



Gospel Impact 8

When It Motivates Sacrifice

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So last Monday morning, I and a group of our leaders heading out to North Texas to do some work, meet with leaders and facilities guys, realtor, meet with a group of people who were they're interested in our new church plant in Dallas. We got to the airport early. We checked in all of our stuff. They loaded us onto the plane. They pulled us out from the gate. It was a Monday so you can only imagine, well, I don't know if you can imagine or not what I'm like on a Monday, but I leaned back. I thought we were like over like El Paso. And they went on the speakers and said, "Hey, we got a problem. They're going to roll us back into the gate. The plane is broken."

So they pulled us back into the gate and they say, "Take all your stuff, get out, and we'll let you know when it's ready." Of course, we all scrambled to get other flights. There were no other flights. So we end up being delayed for 12 hours while they fixed the plane. Now, one thing they didn't do, they didn't ask us like, "What are you doing today? How important is it?" They didn't say that because they assume that it was more important that we not die on our way to Dallas than us getting to our appointments. Who knows? Some people are going to play golf for all I know. Others of us had important meetings. Others who knows? They were probably... I don't know what they were doing, but no one cared to ask us what we were doing because they prioritized our safety above our agenda that day.

Some priorities are like that, right? You just naturally know, you don't even have to ask, this is the most important thing. It's the prioritized thing, it's the chief thing that we do. As the old Westminster Catechism says, you know, "The chief end of man is to glorify God." That's why God made us. And that should be the kind of controlling governing thing that we're here for. Right? And to enjoy him forever. That's our idea of success, is that in our lives, we come to know God, we glorify God, and we get to enjoy fellowship with the greatness of God as distant as it is now, until we meet him face-to-face, and then all the unmitigated blessings and joy of that get unleashed in our lives.

That's the chief thing. Everything else is secondary. Everything else needs to be sacrificed to that. Not that it has to be. Right? There are plenty of things you don't sacrifice. You don't sacrifice your dental health for the glory of God, right? You continue to brush your teeth. It doesn't displace that. But there are things that are displaced and those are the sacrifices we make to glorify God as Christians. Your life is prioritizing certain things that non-Christians lives don't prioritize. Your neighbors are not here this morning, right? You're here. They're out walking the dog, going to the gym, watching TV, football, whatever they're doing, they're doing their thing.

Priorities, sacrificing, yes. Okay, here, this is too clever by half, but here it comes. Your life is really defined as an aggregate. Your life is compounded by deciding what you choose to do over against what you choose not to do. Your neighbors are not here. They're doing all of that. We're not doing that. At least not now unless you're on your phone. We've decided to



say no to some things that you can sit here and listen to me cough and preach. That is a decision and your life is a compounding series of decisions of things that you choose to do over against what you don't choose to do. And often we don't think about what we're not choosing to do. But what you're not choosing to do... your sacrifices in many ways define you. Have you ever thought about that? You chose not to do this, that or the other, so you could do what you do every day.

In this passage, which I'd love to assign to like a first-year homiletics class at Compass Bible Institute. Like, what are you going to do with this passage? Right? So now the professor has to figure out what to do with this passage. I'm looking at this passage thinking verses 18 through 22. Paul's coming back from his second missionary journey. But all it is is Luke just telling us a bunch of stuff that happened on the way there, a bunch of cities that are hard to pronounce, a bunch of things and places he goes, like, what's going on here? I just thought it was a good time for us to stop to look at Paul completing a two-plus year journey, second missionary journey, 3,000 miles of travel and say, "Wow, you sacrificed a lot."

If I said, "Come with me on a two-year journey. We're going to travel by sea and on land and maybe we'll get a donkey or a camel here and there, and we're going to go 3,000 miles on foot." You would say there's a lot I'd have to not do if I'm going to do that, it's going to displace a lot. So I thought it's good for us to stop and look at this passage. And again, I'll just give you my insight into this. If you're a homiletics student, you're thinking about preaching. I see the word "vow" stuck at the bottom of verse 18. I think, okay, that got me started on this. Paul is living a life of sacrifice. A vow, by the way, you're sacrificing something. You're choosing to bind yourself to something willingly, a free will, binding to something that is a deprivation. It's a sacrifice.

And in the middle of this, Luke just drops this line about Paul cutting his hair. Right? And then because he was under a vow. That got me thinking about the whole thing, like this journey, 3,000 miles, two years. It's a big, big sacrifice because Paul is a man of sacrifice. He sacrificed a lot to do what he did. And as we come to an end of the second missionary journey and it's almost unceremonious here at the end of this. We have no chapter division. We have no heading even in your English Standard Version translators, they don't put a gap between it. Between verses 22 and 23 we end the second missionary journey and we start the third. And we'll get into that, Lord willing, after Easter and we will look at what God is doing in Paul as he continues to mature and show increasing wisdom on his missionary journeys.

Let's start in verse 18. Let me read for you remembering where we are. Matter of fact, no applause, but I have a nice colored map for you printed on the worksheet. Do you see that in the bottom right-hand corner? That map, I wanted to give you the whole totality, I know it takes up space there, the whole totality of that third missionary journey. Now, if you've been with us, if not, you can catch up quickly by knowing that these missionary journeys start in Antioch of Syria. That's north of Israel. And that's got a little tag there on the map that says "Starting Point." That's where the missionary journey started, over two years ago is where it started.



