Exploring and Proclaiming the Depths of Scripture
FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

# Useful to the Lord – Part 1
# Anything, Anyplace, Anytime
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

I went out into my yard a couple of months back and I found a thing back there, a thing. I'm not sure what it is. It's some gadget or some part of a gadget. It's got a spring on it and a lever and... It's interesting, it looks important and by the looks of it, it goes to something important. I just can't figure out what it is and I don't know what it's for. It's too important to throw away and I know it needs to be put back wherever it's supposed to be. And there's probably something in my side yard that's not functioning the way it should because it's missing this important piece, but I don't know what it's for. So it ends up on my workbench in the garage as part of the clutter of my garage. I used it as a paperweight and hold down a corner of a rag here and there, but I don't know what to do with it. I don't know what it's about.

The Bible says that if you are a Christian and it says it so powerfully and specifically in Ephesians Chapter 2 that "You are God's workmanship," God crafted you, he made you, "created in Christ Jesus," so now it's talking about your Christian life, "for good works." And I think if you just stop there, you'd think, "OK, well, just yeah, we're supposed to be doing good things," but listen to the rest of it, right? "Which God created beforehand, that you should walk in them." So God has created this set, this purposeful set of good works, and he's designed those good works or more specifically, he's designed you for those good works that you should be walking in those good works, right? You are this creation of God. This new recreation of God in Christ Jesus and he's got a set of things that he has made for you to do. And they're good, of course, because they're what God wants you to do. And they're always going to be defined as good because God has designed you to do these things and those good things you should be walking in.

And even the Greek construction of that phrase "Hina" purpose clause, very strong and in making all the translators who translate this, they translate it with "should," you should walk in them. I mean, this is the point that you are made for these things. That's helpful, because if you don't live with that perspective and you have not discovered what those good things are that God has created for you to do, that pathway, that preset purposed pathway and defined set of good works, well then you're going to feel in the Christian life like the square peg in a round hole. You'll feel like I don't know what it is I'm supposed to be doing. You'll live, frankly, under the heading and the banner of the book of Ecclesiastes. You'll feel like I'm just getting by, you know. I'm just making money and making enough to pay the mortgage and eating and doing my thing and surviving every day and going to sleep, waking up, doing it again. It's just like, what is this all about? What's the point? What's the purpose?

And at the end of my life I'm going to die and take all that I've collected and give it to the next generation. What is this all about? And of course, the book Ecclesiastes is giving us that, "Life under the sun, vanity of vanities, chasing after the wind, what is it all for?" To get us to say there is a purpose for all this You need to be rightly connected to your creator and the earlier the better, right? You ought to seek him in your youth. You ought to figure this out. You ought to put yourself under the submission of God and in the New Testament, of course, more

specifically under the dominion and Lordship of Christ. You ought to live for him. And that's not just the general sense of do-good things, you did bad things before, and just be a good person. No, God has created you, you're his "workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which he, God, has prepared beforehand that you should walk in them." He's got a plan for you. And that plan needs to be understood and needs to be discovered so you can get up in the morning, "Go, OK, here's why I'm here. I'm here for another 20, 30 years, 10 years, who knows how long I'm here for, but I'm here to accomplish those things so that I can say with the Apostle Paul at the end of his life, "I've finished the course."

The course for me is different than the course for you. It's all within the spectrum and category of good. God's got good things for all of us as Christians to do, but my set of good things looks different than your set of good things. And the real question is, are you walking in that set of good things? And I'll bet a lot of you aren't. And you're just fighting God on this. There are some adjustments that need to be made so that you are clearly walking in this preordained set, this purposeful set of good works that God has planned for you. You're not walking in them the way you ought to. We need to make sure that we are.

The Apostle Paul gets saved in Acts Chapter 9, Saul of Tarsus. And we've reached in our study of Acts here in Acts Chapter 13, God now launching him into a new career. He was going to be a Pharisee. He was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel. He was becoming this Pharisee of Pharisees, this Hebrew of Hebrews, and he had a path and God knocked him off his horse, literally there in Acts Chapter 9. But now in Acts Chapter 13 we start his career. Here's a new thing I got for you to do. You're going to become a missionary. And this is the beginning, if you know the book of Acts in Acts Chapter 13, we start a whole new section of the book of Acts where we have Paul as a missionary. Now, his business card says Missionary for the first time. "I'm going to go and I'm going to be this representative of the gospel in foreign lands, in different places. I'm going to travel all over the place as a missionary."

If you were sitting here in this auditorium and you got some job and you're working in some business somewhere in South County and you should be on the mission field, well, you'd feel like a square peg in a round hole and you would feel like, "I'm spinning my wheels. I might be a Christian, I might be saved. But what am I? I'm not doing what I know I'm designed to do, and maybe I'm afraid or maybe I'm not willing..." OK, well, that's the biggest paradigm shift. But probably not most of you here are called to go to a foreign mission field and learn another language, and that's probably not, although we've raised up missionaries in our church and sent them out. They've worked normal jobs in South County and then off they went to foreign lands. That may be true of some of you. But there's a whole spectrum between you just being exactly where you're at and where those people are. And I can picture their faces who've sat here in an auditorium listening to sermons, and God sends them to a foreign mission field to learn a foreign language.

There are a lot of things that probably in your life, you say, "Yeah, to adjust my life to sit in the center of this pathway of preordained good works, it probably means there needs to be some adjustments made. I don't know that I'm functioning and firing on all cylinders and functioning the way that I should be in fulfilling all that God has ordained for me to do." And in some

sense, I guess that's under the rubric and the heading of knowing God's will. We'd all like to know that.

