

Main Idea: If we’re going to have ministries that last, we must devote ourselves to two assignments that the Lord gave His church. Paul modeled both for us in Acts 19:1-10.

- I. We must bring people to the Word (1-7).
 - A. Find out where people are (1-3).
 1. Paul found some disciples.
 2. Paul asked some questions.
 3. Paul discovered a deficiency.
 - B. Take people where they need to be (4-7).
 1. Paul built on what they knew.
 2. Paul taught them what they didn’t know.
- II. We must bring the Word to people (8-10).
 - A. Phase #1: Paul preached in the synagogue (8-9a).
 1. Our message is the kingdom of God.
 2. Our message will offend those who refuse to believe in the King.
 - B. Phase #2: Paul taught in the lecture hall (9b-10).
 1. He worked with the disciples.
 2. He increased the frequency of teaching.
 3. He mobilized his students to reach the region.

Make It Personal: In order to have a ministry that lasts...

1. We need to give people God’s Word, not our opinions.
2. We need to emphasize teaching, not entertainment.
3. We need to focus on our mission, not our comfort.
4. We need to remember whose ministry it really is.

Today’s message is entitled, “*A Ministry That Lasts.*” That’s what we want, isn’t it, ministries that last? But the reality is, not all ministry lasts, to the glory of God. Which ones do? If we’re going to have ministries that last, we must devote ourselves to two assignments that the Lord gave His church. Paul modeled both for us in Acts 19:1-10.

Scripture Reading: Acts 19:1-10

A few years ago Sherry and I were privileged to see the ruins of Ephesus. What a city, so filled with significance as we’ll see today. We saw the huge amphitheater, and other places of interest. One that caught our attention was the library, with two stories and huge Corinthian style columns. Talk about impressive. At least the front of it was and is. Our guide told us they loved to build impressive fronts on buildings, but once you entered, there wasn’t all that much there. I read this week that they used an optical trick, for the columns at the sides of the facade are shorter than those at the center, giving the illusion of the building being greater in size.¹

That’s an interesting word, *façade*, a noun that means “the face of a building, the front that looks onto a street.” But a secondary definition of *façade* is, “an outward appearance that is maintained to conceal a less pleasant or creditable reality.”

It sort of reminds me of a movie set for an old western town. When movie producers do their construction, they don’t build a town to last. In fact, they didn’t even build a real western town, just a shell, something that looks good from the outside to those who come to watch the show. And that’s fine for a movie set.

But what about a ministry? The sad reality is that far too much of what is happening today in terms of church ministry reminds me of a movie set for an old western town.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ <https://www.ephesus.us/ephesus/celsuslibrary.htm>

The emphasis is on first impressions. Nothing wrong necessarily with creating a good first impression. As long as it's not a façade.

If you take the façade approach to church, what will you do? You'll give lots of attention to style while minimizing substance.

So visit a façade-approach church, and what will you find? A crowd? Probably. You'll also likely see quite a show, with quality music, powerful drama, and technology-enhanced messages. You may leave impressed, even motivated and fired up to change the world. But by the end of Tuesday you'll likely discover you're still struggling to change your own life, let alone the world.

Please don't hear what I'm not saying. I believe we should use the best methods available to accomplish our God-given mission. But I wrestle with this thought. Are we doing ministry in a way that will *last*?

How do you do lasting ministry in a society that's big on façade? That's a vital question for the contemporary church. Sure, we can do things to build impressive ministries. But will they last?

Of course, the key to doing ministry that lasts is to do ministry *God's way*. And how do we determine what God's way is? It's not complicated. He's given us His Word to answer that question, and every other question that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

According to God's Word, if we're going to have ministries that last, we must devote ourselves over the long haul to two assignments, that Paul models for us in Acts 19:1-10.

I. We must bring people to the Word (1-7).

Ministries that last are ministries that major on bringing people to the Word. They don't just dabble in the Word. They don't give lip-service to it. They don't allude to it once in awhile. They *major* on bringing people to the Word.

It's not a secret that the Bible is merely an ornament in many American homes. Sadder still, it's a decorative ornament in many American *churches*. There are somewhere in the neighborhood of 400,000 churches in America.² How is the Bible treated in American churches?

