

In Jerusalem it says that there wasn't a needy person among them because if anybody was in need, the people that had stuff sold it, gave it to the apostles, and then they took care of whatever need it was. That kind of thing, where there's not a needy person amongst us, can only happen when everybody pulls their weight and everybody does what they're supposed to do.

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy this study.

WES: Okay, Travis. Well, it's time to read another e-mail, and I'm thankful, as always, for our listeners sending in e-mails. This one came a little while back and we're just now getting around to it, but, again, I want to remind everybody every time we do one of these that I would love to get e-mails, or Facebook messages, or tweets, or carrier-pigeon notes, or just any way you --

TRAVIS: Or voicemails.

WES: Or voicemails, yes. Voicemails are our favorite because we want to play those. The number is (707) 238-2216, and I hope that somebody will leave us a voicemail so that next time we can play that and discuss it, but even if you don't want your voice to be heard, you can send us an e-mail or some other kind of message and we will do our very best to put it on the podcast and talk about it.

So we got an e-mail from a listener named Rick, and Rick said,

"There are some people that spend a lot of time away from worshipping with their home congregation because they're away at camps, sporting events, and various things. In a small congregation this puts a lot of stress and challenges on the brethren. There doesn't seem to be any concern for the congregation. Their events take priority. I've had conversations about this topic but don't seem to be able to reason with them. What does the Bible teach about our responsibilities to our congregation?"

And I think that's a great question, and I think that -- it reminds me of -- of me -- of the situation I found myself in when I was growing up and as a young adult. I was a member of very small congregations when I was growing up -- many small congregations, and when I started preaching I was a preacher in a congregation of less than a hundred, and so I understand that frustration. You and I now, we attend and work -- work with a congregation that, you know, we average around a thousand attendance on Sunday mornings, so it's different now. And in this congregation, if you have people that are gone -- you know, I hate to say that they're not missed, because they are. Obviously, you miss every individual who's not there, but on any given Sunday we probably have a hundred, 200, maybe even more people that are traveling or at various things, and, you know, there's guests and everything else and so there's not really a huge dip in attendance based on those kind of things.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: But when you're in a small congregation, if you have a couple families that are gone, you may be scrambling even to have enough

people to lead in the assembly, so it does put you in a bind.

You grew up in a small congregation, too, right, Travis?

TRAVIS: I did, yeah, a small congregation, and when you said that, I thought of -- definitely there were times where if a couple families were gone, you were struggling to find people to lead worship, even, let alone class and -- because you want to have classes for every age. And we were chatting about youth stuff and how I didn't really have a lot of -- you know, there wasn't a lot of, you know, direction behind youth stuff so we didn't do a lot of camps growing up, and I think sometimes that's what it was, that it was like we were smaller and you would be missed. But I will say the flip side of that was that the young people were really encouraged to serve.

WES: Yeah, that's true.

TRAVIS: You were very encouraged to serve, and so it wasn't like you were -- you may miss out on something by not going to camp or doing stuff like that, but, man, if you showed up, you had an opportunity to serve, and I always loved that.

WES: Yeah. There's definitely -- there's definitely pros to having a smaller congregation and more, you know, opportunities to serve and those kind of things, but it can be incredibly discouraging. And I remember -- I grew up in Northwest Kansas and we were members at a congregation where, you know, I mean, maybe on a Sunday morning -- on a good Sunday, maybe 50 or 60, and, you know, if we had visitors that came from somewhere else, especially if they seemed to be the kind of family that would be superinvolved and they had lots of kids, like people

would just sort of overwhelm them like, "Okay, well, you have to move here," and they're like, "No, we're just passing through. We're just here for the day; we're not staying here." "No, no, no, it doesn't matter. You need to move here and you need to be members of this church." And so we were trying to recruit any way that we could.

TRAVIS: For sure.

WES: And so, you know, it is incredibly discouraging when, you know, you just -- you kind of depend on each other as a family, and when people are gone two or three weeks, you know, and they're gone over the weekend, and when attendance lulls or -- you know, or dips significantly because people are gone, you know, whether that's sports or whatever is going on in their life, and that can be discouraging, and so I understand Rick's frustration.