And what's good about watching God launch Paul into his life calling is it helps us to think about our life calling and to make sure that we're right where we need to be doing the things that God has called us to do. And that all the elements and components are in place. Am I doing the ministries I should be doing? Am I living in the right place I should be living in? Do I have the right job I should be having? Am I living in the right home? I mean, all these things, they come down to you God has created you for a pattern of good works. And it's not just like your neighbor. Your non-Christian is just living to get by or have a good time. I'm a Christian, I'm an ambassador of Christ. I'm supposed to represent him and live for him in a way that makes an impact on my world and my generation and my sphere of influence. And it's a very specific set of good works. I want to make sure I'm on that.

And so I challenge you as we study, believe it or not, for 12 lessons, we're going to go through this first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul, in 12 parts, and we're going to start with God calling Paul into this work. And I want to keep an eye for the next 12 weeks on what God's preordained path of good works is for you. And while we're looking at a career missionary here and following his adventures, if you will, I want to make sure that we're paralleling the application of this to where God has called you to be a missionary. Maybe it's in your office complex. Maybe it's in your neighborhood. Maybe you're not going to move or learn a new language or get on a plane and fly away. But are we sure that you are being the kind of person that God asks you to be in terms of your purposed intention that you're his workmanship for these good works? And I want to rethink all that, and I want to start by looking at where Paul is when God calls him to this work, sitting in the church, leading in the church, ministering in the church of Antioch in Syria.

So grab your Bibles if you haven't already. I want to look at the first five verses of Acts Chapter 13 to get the beginning of this launch of the Apostle Paul into ministry. He's still known as Saul in this text and God is going to call him out. I want to look at the context of it to see if we can't put a few foundational things in place in our lives to make sure we're not missing the preordained path of good works that God has called for us and ordained for us because we're not in the place or doing the things that the Apostle Paul was here. There are plenty of points of application I don't want to miss in this text. Let's start in verse 1 Acts Chapter 13. I'm going to read verses 1 through 5 with a little commentary because I can't help myself.

I'm going to read it from the English Standard Version. Verse 1, "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers." We've got teachers in our church, we've got pastors in our church. We don't have apostles and we don't have prophets. Ephesians 2:20 says they are foundational offices of the church. The reason you need prophets in the church at Antioch in Syria in the first century here in the 60s is because you don't have a New Testament and this church desperately needs New Testament teaching. We need to know about justification by faith, and I can't turn to Romans Chapter 4. I need to know about issues of Old Testament ceremonial law, and I can't turn to Galatians Chapter 3. I need to

understand things about church function, and I don't have First Timothy or Titus. And there are all kinds of issues. What do I do with the Old Testament ceremonial law? I don't have the book of Hebrews. We have none of this recorded and so we need God giving new revelatory information about New Testament function and New Testament doctrine without a written New Testament. So we need the function of prophets.

The miraculous foundation of the church, the apostles and prophets, and they validated and put the imprimatur of God on their ministries by these miraculous things, like the predictive prophecies of the prophets, though primarily their goal was to inform, not to foretell something that was happening and the miraculous ability of the apostles to found the Church of God with the authority of Christ. These things certainly bore a miraculous edge to it because God was trying to make it clear. Anyone could stand up and say this is what New Testament truth ought to be, but I need someone to stand above the rest in the way that God allowed those apostles and prophets to break natural law by knowing things they shouldn't know and be able to do things they shouldn't be able to do, was the way in which God established for us what we need, which is the lamp to our feet, the light to our path, New Testament revelation. We need a library of 27 books to guide the Church for the next 2,000 years and so we have it. But right now, we need prophets in the Church.

So we have prophets and teachers, though they're not delineated in this list, we have five here who were on staff it seems, the leaders of the church of Antioch in Syria, and they're listed. Barnabas we know and he's listed first and he's always listed first at this point when we see him in combination with others because he's a key leader, he's become a key leader in so many ways and you have been with us in the study of Acts or if you know the book of Acts, you know what an important role he's played in the first 12 chapters of the book, Barnabas. Simeon, who's called Niger, which is an interesting nickname for him. Niger means black, it means dark skin so he's apparently black and he's known, his nickname is the "black guy" on staff, I guess. So that's Simeon. He's probably not the only black guy because you got Lucius and Lucius is from Cyrene, and we assume that Simon is also from Cyrene. And so that's an African nation and so probably he's black, but he maybe he's not as black as Simeon's black. So his nickname is the "black guy."

And if you think about Cyrene, Simon of Cyrene or Simeon of Cyrene, because Simon and Simeon are the same name in essence, right? Different pronunciations of the same name. You might be thinking of the guy who carried Christ's cross, and we might be talking about this guy here. It's only speculation, we don't know. But Simon of Cyrene, if he's from Cyrene we assume that he's black, and if he is his nickname is the "black guy" and he's there with another guy from his home country, Lucius and maybe this was the guy who carried the cross of Christ. Which should inform some of the paintings when people show Christ carrying the cross and Simon being enlisted to help him carry the cross through town. What an amazing story he's got. I mean, I do want him to be a teacher in the church to hear his firsthand knowledge of watching the crucifixion of Christ, by the way, if that's the case.

Manaen, and if Simeon is interesting, Simon of Cyrene, if he's interesting, Manaen has got to be an interesting leader in the church as well. He's a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch. I

just want you to think about Herod the Tetrarch. Herod the Tetrarch here we're talking about, that's the nickname for Antipas. Antipas was Herod the Great's son. Herod the Great killed all the babies in Bethlehem. He was the leader of the nation of the Roman oversight of the Israeli lands in the first century. This is his son, Antipas, and Antipas was the person who gave trouble, so much trouble, during the gospels to Christ in his ministry. He was the one who had John the Baptist, you might remember, beheaded. So I mean, talk about an enemy of Christ. Actually, Christ calls him out as Antipas wants to see him and is seeking to kill him and Jesus sends a message to his emissaries and says, "Go tell that fox." He's calling him disparaging names, Jesus is.

