

PRESIDENT STEVE GAINES' ADDRESS

SBC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President Steve Gaines

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God's Pattern for Ministry

Acts 13:1–12

Every person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ is a minister – a servant of the gospel. You might not be called to pastor a church, but if you are a Christian, you are a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a minister, you need to understand how ministry works. There is a fundamental, essential process – a pattern of ministry – when you minister for the Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder if you're aware of it?

My wife, Donna, and I went to a baseball game this past week. We saw the Arizona Diamondbacks play the Milwaukee Brewers. When you go to a baseball game, you'll notice there's a pattern – a process. When someone hits the ball, in order to score, they have to go to first base, then second base, third base, and then to home plate. Bad things would happen if they went out of that order. If the player hit the ball, ran over to third base, and then ran back home, they would call him out. Why? Because he didn't follow the pattern. If he bypassed the pitcher, ran to second base, then ran to third and came home, or then ran to first and came home, either way, they would call him out.

As silly as it sounds, you and I sometimes do just that in the ministry. God wants you and me – all of us – to minister first to Him. When we minister to the Lord, He ministers to us and anoints us with the Holy Spirit and then – and only then – do we have the power and the anointing to minister to other people.

We get so busy and so involved; we're so connected [*president motions laterally*] to people through our involvement with communications – cell phones, social media, e-mails or texts, or who is it that we need to call. We want to minister to people in this way, but we have not yet gone to first base and ministered to the Lord through prayer, fasting, and worship.

We all know there are many wonderful things going on in our Southern Baptist Convention. I praise God that we're planting a hundred churches every month. I'm grateful to God that now our IMB is beginning to send more and more missionaries back on the field and not pulling them off. Let's thank the Lord for that. I'm grateful for God and how He's doing a great work in our midst. I have gone to so many meetings this last year. I've gone to state conventions – God has given us wonderful state conventions. I've been able to preach at almost all of our seminaries and see how God is raising up many godly people to preach and to share the gospel of Jesus. We've got so many good things going on in our midst.

We also know that we have our challenges; we know we're down in baptisms again. However, I want to remind you that there is hope. There's hope for the Southern Baptist Convention, hope for the United States of America, and hope for our lost world. Because there is a bloody cross and an empty tomb – praise God – there is an occupied throne. We do not serve a dead Savior. We serve a living Lord! Because Jesus is alive, there is hope for all of us today! If we will follow God's pattern, we can have access to His power. Let me share about God's pattern for ministry found in Acts 13.

First, **you must minister to the Lord with prayer and worship.** Acts 13:1 - *“Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”* These five men were the leaders of the church at Antioch. The Bible says they were prophets and teachers. Perhaps some of them were prophets and others were teachers. Perhaps they were all prophets and teachers. Prophets predicted the future and also encouraged God's people. Teachers simply taught people the Word of God.

Let's look at them – who are they? First of all, there's Barnabas. You'll remember that the apostles had given him this name. His real name was Joseph. We read about him earlier in the book of Acts. *“Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)”* Acts 4:36.

You might remember that when the apostle Paul had just been saved, he came to Jerusalem as a new believer in Christ and nobody there really wanted to embrace him with the right hand of fellowship. They didn't believe he had really been saved. But Barnabas stepped in and, on Paul's behalf, told the apostles, “He has really been saved, he is a believer. He's telling everybody about Jesus! God has done a great work in his life!” All of a sudden, the church at Jerusalem embraced Paul. They would never have done it had they not had an encourager named Barnabas to lead them in that acceptance.