In January 2020 the Gospel Coalition posted an article, "Bible Literacy Crisis! (And What You Can Do About It in 2020)."³ It cites a recent Lifeway study that found that only 32 percent of Americans who "attend a Protestant church regularly say they read the Bible personally every day." Evangelical Protestants fared a little better at 36 percent.

According to Pew Research, "While about four-in-ten Christians (39%) say the Bible's text is the word of God and should be taken literally, 36% say it should not be interpreted literally or express another or no opinion. A separate 18% of Christians view the Bible as a book written by men, not God."⁴

You can build a façade, but you can't build solid churches that last to the glory of God by neglecting this first assignment. We must bring people to the Word. That's exactly what we find Paul doing in Acts 19.

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html>

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-literacy-crisis/>

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/14/5-facts-on-how-americans-view-the-bible-and-other-religious-texts/>

As the story begins Paul is in his third missionary journey which started in Acts 18:23. If you'll look at a study Bible map and compare Paul's three missionary journeys, you'll notice something rather quickly. On Paul's third trip he didn't go to new places. Basically, he went back to the places where he'd led people to Christ during the first two trips. This third trip was all about strengthening, training, and recruiting. Paul took steps to make sure his ministry lasted.

Wherever he did ministry, Paul's emphasis was to take people to the Word. What's involved in taking people to the Word? Two basic tasks.

A. Find out where people are (1-3). That's what we find Paul doing as Acts 19 begins. Notice verses 1-3: "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied."

The first step in Word-centered ministry is finding out where people are. At the end of chapter 18 Apollos, a powerful Jewish preacher groomed by Aquila and Priscilla, left Ephesus to do ministry in Corinth. Paul arrived in Ephesus after a 200 mile cross-country ministry trip through what is today central and western Turkey.

Ephesus was a strategic city. Paul made a brief stop there on his second journey and promised to return if it was God's will (18:21). It was God's will and Paul ended up staying in this city longer than anywhere else, almost three years.

The city of Ephesus was a port city with about a third of a million people. It had a theater that could seat 25,000 spectators. It was known for its materialism. It was also a cesspool for the occult, housing the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. This temple was over 400 feet long, 200 feet wide (roughly the size of a football field), and had 127 marble pillars. Kent Hughes writes, "Ephesus was a waterhole for every kind of magician, witch, clairvoyant, and criminal. Con artists, murderers, and perverts all found the climate of Ephesus unusually agreeable. That city was the Dark Castle of Asia Minor."⁵

When Paul came to Ephesus his goal was simple—to bring people to the Word. But people are different. People are at different levels of Bible knowledge, so the first thing we must do is *find out where they are*. Here's how Paul did it, in three phases.

1. *Paul found some disciples.* That's what Luke says. "There he found some disciples." There were twelve of them, according to verse 7. These men are called "disciples" which in Acts typically is an identification tag for a follower of Jesus. Here Luke seems to be using it in a more general sense, for although these men were followers of Jesus, the Jesus they knew was the Jesus taught by John the Baptist.

In other words, they were religious men, but their religion was based on inadequate teaching. How do we find out where people are at spiritually? We do what Paul did.

2. *Paul asked some questions.* Here's the first, in verse 2, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Why did Paul ask that? He wants to know the spiritual condition of these men. You don't bring the Word to people the same way. You must find out what they know—and what they *don't* know—in addition to finding out what they've done with what they know.

"No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit," was their reply.

⁵ Kent Hughes, p. 254.

Did that response tell Paul anything about the spiritual status of these folks? It sure did. If they haven't heard about the Holy Spirit, they don't know about one of the most important events that's ever occurred on this planet.

After Jesus died for sinners, conquered the grave, and returned to heaven, He kept His promise and sent Someone Special to the earth, God the Holy Spirit. The wonderful truth is that we are now living, during this period of time between Jesus' first and second coming, in the age of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is one of the main themes of New Testament theology.

Conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). Regeneration and the new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16). The sealing and assurance of the believer is something the Holy Spirit produces (Rom 8:16; Eph 1:14). It's the Spirit who enables the believer to get rid of old sinful patterns (Rom 8:13) and enjoy the new life God intends (Rom 8:11). To put it simply, the Holy Spirit's ministry is vital in order for a person to become a Christian as well as to live the Christian life.