Paul, in this passage in verse 22 is going to end it by getting back to Antioch. But he goes, and we know, Lystra, Derbe, you know all that, he gets to Antioch of Pisidia, which is in the middle of modern-day Turkey you see there on your map. And that becomes a very important city. And then we think he's going to go across to Ephesus and going to Ephesus would make sense. The Roman roads go there. It seems like Paul wanted to go there. The Holy Spirit kept preventing it. We tried to figure that all out. He goes to Troas and he has the Macedonian Call.

He gets on a ship, goes across the northern Aegean Sea, and he gets to northern Greece, Macedonia. Then he ends up going down to Achaia. We go through all these important cities Thessalonica, Berea, we get to Athens, and then we get to Corinth. And he's spending a long time here at Corinth, and we've seen the synagogue ruler get saved. And then we see Sosthenes, this second guy there in verse 17. He is named, but we don't know that he's saved yet. But when Paul writes back to the Corinthians, he's saved as well, later he becomes a Christian. So a lot of fruit going on. And Paul gets camped in Corinth for a while and that's where we pick it up in verse 18.

Verse 18 Acts 18, let's read verses 18 through 22 and see if we can learn a little bit about sacrifices, maybe think a little bit about what you're sacrificing for Christ. Let me just ask that before we continue. What are you sacrificing to glorify God in your life? Think about it. What if I said, "Come on, get up here, here's the microphone. What are you sacrificing?" Okay, I want to think in three categories, because I'll bet you are sacrificing. And I want to know how to look at that sacrifice and say, "Hey, it's a good thing for you to sacrifice some things for the glorification of God, for the Lordship of Christ in your life.

Acts 18:18, ready? "After this," all that that I just explained in Corinth, "Paul stayed many days longer and then he took leave of the brothers." Okay, so we got Silas and Timothy and others, he's traveling with Luke, and he's going to leave them. I'm assuming Luke's going to stay behind because we have no details, really, about the trip other than just he stopped here, stopped there, didn't stay there. And so he "sets sail for Syria." Now, Syria, that's code for a region that represents it, but the city is Antioch. We're getting back to Antioch, where people were first called Christians, disciples were first called Christians, this key city where he was sent off and the church sent him off, a thriving church in Antioch.

Okay. So he's going to go to Syria. "And with him," look, he picks up now his traveling partners, ministry partners, "Priscilla and Aquila," very important tent makers, missionaries now, won to Christ, serving Christ. So he's got some new good friends. They are good friends of his, they're fellow ministry partners and off they're going to go. Okay? "At Cenchreae he cut his hair," which if you're reading that, you're like, okay? He got a haircut. Did he get a manicure? I mean, why are you telling us that? Well, because "he was under a vow." Well, that doesn't help. Like what? What does that mean? We'll have to sort that out. But clearly, the haircut had something to do with the vow. We'll get into that.

Verse 19, "Then they came to Ephesus." Look at your map. Okay? They go across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus because Cenchreae is the port city of Corinth. And they go to Ephesus "and he left them there," and he ends up dropping off Priscilla and Aquila there, "he himself went into the synagogue and he reasoned with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined." Now, that's an interesting statement in light of what we surmise, or at least I did, I tried to convince you. Paul seemed to want to go from Antioch of Pisidia to Ephesus, which would make perfect sense. Key city, important city. And spoiler alert, on his third missionary journey he does go there and he stays there three years. So he's going to stay there a long time.

But right now, interestingly enough, he gets there and they say, "Great, we'd love for you to be here." And he goes, "No, I'm not, I'm going to go." And I do think that has to do with the vow. We'll get into that. The vow from verse 18. So there's sacrifice here, the vow itself is a sacrifice. This whole trip is sacrifice. Verse 21. "But I'm taking leave of them," in Ephesus, "he says, 'I will return to you if the Lord wills,' and then he set sail from Ephesus." So you see that red line or whatever color it is, he goes across the Mediterranean and he's heading back to the coast of Israel. He goes to Caesarea. "He landed in Caesarea," it says Caesarea Maritime we call it. That's the Caesarea on the coast. Lots taking place in the book of Acts. There has been Israel with us. We've had several trips to Israel. You've been there, a beautiful city on the coast, a lot of Roman ruins. You got the whole, you know, columns and the aqueduct. It's a great place to visit.

And when it says, then from there, look at this very important phrase, "He went up and greeted the church." Now, I think you need to read into this something else that's flowing from the vow to go up to see the church, right? "To go up and greet the church." I don't think it's the church at Caesarea Maritime. Matter of fact, the indicators of up and down, I've said this many times, up is always up to Jerusalem. It doesn't have to be Jerusalem, but usually is Jerusalem, particularly when he's going to leave and go down. Right? You don't go down to Antioch from Caesarea, but you'd go down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And so here we have probably an indication of where he's headed. And it probably has to do with a vow and the haircut. More on that in a minute.

But he's going to go from Caesarea Maritime and he's going to go to Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem he's going to go down to Antioch. Which I know we don't get that because we think about going north as up. But you're going away from Jerusalem. You're going down both in elevation and in terms of significance of the city, at least that's how they spoke. That's the idiom of Judaism. You'd can go down from Jerusalem in any direction you go. Did you follow all that?

So that's why on your maps, not every map and every atlas will say this, but I think this particular map that Crossway put together, I think it's right in that Paul goes to Caesarea Maritime, he goes up to Jerusalem to greet the church. Why? Because this is the center of Judaistic Christianity. Even though the Christians were scattered, some of the Jewish apostles stayed there. Of course, he wants to go visit those guys in Jerusalem. And so he goes to Jerusalem, he visits them, he greets them, and then he goes down from Jerusalem to



Antioch, which is north, he goes up in our minds we would say, directionally up north, to Antioch of Syria. And that's where he started.