Later on you read that when the Gentiles began to get saved at the church at Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to check it all out and make sure that the work there was really of God – that the Gentiles were really being led to Christ and that it was a real movement of God. He went there, noticed what was going on, rejoiced in the grace of God, and affirmed the church in that work. We read about that in Acts 11. Barnabas always lived up to his name – he was a true son of encouragement. May God give us more sons and daughters of encouragement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The second prophet and teacher in Antioch was Simeon, who was called Niger (Simeon is a Hebrew a name; Niger means black. Simeon was probably from Africa). Many theologians believe he was actually Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross after Jesus stumbled en route to Calvary. Luke 23:26 - *“When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.”* The soldiers seized him, put the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. If this Simon of Cyrene was the Simeon here in our text, he must have gotten saved just a little while after he carried the cross of Jesus. We know that his son, Rufus, lived in Rome and that Paul was a very close friend of this family. Paul said that Rufus' mother (who would have been Simeon/Simon's wife) was like his own mother. Think about that – the apostle Paul loved the family of Simeon/Simon from Cyrene. He even knew the man that carried the cross of the Lord Jesus; now that man was an elder/pastor at the church of Antioch.

The third man is Lucius of Cyrene from Africa. He was not the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Then there was Manaen, a very interesting person. The Bible says he had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch (also known as Herod Antipas), the son of Herod the Great; both of them were very wicked men. Herod Antipas is the one who stole his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. She divorced Philip and then married Herod Antipas. It was Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded. It was Herod Antipas who mocked the Lord Jesus before His crucifixion, and Jesus wouldn't even talk to him. Herod Antipas had a horrible, spiritual résumé, and yet he had been brought up right by Manaen. How radically

different these two men turned out! One mocked Jesus, had the forerunner of Jesus killed, was despicable to even his own brother; and yet the other, who had grown up right by this evil man, became a disciple of Jesus Christ, a prophet and teacher of God, and an elder/pastor in the great church at Antioch.

Finally, there's this guy named Saul or Paul – arguably the greatest Christian ever to live. He planted churches all over the Roman empire for about thirty years and wrote virtually half the New Testament. He came from Tarsus in Cilicia.

These five men show how diverse the church at Antioch was at that time. It's a very good prototypical church. If you want to know what kind of church you should have, use the church at Antioch. They had Jews and Gentiles, whites and blacks, educated and uneducated, and well-to-do and poor people. Yet, all of them had one thing in common – they had Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

I'll tell you what will take care of the race issues in America – the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one race, the human race. God loves us all. God has created us all in His image. Jesus died for us all and anyone can be saved. If you will repent of your sins, believe in salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, receive Him into your life, calling on the name of the Lord – you will instantly have the Holy Ghost within you. He will help you love everybody around you and you won't care who they are or about their background. That is what we see here in the church at Antioch.

Notice what they were doing, Acts 13:2a – *“While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting...”* They are ministering to the Lord! This word “minister” is a very interesting word (it translates into the Greek word for liturgy which is the pattern of Christian worship). These prophets, teachers, and all of the church members at Antioch were ministering to the Lord and fasting. They were worshipping the Lord.

What is worship? It is when you give your heart to God and He gives His heart to you. You know you've been to worship when you leave the place of worship and God has your heart and you have His. The church was pouring out their hearts to God and they were fasting and praying. They were calling out and crying out to God. They were not engaged in seeker-sensitive worship; they were engaged in Savior-focused and Savior-sensitive worship and they were ministering to the Lord. Jesus was what the worship service was about – it was not a show – it was just a worship service offering up praise to Almighty God. Guess what? God liked it. God responded when they ministered to Him.

Acts 13:2b says, *“...the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”* God calls two of these five prophets and teachers, Barnabas and Saul and set them apart for the work. It was going to be hard. It was going to be difficult and labor involved. He didn't even tell them the details of the work. He said, “Just set them apart for the work to which I have called them.” They were to do whatever God wanted them to do by reporting every day. “Private Gaines reporting for duty, Lord.”

Notice what the church at Antioch did next. Acts 13:3 – *“Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”* This was not an ordination service for their apostolic ministry. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:1 that he did not receive his apostleship from man, but from God. It was an affirmation of God calling these men into missionary service. The gospel had already been taken to the Jews and to the Gentiles, but only in Judea,

Galilee, Samaria, and Syria. Now it was time to go overseas and fulfill Acts 1:8 and go to the ends of the earth.

