I* like him better than me too! But in Corinth, that was the particular sin of division that Paul was dealing with in this part of Scripture. Since these aren't my words but they are God's to us, would you mind standing with me to show God that we honor his Word? Thank you.

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, niv)

May God transform us by His Word to us today. Thank you for standing; you can be seated.

I mentioned before reading that passage that I would take a few moments to set the scene, and I'd like to do that now.

Paul has been building up to this point in his letter, which was a typical thing for Paul to do; he was very smart in his logic and writing, having been trained by the best of the Jewish leaders and the Greek thinkers. If you read the first two chapters, you wouldn't be at all surprised that Paul is now addressing these things.

Paul starts out this chapter by addressing them as “brothers and sisters...” Paul is preparing to level some serious charges against them about their immaturity in their faith, so this greeting is important because he's making sure they know that they are all family in Christ; he loves them and they love him. What he's about to say is because he loves them.

I had a boss once whose life mission for us was to correct everything we were doing wrong – all the time. Have you had a boss like that? And he would do it by writing memos. Well, he read somewhere that you should give a complement before giving correction. So we'd all get memos from him with a compliment up front, but we always ignored that because we knew he was only trying to set us up in order to do what he really wanted to do, and that was to, once again, show us what we were doing wrong. That's NOT what Paul was doing. He genuinely loved them and wanted them to grow. So what he says next comes from the depths of his love for them.

First, he reminds them that when they first became Christians, they were like babies in the faith. That's an analogy we can understand. For a baby, it's all about himself or herself. They are the center of their universe. Their physical bodies, having not yet grown, are pretty much built that way. The baby's eyesight can only see about 15 inches away, which is the distance between the baby and the face of the nursing mom.

The partnership between baby and parent, and baby and world for that matter, is really pretty one-sided: for the baby, “all of you are here to serve me; otherwise you

don't really serve any purpose." So Paul is saying to the Christians in Corinth that their faith was like that – at the beginning – and it was only natural. He uses a word in verse one to describe them, saying they were "worldly." The word in the Greek is "sarkinos." There isn't anything sinful about it; it just means "flesh," like a physical body at a normal stage of development. Then in verse three he says, "You are *still* worldly." But this time he uses a slightly different Greek word, "sarkikos." Do you see that simple difference? One letter makes a huge difference. *Now* it means "sinful," "immoral." So he's essentially saying to them, "When you first started as a Christian, you were *naturally* pretty self-focused and childish. But by *now* you should be a spiritual adult, but instead you are choosing to stay selfish and think that the Christian life is all about you. That attitude is no longer natural; now it is sinful."

As a baby grows into a mature person, it begins to see itself as a part of a bigger community; a part of a family, a part of a neighborhood, a part of a school, a part of work, society, and the world. And a healthy person will see himself or herself as having a part to play in the betterment of other peoples' lives in all those groups. A dysfunctional person still thinks the world revolves around him or her. The same is true spiritually. A new Christian is learning and growing and enjoying all the blessings God and the church have for him or her. But it doesn't take long before that attitude is no longer "cute" or "childlike," and it becomes selfish and sinful.

You might wonder, how long should it take for a Christian to grow from being a selfish baby to a mature believer? We can see the answer from the timeline in this passage: the church in Corinth was started by Paul, and began with brand new believers between 49-50 AD. When Paul wrote this letter, it was around 54 AD. So within 4 years of becoming Christians, Paul expected them to be mature Christians, whose lives were lived in partnership with others and in service to other people, not focusing on themselves.

Only four years...

I've known Christians who have been in Sunday School classes, attending Bible Studies, and sitting in church worship services for *decades*, and they are *STILL* not in partnership with others to grow the Kingdom. They are *STILL* not serving other people. They are *STILL* focused on themselves and wanting more and more of God's blessings for themselves!

Part of the way this is evident is in their "church shopping." Where they go to church, and which pastor they follow, is not about their part in advancing the Kingdom of God. It is about which place or person or type of music they personally like better. But the Christian life is all about *partnerships*: when you become a Christian, you have a part in the Kingdom of God; you are a partner in God's Kingdom, you are in partnership with those who are advancing the work of God to bring the Kingdom of God into the world – that God's Kingdom would come and his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So Paul uses their divisions over their favorite preacher to be both a symptom that diagnoses their sinful selfishness as Christians, but then he uses that as an

opportunity to teach them what partnership in the Kingdom is really all about. Does that make sense?