Now, he didn't stay there long, just based on where we're going in verse 23. We'll get to that after Easter. But the idea here is that he's made this whole complete circuit and that's a big deal. And I just want to ask the question, just thinking about sacrifice and his sacrifice, I just want to ask the question, what would Paul have been doing in those last two years had he not done this? And then I ask, well, why did he do this? Well, he did this because he wanted to glorify God. And he wanted to glorify God by being this missionary who takes the message of Christ, the Messiah, to all of these places. That's what he wanted to do. That was the first missionary journey.

On the second missionary journey, I want to strengthen the churches and I want to continue to go west and I want to keep winning people to Christ. So he wanted to glorify God and he wanted his life to count, and he was willing to do that and sacrifice what he would have otherwise done. Well, let's back up even further. Acts Chapter 9. Right? His life was going in a particular direction. He was, just to quote Galatians Chapter 1 and Philippians Chapter 3 and all that he says in First Corinthians and Second Corinthians, he was a Jew who was all about the pharisaical advancement of being probably someone on the way to the Supreme Court of Israel called the Sanhedrin. He was, as he puts it in Philippians 3, he was a Pharisee of Pharisees, from the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day. He was, Galatians 1, excelling past all of his contemporaries in Judaism.

So he was an up-and-coming leader of Israel. And to prove how zealous he was for the faith of his fathers, he looked at this sect called The Way that believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and he said, "I'm going to persecute them. I'm willing to kill the leaders and the adherents of that Way with those Christians, I'm willing to kill them to show how zealous I am. Talking about earning some stripes among the Jews who were zealous for saying, this is the only way, this is the truth. Well, now this upstart from Nazareth who wants to say he's the Messiah and his followers say that he's risen from the dead, we're going to kill those people.

So had he continued on that trajectory, if there was no Acts Chapter 9 where he gets converted and I ask, what would he be doing here in the middle of the first century? Would he be traveling all over the place there in synagogues, getting run out of synagogues because he wasn't teaching the normal interpretation of the book of Isaiah? No. Would he be let down in a basket over the wall? Would people be throwing rocks at him? No. People would be opening doors saying, "Dr. Saul of Tarsus, please enter in. Oh, you're the famous student from the feet of Gamaliel. You are on the way to the Supreme Court of the country. You're the ruling class of Israel." Doors would have opened. People would have nodded. They would have given respectful greetings in the marketplace. He would have been continuing on his career path.

But Christ got a hold of his life. He became a Christian. He did what all of us are required to do when we come to Christ. We lay our faith and put it in him. We say we trust you now. You are not only our savior, you are the King of kings and Lord of lords. We're saying to you, to



quote Luke Chapter 14 verse 33, "No one of you can be my disciples unless you renounce all that you have." So we lay everything down and we say, "We are going to be followers of Christ. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do." And Saul of Tarsus becoming Paul the apostle, gets kicked off his horse on the way to Damascus. Jesus says, "You're persecuting me," right? Then he takes him to that city where Ananias is, the other Ananias, and he says, God says to Ananias, "This is my chosen instrument." I'm going to use this guy.

And of course he is using him and we're reading all about it from Chapter 9 all the way now to chapter, what are we in, Chapter 18? We've been reading now for nine chapters about Paul and all that God is doing, and that is a career path he would not have had had he not become a Christian. I just want to ask the question, what did he sacrifice to glorify God as a Christian? In his job he sacrificed a lot. We call our job our vocation, our calling. His calling was changed, right? He couldn't pull out his business card anymore, saying, "Hey, Pharisee of Pharisees, persecutor of the Church." He couldn't say that anymore. Now he's a Christian. Now he's a promoter of Christ. Now he's a missionary. Right? How much did he sacrifice? Well, he sacrificed this whole old career path to be a Christian because God changed all of that.

I want you to think right now, probably not as dramatic as that, but what have you for the glory of God under the Lordship of Christ, what have you sacrificed in your vocation? And I know this is a penetrating and true statement that probably applies to everyone at some degree or another. And we had great conversations after the last couple of services. I mean, the one last night in particular where I sat and every person I talked to could say, you're right, in my job I could be doing more to line my own pockets, to advance up the chain, to be more effective, to sell more product if only I didn't have the lordship of Christ governing my life. And I have to sacrifice some things for the sake of Christ. And I just want us to look at that and say, of course it's worth it, right? There's nothing better than for us to glorify God because we get to enjoy him, fellowship with him, forgiveness of sins. We get eternity. This is a great thing. It's worth it.

But number one, I'd like you to see the value of vocational sacrifice. What is the value of vocational sacrifice? Let's break it down. Breaking it down. Number one, you could be like the Apostle Paul. Maybe you were a drug runner. Maybe you were a prostitute. Maybe you were a bank robber. You came to Christ and all of a sudden, here's category one, Letter "A." Your job, your vocation was incompatible with Christianity. Okay. Don't raise your hand if you had an incompatible job. But I hope some of you... I don't know. No, I hope none of you. But you're going to lead someone to Christ one day and they're going to say, "Yeah, I sell drugs." Well, okay, I'm going to lead you to Christ, lead you to repentance. And then, you know, step one in discipleship is career counseling, right? You probably shouldn't do that.

