

# Middle Letters

May 12, 2019

# Paul's Middle Letters

- Series: Mastering the Scriptures
- Location: Paul's Middle Letters
- Last two weeks: the connection between what we *believe* and what we *do*
  - Living worthy of the calling
  - Continuing in the tradition
- Today: Spurring one another on in the tradition

# Paul's Middle Letters

- We've talked about what we believe and do
  - We are a community formed around Christ and His gospel
  - We are to be continually renewing our minds
  - We are to build solid families
  - We are to be engaged in good works and occupations
  - We are to be unified
  - We have to fight against our own nature and the elementary principles of the world
- The middle letters frame up the why and how

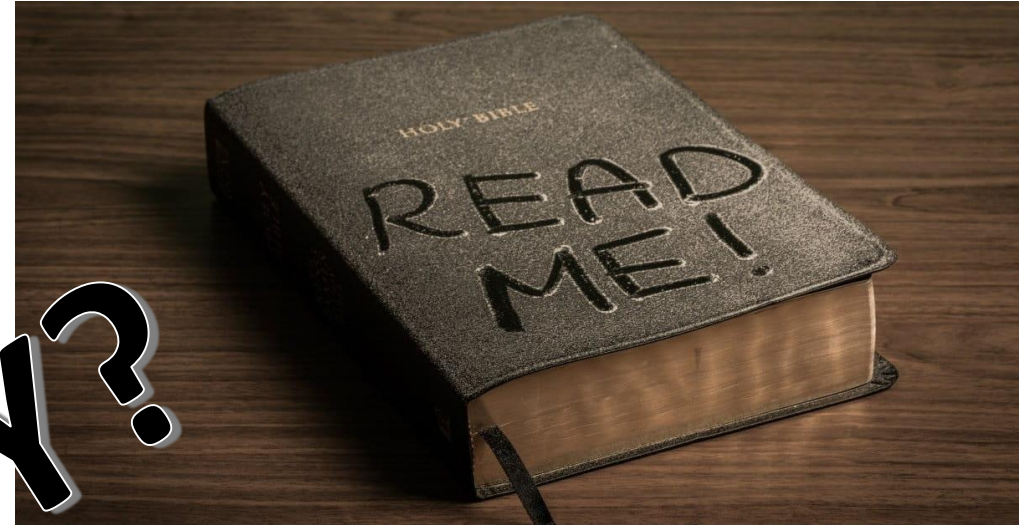
# Why

- How do you grow your relationship with God?
  - How do you view other people?
  - What do we need to know about the future? How do we conduct ourselves now?
  - What do we need to do?
- 
- These are all questions asked in the Kids Studies curriculum for the Latter Prophets section of the Old Testament – looking for growth
  - The kids' answers were not dissimilar from what you'd expect from any Sunday School...repeat the following in some order...

JESUS!



Read the Bible!



WHY?

Pray!



# Why

- Nothing wrong about the answers
- Why would we be confident these things work?
- How do we sustain doing these things?
  - 20 years? 30 years? 40 years? Lifelong?
  - Most formal schooling is 13-17 years.
  - Most careers are 35-45 years long.
  - People are done and ready to move onto something else either at the end or long before the end of these endeavors (or both)
  - Average length of marriage ending in divorce: 8 years
- Remaining committed for a lifetime is hard!

# Why

- For the kids, I had to ask how they would build a relationship with other kids they know?
  - “Do the things they want to do!” was the overwhelming response
  - Specifically, for this group of 4th and 5th grade boys, they were hopeful the answer meant...



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## Why

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# Why

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  - “Do the things they want to do!” was the overwhelming response
  - Specifically, for this group of 4th and 5th grade boys, they were hopeful the answer meant...
  - But they understood that maybe, *just maybe*, that wasn't the case for everyone

# Discussion

1. How can we know God's will for our lives, throughout our lives, even as circumstances change beyond our control (health, money, conflict, government, etc)?
2. How do you respond to people who think it's arrogant to think we can know God's will?
3. How does understanding God's will enable us to continue to sustain our faith even through the rocky stages of life?

# Why

- The middle letters provide us with perspective
- I was in the class with the kids for 4 or 5 weeks, and every week I reminded them of the “church” verse

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. <sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Eph 3:7-13

- \*\*For parents of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders – there’s still some work to do on this one.\*\*

# Why

- IF we want to do what God is doing – we should be participating in His church
  - Understanding what the church is, its teachings, its mission – and then working to make the church strong – you will be following God’s will
  - We can be confident in this
- We’re reading the Bible, praying, and following Jesus so we can more effectively participate in the lifelong work that He has for us building His kingdom in this age.
- This is our part in the story that spans thousands of years

# Why

- Doubt and conflict always work their way into a community, and can win the day if we aren't constantly on watch
  - Examples
    - God brings about 10 plagues and leads His people out of Egypt with a miraculous parting of the Red Sea – delivering his people from slavery!
      - Community fears God can't provide in the wilderness, would be better off in Egypt
      - Community fears hearing from God – sends Moses as a representative
      - Community gets board waiting for Moses – Golden calf made to worship
    - God promises victory in the land of milk and honey for His people!
      - Spies sent into the land, 10 scared, convince people not to go into the land
    - Israel victorious in their conquest of the Land, promise to live by God's commands!
      - Land descends into anarchy as the gods of the people they conquered replace God
      - People eventually demand a human king to rule over them
    - ...