So talk about polar opposites. You've got a lifelong friend of the enemy, right? The antithesis of Christ in the New Testament story, who's now a pastor in the church at Antioch and probably an Edomite, a Jordanian, who knows? It doesn't matter what his ethnicity is, nor does it of Simeon or Lucius, but there they are. And then there's Saul. Saul, the Hebrew of Hebrews from Tarsus. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel on his way to be a pharisee. Well, there's the group, because the gospel is an indiscriminate ministerial commission, right? "Go make disciples of all the nations." We have that. It's not the intention, it's the byproduct. That's the point. It's not about celebrating diversity, by the way. It's about going and doing this indiscriminate and irrespective of who they are. It doesn't matter what the class, it doesn't matter what the economic status, it doesn't matter what the ethnicity is. And so you have what you have here, this leadership team at the church of Antioch and everything is firing on all cylinders. All looks good.

But verse 2, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Now even just saying what I said about the team and it's all in place and it all looks good, I hope you feel a little jolt in that sense. You're going to break up a good team we've got right here. Barnabas, remember, went to go get Saul because he knew he was a good teacher, he had proven himself in Damascus, and now he's bringing him back after that time in seminary in the desert, the Upper Arabian desert and now he goes to get him, and now he becomes this key preacher and leader in the church of Antioch. And now, all of a sudden, God's going to tear not only Saul out, this great new expositor they have on their staff, but also Barnabas, who's always listed at the top of the list. So like, he's the key senior leader. Wow. And you've got to work for them, and it's not going to be here? You're going to send them somewhere else?

Not to mention that this really becomes the theme for our next 12 weeks. God has a calling for Barnabas and Saul, which later becomes Paul and Barnabas. And Paul, we're going to track for the rest of this book to the last chapter. And God is setting him on a course, saves him in Chapter 9, commissions him to a new career in Chapter 13. And we see here all of this play out from this point on in the next two chapters we're going to look at in this series, which I've called "Useful to the Lord." We're going to look at that first missionary journey. And I want to keep that in view. This is what God has called Paul to do. And I'm going to learn what we can learn about what God has called you to do. Because God has called you to do stuff. You don't have to be a career ministry person. You don't have to get a paycheck from a church or a missions organization or a Bible translation society to be in ministry. You're called to be

ministering wherever God has set you in, and it doesn't mean, well, wherever I'm at I'm just going to ministry here.

God may say and make clear to you as you discover his will, I don't want you here, I want you there. Or I don't want you investing so much in this, I want you investing in that, even though I don't want you to move geographically. Or maybe it is you're going to move geographically. I don't know. For you it's different than it is for me. But I'm going to learn the principles that I can learn from these next two chapters to try and expand on that very simple line, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So, they want to make sure they got this right, even though they're prophets and teachers, "After fasting and praying," I assume that "they" goes back to verse 1, this pastoral leadership team, "they lay hands on them," the two guys who are identified, Barnabas and Saul, "and they sent them off." As painful as that was, and you can imagine breaking up a good team, sending two of their strongest guys off to go on this missionary journey that is going to play out for the next two chapters.

So then, even though it were human beings who laid their hands on them and commissioned them, "So then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit," verse 4 says, so this is a God-thing, this is God's will, this is the preordained path that God has set for them to walk in, they go. They were sent out by the Holy Spirit. "They went down to Seleucia," which is the port city there on the mainland, "and they sailed to Cyprus," which is the island in the Mediterranean. And I look back on this and I realize I need to start putting little maps on the worksheet every week. But if you can picture this, the island of Cyprus, which is the closest island to Israel, they come from up north in Syria. They go down to the island of Cyprus. "When they arrived at Salamis," which is the port city on the northeast side of the island, they work their way through this island, "proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them." John now, look back up to the last verse of Chapter 12, we remember John is also called Mark, his nickname for us as Bible students is John Mark. He ends up writing the gospel of Mark. And we learn a lot about him or a little bit about him, at least, in the book of Acts. More to come on that.

So here's the setting. But I want to start with that beginning setting that there in the church at Antioch, verse 1. I mean, the physical historical setting and you've got two guys who are about to have made clear for them what God wants them to do. The will of God's about to be revealed in a miraculous way through the prophetic voice of the prophets in the church. But still, the context applies to you. And that is what is the setting you're going to need to be in to discover God's will for where you ought to be and if there are mid-course adjustments that need to take place, what should I do? And I'm thinking, well, I know this with great authority, you ought to be in the same context that Paul and Barnabas are in. And that is, at least I know, ensconced in a Bible-teaching church.

To give a heading to that because we'll make a few observations, let me give you this first line because when it comes to being useful to God, number one, I need you to "Position Yourself to Be Useful to God," be positioned in your life to be useful to God, because that's the whole point. Matter of fact, if you looked at the overview of this series, we're going to end our last

sermon, sermon number 12, with aiming at hearing well done. "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's what I want to end my life having heard that. I want to be able to say with Paul, "I have finished the race." As Hebrews Chapter 12 says, "The course that was laid out for me, I finished it," and then I want to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Well, to get to that, I need to start with making sure that I know that I'm on the right path and I'm doing the things that God has created me to do. And so I have to be in a position to be useful to God, and the first position, we'll build some points here, is I need to be all-in at a Bible-teaching church and these guys certainly were. And I'm not stretching at looking at a description and making a prescription out of this. I'm being clear because all throughout the Bible, there are no disconnected Christians who the Bible presents as a good example of this.

Matter of fact, anyone who is neglecting being all-in in a Bible-teaching church is condemned in Scripture. It's a bad habit and you shouldn't do it even though some people make it their habit, you should not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. You ought to be committed to a church. You ought to have a set of identifiable leaders that you say I'm submitting to their authority and everyone ought to have a good church and I'm preaching to the choir, even though half of our church is sick this weekend. I'm looking into your eyes or I'm looking into your eyes on the Internet there and I'm saying, I know this is your church, and that's great. But I will say this if you don't know, more people hear the sermons at Compass who don't go to our church than hear our sermons who go to our church. I mean, we have hundreds of thousands, literally, of people who listen on the radio and let me speak to them for a second and say, you know, you're living in some city in Tampa or Cincinnati. If you're not all-in at a Bible-teaching church then there's a problem. You have to be an attached, connected Christian.