Gals, you meet some gal at some fast food place, share the gospel with her, and you lead her to Christ. And then she says, "Oh, yeah, I'm a call girl. I'm a prostitute." Well, you're not going to say, "Oh, well glorify God in your job. Just leave tracts on the hotel counter." No, you got to change your job, right? Some guy's doing abortions for a living. You got to stop. Right? Sanctity of life. Your Christianity is incompatible with your job. And so some people, like the



Apostle Paul who persecuted the Church, can't be a persecutor of the Church anymore. Do you see that? I don't know if that applies to very many people. I mean, this is going all over the radio. Somebody had to quit their job because of their Christianity, because their job, by the nature of what it was, was incompatible with Christianity. Paul is in that category. Letter "A."

Letter "B." Some of you are maybe in this category and that is your vocation is compatible with Christianity. Christians can do it, but YOU can't do it. It's not something you're allowed to do. "Well, I don't know how that works." It works this morning in our Daily Bible Reading. Did you read our Daily Bible Reading this morning? Jesus comes upon some fisherman and he goes, "Hey, you guys are fishermen." He doesn't say that's an incompatible occupation. You can't fish for fish and be a Christian. No, no, no. You can fish for fish and be a Christian. But he says, "Hey, leave your nets behind. You're fishing for fish. Hey, follow me. You're going to be fishers of men." Okay? Now, if Peter wants to say, "No, I put a lot into this man, it's a family business. I've got my brothers involved. We put a lot into this. You know how much I paid for this boat and these nets? I cannot leave this behind. I'm not going." Would it be sin for him to continue to be a fisherman? The answer is yes.

Now, can he tell his other fishing buddies, "Hey, it's sinful to be a fisherman? You can't be a Christian and be a fisherman." He can't say that. Right? But he can't be. Matthew, a tax collector, Levi, that was his old name, his Hebrew name. Jesus comes he's at the toll booth and Jesus goes, "Leave it behind. Come and follow me. You got a new career now. I'm going to make you a leader of the Church." Would it be wrong for him? It's just like when Peter falls on his face and he's demoralized in John 21, Jesus comes to him and says, "Stop it. You went back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee. You can't do that." This is post-resurrection. Jesus makes a special appearance to say to Peter, "You cannot continue to do that. It is sin for you to do this." Does anyone have a story like that?

I mean, I do, right? I had my career aspirations as a kid and I grew up and had some moderate success in stuff that I was doing in music. And I wanted to be a musician because I couldn't throw the football as far as my buddy who became the quarterback and I was really bitter about that for a lot of years. So I figured it'd be really cool if I wasn't the quarterback if I was playing the trombone up in the stands. That'll be just as cool. That's a joke. So I did that. But I thought, okay, I'm not the football star, I'm going to be the musician. So I poured myself into that and I got fairly good at it, good enough to get scholarships and opportunities and play in different groups and travel all over the place. And it was like, okay, this is my career. I want to be a musician. I mean, my aspirations weren't... I wasn't aiming for the moon or anything, but I thought I'll be doing studio work in L.A., doing, you know, Burger King jingles or whatever. And so, yeah, I can make a living out of that. I'm going to do it and get my scholarships and get that. So I was going to be a musician. That was after I wanted to be Evel Knievel and a few other things, but I settled into a career path.

Then I became a Christian. And you know what most people said to me who loved me and were really glad that this guy's become a Christian. Do you know what they said? "You can use that for the Lord." And you know what? Maybe I could have. Just like Peter James and



John could have said, "We're going to catch fish for Christ. We're going to put, you know, a Jesus sticker on the boat and it'll be great. We'll talk about Jesus and we will have a great career now as Christian fishermen." But for them, it would be wrong. And for me it was wrong. And God made it clear, it took some time, but he made it clear, you can't do that. And while all my friends said, "Just do it now for the Lord," I had to say, no, no, no, this is not what God is calling me to do. And that became clear externally, internally, the call to something else. And so, sadly, L.A. is down one studio musician playing commercial jingles.

But the world now has to put up with a preacher, another preacher. And what's the point? The preacher was what God wanted me to be, and I cannot be that other thing because that's compellingly wrong. Compelling wrong in the experience of God setting me in a position and saying, listen, this is not for you. Now in your small groups, and I hope you go to a home fellowship group, on the back and it'll be a little complicated. You leaders of these small groups, you need to be careful in this section, but I'll take you to First Corinthians Chapter 7 in particular, and I will say you need to think through this passage. And the default position of becoming a Christian is whatever you are, stay there unless it's illegal, unless it's immoral, unless it's incompatible with Christianity, in the beginning, stay there. And I love the way Paul puts it with God. Do this thing with God.

It doesn't mean you can't get a job change. He says bondservants be bond servants for the Lord. But parenthetically it says in First Corinthians 7, "If you can gain your freedom do that." That would be good, of course. So job changes are great as Christians, but you need to say, I'm going to be with God in this work and I'm going to seek to, as he ends up ramping up at the bottom of the passage, he says, I want you to have undivided devotion to the Lord. I'm not trying to put a constraint on you, changing your thing or your situation in life, but serve the Lord in this and God will make it clear if you are going to be more effective in glorifying God in some other job.

But I say this to some of you in this auditorium right now, or listening on the radio right now, that if you are someone who has not regularly brought your job before God and said, "God, I'm willing." I mean, Luke 14:33, I came to you on the condition that you were the king, and if you want me to do something else, I'll do something else. And you should say that to God, and you should make it a periodic thing. Even here on our pastoral staff, every year we have that discussion. We sit down, is this what we should be doing? We should all lay that out before God and say, I'm willing, I'm holding my career loosely, my vocation God has the right to change that. And I want to be able to say, God, you got it, whatever you want me to do.