But concerning all of this, these men were in the dark. "We have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit," they confessed.

So Paul asked a follow-up question, one that would give him further insight into their spiritual condition. Verse 3, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

And their reply was, "John's baptism." That answer told Paul plenty, namely...

3. *Paul discovered a deficiency.* These men were not irreligious, just missing something. What they had done wasn't bad. It just was incomplete. The baptism of John the Baptist was a baptism of expectation rather than a baptism of fulfillment.⁶ John the Baptist taught, "The Messiah is coming. Repent and get ready for Him." And those who did were baptized to show their sincerity.

That's what these men had done. In a sense they were like "Old Testament saints." Maybe they were some of Apollos' early converts and as such had never heard the whole story about Jesus. Yes, they believed what they knew. They just didn't know the whole story, that the Messiah *had come* and that the Holy Spirit *had come*, and that those who believe in Messiah Jesus receive the promised Holy Spirit.

By asking those two simple questions, Paul learned a lot about the biblical literacy of his audience. It's vital we do the same. We never teach in a vacuum.

As the story goes, a new minister was asked to teach a boys' class in the absence of the regular teacher. He decided to see what they knew, so he asked who knocked down the walls of Jericho. All the boys denied having done it, and the preacher was appalled by their ignorance. At the next deacons' meeting he told about the experience. "Not one of them knows who knocked down the walls of Jericho," he lamented. The group was silent until finally one seasoned veteran of disputes spoke up. "Preacher, this appears to be bothering you a lot. But I've known all those boys since they were born and they're good boys. If they said they didn't know, I believe them. Let's just take some money out of the repair and maintenance fund, fix the walls, and let it go at that."⁷

If we're going to help people grow, we must start by finding out where they are. Next...

B. Take people where they need to be (4-7). Watch Paul in action: "Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one

⁶ F. F. Bruce, p. 386.

⁷ Source Unknown.

coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.”

Simple, yet vital. Notice what Paul did. He found out where they were and began to take them where they needed to be. That’s what the ministry of the Word is all about.

Now let’s look more closely. How did Paul take his listeners where they needed to be? He did two things, as we must do.

1. *Paul built on what they knew.* They knew about John’s baptism, so he started with John’s baptism. He didn’t criticize them for what they didn’t know, but focused initially on what they did.

“So you know about John’s baptism? That’s good. John taught people to repent, to get their lives in order. Yes, that’s vital.”

What’s Paul doing? He’s building on what his hearers knew. A good teacher (and parent too) does that. A good teacher realizes he may not be the first person God has brought into the hearer’s life to teach Him the Word.

When I witness to people, even people who don’t know Malachi from Revelation, I often find they know some things from the Bible. Maybe a grandmother taught them some truth. Perhaps they visited Vacation Bible School years ago. Possibly a friend gave them a tract to read. As I seek to bring the Word to them, it’s important to build on that, again like Paul did. He built on what they knew. Then...

2. *Paul taught them what they didn’t know.* Specifically, this. “John the Baptist did something else besides preach repentance. He also told people to *believe*, to believe in the One coming after him, to believe in the one and only Messiah, *Jesus*.

There was the missing piece of the puzzle. *Jesus*. These men knew some truth. They were religious. They were sincere. But they didn’t know Jesus, and had yet to place their faith in the Sinless Savior who had died for sinners and rose again for their salvation.

But on this day, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit of whom they’d just learned, they did! Luke says, “On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Granted, baptism doesn’t save a person. God saves a sinner the moment he *believes* in Jesus. But baptism is God’s designated way to show you have believed in Jesus. And being baptized “in the name of Jesus” isn’t some formula that must be recited to make a baptism valid. To be baptized in Jesus “name” simply means the person acknowledges that Jesus is the Savior—which is what His name means, *Yeshua*, the Lord saves. “I can’t save myself. I believe that is why *He* came, to save me.”

That’s what twelve men did that day. And it all happened, humanly speaking, because someone took the time to bring them to the Word.

Brothers and sisters, if we’re going to do ministry that lasts (and this goes for us as a church, for our families, at the camp, wherever), we must bring people to the Word. And of course, if we’re going to bring others to the Word, we must personally and continually be going to the Word.