It is interesting, you know, again, our perspective now -- I'm glad that we have -- both you and I have the past experience to draw from when it comes to this conversation, but now our -- you know, our experience is a little bit different and so that kind of skews our perspective. But I was looking up some statistics earlier, and the Barna Group that does research on religious statistics in the country, in the United States -- it says that the Barna Group pegs the average Protestant church size in America at 89 adults. So the average church in America, regardless of what group they're a part of, is about 89. It says that 60 percent of Protestant churches have less than a hundred adults in attendance. So you could easily say that the vast majority of congregations are less than 250. There are very few -- it says that

there's only two percent -- only two percent have over a thousand adults attending, so only two percent of churches in America have over a thousand.

It can seem like -- you know, sometimes it seems like everybody's part of these big -- you know, these big churches, and things like that, but the reality is that most people that attend church attend at a smaller -- a smaller congregation. And that's true, for sure, in churches of Christ. We are -- we are -- at McDermott Road, we are in a very small percentage of congregations that have an attendance around a thousand. And so it can be -- for the vast majority of congregations and for church leaders -- and so I think about elders and deacons and preachers that are working in small congregations, and when -- when church attendance, or church involvement even, doesn't seem to be a priority for people, for families, and sports and, you know, vacations and everything else seem to take a higher priority and they're just gone for weeks at a time, it can be discouraging because it's like where I can't do anything with the people because they're gone.

And so here's sort of like the bigger picture, and Rick ended his e-mail -- and, again, I understand the frustration. I appreciate the frustration, but it made my mind start to search through and think through this question here at the end of the e-mail that says, "What does the Bible teach about our responsibilities to our congregation?" Now, that kind of brings up a bigger topic, and I think that this is what we can explore today, is that we live in a very different era of Christian history. Our culture, especially in the United States -- again, I don't mean to leave

anybody out that lives in different cultures because I know we have listeners all over the world, but, you know, I only know this culture, and I know that -- let's just say that if somebody is a member in our area -- and we're in the Dallas area, and so there are lots of -- even lots of congregations of churches of Christ, and so somebody could -- you know, they could attend here one Sunday, they could attend at another one the next Sunday. I moved here from Abilene, Texas, and in Abilene there are close to 40 churches of Christ in a city of less than 200,000.

TRAVIS: Wow.

WES: So we call it "church hopping," you know, and so there was quite a bit of, you know, people that didn't place -- quote-unquote, place membership at a congregation; they just simply floated around to different congregations. Or if some -- if they were members at a congregation and somebody did something or said something they didn't like, they would go to another congregation and they sort of made the rounds around town. And so that's a phenomenon of the culture and the time in which we live.

In the first century, it seems like there were two models. In Antioch -- when you read what Luke writes about the church in Antioch, it seems like they met together, and it seems like, at least for a while, that that was -- you might even say it was a megachurch. Luke emphasized over and over again how there were so many people that were meeting together in Antioch. But then when you read books like Romans -- the way Paul ends Romans in Romans 16, it seems like, in Rome, there were lots of house churches that met throughout the city.

They were connected. In fact, the book of Romans is written, it seems like, with the priority of telling the Christians in Rome, regardless of the fact that they are, you know, part of house churches throughout the city, that they need to accept one another and love one another and welcome one another, regardless of the fact that, you know, you have slaves, and you have free people, and you have Jews, and you have Gentiles, and you have all of these cultural ethnic diversity and dichotomy and, you know, just situations, strife sometimes, even tension, and Paul is trying to reconcile them and bring them together as a body. So you do have sort of situations where you have various congregations, various meeting places in one city, and times where -- and I think -- but I think the norm would be -- because most -- most of those Greco-Roman cities would not have been so large that they would have multiple, multiple meeting places for Christians.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: It probably would have been the case that in most first-century towns and villages and cities there would have been one synagogue, as it were, one Messianic synagogue, one Messianic group. Whether that be primarily Jewish, or Jewish-Gentile, or whatever the case might be, it would be the case that you would go into a city and there would be one meeting place, they would probably be meeting in somebody's home, and they would be -- they would be the assembly of Jesus' followers in that community. It's not like you had signs out in front of the building that said, you know, the church of Christ meets here, or the church at Ephesus meets here, or whatever. It would be that they met in a home.