This overseas mission trip would have never happened had they not been ministering to the Lord. Missions was birthed in the same kind of setting that the church was birthed in; the church was birthed in a prayer meeting – not in a business meeting. Missions was also birthed in a prayer meeting – not in a business meeting. There is a time to have business meetings, but we need to do business with and minister to God first.

Twenty-two years ago, I came to this convention. I was tired, not of the ministry, but I was tired in the ministry. Have you ever been there? I was at my church in Alabama and God was blessing us and we were seeing people saved. However something was missing in my heart and I was literally burning out; unable to understand what was happening.

I came to the Southern Baptist Convention that year and talked with a dear friend of mine, Dr. Ronnie Floyd. I could just tell something wonderful was happening in his life. I said, “Ronnie, what is going on with you?” He said, “Well Steve, the Lord called me on a 40-day fast. I have met with the Lord. I have been rekindled. I have been revitalized. God is at work in my heart.” When I talked to him, all of that was obvious. I went away from that conversation saying, “Lord, that’s what I want. I don’t want just a few more baptisms. I don’t want just a few more dollars in the plate in the offering. I don’t want just a few more people joining the church. God, I’ve got to have a fresh anointing.”

One night during the Southern Baptist Convention, as I was praying with some seminary friends, a dear friend, Alvin Reed, gave me a book on prayer and fasting written by Bill Bright. I started reading it and I couldn’t put it down. I said, “Lord, I hear You. I’ve been crying out to You Lord, and I just have not been ministering to You. I have not been praying. I have not been putting You first. Whatever else happens in the day, I’m going to begin my day with You. Lord, I’m going to read the Word every day. I don’t care how many meetings I have. I don’t care how many appointments I have. I don’t care how many phone calls I have or anything else, Lord. I’m going to etch out that time for You.” From that time twenty-two years ago to this day, I have missed very few days. I’m not trying to brag that I have gone through fasting and all these other things. I just want to tell you that it is a wonderful thing to make a commitment in your life and say, “Lord, You are first. You’re not just first when I give my money, but You’re first in the day. Lord, I’m going to go to bed and get up on time; before I talk to anybody, check any e-mails, or face this day, I’m going to get on my face before You. I’m going to have something to deliver because I’m going to have the anointing of Almighty God. Oh God, I want to minister to You.”

Think about the Old Testament priests – they ministered to the Lord in the tabernacle, the temple of God. Before we minister to people, we need to minister to the Lord. How do you do that? By worshiping Him and praising Him. How do you worship and praise Him? I take the names of God, and I pray them back to God. “Oh Lord, I thank You that You are Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord my Provider. You *‘who did not spare Your own son but delivered Him up for us all. How will you not also with Jesus freely give us all things?’* (Romans 8:32). You *‘will supply all of our needs according to Your riches and glory through Christ Jesus’* (Philippians 4:19). I just praise You today that you have given me food to eat, clothes to wear, and a roof over my head. Most of all, I thank You Jehovah-Jireh that You have written my name in the Lamb’s Book of Life and given me the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ through His blood. Thank You that You have given me everything I need to love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thank You that You’re Jehovah-Jireh. Thank You that You are Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our

Healer. I pray that we will prosper and be in good health, just as our souls prosper. Lord, thank You that You're Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord, my Banner, You fight for me while I keep silent." You worship the Lord according to the names of God because they describe His attributes.

You also minister to the Lord when you pray and thank Him for what He's done for you. When you don't know how to pray, just start thanking God for what He's done in the last 24 hours. Thank Him for every blessing you've been given and I promise you it will get your prayer life back in gear.

You also minister to the Lord when you petition Him to forgive you for your sins. Ask God to forgive our nation for our its sins. Intercede for the needs of other people. I've got about 25 people in our church who are sick that I pray for every day, and I pray for God to heal them. I've got a list of about 30 people who are lost, and I pray every day that God will convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment; I pray they will call upon the name of the Lord. All of that is ministering to the Lord by interceding for the needs of others.