And here are some logical implications why. If God has a set of purposeful, good works for you to accomplish, the place where you're getting to know what those purposes of God are is in a Bible-teaching church. And you go, "Well, I listened on the radio." That's not good enough. I have no problem with you supplementing your understanding of God's word, either by reading good Christian books or listening to good Christian sermons on the Internet. There's nothing wrong with that. But you need to have a church that is your local congregation and you're committed to that. And so I will speak to maybe somebody here. You're visiting, you're new, you're unattached and you come to church occasionally, you need to be committed and you need to be committed to being here. And you need be completely resolved in your heart that this is the church I'm all-in at. And if it's not this church, find a church where you can be all-in. If it's teaching the Bible great, be all in at a Bible-teaching church.

You will learn about God's purposes, you'll learn about God's priorities, you'll start to look at your life in light of those priorities. And if the sermon doesn't smart every now and then, maybe you're not in a good Bible-teaching church because that thing is like a mirror that helps me look at my life and say, "Well, maybe my life needs to align a little bit more to this." And that's what good Bible teaching does. And so you got to be all- in in the Bible-teaching church. God's going to make some things clear about Barnabas and Saul, and that's made clear in the context of them being a part of a church. Now I know they're special. They're

pastors, they may even be, you know, prophetic. Of course, we know the Apostle Paul ends up being a prophetic figure in the Church, but I'm just saying that's a good paradigm for all of us to adhere to because all throughout the Scripture, you're commanded to be all-in in a Bible-teaching church.

More specifically, and I think it's also a key for us to go back and observe what's happening, they're worshiping God and fasting. Let's just look at that word "worshiping." I wish there was a footnote on this and maybe your study Bible, depending on which kind you have, maybe makes a reference to the word "worshiping." It's not the normal word for worshiping and I'm almost frustrated, almost, I'm not quite frustrated, but I'm almost frustrated that this is not translated differently. Some translations do translate it "service" or "serving" or "ministering." Because this word is used that comes from the Septuagint or at least the Greek usage comes from the Old Testament, the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, and it describes what the priests do on the Sabbath when they go about their work. They got to put out the showbread, they got to light the candles, they got to trim the wicks, they've got to kill the sacrifices, they've got to keep the fire on the altar going. They have to do all the things, burn the incense, they're working, they're busy and they're working. They're serving God.

But they're serving God with a complete deference to the fact that I'm doing this for the Lord. I'm worshiping God by my actions, right? And so sometimes this is translated in translations that they are serving. There's an activity to it, let me put it that way. But it's an activity that the emphasis, and I have no problem with putting the emphasis where it belongs, the emphasis is on the fact that I am involved in activity for the honor of the king, of the boss, worshiping the Lord. The word lord just kind of is a flat-lined word for us because we hear it so often, but it should jump off the page because it's the word "boss" and the one in charge. I'm active with this deference to the chief and the leader and the boss. I live with this sense of, to put it in terms of First Peter Chapter 3, that I've set apart Christ as Lord in my heart.

So the things that I'm going to do in my activity in church and the way that my church affects what I do throughout the week, it continues to exalt the view of Christ in my life. This doesn't mean necessarily they were sitting there and someone was on the harp and they were singing songs. I mean, it means they have this activity in the church and they're doing things in the church and it's bleeding out into the week where they're showing this lordship of Christ in their life, right? And that's a lot to pack into one word. But that is the Greek word. I think there's so much in that Greek word to describe this idea of a deferential activity to the lordship and greatness of the risen Christ. And so I guess I would say this: if you want to know God's will for your life, you need to be plugged in, all-in at a Bible-teaching church. Secondly, you need to make sure the Lordship of Christ is clear in your activity. That the things that you do, whether it's service in the church or whether it's just your thinking about God, or whether it's the things you do throughout the week, it's always with a sense of I'm a servant of Christ and Christ is the king. That's the sense of worship, deference, submission to the greatness and authority of Christ, and you ought to see that continually grow as a Christian.

Thirdly, they were fasting. Do you see it says they're fasting? Fasting, of course, is referring to food that you're purposefully and intentionally depriving yourself of eating food, and that's

always a good experience, right? You're saying no to that and you're focusing, you're at least in the context of what we see in Scripture, focusing on my pursuit of God. Missing a meal and missing a pleasurable experience in eating because I'm focusing on God, seeking God, pursuing God, praying to God. Today, people speak about the word "fast" without reference to what we would think of in terms of focusing on God. They're doing it for their health or periodic fasting. Whatever they do to lose weight, look good. They're not doing it for God. So we're talking about the deprivation in Christian's lives for the sake of, and it's a combo with this concept of worship, for the deference and greatness of God. I'm serving and fasting. I'm worshiping and fasting. I'm willing to be inconvenienced. Here's how I put it. I'm sacrificially serving God.

So, building three things here, I'm all-in in a Bible-teaching church. I really affirm in my heart and my mind the Lordship of Christ and I'm already engaged in sacrificially putting my interests second to God's. Sometimes that is literally saying no to food. It's seeing that the things that we do for the Lord come before things I do for myself. Think about it. I've had people complain about the times our services take place because it interrupts their mealtime. It's like, "Oh, OK, I'm sorry." Consider it a fast for the Lord. I don't know what to tell you, eat a granola bar before you come. But those are the kinds of things I'm thinking, OK, that's just the pattern. It's like giving. If I could take this money, if I'm giving 10 12% of my income to the service of the Lord at my church, I could do a lot with that. I could buy a quad. Or I can go start saving toward a cabin in the mountains or something. But instead I sacrifice my stuff for God's stuff. And that's a sacrificial pursuit of God in obedience to God, in deference to God, in that submissive worship of the boss in the universe, Christ, who is my king and my judge, I'm going to be willing to go without.