Maybe they rented a facility. That happened sometimes. They would rent a facility and that's where the church in that community would meet, and so there was one church.

And then you also think through the fact that in that era, in that time period, in that culture, Paul traveled a lot, obviously, but most people -- when you think about the average person, it wasn't like they're out of town on the weekend, you know? It wasn't even like weekend was a thing, right? We tend to think, you know, in five-day workweeks and then a two-day weekend. That's not how their schedule went, number one.

TRAVIS: Sure.

WES: Number two, they -- for them, the first day of the week was the first day of the workweek, so Sunday was a day of work, you know, and so there was some interesting situations that that caused, I'm sure. But there wasn't -- there wasn't, like, vacation. It wasn't like, oh, sorry, you know, so-and-so and his family, they're out of town on vacation this weekend, or they had a baseball tournament, or -- you know, that just didn't happen. People didn't travel the way that people travel today. They didn't -- you know, I'm sure people did go out of town on various trips or excursions or, you know, they went to go sell something and --

TRAVIS: Paul did.

WES: Right, yeah. So you have, of course, Paul's travels, but the average person, the average merchant, or slave, or, you know, homeowner, or whatever, I mean, it's just not like it is today. So today we live in a highly mobile culture. People travel a lot. They especially travel on the

weekend. They have, you know, various priorities and, you know, activities and things that they're doing and things that are going on in their life. And so what we have to do -- and I think that this is true in so many areas, is that we look at what the New Testament said to the people of that day and time, what the apostles and what Jesus taught the followers of Jesus to do, and then we have to look and say, well, what general ideas, what general principles apply to us and our culture?

So when Jesus talked about -- Jesus would use "one another" a lot, and Paul does that, as well, you know, and John and the other apostles use these "one another" ideas, these reciprocal ideas on the way that we treat each other. So it's love one another, or bear one another's burdens, and so this is the way that we treat one another. I think that both Jesus and Paul, or whomever, would have seen those "one another" ideas being played out primarily with the people that are around you -- the other disciples, the other followers of Jesus, the other Christians that are around you, and that would have been the church family of which you are a part.

Again, for Paul, in Rome, that didn't just mean your house church. It didn't just mean the five or six families that you -- with whom you met, but all of the Christians in Rome, and so it would have applied to people of different congregations. We have this tendency, I think, to view congregations now -- to view different groups as, you know, sort of in competition with each other, whereas Paul would have -- you know, all of these followers of Jesus, this is the way you live your life within the Christian community. And so, you know, there are all of these

responsibilities.

But now we live in a highly mobile culture, and so is somebody doing something wrong by traveling on a Sunday or traveling on a weekend, and they're out of town on a Sunday and so they're playing a baseball tournament in some other city and they go meet with the Christians there and love their church family there and get to know their church family there? Have they done something wrong by sort of leaving their congregation at home in the lurch? You know, I -- those are interesting questions, but, again, that's not something the New Testament especially addresses because there isn't the idea of, well, you're a member in Ephesus, and, you know, you're not really a member here.

Again, it's this idea that, yes, you're -- when you become a follower of Jesus, you're part of the church universal; you're part of the big body of Christ universal in the world; you're part of what Jesus is doing in the world; you're part of this big community that can't assemble yet. Someday we will all assemble, but right now we're spread out throughout the world. But then you live your life and you're part of this local community of Jesus' followers, you're part of this local congregation. But this idea of placing membership, I mean, it's -- it makes sense that we have this idea of placing membership because we want to know, in our highly mobile society, in our highly mobile culture, like --

TRAVIS: Who can we expect to be here, and...

WES: Right, yeah, exactly. Yeah, I mean, who's part of the --

TRAVIS: Sure.

WES: -- this particular family and who's not? You know, I mean, who should our shepherds shepherd? Who should our elders watch over and hold accountable? And how do you create that accountability and that relationship if you're not -- you know, if you don't have some sort of mechanism? And we do that; we place membership. And so, you know, you just have to look and say, okay, well, how do these general principles apply to us today given the fact that we live in a highly mobile culture? And, again, I mean, there's just nothing real specific about it, and I think we have to be very careful when we say, well, you have X, Y, and Z responsibilities to this congregation when, you know, it just -- it never really says that.