So perhaps we've seen ourselves in the worldliness of the Christians in Corinth. If so, we need to pray, ask God to forgive us of this kind of sin and division, and then we need to commit ourselves to being unselfish partners in God's Kingdom.

Pray

Now, let's see what partnership is really about. In order to describe the partnership that he and Apollos have with God, Paul uses an agricultural metaphor of planting and growing. Jesus used these kinds of metaphors a lot when teaching with parables. Paul is saying that he and Apollos are an example to the church of how we are to function as a partnership. So let's make sure we are applying the lessons to our own lives and church.

First, see that we have a...

1. Partnership in *Mission*

Paul and Apollos are not two different leaders who are doing different things. They are both people who are working together for the same purpose, the same mission. They are partners, each with their own task, or part to accomplish. Using the agricultural metaphor, Paul says that he planted the seed (in this case, he saw the Corinthians become Christians, and he started the church), and then Apollos watered that seed. But even with all their work, it was God who made it grow. They worked together so that the Church would grow – thanks to God through the Holy Spirit – and God would get the glory.

On June 8, 2014 at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg Florida, the Seattle Mariners shut-out the Tampa Bay Rays 5-0. It's memorable because that doesn't happen a lot for the Mariners! The M's ace pitcher Felix Hernandez got a total of 15 strikeouts (which was a personal best), but then was taken out after pitching those seven scoreless innings, because his pitch count had reached 100. Seattle's reliever Yoervis Medina pitched only the eighth inning, but he got the credit for the win because the Mariners scored all five of their runs in that inning. Two more Seattle pitchers (Dominic Leone, and Charlie Furbush) pitched in the bottom of the ninth to preserve the shut-out.

But in the next morning's official box score, Felix Hernandez was not credited as the winning pitcher. Instead, all of his efforts—his seven solid innings of pitching and his 15 strikeouts—were officially labeled a "no decision." One of his teammates, a player who pitched only one inning, got the official win. But there was no way they would've won without Hernandez' shutout and 15 strikeouts. Then his fellow teammates combined their efforts for the win. Have you heard that quote by President Harry Truman: "There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't

care who gets the credit!"² That needs to be our attitude in the church. Each of us is working together for the mission of God's Kingdom.

So each of us has an important part in this partnership of West Valley Church. But none of us is more important. The volunteers who work with the Wide Hollow 3rd and 4th graders at our Homework Club are not more important than the person serving food at Wednesday Night Dinner or the Children's Caravan teacher. But they all work together to see that child from our neighborhood do better in school, then stay for dinner with her mom and dad, then attend Caravan and learn about Jesus' love for her. And those people are not more important than the worship team member up here on Sunday or me as I preach, as that family attends church. It is God who loves, it is God who saves, and it is God who makes that family grow in their faith and it is God who makes our church grow.

And our church is a partner in the Kingdom of God with other valuable ministries like Love INC, the Union Gospel Mission, Mission Agape, and others. They are partners with us, and us with them, for God's Kingdom.

Secondly, we have a...

2. Partnership in *Message*

When it came to preaching, there were some really big differences between Paul and Apollos. Paul was not known for being a dynamic or exciting or eloquent preacher. If there was a way to preach something in a half hour, Paul could do it in two hours. In fact, there is a story in Acts about Paul preaching and getting long winded. He started out around the same time on a Sunday morning that I did this morning. But he was leaving the next day, so he decided to keep preaching. And Preaching. And Preaching. He preached until midnight. Then it was too dark, so he had them get candles, and then he preached some more. But with the candles and all the people in the room and all of Paul's hot air, there was a teenage boy who fell asleep – and fell out of the second-story window...and died! So Paul went down, prayed, and God raised the boy from the dead. So Paul celebrated...by going back to preaching until daylight! (Acts 20:7-12). Paul was so long-winded it was deadly!