Martin Luther shared this testimonial: “I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb--study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.”

Now when we shake the branches of God’s Word, guess what happens? Sometimes we find things that are difficult to understand. Like what happened next in verse 6, “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

Whoa, what’s going on here? Why did Paul put his hands on them? We don’t see him doing that elsewhere with new believers. And why did these believers speak in tongues? We didn’t see that happen when Paul led people to Christ in Thessalonica, or Philippi? Is this something all believers should experience?

To answer these questions, we must see this text in the light of the rest of the Bible. Or to put it another way, our exegesis of one passage must always be informed by our biblical theology. In other words, what does the rest of the Bible say that sheds light on what’s happening in this particular passage?

In this case, what’s the purpose of the book of Acts? Luke wrote the book of Acts to tell us what happened. It’s history. He’s not necessarily telling us what should or will happen for other believers. Here in Acts 19 he is recording what happened to twelve men in Ephesus, telling us that when Paul placed his hands on them, the Spirit came, and the believers spoke in tongues (lit. other “languages”) and prophesied. He’s not saying this is the norm. In fact, this is the last time he mentions tongues-speaking in the book of Acts.

Here’s a simple statement to keep this in mind when interpreting the New Testament. Acts is narrative. The epistles are normative. Acts tells us what happened in the early church. The epistles show us what should happen thereafter.

A comment by Warren Wiersbe explains, “Today, the gift of tongues is not an evidence of the baptism of the Spirit or the fullness of the Spirit...When Paul wrote to his Ephesian friends about the filling of the Spirit, he said nothing about tongues (Eph. 5:18ff.). Nowhere in Scripture are we admonished to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit, or to speak in tongues, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. Read Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church and note the many references to the Holy Spirit of God and His work in the believer.”⁸

Acts 19 doesn’t give us the pattern for today. The purpose of Acts 19 is to show the unity of God’s people. Back in Acts 2 we see what happened when God saved Jews in Jerusalem. In Acts 8 we see what happened when God saved Samaritans. In Acts 10 we see what happened when God saved Gentiles. In Acts 19 we see what happened when God saved Jews living outside the promised land. And in each case, what happened? In each situation, the same thing occurred. When God opened the door of faith to Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and even Jews outside of Israel, He gave them the same gift (the Holy Spirit), and the same spectacular demonstration of the Spirit’s presence (tongues). By doing so God made it clear He has no second-class citizens in His family. Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles—once saved, they all become one in Christ.

What happened in Ephesus in Acts 19 was a distinct event in a place that would have a distinct role in God’s unfolding outreach plan. F. F. Bruce comments, “Ephesus was to be a new center of the Gentile mission—the next in importance after Syrian Antioch—and these twelve disciples were to be the nucleus of the Ephesian church. By this exceptional procedure, then, they were associated in the apostolic and missionary task of the Christian Church.”⁹

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, p. 481.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 387.

Some people today use a text like this to “prove” that receiving the Holy Spirit is an event that occurs subsequent to conversion. But again, that’s a misuse of the purpose of a narrative text. What God did for these twelve men in Ephesus isn’t the pattern for the church today.

You ask, “What is the pattern?” It’s what happened to the rest of the people God saved in Ephesus. Paul didn’t lay hands on them. They received the Spirit when they *believed* in Christ, as Paul explains in the letter he later wrote to them.

Take a look at Ephesians 1:13-14, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. *Having believed*, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

There’s the pattern for today. When a person believes in Christ, at that very moment he or she receives the Holy Spirit. That person is baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), a one time event. The Spirit seals that person for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30).

So if you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is in you. And He will never leave you.

You say, “Do I have any responsibilities when it comes to the Holy Spirit?” Indeed. You are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), which is a daily matter and is linked to how you respond to His Word. You can grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30) and even quench His ministry in your life (1 Thes 5:19). You are to keep in step with Him and allow Him to produce His fruit in your life (Gal 5:22-25).

Perhaps you’re wondering, “Well, if that’s what the Bible says, why is there so much confusion today?” There are several reasons, for starters this is a tough question. But perhaps the greatest reason is this. Too many churches aren’t bringing people to the Word. It’s not a major emphasis for them. Oh, they use the Bible, and sing the Bible, and say they agree with the Bible. But it’s become a *façade*, and once inside, other things replace the Bible in terms of importance.