But, that said, I think it is healthy for us to think about the commitment that we're making when we -- when we commit to a local group of people. And when we say, okay, this is -- this is the community that I'm going to be a part of; this is the congregation that I'm going to be a part of; these are the shepherds that I'm going to submit to; and this is the group in which I'm going to primarily live out my Christian life, and they're the ones that are going to be helping me to grow and I'm the one that's going to be helping them grow, you know, what that -- what that looks like, specifically, I think we look at these general -- these general principles and we say, okay, what does this look like?

So, I mean, you could turn to any passage in the New Testament, but since this is the Bible study podcast, we'll turn to one. So I think about Ephesians Chapter 4. So, again, Paul is writing to the church in

Ephesus, you know, that's a church, a congregation with a set of elders, and I think he especially intends for them to live out these principles there in that congregation.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: But does that mean that, you know, if a merchant traveled from Ephesus to Rome and was there for a month that he shouldn't live out these principles while he's there or that he's somehow not fulfilling his responsibility to his church family back in Ephesus, or --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- or if he was really serious about being a Christian, maybe he would get a job where he didn't have to travel? No, I don't think any of those things are implied in the text, but I do think that we should read these and say, okay, well, how do I live this out? So Paul says in Ephesians 4, he says, "I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There's one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope" -- you know, so he goes on.

And this is the kind of thing -- you know, at the end, he compares the church to the body. He says, "Speaking the" -- this is verse 15: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." So there's Paul's picture of this is the way the church works, that

Travis is equipped with certain abilities and gifts and talents and he's a certain individual, and now that he's a follower of Jesus and Wes is a follower of Jesus -- now they're going to build each other up. And as all the body comes together, it builds itself up in love.

And I think -- I think -- to Rick's point, I think that our tendency in 21st century America is to treat Christianity as sort of a devotional-style thing where it's very individualistic, where we sort of go -- quote-unquote, go to church in order to get something out of the lesson, in order to get something out of the singing, and we -- you know, part of it may be just checking something off a list. So it's like, hey, when I'm at home, I go to church there and I get what I need there; when I'm out of town, I go to church there, and I get -- but there's something that's supposed to be so much more than that. You have to be -- in order to fulfill Jesus' vision and the apostles' vision for the way the church works, for you to get what you're supposed to get and to be who you're supposed to be and to give what you're supposed to give, you've got to be intimately connected with a family of believers. Does that mean you can't -- you can't be gone on a weekend? No, it doesn't mean that at all. Does it mean that you're letting them down somehow? No, but it does mean that that becomes a priority, where you say, my -- part of my following Jesus is to help build this body up, not that I have -- again, I mean, I just hate to -- I hate to make that sound so concrete --

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: -- that it's like, you know, implying that you can't travel or that you can't whatever, because, I mean, what if somebody has a job where

they're -- you know, they're in a different city every week? I mean, yeah -- and somebody actually e-mailed me the other day and asked about evangelists particularly, and, apparently, there's an area -- and I think it's somewhere in the United States, I'm not sure, but where there's an area where there are several different congregations and this evangelist travels around and is in a different church every Sunday and isn't really a member at any congregation but just travels around as an evangelist. And they said, well, isn't that wrong? Like doesn't he need to be a member at a specific congregation? And I said, well, what congregation was Titus a member of? Because Paul sent Titus -- left Titus in Crete, which is an island and had several different cities, and there were congregations in all those cities. And Titus' job -- his apostolically assigned job was to work with all those congregations. So which congregation was he a member of? Well, he wasn't. He just traveled around, which is the case with Paul, as well. Timothy probably stayed a little bit more in Ephesus than maybe Titus did at any one congregation in Crete, but this is the way it worked in the first century, so why would we think it has to be any different today?

Do you have to place membership at a congregation? Do you have to devote your time specifically to that congregation most of all? Well, again, I just hate putting anything that scripture doesn't -- you know, that scripture doesn't spell out in have-to's -- I'm doing air quotes, but nobody can see that -- that if the Bible doesn't command that, I think we have to be very careful that -- but I think it makes sense. You know, I think it makes sense, in general, as a general rule, for most people to say,

you know what? I need a close circle of fellow believers and I need elders that are watching out for me. I need shepherds that are shepherding me that can hold me accountable. I need accountability. I need shepherding. I need someone to whom I can confess my sins and ask for prayers, and I need to be part of a congregation.