And so if you've got that in your life, you're already positioned, I think, for God's will to become clear. Granted we don't have a team of prophets on our staff to come and say, here's what God says you're going to go be a missionary in China. We don't have that. But what we do have is a complete canon of New Testament wisdom wherein the preaching and exposition of it as you sit all in in the Bible-teaching church with a heart of deference to the King of kings and how you worship him and you're willing to be deprived of what you want for what God wants, you're already in a great spot to learn what God's set of good works are for you. Are you following that? That's you're positioning yourself to know what God's will is so that you'll be useful to the Lord. That's a helpful start, I would hope. And one that I hope that all of us are engaged in, and increasingly so, because at that point, God can make his will very clear.

He's about to make it clear here in the bottom of verse 2. So let's look at our passage again. "The Holy Spirit said..." Right? He said it clearly through the mouth of the prophets to these guys. And in this team, it was clear God was saying, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." That I hope sends a chill up your spine. "I called him to this work." If you literally heard God's authoritative voice say, "I have work for you to do." I hope you go like, "Wow!" And to know that he's the creator, he's the sovereign, he's created... "If you've created work for me to do and you want me to go do it, you want me to be set apart to do that. Wow! Absolutely." I mean, that would be a satisfying thing to have a sense of purpose that God has set me on a path that he has ordained for me, and he knows this is the

work I want you to do. And most Christians are sitting around saying, "Well, absolutely, I would love to know what that is."

But here's the problem. So often they subordinate that to their own plan. They do not prioritize the fact, and this is very logical and simple, it almost sounds stupid to talk about, but in the 21st-century church, we need to talk about it, that God's work, God's priority, what God thinks I should do is more important than what I think I should do and what kind of work I would like to do and my preferences. So let's put it this way. Number two, we need to "Value the Importance of God's Work." And I don't know how to pick a stronger word for that, but we've got to prioritize it, we've got to value it. we have to cherish it, we have to exalt it in our thinking. You have to think that God's work is more important than whatever work you want to do or whatever work you think is important.

And that is so hard. Why? Because the modern church in particular has been so conditioned to see God as some kind of energy or some kind of dynamic force that you can harness to help YOU accomplish what YOU want. In other words, God has become this butler, as I often say, this life coach. He's the means by which I can see my dreams realized. And you say, "Well, I reject all that. That prosperity gospel stuff, I'm not, you know, I'm not, I'm not into that." But how often do we really stop and think if God could clearly say this is important work and I want you to do it, that we would say whatever I think is important work to me needs to be set aside to do that important work. Because Paul could say, "I know what my job is. My job is to teach at the church of Antioch, it's the third-largest city in the ancient Roman world. It's a crossroads of the marketplace, I found my thing. I'm going to be on staff at this church and I'm going to continue to serve these people. It is growing. It's thriving. I want to be right here. I'm want to do this."

And God says, "Nope, you're going to go back to learning a trade. You're going to be a tentmaker, you're going to be a bi-vocational missionary and you are going to sail to an island in the Mediterranean. That's your first stop." It's like Paul could say, "I don't see that as important work right now for me. I see more important work here." And we blame a lot of stuff that's happening in our lives on God. But we just need to stop and think, now, wait a minute. Do I really have that sense of priority that God's will is more important than my will? I mean, do I really think that? Because when you start thinking that way, it's very dangerous, because now all we need is God to clearly show us what that is and us to trust that he knows better for me than I know for myself, and that I'm then going to willingly, even sacrifice, even having family members say, "Well, that's crazy that you would do that." But you know that God has made clear and the Holy Spirit's at work at making the set of preordained, good works known to you, and you're going to do them and it doesn't matter what my family says, it doesn't matter what my friends say. This is what God has called me to do.

Now we don't want to put words in God's mouth, and so often people have a desire and they blame that desire on God. All I can say is, who knows what Barnabas and Saul's desires were at this point. That's not important. It's not like, "Hey, guys, what do you want to do? Well, I'm ready to bless that." It's no, "Here's the work I have for you to do now. Set them apart and have them go." And I know it wasn't a thing that the church must have cheered about unless

they were convinced that God's work was more important than the work that they thought was important. Because I'm sure they thought what was important is Barnabas went to get Saul. He's in our church. He's a great teacher. I can't wait to continue to be blessed by his teaching and his exposition and his prophetic words in our church. This is awesome. Now you're going to tell him to leave, our number one guy, Barnabas, and this new teacher who is really good. You're going to send both of them away. Yeah, that's God's will as hard as that is to celebrate, you're going to celebrate it because you really value God's work is more important than your work.

How much do you really value that? If I can bring Christ out here on the stage and say, "OK, Jim, here's what I want you to do for the rest of your life, and it's completely different than what you think you're supposed to do for the rest of your life. It's different than what you want to do for the rest of your life." Would you say, "Well, it's Christ, that's what he wants? I'm going to do it." I hope so. I mean, it's kind of a fundamental assumption of the Christian life. Maybe you've seen the subtitle of the message. Maybe now's a good time to slip it in. I hope you realize that when it comes to what we're talking about in positioning myself to be useful to God, it really is the key to me understanding what God's will is, is me having this a priori commitment, this presuppositional commitment to the fact that I will do it. I will do it even before I know what it is because I recognize the greatness of God, and I recognize whatever he says has got to be more important than what I say. And I'm going to be able to say with Christ, "Not my will, but yours be done." Right?

Now, that is a fundamental Christian truth that a lot of us don't quite readily identify within our daily lives because we like to say, "Surely God wants what I want, and if this is what I want for my career, this is what God wants for my career, and this is what God wants me to do with my Thursday nights, you know, I'm sure it's not in conflict with what I want to do with my Thursday nights. I'm sure that if I thought I was done with college and school, God would not want to put me back in college now, certainly not at some tilt-up university across the street from my church." But whatever your thinking is, I just need you to be open to saying whatever God would ask me to do, I will do it because I recognize the importance of what God thinks is the right work for me.

