**HEALTHY CHURCHES AIM FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT**

**(1 Corinthians 12:1-31)**

Just outside of Branson, Missouri there is an institution of higher learning named College of the Ozarks. They refer to themselves as Hard Work U because every student of that school has a job of some kind working for the school. Each student works 15-hours a week plus two 40-hour work weeks during school breaks doing something of importance on the campus. There are over 100 different types of jobs and industries at the college. The school has a restaurant, a hotel, a mill, a kitchen that sells products (apple butter is said to be on their most popular), and there are a host of other ways students can work. The students pay no tuition. That leaves just room and board, and that too can be covered if a student works during the summer. A student can obtain a valuable and excellent college education and leave completely debt-free.

What would our city look like, what would our country be like if everybody who could work did work? Since 2009 the unemployment has gone down steadily, and recently, it was at an all-time low. The official, government unemployment rate, however, only counts those who want to work who are out of work. It doesn’t count the number of unemployed who aren’t looking for a job and don’t want a job. If they were counted, the unemployment rate would be far higher.

The better the employment rate, the better the health of the economy. The same stands true regarding the health of a church. The more members of a church who are actively involved in a ministry using their spiritual gift to serve God and to serve people, the better the health of that church. Most churches, however, have a very low employment rate and a very high unemployment rate. Accordingly, most churches are not healthy because far too many within the church are not working and many do not want to work.

You have probably heard the 80/20 rule which holds that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. In some churches it is even more lopsided. That may account for why the vast majority of churches in our nation are on the decline.

We have got to get people back to work.

The title of tonight’s message is, “Healthy Churches Aim for Full Employment.” Our text is 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. We are going to work through this chapter segment by segment, and as we do, I want to make four simple statements.

1. **WE HAVE THE SAME EMPLOYER.**

Notice what Paul says in 12:1-6. There is just one Lord, just one Spirit, just one God who has called and equipped us to serve Him.

Notice the very first sentence of this chapter. Paul was answering the questions the people had. The Corinthians were curious. They were experiencing problems related to spiritual gifts. To their credit, they asked Paul. They had written Paul a letter in which they asked a series of questions. In the latter half of Paul’s letter, he addresses those questions. Chapter 12 is Paul’s response to their question about spiritual gifts.

If you owned a restaurant and I owned one just a block down from you, we would be competitors. That would be especially so if we served the same kind of food. If, however, I owned a drive-in burger joint and you owned an upscale restaurant that specialized in Asian cuisine, we really wouldn’t be competitors. We would appeal to different clientele.

I am sure that you have seen hotels sitting side-by-side, and you think they are competitors. What if I told you that the same man owned both hotels? Would you think he would be bothered if he saw someone drive by the first hotel and stop at the second? It doesn’t matter to him because he owns them both.

I knew a family who owned two banks in the same town across the corner from one another. Each went by a different name. If a resident had his money in one bank and got mad, closed his account, and moved his money to the other bank, the bank owner wasn’t all that upset.

Let me ask you a question, are we in competition with any of the 100 churches across Enid? We are certainly not in competition with any of the Catholic churches or the liturgical churches. Are we in competition with any of the other Baptist churches or small Protestant churches on this side of town? Why not? We have the same owner.

In 2002 the motion picture *Drumline* was released. It is about a talented percussionist from Harlem who receives a full-ride scholarship to Atlanta A&T University to play in the marching band. His name is Devon. He definitely marches to the beat of his own drum. He consistently deviates from the protocol outlined by Dr. Lee, the band director.

One morning, before sunrise, the incoming freshmen band members are lined up like Army recruits on the University’s football field. The returning band members observe from the sidelines. The freshmen are all wearing white t-shirts except for Devon who is in a black one. Dr. Lee addresses them like a boot camp sergeant. When a few stragglers arrive tardy, the director asks one of them to identify his roommate. The embarrassed latecomer points to Devon.

Dr. Lee approaches Devon and asks him why his roommate was late. He responds that his roommate probably overslept. When the band director inquires why he didn’t wake him, Devon flippantly answers, “I’m not his mother.”

Dr. Lee says loud enough for the entire band to hear, “Section leaders. What is our concept?”

The section leaders answer loudly in unison, “One band, one sound!”