When you fast and do without food, you focus that time on the Lord. When you do that, you are demonstrating your sincerity and urgency in praying unto God. You minister to the Lord when you read the Word of God, not just for information or inspiration, but for revelation so that God will speak to you and give you His Word and also so that you can meditate on that Word. This is another way to minister to the Lord, by praying the Word of God back to the Him like Jesus did on the cross (Psalm 22:1 and Psalm 31:5). You also minister to the Lord when you worship and assemble with other Christians and when you give financially to the church.

Oh friends, we need first of all to minister to the Lord. When's the last time you had a meaningful time in prayer? If you love somebody, you're going to talk with them. If you don't talk with the Lord, do you really love Him? If you love someone, talking is so natural. I've been married 37 years. What if I wake up on our wedding anniversary and say, "Oh, I have to go talk to Donna. I know I'm supposed to, and today above all days is our anniversary [but I really don't want to]. 'Oh, hello Donna. How are you? Thank you for all you...'" What's up with that? That's not love! When you love somebody, you talk with them and an hour goes by in an instant. When you love Jesus, you talk with Him. With all due respect, I don't care how many books you've read or written, you can have all the degrees you want – you can have more degrees than a thermometer – but if you don't talk with Jesus then you don't love Him the way you think you do. I want to encourage you to minister to the Lord. It is God's pattern. You need to truly worship the Lord God Almighty.

Once you minister to the Lord in worship, **the Lord ministers to you with His Holy Spirit.** If you're going to have any ministry to other people, you need to minister to the Lord in prayer, worship, and fasting, and He must minister to you with his Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid of the Holy Spirit – be afraid not to have the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13:2 says, "*While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'*" The Holy Spirit ministered to these believers and spoke to them. It could've been through one of their prophets or through an inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how it happened, everyone there knew that the Holy Ghost had called Barnabas and Saul to do a special work for the Lord. After the Holy Spirit had ministered to them by speaking, they once again ministered to the Lord. Look at Acts 13:3 – "*Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them (Paul and Barnabas), they sent them away.*" The three prophets and the teachers that had not

been called into that missionary service laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, along with the other believers in Antioch. They prayed for them and sent them out in the power of the Holy Spirit. “*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus*” Acts 13:4. Barnabas and Saul boarded this ship in Seleucia – the port town closest to Antioch – and headed west across the Mediterranean for the island of Cyprus. That is how overseas missions got started! They ministered to the Lord, the Lord ministered to them through the Holy Spirit, God through the Holy Spirit called them to the work of missions, the church prayed over them, and the Spirit of God sent them out. When they ministered to the Lord in worship, prayer, and fasting, the Lord ministered to them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A few months ago I was preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I was looking over my notes when the congregation started singing “Before the Throne of God Above” written in 1863 by Charitie Bancroft. I put my notes down and started singing this song. I’d sung it a few times before, but I didn’t know it very well. At this moment, though, it gripped my heart. Suddenly tears came to my eyes and I sensed the presence of God coming upon me. During this song, I knew that God was ministering to me and I was ministering to Him in worship, prayer, and in crying out to Him. I started really looking at the words in this song and wrote them in my prayer book; now every morning when I wake up, I sing this song:

*Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea.
A great High Priest, whose name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands, my name is written on His heart.
I know that while in Heaven He stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart.*

When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and I see Him there, Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free.
For God, the Just, is satisfied; to look on Him and pardon me.*

*[Gaines pauses between the verses to ask: “Does the devil tempt you to despair? The devil is the great discourager; he’s trying to take courage out of you. God is the great encourager; He’s trying to put courage into you!”]

When I sang that in New Orleans, the Spirit of God came upon me; and when I preached, I preached with a different anointing. There’s one thing to preach out of a dry well, but there’s another thing to preach the Word of God and know the Spirit of God is flowing through you.