So you need to think about that. Nothing wrong with your job. It's not incompatible Christian, you know, non-Christian reality. In other words you can be a Christian and do that, but at least go to God and say, can I live for you with undistracted devotion to you in this job, glorifying you as a dentist, a plumber, you know, raising children or whatever it is you're doing. Okay. There's a third category that a lot of you and probably the majority of you are living in, Letter "C." You have a compatible job with Christianity. Okay? And you're going to continue in that job and you'll live that job out for the rest of your time. Great. Here's the caveat. It needs to be



under new management, under new management. Your job continues under new management.

When they came to John the Baptist in the desert, Luke 3, and they said, look, we're tax collectors, what should we do? Now, there are some people like Levi who we're told you can't be a tax collector anymore. You're going to change. Christ has the right to change his job. But here's the default for John the Baptist. He answers, "Hey, continue to be a tax collector, but do not..." now, here come the caveats. Now you're a Christian. You're under new management. "Do not collect more than you're authorized to collect." The soldiers said, "What should we do?" Right? You can be a soldier and be a Christian. Great. He said great, "Continue as a soldier." He said, "but make sure you're not using your power to extort people. And stop complaining about your wages. Be content with your wages."

So here is a different kind of soldier and a different kind of tax collector because they're making sacrifices occupationally. If I said I am now a new Christian, I put my trust in Christ, in this case, in the time of John the Baptist, I've repented of my sins, I'm looking for the coming of Messiah who's about to show up. And I'm here now. I've just gotten my life right with God and I'm a tax collector. But here's the thing, now under new management, because I'm a Christian, let's just say anachronistically, I'm a Christian, right? "I just lost some income because I used to collect more than I was authorized to collect. Now I can't." A soldier. "I used to go in and get free falafel because I had a spear and a sword, and I was able to extort people for stuff. And now I've become a repentant person. I can't do that anymore. So what have I lost? I've lost some free lunches."

Do you follow me now? Every career has vocational sacrifices if you are a Christian. Why? Because Colossians says you have a new master. You look beyond the shoulder of your boss, your middle manager, your board members, your shareholders, and you're saying, I know that what matters is Christ and he is my boss. I will give an account to him. There's no partiality with him. He is going to judge my life. He is the one from whom I get the reward. So I look for that boss. And sometimes I displease my boss. Sometimes I displease my shareholders. Sometimes I displease my managers because I have to adhere to the Lordship of Christ in my job.

And it wouldn't be bad for us because our lives are defined by our sacrifices, for this morning, just to think, or this week, just to think, what am I sacrificing? Right? And it would be good to say I sacrifice my whole career because I did, right? And I need to willingly see the value of that. I'm happy to sacrifice that for God. I wanted to be something. God wanted me to be something else. Fine. Maybe for you I could be all of this if I lived by the world's rules in my job. But I got to do this because I'm under the Lordship of Christ. Great. Quantify your sacrifice vocationally, and let's say happy to do it.

Verse 18 second half. He comes to Cenchreae, the city, the port city of Corinth, and he gets a haircut. Right? Why? For he was under a vow. What's that about? We don't know what it's about, but everyone thinks, well, it seems to obviously be about, he's a Jew, a Pharisee of Pharisees, he's an Old Testament expert. But the only vow we know of that involves hair is



Numbers Chapter 6, the Nazirite vow. So it must be the Nazirite vow. Now it can be and I assume it is. If it wasn't, I assume Luke would make some specification or delineation or distinction. But since he doesn't, I think we're safe to assume, even though it doesn't say Nazirite vow, that it's the Nazirite vow, right? Nazirite. To consecrate yourself, to set yourself apart.

In the law of Moses, there was a big distinction between the 11 tribes and the 12th tribe of Levi. Levi was different because Levi didn't get a land inheritance. So we read that in the DBR this morning, our Daily Bible Reading. So they had a special place of consecration. Do you know that word? The Latin word, consecrate, set apart. They're different. And so all that talk about the consecration of this Levitical tribe, you might think, wow, that's too bad. Well, I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. I'm of the tribe of Judah. I don't get to be set apart like that for God's special use. Oh, Numbers 6. Anyone can do this. It's called a Nazirite vow. And you can willingly say, I'm going to consecrate myself, set myself apart for some special purpose, special focus, special devotion to the Lord and I have to sacrifice these three things.

What three things? Numbers Chapter 6. I need to sacrifice. I can't go to a funeral, I can't come into contact with a corpse, a dead body. Even if my dad dies or my mom dies or my sister dies, I can't go to a funeral because I'm in my period of my Nazirite vow. I cannot eat any derivative of the vine. I can't have a grape, I can't have a raisin, I can't drink wine. I can't do any of that because I've decided I'm going to consecrate myself to the Lord for some special purpose, concentrating on something, focusing on something, pursuing something, special devotion. And so I can't have the fruit of the vine in any way. I can't go to a funeral or be in contact with a corpse. And thirdly, I can't cut my hair. My hair has to just keep on growing as long as I'm under the Nazirite vow.

Some people in the Bible, you remember famously people like Samson, right? They were under this Nazirite vow. Or Samuel, his mother, thanks Mom, put him under this Nazirite vow as a kid. And he had certain things he couldn't do because he was under this vow of devotion, special devotion used for God. Now, all these guys from Samson who is maybe unique, John the Baptist and Samuel. I mean, it seems like they joyfully put up with all that. They did without certain things, personal. Things that would be fine for them to do and enjoyable for them to do but it would be great to get a little haircut before I went into the synagogue to preach about the Messiah and the fulfillment of the prophecies. But instead, I'm not getting my hair cut. My hair looks like a mess. But you know, I'm under a Nazirite vow. Great.