So membership makes sense as an expedient, especially in the culture in which we live today. And feeling an extra -- an extra responsibility to the other members of that particular congregation, those all make perfect sense, especially in the culture we live today, but none of that is necessarily commanded by scripture. And, again, part of that, I think, is because we live in a different culture.

TRAVIS: Yeah. You know, I think -- just one thing I thought of, I felt like I was given a perspective about church because of the small church that I went to and a very, very difficult situation that we had when I was growing up and kind of coming of age, where I was serving and got to be a part of a lot of different ministries. And I knew about the difficult situation and I saw the toll that it took on the leaders of the church, but I knew I couldn't do much about it, you know, that -- I wasn't in those meetings. You know, it was -- a lot of it was beyond me and it was between people that were beyond me, but because I knew about it, I feel like it gave me a perspective on when I came to church, I had a different idea of what I was there for. I knew it was difficult and I knew that there was tension, and you could -- I mean, it doesn't have to be said; most of the time you can feel it. And as hard as that was, again, it gave me this perspective of, when I show up, what can I do? I don't want to just show

up and sit down and listen. You know, I want to do something. I want to have some part in the worship, in teaching class, and, you know, helping out with whatever's going on after.

And I look back, and I was kind of doing it almost to distract myself, but it gave me an attitude of, you know, I'm not just trying to find a church where it checks all of my boxes, their doctrine is completely sound, I don't have to feel guilty about going -- that's not -- that's all kind of after-the-fact stuff to me now, that it's like I want to go to a place where I can effect change. And I think, to your point about the evangelist, there's still people that do that today, traveling --

WES: Sure. Oh, absolutely.

TRAVIS: -- evangelists that stop in and maybe you're only there for a year at a time, or maybe you're only there for a Sunday. And, again, it's like, can you add something to that on Sunday? Can you add, you know, a fresh perspective? Can you add a thought in Bible class? Can you add just another body in the seat singing and --

WES: Right.

TRAVIS: -- and having the Spirit? And, I mean, we have to believe that that means something when you come at it with that perspective because church can be really hard. And I think, you know, you can probably attest to this, too, that a lot of times, I think, at a small church, it can be a particular type of hard because it's a small group of people and so a lot of baggage can accumulate over time, some good and some bad. You know, some tension produces good things, and -- but over time it can get very hard. And sometimes it was like we'd go out of town and

you'll appreciate the break because you come back fresh and you come back going, man, I'm excited to go back to my home congregation. Yeah, there's difficult things going on, but that's a place I can serve.

WES: Yeah. Well, you bring up such a great point, and I think that this may be a great place to sort of land the conversation in that thinking -- you were saying that even at a young age you could feel the tension and you could see the -- you know, whatever was going on.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And I think -- to Rick's point, I think that that's what I would hope that people could realize and just think about how other people feel when you're gone, you know, and just trying to do for others what you would want done for you. I mean, that's how you live in the Christian community. That's how you live in the church, is to think through, you know what? I bet it's discouraging when we're not there. I bet it's discouraging when we're not contributing to the collection. I bet -- man, how are they going to make it without our contribution? You know, they've got all kinds of responsibilities that they're trying to take care of, and if we're not giving to that with our time and energy and money and presence, then, man, that's going to put somebody in a very difficult situation.

And I think that's the frustration sometimes. When you're part of a small congregation and people are depending on you and then you just don't show up for a week or two, or you don't contribute for a week or two, it puts other people in a very difficult situation. And while there may not be a specific command, hey, you have to be at your

congregation every week or you have to give at your congregation every week, it's just a matter of thinking through the feelings of others, putting yourself in their situation and say, somebody -- somebody is left holding the bag. Somebody is left in a very difficult and an uncomfortable situation if I don't play my part. If I don't do my part in this family, then we can't be everything that God wants us to be in this community and for each other.

And so it's just a matter of thinking through those things and encouraging every member to think through those things. And if you're going to be a part of any family or any community or any group, you have to think through what does your participation or your lack of participation -- what does it do to the other members? And then treat others as you would want to be treated, and that's, I think, what it comes down to.