Dr. Lee repeats the slogan: “One band, one sound!” and then continues to address the newcomers. “When one of us is late, we are all late. When one of us looks or sounds bad, we all look and sound bad.”

Staring at the freshmen, he asks, “What’s the concept?”

The newcomers reply, “One band, one sound.”

Dr. Lee continues, “Now I want ten laps from all those who are ‘not’ their roommate’s mama.”

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:5, “one Lord, one faith.” We might say, “One Church, one owner.”

There are not 100 churches in Enid. There is one church and a whole bunch of congregations.

1. **WE ARE EQUIPPED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.**

Let’s look at 12:4-11. A spiritual gift is an ability that God places within you that He means for you to use. When you use it, God is glorified and people are blessed. When I sing, people are not normally blessed. That might be momentarily amused but not blessed. That is because I don’t have any musical gifting.

The other day, Ruth Ann and I were talking about life verses. I shared mine with her—Isaiah 50:4.

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning He awakens; He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

I have a speaking gift. There are many gifts, but there are two broad categories—speaking gifts and serving gifts. I get this from 1 Peter 4:10-11.

**10**Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. **11**If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

We need to learn what our gift is and use it for God’s glory and for the growth and blessing of the church.

When I lived in Stillwater, there was a 2 and ½ year period when I was the manager of a hotel. At the hotel, we had different departments.

* There was the **housekeeping department**. They cleaned the rooms.
* Another was **laundry.** They washed and dried all the towels and sheets and duvets or bed covers.
* Another was **maintenance**. They kept the heaters and air conditioners running. They made sure the hot tub and the swimming pool were clean and that the chemicals kept the water at the right pH level. And they did a host of others things
* Yet another department was **front desk.** They made reservations, checked people in and out, answered questions, and attended to complaints and requests.
* The **Breakfast** staff came in early, around 4:30 to make sure the breakfast was ready and that everything was set out for guests by 6:00. They had to keep the area clean and the containers and warmers re-filled as needed.
* I was part of **management.** I hired and sometimes fired. Of the 25 or so employees we had when I left, I had hired all but about 6 of them. I made schedules, met with supervisors of the various departments, consulted with owner often, and did all kinds of other things.

Each person had a role to play. We didn’t expect our housekeepers to make reservations and check guests in. We didn’t ask our maintenance to clean bathrooms and make beds. We didn’t ask our front desk staff to replace air conditioners. But we did rely on one another to do their jobs and use their abilities to make the hotel the premiere place to stay in Stillwater.

My last year, the hotel earned the Connie Award, named after Conrad Hilton. It was recognized as one of the two best Hampton’s in North America. For many, we were the hotel of choice when they came to Stillwater.

Liberty Southern may never be the church of choice for the tens of thousands of people who live in Enid, but we can still be the best church we can be as each person plays his or her role and uses his or her spiritual gift or gifts.

1. **WE ALL NEED ONE ANOTHER.**

Let’s read 12:12-26. I’ve been using a business metaphor. Paul used the metaphor of a human body. The Church is like a body. A body has man members. According to the Lever 2000 soap commercials, there are 2000 body parts. That doesn’t include all of the internal organs and systems that are at work inside the body.

The body is healthy when all of the parts do the job they were designed to do.

The same is true in business. Going back to my hotel analogy, if the breakfast lady slept in late or just didn’t show up, I would have gotten a call from night clerk at 5:00 telling me, “She’s not here, yet.” I would have quickly got ready and rushed to the hotel. In the meantime, the night auditor would have gotten as much as he could set out and maybe even started heating up breakfast items while trying to keep an eye on the front desk. I would have taken over when I arrived. At the end of breakfast, the housekeep supervisor and maybe one of the assistant supervisors would have come over to help me get everything cleaned up and put away.

Often, we did things we weren’t necessarily hired to do because we belonged to one another and depended on one another.

What would have happened if the laundry staff said, “You know, none of the guests of this hotel ever see me. I’m stuck in this laundry. Even the manager rarely checks on me. I must not be that important. I’m not as important as the front desk people. They take reservations. They talk to the customers. They are out front for everybody to see. I’m just going to stay home today. I won’t be missed.”