# Why

- We have to re-center ourselves in God's story as individuals and as His church to remain faithful throughout our lives and for generations to come
  - Experiences (even miracles) ≠ lifelong faith
  - One generation's faith ≠ the next generation's faith
- How?



# How

“Polarization is symptomatic of an erosion in both camps of the self-evident sense of the sacred, of the reality of the sense of God...Perhaps both liberals and conservatives are less ‘intolerant and rigid’ than insecure, clinging to a life raft because the ocean is so vast and the storm is threatening”<sup>1</sup>

- We cling to what we know – if we’re clinging to traditions and dogma that we don’t understand, the ocean is going to be a big place and things will get pretty dire when a storm comes.
- We will make standards and traditions to help us navigate the waters if we aren’t well grounded in the full teaching of Christ and His Apostles

1. Hutcheson, Shriver: [The Divided Church](#), p 11

# How

So, thanks for humoring me when I called yesterday. John has a lot of friends having children now and he was saying he thought it was crazy to have them “young” because of all the work and responsibility. So I pointed to you guys as an example of how much fun and joy having children early on can be so that is why I called.

Yep, figured the group they're around tends to lean towards having kids later.

# How

I think the short conversation helped them see that having kids can be a great addition in their lives instead of limiting. So many of Andrea and John's friends/classmates that had kids early on either didn't get married or are divorcing now. So they are seeing the tragedies that result from that. I think they will come around, hopefully. Andrea just had her husband's younger sister (22) that had a toddler and a baby move in as she recently got divorced. As you can imagine it pushed Andrea farther from desiring kids anytime soon as their mother is very immature and the kids are difficult.

Definitely harder when others aren't succeeding, and it hurts. Don't know if they're engaged with and participating in a church with strong families, going to be a tough road without that. Helps having good models at several age groups to provide more perspective. Everything's a crisis when you can't see well.

# How

- Besides understanding where we are in God's plan, we also have to understand Paul's instructions about how the churches are to be ordered:
  - Individuals
  - Families
  - Community
    - Older/younger
    - Leadership
  - Networks

# How

- The chaos created from not following Christ's order will multiply
- In the previous example, the value of parenting is thrown into question as people are immersed in a community with negative role models to base their opinion.
- Sustainability
  - Our churches have to be prepared with elders who are ready to teach sound doctrine and refute false teachings.
  - All members ordering their household according to the teaching
  - Members using their gifts to fulfill the mission of the church
    - Unity
    - One-anothering

# How

- Household Guidelines Addressed (Pauline Epistles)
  - Leaders
  - Men and Women
  - Handling Conflict
  - Assembly Meetings
  - Giving and Financial Matters
  - Widows and Special Needs
  - Community Life and Ministry
  - Relationship with the World