Who knows you better? You don't even know yourself that well, think about it. Who knows you best? God, of course does. And if you're "God's workmanship in Christ Jesus created for good works, which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them," then you ought to say, "Well, God, show me what that work is. Show me what that preordained, purposeful set of good works are and I will do them." But that really is what the subtitle is all about. And it's a phrase we toss around here a lot, but it's us saying to God "Anything, Anyplace, Any time." That's our ADAPAT is the abbreviation of it. Right? ADAPAT. Anything. I will do anything you want me to do. I'll do it at any place you want me to do it and I'll do it anytime you want me to do it.

That's the willingness to say, as Isaiah said, "Here am I! Send me," before he knew what the assignment was. Right? And how did he get there in Isaiah Chapter 6? He got there by looking at the greatness and exaltation of the God that he talked about, that he preached

about. And now God says, "Who's going to go for us? Who am I going to send?" And Isaiah didn't say, "Well, tell me what the assignment is and then I'll see if I'm available." He said, "Here am I! Send me." Well, you don't even know what it is. And all I'm saying is you'll never going to really know what that preordained set of good works is and what it includes. Whether it includes going back to school, whether it includes another night out of the week, whether it includes leading a small group, whether it includes changing jobs, whether it includes going on a church plant. You're never going to know what God's will is unless you're willing to stop and say, "I believe his work is more important than whatever I think important work is to me. What I think is important in terms of where I live or what I do or how I spend my money," you've got to be willing to say, "I think God knows best."

So I am in deference to him saying whatever you think is important, I will think is important. Anything - I will do it. Any place - you want me to do it. And any time - you want me to do it. Anything, any place, any time. That's what the fundamental commitment of the Christian life is from the very beginning. And you'll position yourself, I think, to know what it is as you sit all-in in a Bible-teaching church, when your view of Christ is exalted, when you in your mind clearly are thinking about the implications of all of that in your service and activity that even if it inconveniences me, I'll do it. Because all of that is really you saying, "God, your work is ultimately my will."

If you got to the end of your year and you were giving reviews to your employees. Think about this managers, supervisors, business owners. And as you sat across from your employee, you're about to go through your employee's review, he said, "Yeah, yeah, wait, boss. Before you get started, I just want to tell you, I had a great year this year. Because I got to do everything I wanted to do this year at work. I wanted to really master sandwich making in the break room. I wanted to get better at ping pong in the break room. I wanted to decorate my office to make it really look cool and get some things up that I really liked. I wanted to get some great speakers for my computer. I got those and things sound great. I wanted to find a great playlist on Spotify that I like working to. I got all that dialed in this year." Right?

Now, if you're reviewing your employee, you'd say, "I don't care. That's nice. I don't mind you making sandwiches. I don't mind you playing ping pong in your breaks. I don't mind you decorating your office. I don't mind if you listen to music while you're working. I don't mind any of that. But what I care about is whether you hit the targets that I have assigned to you as your boss. And that's what matters." And here's the sad thing. While that just seems so self-evident to most of you, particularly you leaders in industry, I just want to tell you most Christians don't think that way when they stand before God. Most people don't even think there is a review at the end of their lives. They think judgment is for non-Christians. But we need to rethink that. Every Christian will stand before the Bema Seat of Christ, the raised platform of Christ, and we'll give an account for our lives. I mean, that's just a fundamental Christian doctrine, and no one likes to preach about it because we don't like to think there was a review at the end of our lives.

And when he reviews our lives, he's not going to say, "Well, how did it go down there?" And you go, "Man, I had a good Christian life. I found a good church I really liked. I found one

where the music was the way I really like. The preaching was really cool. You know, it had convenient programs for my kids. It was great. Matter of fact, I enjoyed the place I got to live in was really... I didn't have as big a house as I wanted, but it was good. It was good and was decent. You know, my kids were pretty obedient and I had a good time. My job, you know, I didn't get the raises I wanted all the time, but I had a good Christian life." Can you imagine? I mean, that's how most people think if there is a review, it's just going to be filled with joy. Did you have fun? Was there a lot of love in your life? That's not how Jesus is going to respond when he has said repeatedly, "Follow me. I'll make you fishers of men. You are my ambassadors. You represent me in this world. You're salt, you're light." You don't think he's going to have a whole set of criteria on which to evaluate your life that's basically saying, what was this preordained set of good works I had prepared beforehand for you to walk in? How well did you walk in that preordained path?

He's going to want some answers and you're going to have to give them. And you're not going to be able to point to your bestselling Christian book to say, "Well, this guy said it wasn't going to be like this." You're going to stand before your maker and give an account of your life. And what really matters is whether you can stand back and say, "Yes, I diligently sought to know what your work was and I set myself apart for that work and I was doing the work you called me to do." I mean, that's the goal. The year in review is the life review, and God, of course, knows best what you need. He's made you for something.

I don't have time for this passage, but at least jot it down. Second Corinthians 4:16 through 18. It's just another one of those texts that reminds us that the things that we so often defer and default to are things that matter for the here and now. They matter for the temporal time. They're about the comfort and conveniences of this life, like the things we can see. It's not the eternal things. It's like Colossians 3:1 through 4 when our minds aren't often "set on the things above." And that's why we need to really say, "God, what is the work you've called me to do that has eternal significance that's going to matter 100 years from now," as I like to say. You have to think through those things and be able to say, "God, whatever that work is I want to know what it is. I'm willing to do it before you show me what it is," and that's really the key to knowing it. If you want to know whether God's called you to be a missionary or to go on a church plant or to lead a small group or to take someone through Partners, whatever the thing might be, it starts with, "God, whatever it is you want me to do, I'll do it." I can think of the most extreme thing and I'll do it, and I can think of the most mundane thing and I'll do it. Just make it clear what it is. Position yourself in the right place with the right attitude and then say, "God, I value your work and I'm willing to see myself as set apart for it."