"Cut his hair, for he was under a vow." But now he's getting his hair cut. Why is he getting his hair cut? Because at the end of the vow you cutting your hair. You had a time period. Now, the Mishnah, for instance, the part of the Talmud that talks about the specifications of all this, plenty of oral law that got codified in writing. The Jews would say, you know, the default term was 30 days. And when you were done with this, you took your hair, and even it does say this in Numbers 6, you take your hair, here's how it says it in Numbers 6, what you've cut off after this period of time, it doesn't have to be 30 days. It could be a long time. But you've committed yourself to not cut your hair. Once you cut it, the vow is over. You can eat grapes



again and you can eat your raisins. You can have your wine, you know, you can go to a funeral. Great.

Now you take your hair and it says, "Bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting," go to the altar and you burn it on the freewill offering. So it's a stinky thing that you do, but you burn the hair on the fire. Well, there is no tabernacle now. Now we have a temple in Jerusalem. I think that is why instead of just sailing up to Syria and going to Antioch, he's sailing now to Caesarea to go to Jerusalem because that was part of what you did with the Nazirite vow. You took the hair, you brought it and you brought three animals and you went to the ceremony and you sacrifice those things as the completion of your vow. Okay.

A lot of questions are raised about that. Like, why is he doing that? I mean, we are a post-Jerusalem Council here. I thought we weren't doing Old Testament stuff. Well, he's doing something that is a vow and it seems to be a Nazirite vow. And he seems to be voluntarily doing this maybe for the sake of ministry, maybe for the sake of devotion, maybe for the sake of focus, maybe some kind of crying out to God for protection in Corinth because it was such a mess. So much was going on there, he needed protection. Who knows why? But whatever it was, I know this: because it was a vow it was sacrifice. He couldn't do what everyone else could do. Okay?

Now, there are some parallels, though probably no one here has taken a Nazirite vow. Some dudes with longer hair, maybe you're in a vow of some kind right now. I don't know. But most of us aren't doing Nazirite vows. But you do as a Christian if you're serious about Christ, there are things that you probably sacrificed for the sake of your devotion to Christ, your focus on Christ, your service to Christ. I mean, think about it. When someone comes to you and says, "Would you wear the green shirt or the red shirt at Awana on Thursday night? Say no to your basketball league or whatever you were doing on Thursday. Come and serve our church." Well, there is even sacrifice in that. You're doing it for the sake of ministry in that case. But maybe you've devoted, "I'm going to do it. I will commit to the whole year, to the fall and the spring semester. I will do Awana leadership." Great.

I mean, in a sense, you could say I'm quantifying what I'm not doing. I'm saying that I'm sacrificing what I would normally do on those nights for this. Okay? There's a lot of personal sacrifice, and I think you should just see the value in that because there are lots of reasons that we should do it. And number two, I think you should write it down that way, that we should "See the Value of Personal Sacrifice," time, enjoyment, pleasures, vacation kinds of vacation, things that I might do, that I might indulge in, that it would be fine for me to indulge in. But I'm not indulging in it because I'm in a particular state of consecration or focus or attention to God or his service in some way.

Three things. Super, super quick. Let's build some sub-points. Three things you should never, never think of when you're doing some kind of personal sacrifice for something you're doing with God. Number one, you should never think that everyone has to do it. Right? That's the whole point of a free will vow. It's a vow that you enter into and you choose to do it. Not everyone has to do it and don't ever tell people they have to do it. Colossians 2, there were



people saying you got to do these things, you got to deprive yourself from this. Paul equates that with false teaching. Just because you don't do something, if it's allowed in Scripture, you can't tell other people not to do it. It is a voluntary thing. Paul did not say, "Hey, everyone else has to do this vow." He was under a vow. In Chapter 21 there'll be four other guys who are under a vow. The same kind of thing. We'll look at it when we get there. But people are volunteering, just a few and whoever wants to. Great.

Number two, don't think you're ever manipulating God with deprivation. You're making a personal sacrifice. You say, "God, if I do this, then you must do that." Some people think that that's how it works because fasting is one of the most basic deprivations we do of personal sacrifice that probably most Christians are familiar with. Right? You understand what it is to say, "I'm not going to eat today or tomorrow or I'm not going to eat today," or whatever your fasting term is. You say, God, "I'm going to do this and I'm going to give myself to prayer so that my kid who's going through this thing, I'm praying for this." And you may focus on the special consecration and concentration on something and you say, "But God, you've got to answer me now because I'm sacrificing over here." Now, you know that that's no good, right? You know that's wrong, right? Raise your left eyebrow if you know that's wrong. That's wrong, right? That's not right. We can't manipulate God. You can't twist God's arm. We're doing this for us. We're not doing this for God. We're not doing this because we somehow have some leverage now on God. So we can't do that. The Bible's clear on that.

Thirdly, you can't do it because you want to be seen as holy. Remember that in Matthew 6:16? He said, "Don't be like the Pharisees when you fast because they like to look gloomy," "look up at us, we're fasting." Right? They want to be seen as righteous and Jesus says that "they have their reward." They're not going to get anything out of this but a few people going, "Oh, you're amazing. You're so righteous." Right? It's like the meme I saw this week about people who do marathons. It said how many people would do marathons if they couldn't tell anybody they did a marathon. I mean, maybe some, but less. (audience laughing) Would you admit it? Okay, put their sticker on the back of their car. "It's only thirteen, I did half." Okay, great. Great. No, obviously I'm not doing marathons, but what's the point? These Pharisees were just like that. "I went without eating all week. I sacrifice all these things." Right?