I know when God’s is there and I know when He’s not really there. I know He’s always there in His omnipresence, but I’m talking about the anointing of the Spirit of God. Isn’t that what we need back in our churches? Isn’t that what we need back in our lives? I don’t want to live a life of dullness or dryness. I want to live a life that is anointed by the Holy Spirit of God. God is not going to anoint us until we minister to Him. Then, and only then, will He minister to us with His Holy Spirit.

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit lives within us. “*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body*” 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.

If you have been saved, you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves*

or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" 1 Corinthians 12:13. If you are a Christian, you need to ask God on a regular basis to fill you with His Spirit. *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"* Luke 11:13. I asked the Lord just before I came here, "Lord, fill me and anoint me afresh with the Holy Spirit of God," and I'm praying that He did.

Everyday you should say, "Lord, help me to bear the fruit of the Spirit." Galatians 5:22–23 says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*

Each day we're to ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we will witness and share Jesus with lost people. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"* Acts 1:8. Everyday we're to pray that God will fill us with His Spirit so we can witness. Everyday we are to pray to God, through His Spirit, that He will help us pray more effectively. *"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"* Romans 8:26. Everyday the Spirit of God will help us when we worship the Lord. The Bible says, *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* John 4:23–24.

If there are true worshipers, guess what? There are false worshipers. The Father is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God, the Father is looking over the earth right now. He's looking for people who will worship Him with the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. He's looking for people that want the Holy Ghost to be upon them when they cry out to Him. He's looking for Spirit-filled believers to minister to Him.

The Bible says, *"For God is Spirit. Those who worship Him, must worship in Spirit and in truth"* John 4:24. Every Christian is not a pastor, but every Christian is a minister and is supposed to minister to the Lord. If you do that through worship, prayer, and fasting, God will minister to you through the power of His Holy Spirit. That dryness, deadness, and all of that burnout will be gone. God can do more through the power of His Holy Spirit in five minutes than you can do in fifty years if you will let Him anoint you. If you'll minister to Him, He will minister to you.

That's not all there is to it – there's one more thing. We minister to the Lord in worship, in prayer, and in fasting. He ministers to us through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, but He does not do just that for us. After we have ministered to the Lord and He has reciprocated and ministered to us, **we must minister to others with the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Barnabas and Saul were called to go on a soul-winning mission trip. I want to encourage you to be an evangelistic soul-winner. I want to encourage you to be like Philip. When Philip saw that Ethiopian eunuch, the Bible says, *"He opened his mouth and beginning from the scriptures, he preached or he shared Jesus with him"* Acts 8:35.

This past year I have emphasized prayer everywhere I've gone. This next year I'm going to emphasize soul-winning. I'm going to recommend appointing an evangelism, soul-winning task force to study ways we as Southern Baptists can be more effective in personal evangelism

and soul-winning and also in evangelistic preaching. If we will share the gospel of Jesus Christ with lost people in the power of the Holy Spirit, there will be salvation.

What happens when you share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others? First of all, some will be open to it. In Acts 13:5 we see that *“When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.”* Barnabas and Saul began their ministry at Salamis which was on the east coast of the island of Cyprus and traveled 90 miles westward witnessing as they went. They always began their ministry in the Jewish synagogues because that is where the Jews, the Gentile converts to Judaism, and the Gentile God-fearers could be found. They were in the synagogues and had the best background of the Old Testament Word of God making it easy for the apostles to talk to them and reference Scripture about Jesus being the Messiah. The Bible says that John (John Mark) was their helper. He would go on to eventually write the first Gospel that was written, the Gospel of Mark.