Now, I don't want to make this excursus too long but there are things in Scripture, if I want to think of the most extreme example of being set apart for a job, I guess it would be a missionary or a pastor or a church leader. And there are paradigms for that in Scripture as to what that looks like. So let me use that knowing that we're not just talking about career ministry, but let's look at some of those really super quick, the criteria for clarifying that call and then trying to apply it to whatever you might be looking at as like, "God, is this what you're really calling me to do?" No matter how small of an adjustment it may seem in your life.

We need five things real quick if you want to know. Here's number one. So often God's call for your life and that set of good works is preceded by someone actually requesting you to do it. OK? Later, when Paul taps Silas to go on a missionary journey, it's Paul saying, "Come with me." And there may be someone who is asking you to do something. Would you start this program? Would you co-lead this ministry with me? Would you step up and teach our kids at Awana, it's someone requesting, that's so often the pattern in Scripture. Even in Paul's ministry, when he's in his second missionary journey, he gets to a place where he was before, and you'd think he's going to turn back and head back toward Antioch. He ends up going further because he has this Macedonian call and it's a man, a Macedonian man saying, "Come and help us." The request is often God's tool, the open door of saying, "Here I'm trying to show you what my will is." So don't neglect that. Don't just write that off. Well, everyone's asking me to do a lot of stuff at church or everyone's asking me to do a lot of stuff. I don't know. If someone says, "Would you be a part of this thing that has eternal significance?" You need to at least pause and go, "Oh, there's part of the criteria," at least it's part of the thing that we often see happen.

Number two, and this happens in varying degrees. Right? And I base this on First Timothy Chapter 3 verse 1. It's desire. It is that I have some desire for it. I think that's important. And those two things immediately come together where you say, "Someone asks me to do something that I kind of wanted to do." Well, then it's a no-brainer. Well, there's more to it than those first two criteria. And I will say this: it certainly should never be seen in isolation because it doesn't matter what you want to do for God. It really doesn't matter if you're not gifted to do it, if you're not qualified to do it, if you're not ready to do it. So there's still a lot more to come, but desire certainly is a part of it. There are things that you find people asking you to do. There may be things that you're not asked to do, but you think I really feel like God has made me to do this. It feels copacetic. It feels synergistic. It feels like things are right when I do this thing and I just want to do that. Sometimes it's there, sometimes it isn't.

I remember the first time I was ever asked to speak publicly. Right? I didn't. I wasn't looking for it, but someone asked me, "Would you come and speak to this group about the Bible?" And I'd never done it before. I don't know. I didn't have some overwhelming desire. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought I guess I could do that. I could give that a shot. And so I did. I realized it as an eternally significant thing, I realized how important it was in my life when other people taught me. OK, I went. Well, there's more to it than that. But desire and request, those are things are often a big part of this.

Thirdly, there ought to be some qualifications. You've got to be qualified to do the things that God is asking you to do. If some are just mundane, right? If I ask you to go be a missionary and you can't travel because you've got some weird thing going on in your life and you can't even get on a plane or whatever, well, of course, that doesn't seem to work. Can I drive to China? No, you can't. So whatever. There are certain qualifications, but more than that when you start talking about ministry experiences that have greater impact on more people, there's a set of character qualifications all the way up to missionary and pastor and all the rest. There's a whole book filled with those, two of them, Titus and First Timothy, trying to give qualifications, in particular First Timothy 3 and Titus Chapter 1, giving us qualifications,

character qualifications that should be vetted. People should say, "Yes, you are qualified to do this."

Fourthly, there ought to be some developed giftedness. You ought to have the wherewithal to do the things you're being asked to do, even though it needs work. The first time I was ever asked to speak publicly, I wasn't very good at it and I'm not claiming I'm good at it now, but I think I'm better than I was then. But the point is I needed to develop that. I needed to work at that. I needed to get better at that. And I sense that God was giving me the ability to do that, but it needed work. I think of that passage that I should be a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed. Second Timothy 2:15. I want to be someone who's always trying to develop the gifts that I'm assuming are in place because I'm qualified, I'm asked and I desire to do this thing for the Lord.

And lastly, and this is important, recognized effectiveness. Recognize the effectiveness. So I'm talking about sometimes it's preceded sometimes by a request, desire, qualifications, giftedness and effectiveness. And that means that if I think my help is helpful and no one else thinks my help is helpful, then it's not helpful, right? So I need to get past the sense of well my desire though really is to do this. It doesn't matter if my desire is there, it doesn't matter if people have requested me to do it. If the end result is no one thinks my help is helpful, then this is not a calling in my life. So there has to be some affirmed, external, and not your mother, I'm not talking about your mother, "Well you did a great job, honey." I'm talking about some objective, recognized effectiveness.

All right. Lastly. This looks like just they lived happily ever after, and I'm dipping into this next paragraph here in verses 4 and 5, but go back to Acts 13:4, "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia," they went there and "sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them." All that looks great. It looks like, "Oh, great, they're on their way, how neat." Credits roll, the end, they lived happily ever after, they had effective ministry. Well, even the first missionary journey, it's going to take us 12 weeks to get through, 11 more weeks to go. But what we see as starting out, if you put yourself in the sandals, say of Barnabas at this point, it isn't going to work out the way you thought. Right?

Now, when the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for this work," do you think the Holy Spirit knew how this was going to work out? Of course. He planned it. He designed it. He's sovereign. But Barnabas didn't know how it was going to work out. Matter of fact, we can't even get to the end of the chapter before Barnabas and Saul becomes Paul and Barnabas. And by the next chapter, when they arrive on this island and people start calling them Greek gods, they end up calling Paul Zeus because he's the chief guy. No one saw Saul as the chief guy when Barnabas was always listed first, that was important. It was like Peter always being listed first among the apostles. Barnabas is listed as the key player. He's the leader, he's the senior guy here and all that's going to be turned on its head.