Apollos, on the other hand, was a very eloquent speaker. He was amazing to listen to. In Acts 18:24 it describes him as "a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well." (nlt)

Apollos could get to the point, make the point, and move you to follow the point. No sleeping teenagers falling out of windows when Apollos preached!

But Paul and Apollos would both tell you that they had the same message: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the next verse, Paul said:

²Greg Asimakoupoulos,
<https://www.preachingtoday.com/search/?query=Mariners&searcharea=illustrations&type=>

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:10, niv)

Earlier in this letter, in chapter one, Paul wrote about both he and Apollos:

“But we (*he’s referring to himself and Apollos*) preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, niv)

Folks, we all do many things here, many different ministries. But we do it all for the same message: the Good News of God’s Love revealed in Jesus Christ and made available to us through his death and resurrection. That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No matter what we do as a church, it is ALL for the same message. Our work is all toward building relationships so that we can share that message in both action and in word.

Our strategic partnerships are with ministries and churches that share that same message. We don’t support United Way. *You* can, if you want. I’m not saying you shouldn’t. But as a church, our partnerships are because of, and for, the showing and sharing of the Gospel message.

Finally, I want us to see that Paul points out we have a...

3. Partnership in *Method*

Paul made it clear that for he and Apollos, their partnership was with God. He wrote in verse 7, “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” (niv) They were committed to God’s method of showing and sharing the Good News so that people could be discipled from birth to heaven.

In this privileged partnership as workers together, God has made a covenant with us and promised to bless us if we would use His method for accomplishing and carrying out the mission and ministry of His church here at West Valley.

Jesus said:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20, niv)

So we have been committed and dedicated to maintaining our mission, which is to:

- Introduce People to Jesus Christ,
- Equip people with a faith that works
- Live as people with purpose.

Put simply, to love, learn, and live. We do that in the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Together, we follow God's method with this message and mission. So God has led us to these partnerships locally, regionally, and globally. Because Jesus said:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, niv)

That means locally, regionally, (which I've already mentioned some ways) and even globally, as we give to the work of missions and we continue in our partnership with the church in Victoria, Guyana, as they build their church and community center.

So we all are a part of these partnerships for the Gospel that we celebrate.

Now, as you know, we are encouraging all of us to pray about committing to give over the next year to our partnerships. Our goal for this next year is that together we would give a total of \$160,000, with \$60,000 of that for Guyana and over \$30,000 for World Missions in general, and the rest for our local and regional missions and partnerships.

And usually, we think of this partnership in terms of our responsibility to tithe and give offerings. This is true, but there is much *more* to fulfilling our partnership with God. Giving support through money is only *one* part of our partnership. We must bring all of our talents and abilities to God as well, and put them to use in fulfilling our partnership responsibility. That's what Dr. Porter said last week when he talked about picturing us putting our whole selves in the offering plate. We want to use all of our abilities to partner together with God for his mission, message, and method. Giving is just one of the methods. We partners with God, by giving our whole self for his Kingdom work.

Perhaps you've heard of the great evangelist of the last century, Dwight L. Moody. On December 22, 1899, Moody lay dying. Forty-five years earlier, his first job had been as a shoe clerk in Boston, at the age of 17. A year later, when he was 18, Moody became a Christian. That year, he gathered eighteen ragged boys off the street to organize a Sunday school class. In two years that class of boys had grown to fifteen hundred. In his lifetime Moody was to take two continents in his hands and shake them for God, leading tens of thousands of people to Christ.

After he had passed, they found the following written on the flyleaf of his Bible:
"If God be your partner, make your plans big." (repeat!)

Who would think that a church on this corner of town would one day have a deep and abiding partnership with a church in South America? That we would be encouraged by the school district to partner with not one, but two elementary schools, and that the second one – Mountainview Elementary – would be for the purpose of becoming a new church site. That soon we would be debt free, so that we can see tens of thousands of dollars flowing into ministries that change lives. And folks, that isn't even scratching the surface of the plans God has. We've partnered with him in mission, message, and method. We'd better make our plans big!

Will you partner with God through West Valley Church? Will you give of your time, your abilities, and your resources for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Whatever you have to give is just as important as whatever anyone else has. Don't hold back, because when we work and give together, God makes it grow!

Pray