If you want to see Church 101, look at Acts 2:42. Here’s what the first, brand new, Spirit-filled church looked like. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Ministries that last are ministries that prioritize those four activities, and it starts with a devotion to the Book. They take people to the Word.

This is one of the things I love most about this church. You want to be taken to the Word. You come expecting to be taken to the Word. You’re not interested in superficial experiences, or hearing someone’s opinion. You hunger for the Book, for you know this Book is the key to knowing the Author of the Book, our wonderful God and Father and His Son Jesus our Savior.

There’s a second assignment we must fulfill, one that Paul models in verses 8-10.

II. We must bring the Word to people (8-10).

Ministries that last are concerned about *depth*—taking people to the Word so they can know it better—and *breadth*—taking the Word to people who have yet to hear it. Paul’s outreach ministry in Ephesus went through two phases.

A. Phase #1: Paul preached in the synagogue (8-9a). “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them.”

On his first trip to the city, Paul had preached in the synagogue with a somewhat favorable response (18:19-20). In fact, the Jews asked him to spend more time teaching them. So when he returned, that precisely what he did. As was his custom he sought to reach the city of Ephesus by starting in the synagogue.

We learn a couple of things here from Paul about taking the Word to people.

1. *Our message is the kingdom of God.* For three months Paul went to the Jewish house of worship. Because he was a trained rabbi, he was given permission to speak. And speak he did! Boldly, he proclaimed to the listening Jews from their own Hebrew Bible a subject dear to their hearts, namely, *the kingdom of God*.

For centuries the Jews had been waiting for God's kingdom to come. They'd been waiting for *the king*, the Son of David, to come. So Paul opened the Scriptures and showed them the prophecies...

God's Anointed One would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and eventually be crucified (Ps 22:16), not for His own sins but for the sins of His people (Isa 53:5). Then He would rise again (Ps 16:11), ascend to heaven (Ps 68:18), and send the blessed Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32).

Week after week Paul announced, "The King has come! *King Jesus* has come, just as God predicted. Receive your King and be saved!" Which is what some apparently did.

But others became obstinate, according to verse 9. "Stubborn," says the ESV. They "continued in unbelief," and they were "speaking evil of the Way before the congregation."¹⁰

This teaches us something else about taking the Word to people.

2. *Our message will offend those who refuse to believe in the King.* You can't have a little of Jesus. Either you receive and submit to Him, or you reject Him. You can't live life with two kings.

John Wesley used to ask his young men whom he had sent out to preach on probation two questions: "Has any one been converted?" and "Did any one get mad?" If the answer was "No," he told them he did not think the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel, and sent them about their business. When the Holy Ghost convicts of sin, people are either converted or they don't like it, and get mad.¹¹

So Paul left the synagogue, discouraged I'm sure, but not disillusioned. His ministry in Ephesus was far from over.

B. Phase #2: Paul taught in the lecture hall (9b-10). "He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

Notice the three steps involved in this phase of Paul's teaching ministry.

1. *He worked with the disciples.* Luke says when Paul left the synagogue "he took the disciples with him" and started teaching them.

2. *He increased the frequency of teaching.* He taught these disciples and others who eventually came *daily*. Don't miss that. Paul began conducting *daily discussions*.

Where? He found an available lecture hall. Tyrannus was probably either the owner of the lecture hall or perhaps one of the philosophers who taught there. His name means "our tyrant" which may be a nickname his students gave him!

¹⁰ That seems to indicate that since they couldn't deny what the Scriptures said, they resorted to mud-slinging and attacked "the Way," that is, the people, the movement, the church.

¹¹ [Moody's Anecdotes, P. 123.](#)

One Greek manuscript says that Paul taught in the hall from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. That certainly makes sense. Tyrannus would have used the building in the morning hours and perhaps in the evening hours. Because of the heat all the Ionian cities stopped work at 11:00 and didn't start again until late afternoon. The people took a siesta in the middle of the day. I read that there would actually be more people sound asleep in Ephesus at 1:00 p.m. than at 1:00 a.m.