Not to mention that John guy that we call John Mark, Sunday school grads know where I'm going with this. What happens with him? We can't get out of this chapter until he says, "I'm

out of here." After they sail from Cyprus back up to the mainland, modern-day Turkey, and they go into Pisidia Pamphylia. John Mark says, "I'm done," and he goes back to Jerusalem. We don't have an explanation of that other than Paul looks back on it in his second missionary journey when it's time to go back to some of these cities, and he goes, "I'm not taking that guy. John Mark abandoned us." So this team that looks like, "Oh, we got a great team, we're sending them off. We got Barnabas the key figure. We got Paul, this great teacher, and we got John Mark this great assistant pastor. It's going to be great." They're just going to live the rest of their ministry. It's going to be just the three musketeers. It doesn't last.

Why? Because God has got a plan and that plan is working out, and it doesn't work out the way that they think it's going to work out, even though they found the path of good works that they're supposed to be on. Because here's the thing: God gives us just enough light to see the next few steps and you can take those steps and sometimes you can only see the next step. But you take that step, you trust God, and then you have to be flexible. Number three. "Know You'll Have to Be Flexible." When God made clear to me, for instance, that I should be a teacher of God's word, I had no idea how that was going to play out. Matter of fact, when I finally became a pastor of a church, I thought, "Well, here's how I guess it's going to play out. And I got no intentions of doing anything but this and doing it here, and I thought, here's the plan. I've stated the plan and this is what I thought it would be." And I had to learn, like everybody has to learn on the path of doing what God has called us to do. You don't know. You better be flexible because things aren't going to turn out the way you think. Rarely does that take place.

So you need to be ready to say things can change, personnel can change. Think about how tight Barnabas and Paul were. Barnabas was the guy who got the church at Antioch to even give Paul a post in the church as a pastor. Think about that. He goes and travels miles and miles and miles and days of traveling to bring him to Antioch. Not to mention that when he was in Damascus and the believers in Jerusalem did not believe that Saul was really a Christian, Barnabas put his arm around Saul and he goes, "This is the guy, the real deal. I've heard his testimony. I've listened to him preach in Damascus. Trust him." They're tight. Well, by the time they're about to start the second missionary journey and they're going we ought to go back and minister to these people, here, Barnabas hears that Paul does not want to take John Mark with him, and Barnabas goes, "We need to take John Mark." Paul says, "Nope, I'm not going to take a guy who abandoned us. I'm not going to do it." Barnabas counters, "Well, we are going to do it."

And so they get, here's how it's described in Acts, they had such a sharp disagreement that they split the team up and went their different ways. Barnabas takes John Mark and we don't hear about him because Luke doesn't go with them, the author of the book of Acts. Luke goes with Paul and we hear all about Paul and Silas. Silas gets tagged. So all of this is not what they planned. It's not what they thought. It's what God planned. It's what God thought. It's what God knew was the path of good works. And even in that conflict, that staffing conflict, there was multiplication of ministry. God is sovereign, the Holy Spirit knows but you and I don't. And you may get into a situation where you say, "I'm following what God I think wants me to do, it's clearly affirmed. Maybe I've got a request, I have the desire, I've got the

qualifications, I've got the gifts, I've got the affirmation. I'm going to do this." You get there. And now it's changed. It's like, "Wow, what do I do now?"

All I'm saying is you don't doubt that what God has shown you in the light, you can't doubt when it gets bumpy. You don't know how it's going to turn out. I get that. We have to stay flexible, remain flexible, never lose sight of the fact that God has a plan and he's going to reveal it in time and he gives us the information we need. There are no guarantees and there are no comparisons that you ought to be making because I know I can fall victim to that just like you. You say, "I did the same things this guy did, and this guy didn't have to retool everything midstream, I don't get it." You don't have to get it. John 21, when Peter is told that he's going to be dying as a martyr, he looks at John the Apostle and he says, "Hey, Christ, what about him?" And Jesus says, "What about him?" I mean, that's a paraphrase, but it's like who cares? He says it doesn't matter what's going to... If he lives until I return again, which didn't have the humor it has for us now, right? If he lives until the second coming, what is that to you? I told you to follow me.

So I know your pathway. You cannot make comparisons. You cannot be envious. You cannot say, "I don't get it. What about them? I did all the same things she did, and her life worked out different." Stop with all of that. God's got a path for you to fulfill. Now go do it. Make sure it's eternally anchored on what's important. Be committed to the Lord's work, whatever that might be. Value that as the calling on your life and then be flexible. You're going to have to be flexible. Life, of course, any non-Christian can tell you that you got to be flexible. But as Christians there are no guarantees about how that path is going to go. Circuitous, twisted, turns, rocky, steep, narrow. Who knows? Maybe broad, maybe wide, maybe green pastures. Who knows what your ministry is going to be like? But you got to do it because we're committed to doing it. It's preceded by an attitude of ATAPAT. I'm willing to do whatever it is you ask me to do. Let's start with that prayer.

Pray with me. God, we want to be ATAPAT. We'd like to have in our minds a pre-conditioned, a priori, we're going to do what you want us to do. We want to seek what that is and do it. We want to start by being all-in in a good church, we want to start by being worshipers who exalt you in our hearts and our minds. We want to be doing it by our own deprivation and being willing to be inconvenienced, whether it's through our meals or any other way to put your agenda before ours. And then, God, you're going to open those doors, you're going to make it clear, you're going to give us opportunities and we're going to walk through those doors with a real sense of your affirmation that you're working and that you're calling us to this work. So, God, whether it's adding a ministry this semester, whether it's changing our ministry post, whether it's changing careers or moving out with a church plant, God, make it clear to us, please, what you're will is. So we commit ourselves to you, God.

In Jesus name. Amen.