And I guess I would say this too. Who would fast if they couldn't tell anyone they were fasting? And my point is this: who would sacrifice something if they can't tell anyone they've sacrificed? And that's the whole point of Jesus saying look at how the Pharisees do it for attention to be seen as righteous. He says, "You wash your face, put your hair gel in, go out there and fast in secret, where your heavenly Father sees in secret." This isn't about your reputation.

So those three things, did you get those? Right? This is not mandatory for everyone, and you can't make anybody else do it. Number two, it's not to leverage God twisting his arm. And certainly it's not just to make you look holy. Okay, so what would it be for? Number one, ministry, more ministry. You could say I'm not going to do this thing for the sake of more ministry. We see this immediately after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Acts 15 here they made this decision. Paul was there, Peter was there, everyone was there, James was there.



And they said, "we do not make the Gentiles do the ceremonial law of the Old Testament." Now, they should be sensitive not to hack people off, but no one should be made to do these things. You don't need to do these things. Chapter 15. You're all familiar with that.

Chapter 16 Paul finds this young guy called Timothy and he goes to do ministry with him and he goes, "Hey, cut your foreskin off." It's like, what? Yep. And if I'm Timothy, I object at this point. Number one, "My parents didn't do it when I was a kid. No, I'm not doing that. I just heard you guys bring the Jerusalem Council. I'm not going... No, I don't have to do that." Paul responds, "Now, I know you don't have to do that. But here's the thing. We're going to increase our ministry because the people don't want to listen to you because of your mixed background here between Greek and Jewish. You need to do this thing because when they know that you're circumcised, they're going to give us an open door to preach the word. So for the sake of ministry you lose your foreskin. Circumcised. That's the Bible word.

And what does that cost him? Well, a few days of pain it's costing him, at least I'm thinking some recovery time, and he's sacrificing for the sake of advanced ministry. And as long as I'm stating that I might as well state the principle from First Corinthians Chapter 9. Paul says, "I do all things as much as I can" whatever it takes, "so that I might by all means win some." For all people, whatever it takes. Under the law? I'll be under the law. If that's what it takes, circumcised? Great. Eat kosher. Hey, great. Fine. As long as it gives me an opening for ministry. You're not under the law and you want me to have a ham sandwich. Great. I will do that. I'm not under the law. And yet I'm not without the law of Christ. Of course, there are parameters on everything based on the Lordship of Christ. But you follow what I'm saying here. Sometimes you sacrifice for the sake of increased ministry. And one of the simplest things I can say is what I just analogized with you volunteering for ministry. Whatever you're going to do on that night, sacrifice so I can do more ministry here. Great. That's one way we do it. Okay.

Number two, when I think about the things that I will sacrifice for and as long as I'm in First Corinthians Chapter 9, the end of that passage verses 25 and 26, I think it is. He says, "Listen, I buffet my body and I make it my slave," I beat my body and make it my slave, "so that I may by all means I'd not be disqualified." I want to make sure that I'm in control. So sometimes we sacrifice things for the sake of self-control. Sometimes maybe your fasting is that way. Your fasting is just, "I want to say no to the impulses of my stomach so that maybe when I'm in prayer, I can say no to the impulse of distraction, and I'm going to be disciplined." Self-awareness, that's what sometimes deprivation will do and self-control, fruit of the spirit. That God is going to use deprivation, sacrifice to make that happen.

With all the reports out this week, you know, you think about people and their concentration in prayer, and you read all this stuff about what's going on with Reels and TikTok and Instagram stuff. You think, okay, if really I'm thinking I can't even concentrate for 2 minutes because I'm doing all of this all the time and I'm on my phone all the time, some of you can say, "Well, I'm going to sacrifice that. I'm going to delete all those apps because I really want to be more focused over here, in my prayer life or my Bible study." That's great, right? You can't make other people do that. You're not twisting God's arm. And it's not to look holy, but you might do



it for the sake of your own self-awareness and self-control. Fine. You may do it for ministry. You can sacrifice personally something for ministry.

How about this one from Romans Chapter 14? Paul says this because here's the concern in Rome. You've got Jewish believers, you've got Jewish background believers, you've got Greek, Latin believers, and they're in this church. And so you've got people who were conditioned in their conscience about ham sandwiches and bacon and non-kosher meals. And then you got people who didn't care. They never grew up with that. They never had any twinge of conscience about it. And he says, listen, you guys who have freedom to eat whatever you want in your conscience, your sensibilities, he said, don't flaunt your freedom in front of people who are going to stumble over that. In other words, you should curtail your freedoms, give up, personally sacrifice things for the sake of your, here's how I put it, how did I write it? "Consider it love for others."

Paul says this: if eating meat causes my brothers to stumble, I will never eat meat again. If that's what I have to do, fine. I'll never do that. There are freedoms that we have in the Christian life that some people have sensitivities to that I need to say, certainly me in ministry, in more public life, I need to say I'm going to say no to these things, not because they're wrong in and of themselves, but because there is a kind of connection and association with those things. And because of that, I'm going to personally sacrifice that. Right? Because you're probably saying, "He could use a drink, right? Give him some wine. He would calm down, just a little drink, would calm Pastor Mike down and we could follow him easier." But here's the deal. I say no to that because they're sensitivities, maybe a shrinking sensitivity in our day, of people that say if I stood out there while you're getting your donut and your coffee and I had a Budweiser in my hand, they'd go, ooh, and that doesn't compute. Okay?