I will tell you what would happen. The housekeepers would be all up in arms. Their work would grind to a halt. They would quickly run out of towels to put in the bathrooms. They wouldn’t have clean sheets to make the beds. Rooms wouldn’t be ready for new guests. The front desk would get a barrage of complaints. “Where are my towels!” It wouldn’t be pretty.

Just because you don’t stand up in front of a crowd on Sunday mornings, that doesn’t mean the work you do is less important or unimportant.

In a sermon on this passage, Ray Stedman said:

One morning after my sermon, a doctor told me something I’ll never forget. He said, “You may be interested to know there’s a part of your body that is absolutely essential to you as a preacher. You probably don’t realize it when you’re preaching, but without it, you couldn’t do what you do.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s your big toe,” he replied. “The big toe senses when your body begins to lean or shift or get out of balance, and it immediately strengthens so that you can stand up and speak. Without your big toe, you could never preach.”

I’ve been guarding my big toe very carefully since then. Don’t step on my feet! That’s an essential part of my ministry.

You don’t have to be big and visible to be important and essential. You are needed for God wants us to become and to do what He wants us to do.

So far, we have said:

We have the same employer;

We are equipped in different ways;

We all need one another.

1. **WE NEED TO WORK WHERE HE WANTS US.**

Let’s conclude with vv. 27-31. We each have a place in the church. We need to be where God wants us to be. Let God show you where that place is and what it is that He has equipped you to do.

You may be asking, “How do I know what my gift is?” Let me give you a few suggestions.

* Pray. Ask God to show you what your gift is.
* Experiment. Serve in some different roles. You don’t buy a car until you test drive it. Test drive some ministry opportunities.
* Examine your feelings. Where did you feel joy? What did you find draining? A strength is what makes you feel strong when you do it. A weakness is what makes you feel weak when you do it.
* Expect confirmation from the body. What are other members whom you respect telling you?

Let me dispel one popular myth. Most people think that serving the Lord involves doing something at the church building. That is not true. The gifts God gives are best exercised not in this place but at your place. How do I know that to be true? I know that because there were no church buildings in the days of the New Testament, and there wouldn’t be any church buildings for another three centuries. God wants you to use your home as a platform for your ministry.

I have said this before: The most important house in America is not the White House. It is not the House on Capitol Hill. It is not the court house. It is not the school house. It is not even the church house. The most important house in America is your house. Use your home as a base of ministry in your neighborhood.

In one of his books, Donald Miller tells about an interesting neighborhood parade that was held on New Year’s Day. Listen to the story. It was organized by a dad named Bob Goff with the help of his children.

Bob and the kids were sitting around on New Year's Day when one of the kids mentioned she was bored. Bob agreed and said he thought New Year’s Day was probably one of the more boring days of the year. He asked the kids what they could do to make New Year’s Day less boring.

The kids started tossing out ideas, things like buying a pony or building a rocket ship, and then one of the children mentioned they could have a parade. Getting himself out of buying a pony . . . Bob lit up and said a parade sounded great.

So, Bob, [his wife], Maria, and the kids sat around the dining room table and dreamed up what their parade might look like. They could wear costumes and hold balloons, and maybe they could invite their friends to watch. Maria began planning a cookout at the end of the parade, in their backyard, and wondered how many people she should prepare for.

Bob thought about it, though, and realized it’s more fun to be in a parade than to watch one. So, he made a rule: nobody would be allowed to watch the parade, but anybody could participate. He and the kids walked down their small street and knocked on doors, explaining to neighbors that they were having a parade, and anybody who wanted could be in the parade, but nobody would be allowed to watch.

Surprisingly, plenty of his neighbors agreed to take part. They agreed to march down the street with Bob’s kids and join the cookout in the Goffs’ backyard . . .

Bob and the family dressed up in their handmade costumes and walked to the end of the street, where they were joined by a few neighbors, and began marching down the street, converting all parade watchers into parade participants. And by the time they got to their backyard, they had a dozen or more people sitting around, enjoying each other’s company and eating hamburgers.

Donald Miller*, A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*(Thomas Nelson, 2009), pp. 234-237.

As the old hymn says, “We Are Marching to Zion.” Others, can watch our parade. They’d have more fun if they joined the parade. Invite them to join us. Let God put you in the portion of the parade where He wants you to walk, and work, and witness.