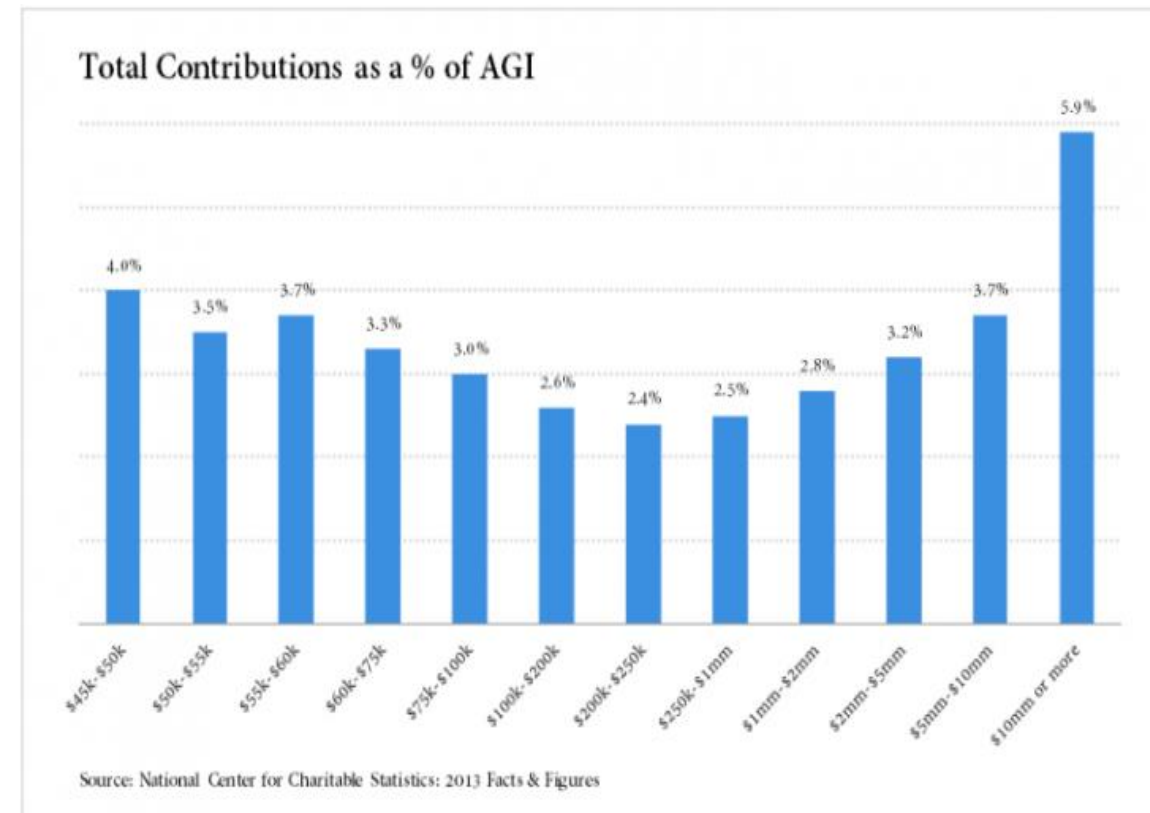


# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - We must control our money, not the other way around
    - In debt, in wealth or somewhere in between, money *can* be our master
  - How you use your treasure is a window into your heart (same for time and talents)
    - Are you seeking after power, security, fame, more money, generosity?
  - Many, many strategies and sub-strategies for managing money
    - Only use cash vs. using cards to get “rewards”
    - Envelopes vs. software vs. pen/paper for budgeting
    - Budget percentage targets for housing, transport, food, insurance, entertainment, clothing, kids’ college, taxes, retirement, savings, etc
    - Giving, and giving specifically to the church is not usually a major part of the budget

# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - Giving principles
    - First and Best
    - Not out of compulsion
    - Giving out of every situation
    - It's a matter of trust
      - God will provide what we need
      - May need to re-calibrate what “needs” are
      - Leadership will use money wisely
    - Build habits of generosity today
    - We should be characterized as generous
      - Not just direct giving to the church
    - Focus on building the church



# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - But even if we're all giving faithfully as individuals and families, we can still not be handling our money well as a church
    - Staff salary for staff with a top/primary focus on only that church
    - Buildings, real estate, and parking lots
    - Programs within the church

# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - As churches we have to remain focused on the mission, just as we challenge ourselves individually
  - Critical success factors (from the *Funding Spontaneous Expansion* encyclical)
    - The Churches – supporting apostolic ministers who were sent out from their midst, investing resources into the next phase of expansion
    - The Benefactors – provided money, homes, and influence to help apostolic teams
    - The Collections – meeting needs around the rest of the network, helping with expansion strategy of the apostles
    - The Enterprising Apostolic Team – not controlled by churches, not a burden to churches. Had skills to enable them to make money as needed.

# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - As individuals and families
    - If you don't believe you are in control of your money, work on developing a strategy to get back control
      - May not be a quick fix (multi-week/month/year strategy)
      - Work with others if you need help, or accountability
    - If you haven't already, develop a conviction about what you give, and how you give
      - Continue to renew your mind, and assess where you're at, and your convictions
    - Be prepared to meet needs

# How

- Order matters – giving and financial matters
  - As churches
    - Share your stories about how God has been faithful
    - Share your stories about how you've developed and applied your convictions
      - Giving large amounts of money to the church is not normal, how will it become normal and a priority for people in this and future generations if we aren't sharing our story?
    - Evaluate spending in relation to its contribution to expansion, and the mission (locally, regionally, and globally)
    - Be prepared to meet needs



# How

- Ultimately, the order we've been given is easy to understand, but difficult to maintain.
  - Chaos and disorder are always knocking at the door, and they are frequently invited in and given a seat at the table
  - We must be renewing our minds, and we need well-trained leaders
- It's not all about us as individuals, and it's impossible for us to truly fulfill God's plan for this age on our own
- Together we provide each other models and normalize what would otherwise be unusual behavior!
- Giving and financial matters are one example, but as you work through the other household guidelines, similar patterns appear.