And, you know, I'll just say -- I mean, this is kind of extremely personal, I mean, but just as a -- as a minister that's been a minister in both big and small congregations, I guess it kind of gets frustrating when -- you know, we talk about the 80/20 rule, that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. It gets frustrating sometimes when -- you know, maybe it's a funeral, you know, somebody passes away, or somebody's in the hospital, and it's somebody that, like, technically, their name is on a membership record somewhere, but they've never attended; they've never been part of the congregation; they've never participated; they've never helped; they've never been an active part of the community, but then when they're in need, they call the church and

say, hey, we need you to do all of these things for us. And it's like, do we mind? Well, no, of course not. On one level, it's like we love people and we want to serve people. But it's putting -- when every -- when a lot of people do that, when that happens a lot, it puts an extra burden and responsibility on those that are involved.

So if you have, for instance, maybe two or three or five or ten percent of the ladies of a congregation that make meals and take it to those that are sick or hurting or in the hospital -- or just getting out of the hospital or had a baby or had a funeral, or whatever, if those ten percent of those ladies do that for each other, it's no big deal; they all take care of each other. That's the way it's supposed to work in the church; we all take care of each other. And if everybody does something for everyone else, everybody's taken care of. But when ten percent of the people are caring for 90 percent of the people, well, then, I mean, they get burned out and overwhelmed and then the 90 percent of the people -- and I think most of the time they're not trying to put an extra burden on somebody else that they're not willing to carry, but they just don't know. They're just totally oblivious to the fact that someone else is making up for what you're not doing.

That's the way a community has to work. When you think about Acts Chapter 2 and Acts Chapter 4 in Jerusalem, it says that there wasn't a needy person among them because if anybody was in need, the people that had stuff sold it, gave it to the apostles, and then they took care of whatever need it was. That kind of thing, where there's not a needy person amongst us, can only happen when everybody pulls their weight

and everybody does what they're supposed to do.

Now, Paul, when he's writing to various churches, he really saw the church, quote-unquote, as this huge body of believers, not just local congregations, and he really saw us filling out that responsibility for people in Galatia or in Rome or in Corinth or in Phillippi, for the people in Jerusalem, or whatever, and we're all doing that for each other. But it can only happen on a grand scale like that if it's happening on a local scale. If it's not happening on a local scale, there's no way we're going to be able to do something like that on a global scale.

And so we really -- every member just has to think through, am I doing what I can do? Am I fulfilling my role as a part of the body of Christ? Am I helping? Am I participating? Am I helping to accomplish the things that -- building -- as Paul says in Ephesians 4, building the body up together in love? And so, you know, it does -- it gets frustrating for the ten percent. I'm not saying for me personally. You know, I'm financially supported to help and work with the church, but especially for the people that volunteer, and I think especially about ladies that make meals, you know, and just when it always falls on the same group of people to do it. They don't mind, in a sense, but at the same time, their burden would be a whole lot less if the burden was spread out amongst more people.

We -- we have the benefit of being in a huge congregation so we have hundreds of people that are willing to step up and take care of those things. But in a small congregation, when the percentages may be the same but you've got fewer people, you may have two or three ladies

that are taking care of 20 or 30 people.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: If it was 20 or 30 people all taking care of each other, it would be a totally different scenario. So yeah, I do -- to Rick's point, I think that there are general principles that have to be applied in these ways and we have to think through them, but it all comes back to what you said, Travis. It comes down to thinking how -- how is the leadership feeling? You know, what burden are they carrying and how can I help them to carry that burden? How can I help to spread out the burden and help be a part of the solution rather than just expecting my burdens to be carried by the church?

TRAVIS: Yeah. And I think, too, a thing I thought of and, hopefully, just a bit of encouragement, because I know during that time where there were troubles going on at our church it could get very discouraging and you would start to kind of play the game of -- even if somebody moved away -- you know, a prominent family in the church that really did a lot, they moved away and you start getting discouraged and down about like, man, if another family leaves we're going to be in trouble. And I remember, at the time, thinking, I know there's people thinking about that. I know there's people kept up at night over that. It's probably not going to do me any good to join that group if I'm not a part of it already. And to just think about, well, there's an opening. There's an opening. There's another spot for me to help out or for somebody else to help out. And even -- you know, even at a young age, it was like I felt like I was given a perspective because of hard times and because I knew a lot

about what was going on and knew just how much I couldn't do about it, and then that freed me up to just say, okay, well, then what can I do? What can I do to make the leaders' lives better, you know, with how I serve?