Acts 13:6a tells us they *“...had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos...”* Paul was always trying to go West, he wanted to go to Rome and other places like that and when he got all the way to Paphos, something unusual happened. In Acts 13:6a we find that *“...they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus.”* Bar-Jesus means son of the Savior – that’s a misnomer; this man definitely did not live up to his name. *“[Bar-Jesus] was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God”* Acts 13:7. Sergius Paulus, a Roman ruler and politician, was very intelligent and desired to hear the Word of God.

Sometimes I think that we believe that smart people don’t want to hear the Word of God. There are a lot of people out there who are fair-minded intellectuals, like Sergius Paulus, and want to hear the gospel. There are a lot of people out there that if you will just share the gospel with them, they will listen. If you’ll tell them the old, old story of Jesus and His love, they will hear what you have to say.

As you minister to others, some will be open to the gospel, but some will oppose it. Acts 13:8 shares that *“Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.”* Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas the magician, was a court wizard and was demonized. He operated in the occult. He opposed the gospel message of Barnabas and Saul because if Sergius Paulus embraced it, he would no longer need a court wizard. Not to be outdone, however, Saul opposed right back.

“But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, ‘You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.’ And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand” Acts 13:9–11. This sounds a lot like the apostle Peter rebuking Simon the sorcerer in Samaria back in Acts 8. Just like Simon the sorcerer, Elymas the sorcerer found out that the power of God is greater than the power of the devil. He discovered that he could not stop the gospel of Jesus Christ. I’ve got news for everybody in the world – Jesus Christ is going to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!

Just as Jesus blinded Paul on the road to Damascus, Jesus now blinded Elymas at Pathos. Elymas opposed and rejected Jesus and so Elymas went blind. If he didn’t get saved after that, then he’s in hell right now. It’s amazing how people will reject Jesus Christ.

I was listening to a report about how Senator Bernie Sanders was berating Russell Vought, President Trump's nominee to be Deputy Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, because Mr. Vought believed that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. May I just make a statement? With all due respect to any politician, whether it's Bernie Sanders or anybody else, Jesus Christ is the only way to God! Jesus said in no uncertain terms, "*I am the way, the truth, the life, no man cometh under the Father but by me*" John 14:6. The Bible says "*there is no other name under heaven given among men where by we must be saved*" except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). Say his name out loud – Jesus. No other name can save you; His is the only name that will save you. The name Mohammed cannot save you. The name Buddha cannot save you. The name Confucius cannot save you. No other name can save you except the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5). He is "*the way, the truth, and the life.*"

Back to Bernie Sanders berating Mr. Vought – that's okay – I believe Mr. Vought is going to be all right with God. When you stand with God, you always stand in the true majority. One second after a lost person rejects the Lord, on the day they die, they're going to see the Jesus they didn't accept. Regardless of what anybody does or says, everybody on this planet is going to go to heaven or hell based upon what they do with the Lord Jesus Christ during this short time of life. Matthew 25:46 says, "*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" When you die, you don't cease to exist, come back in some animal, go to purgatory and have your sins purged away, or come back in some kind of reincarnation. Hebrews 9:27 says, "*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.*" Revelation 20:15 says, "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" You don't have to go to the lake of fire; you can repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – that He died on the cross for your sins, and that He rose from the dead and wants to give you eternal life. If you will bow before Him, call upon His name, and receive Him as your Lord and Savior, Jesus will save you right now. Jesus Christ is all about salvation!

We must minister to others. Some will be open to the gospel and some will oppose it – but bless God – nothing can stop the gospel. "*Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord*" Acts 13:12. Sergius Paulus got saved and Luke highlights that here in Acts. Jesus could defeat demons. Jesus could silence sorcerers. Jesus could save Roman pagan officials. Jesus Christ is King of Kings and He was able to use Paul and Barnabas because they did ministry the right way.

They didn't start trying to minister to these people on this island in their own fleshly power. They didn't go out away from the power of God, they went to Cyprus because they had ministered to the Lord and He had ministered to them. Then they came in the power of the Holy Spirit and saw someone who was demonized. God gave them the gift of discernment of spirits. Paul knew exactly what it was as he talked directly to the demonized man. The man had no power or no authority over him because Paul had first ministered to the Lord and the Lord had ministered to him. Paul had power and anointing; he could even talk to demons if God directed; in fact, he did that at Philippi when he commanded demons out of people.