Which shows how serious Paul was about teaching the Word. In Acts 20 Paul says while in Ephesus he worked to support himself, apparently doing so in the morning hours as a tentmaker. Then from 11 to 4, while others slept, he taught in the vacant lecture hall. That left the evenings for the house to house teaching ministry that he referred to in Acts 20:20.

This makes it clear that Paul was serious about taking the Word to people. It also shows that some people were as serious about *learning* God's Word as Paul was about teaching it, for they too sacrificed their siestas!

Let the numbers sink in. Paul taught the Word of God in this city about *five* hours a day *every* day for *two* years. Let's assume he took one day off for worship on the Lord's Day. In two years, that adds up to more than 3,000 hours of teaching. James Boice comments that this is "more solid teaching than most seminarians receive in a three-year academic program preparing them for the pastorate."¹²

Here's the secret to a ministry that lasts, but it's no secret. It's what Paul did. Take people God brings into your life to the Word, and then find ways to take the Word to more people. Teach the Word of God consistently, carefully, and continuously. Build lives by the Book.

Someone has written the following poem, *A Builder Or a Wrecker*:

*As I watched them tear a building down
A gang of men in a busy town
With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell
They swung a beam and the side wall fell
I asked the foreman, "Are these men skilled,
And the men you'd hire if you wanted to build?"
He gave a laugh and said, "No, indeed,
Just common labor is all I need."
"I can easily wreck in a day or two,
What builders have taken years to do."
And I thought to myself, as I went my way
Which of these roles have I tried to play?
Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring life by rule and square?
Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan
Patiently doing the best I can?
Or am I a wrecker who walks to town
Content with the labor of tearing down?
"O Lord let my life and my labors be
That which will build for eternity!"¹³*

¹² Boice, p. 324.

¹³ Author Unknown, *The Increase*, 35th Anniversary Issue, 1993, p. 9.

Are you a builder? Is that your ambition? Paul had a building ministry. He found ways to invest his time building up God's people by building God's Word into their lives.

But it didn't end there. Verse 10 shares this staggering result: "This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

Did you catch that? *All the people* in Asia Minor heard the Word. No, it doesn't say they all believed it, but they all heard it. That's thousands and thousands of people. How did Paul reach all of them? He didn't. He just put step #3 in motion.

3. *He mobilized his students to reach the region.* Luke specifically says that Paul taught daily in Ephesus for two years. But Luke also says the Word spread throughout the whole province of Asia. If he is in Ephesus then that means he isn't outside of Ephesus, right? Which indicates Paul got others involved.

He practiced what he later preached in 2 Timothy 2:2. He found faithful men, taught them, and then urged them to do the same.

For instance, 100 miles east of Ephesus was the city of Colosse. A church started there. Do you remember how it happened? How did those people hear about Jesus? Paul didn't tell them. One of his students did, a man named Epaphras (Col 1:7). Apparently, the Word made it to the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea the same way (Col 4:13). In fact, it's possible that all of the seven churches of Asia to which Jesus wrote in Revelation 2-3 were started at this time.

My friends, what we're seeing here is intensive outreach that transformed a region nearly the size of the state of Ohio (roughly 200 miles by 150 miles) in just two years. And it all grew out of an intensive teaching ministry at home base in Ephesus.

Make It Personal: In order to have a ministry that lasts...

1. *We need to give people God's Word, not our opinions.* God's Word is powerful. God's Word can do what man's ideas cannot do, *change lives!* Let's give it away!

2. *We need to emphasize teaching, not entertainment.* Paul taught the Word 25-30 hours a week every week for two years in Ephesus. Should we rent lecture halls and do the same? Not necessarily. But what would happen if the churches in America became as serious about teaching God's Word as the early church was? To be honest, they might lose some people. They would also begin to build ministries that last.

3. *We need to focus on our mission, not our comfort.* Paul didn't get a lot of sleep in Ephesus. He worked night and day with tears (20:31). Why? Because God's mission matters more than our comfort.

4. *We need to remember whose ministry it really is.* It's God's. And when God's work is done God's way it has God's blessing. So let's do all we can to bring people to the Word and bring the Word to people.

Closing Song: #185 "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (verses 1, 2, 3, 4)