And, again, as I've gotten older, I realize that's also trusting the Spirit, that, man, if I'm trusting my ability to figure out what are we going to do if people keep not showing up, if so-and-so moves away, if this or that happens -- I know that there's people who need to think about that, but I think it's probably -- it would probably be a healthy dose of the Spirit and just trusting that God's watching over this work. If it needs to end and make way for something else, I have to trust that that's okay. And if -- you know, if he's going to bring new people in, I have to -- man, I want to be the best version of myself for those new people that get here, and just not thinking -- you've brought this up a couple times lately -- not thinking so much about the future, to think more about just what's my next move.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, it's something I've noticed, too -- and I hope that this encourages some church leaders out there that are in small congregations that are trying to motivate people to be more involved, because it does get frustrating. But desperation and worry leads to anger, leads to berating, making people feel guilty, and that -- those types of things don't motivate people to be more involved. And so if every time somebody -- every time the church gets together and somebody gets up there and said, yeah, glad you're here, but wish more people were here. People just don't care about church anymore. It's just

so discouraging. I see so many empty pews. Where is everybody? That discourages the people that are there. And when you say, well, nobody helps around here and 20 percent of the people are doing 80 percent of the work, those things may be true and it may feel good to vent frustrations and those kind of things; it doesn't actually help the situation.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And so the best thing that we can do is exactly what you said. What can I do? How can I encourage -- as Paul -- or as the Hebrew writer says in Hebrews 10, "consider how to spur one another on to love and good works"? And so that's got to be our goal, is how can I encourage the people that are here? How can I help spur them on? How can I be a catalyst for positive change in their life?

Somebody said one time -- this isn't a Bible verse, but it's a proverb that kind of stuck in my head. But they said, "Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can." And I like that. You know, it's like I'm not -- I'm not at that church, I'm not at that church, I don't have this resource, I don't have that. And we have this tendency to think about what we don't have or what we need or what we wish we had or what we're afraid is going to happen. Stop. Just start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can.

And I think that's exactly what Paul is saying in passages like I Corinthians 12, Romans 12 when he talks about the body and he's like you are exactly who you are for the purpose that God created you to be, so be that. If you're a nose, be a nose. Don't try to be an ear. Don't try to

be a mouth. Just be the best nose that you can be. Just be the best ear you can be. Whatever you are, just use -- like you said, trust the Spirit. Trust that you have and that you are where you need to be, and just do that and just encourage people. Don't berate people. Don't make people feel guilty. Don't try to shame them into work. Don't compel them into giving, or whatever. Just love them and show them how great it is and do whatever you can, but also rest, and rest in the Lord, you know, and take time and just do what you can, and it's going to be okay.

We know we win. Jesus wins and Jesus' people win, so we don't have to worry and we don't have to fret. What can man do to us? You know, if this whole thing could get started and kicked off with 12 people -- you know, really, a hundred-something people, but -- all the followers of Jesus, but 12 apostles and then this handful of people in Jerusalem -- if this whole thing could turn the world upside down with just a handful of people that are infused with the gospel and with the Spirit of God and that they could go out into the world and turn the world upside down, then no matter how big or small your congregation is or how many people are involved or not involved or where they are in their personal walk with the Lord, you and the people in your community can really do some amazing things. You don't have to be McDermott Road. You don't have to be Memorial -- Memorial Road?

TRAVIS: Memorial Road.

WES: Memorial Road. I'm always afraid I'm going to say "Drive" or "Road." You don't have to be some congregation that you're not. You don't have to try to accomplish what you can't accomplish. Just do what

you can in your community and encourage the people around you.

I want to thank my church family, the church of Christ on McDermott Road, and our editor, Travis Pauley, for making this podcast possible. And thank you for listening. If you haven't already done so, please rate, review, and subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcast, or wherever you're listening. I also want to invite you to check out Logos Bible Software, who has partnered with us to give our listeners a great discount. Just go to RadicallyChristian.com/logos. I think you'll love the software and you'll get a great discount by using that link.

As always, I love you, God loves you, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

- Wes