We need to operate that way. When we go to people with the gospel, even the most intellectual people can be saved, like Sergius Paulus. The gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16).

Are you tired of being impotent in your walk with Christ? Are you tired of being a person who says, "I'm grinding. It's like I have an engine running but there's no oil and the gears are all grinding together. I want to know, is there any hope? Does anyone else feel this way besides me? Is there anybody out there that's going through this and knows what to do?" There are people all around you that have gone through hard times in the ministry. Anyone who has been in the ministry very long knows that the devil and our world is attacking constantly. We're also dealing with our own fleshly selfish natures, and we wonder how in the world we are we going to make it. You're going to make it by doing things God's way. If you'll do things God's way, you'll get God's power. If you try to do it your way, you won't get God's power. You've got to start ministering to the Lord. You've got to start saying, "Bless God, I am going to make Jesus Christ first; not just in my finances, but in my time. I'm going to go to bed on time and I'm going to get up on time. I'm going to read the Word, not just for inspiration or information – I want God to talk to me through the Bible. Oh God, I'm going to stay in Your Word. I'm going to read Your Word until your Word is reading me. Lord, I'm going to talk with You until You're talking with me. God, I'm going to cry out to You. I'm going to bless Your name. I'm going to give You praise. I'm going to sing songs to You." Even if you can't sing – if you're singing by yourself – the Lord's right there with you, and He likes the way you sing!

Sing to the Lord, worship the Lord, and cry out to God. Pray for your children and pray for our nation. I've been praying for our nation, "God from Maine to Florida to Texas to California to Washington to Minnesota and back to Maine – all across America – from Alaska to Hawaii, God come back upon this nation. Oh God, we your people pray as Christians and call upon Your name that You would forgive us for our sins and heal our land. As we turn from our sins and repent, as we come to You in wrath, Oh God, remember mercy. Oh God, will You not revive us again that Your people may rejoice in You?"

If Southern Baptists are not going to minister to the Lord, who do you think is going to minister to Him? We're the ones that believe the Bible. We're the ones that believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. It's not enough just to believe in the gospel, though. It's not enough to just believe it in your head – you've got to cry out to God and engage Him.

If you want to see God revitalize your life and your family and if you want to see God come back upon you and upon your ministry, church, and denomination, then let's minister to the Lord! When we minister to Him, He will minister to us. When He ministers to us, then when we go out, we'll have Him with us. God will be on us and we will see a new day of people being saved, healed, set free, delivered, and disciplined in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you want to minister to the Lord?

I called Jerry Vines and asked him to pray for me as I shared this message. Brother Jerry and I have been friends for a long time. I told him what I was going to share. He said, "Brother Steve, you tell those people that ministering to the Lord better become a priority in their lives because they're going to do it when they go to heaven and throughout all eternity. You tell them about Revelation chapter 7." I looked it up and I want you to read it as well.

Revelation 7:9–17 - *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,*

'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' [they're ministering to the Lord] *Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.'* *And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve [same word back in Acts 13] Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.'*"

I don't know all that heaven's going to be, but part of heaven is going to be ministering to the Lord.

Father, in the name of Jesus, You are worthy of our worship. God, forgive us for trying to minister to other people before we minister to You. I pray that You would burn in our hearts the fact that Jesus chose The Twelve first to be with Him and then to send them out to preach the gospel and to cast out demons. Help us to be with You. Help us to minister to You, Lord. The apostles said they were devoted to prayer and then to the ministry of the Word. Help us not to try to run to third base and then home. Help us to run to first base. Help us to first minister to You, oh Lord, and then thank You that You are going to be faithful to minister to us.

— *from the office of Dr. Steve Gaines*