And as long as that sensitivity is there, I'll say, okay, you want to drink? Fine. You can't be drunk. Right? Buy a breathalyzer. Figure that all out. But here's the deal. There are certain things that I will give up. And I'm sure in your life, certain things you give up probably in your lifestyle for the sake of your parenting, for the sake of ministry, you serve on our youth group. You give up things so that you cannot stumble people because you have a considerate love for them. And all I'm saying is sometimes we sacrifice for the glory of God by loving his people and caring considerately for their conscience.

How about this one? This fourthly, and lastly, in this sub-point, Psalm 132 verses 2 through 5 speaks of David making a vow. And here's what it says. "He swore a vow to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, 'I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'" So here's David saying I'm not going to sleep. I won't go into my house. I won't go into my bed until we figure out where we're going to put this temple. Right? His son was going to build it. He was making preparations. He made collections for it. He made plans for it. Apparently, at some point he goes, I'm going to make a commitment, a vow. I'm not going to eat until I do this thing.



That's a sacrifice. And some of you probably make those sacrifices for the Lord. I mean, you take a Compass Bible Institute class, right? Think about it. You're reading now 800 pages of material for some class, right? Your friend at work, they didn't stay up till midnight reading textbooks. Right? But you're doing that because you have a goal here. You're trying to grow in your knowledge of God. You're trying to grow in your devotion to the Lord. You've taken some class and it's like I'm not going to sleep until I finish this assignment. I'm going to write this paper, I'm going to read this book, whatever it is. There are lots of things that we do to sacrifice for the sake of our resolve. That's how I put it, to focus on our resolve, our resolve in some godly way to do some godly thing.

That was one verse in 50 minutes. But let's finish the message. No one groaned. That was good. Congratulation is helpful. Verses 19 to 22 real quick. He cut his hair. He's under a vow. That's personal sacrifice. Well, there's one more sacrifice. It's littered all over verses 19 through 22, and I've already emphasized it when I read it. But let's see if we can pick up on it. "They came to Ephesus, and they left them there," their friends, Priscilla and Aquila, they leave them behind. Okay? They went to the Jews, they did ministry, Paul did.

Verse 20, "They asked him to stay," in Ephesus. We'd like you "to stay longer." He wanted to be there. We knew that from earlier in the book, but "he declines." "Well, if the Lord wills, I'll return to you." Why? Because he's probably going back with that head of hair in a bag, and he's going to go to Jerusalem and finish that devotional act to the Lord, and he's committed himself to that. He's not going to stay. He's going to get there by the festival or the feast or whatever ceremony was going on there at this particular time of the year, we don't know exactly.

Verse 22, "He lands at Caesarea, he goes up," that's to Jerusalem likely, "greet the church." Do you think that Peter, James and John or whoever is there at the church of Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders, the apostles, do you think they wanted Paul to stick around, the former Pharisee Pharisees? Do you think they would love to have him guest speak for a while? Absolutely. And yet he goes, no, he leaves them and he "went down to Antioch." I'm assuming that followed fast upon. And my point is this. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. His social relationships are disrupted because of his devotion to the Lord and wanting to maximize the glory of God in his life. And I just got to say, you should probably quantify that. It's not a bad thing to quantify.

Number three, right? You need to "See the Value of Social Sacrifice," relational sacrifice, sacrifices to relationships that you would like to have. He did this, here's the first category, quick sub-point Letter "A" for ministry. He's saying goodbye to relationships for ministry. I'm going to do this thing for devotion to God, ministry. I'm going to say no to relationships now in this context. We'll meet you up later "if the Lord wills" and thankfully he did in Ephesus. And Priscilla and Aquila, lots of love in those friendships, but he's putting that on hold.

We're doing that with our Texas crew. It was sad. I went out to Texas and it was great, exciting. But I'm getting on a plane, coming home thinking these are great people, I love these people. And then I'm going to come and see the people who are here meeting in a classroom



across the street last night who are going to North Texas. And it's sad. We love these people. We hate to see them go, but we sacrifice the closeness of those social connections for greater ministry. That's category one.

Sometimes people disconnect from us because of our Christianity, right? We sacrifice sometimes socially, because they look at us and say, "We don't want to be with you. We don't like you now because you're a follower of Christ." And you can imagine the more devoted and more vocal you are, or the more committed or resolved you are to Christ, sometimes it's because you're a follower of Christ that you lose invitations to stuff. Jesus said they will exclude you, Luke 6, because of me. And in situations that happens. I can talk about even my extended family saying, "We don't want the preacher at this one. Can we not invite him?" You can imagine, right? "We don't want that." And I get it. And the Bible says in the day that you are excluded, you want to see the value of it, leap for joy. Rejoice. Right? I get that. Your family probably doesn't want me at your Thanksgiving. Think about it. Right? Some of you. Most of you.

What's the point? You are going to be excluded not only from family, Jesus said, sometimes from extended family, sometimes from immediate family, but from a lot of people. If they call the leader of the house Beelzebul, they're going to call servants Beelzebul. So we lose relationship there. That's Letter "B." Letter "C," sometimes you have to step back from social circles because of your sanctification and you know this isn't healthy, this isn't right. Do you want a passage for that? First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 33. First Corinthians 15:33. "Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals." He says to the Corinthians, "Hey, great to have a great church there and all that. You got problems. I've tried to correct those, but just know some relationships you need to step out of." He says it again in Second Corinthians Chapter 6, "Do not be unequally yoked." Sometimes you need to step away from a social situation and say, I can't have that relationship because of my sanctification.

Letter "D." We read about it this morning. Maybe a more poignant passage is Mark Chapter 1. Let me read verses 35 through 37. "Rising early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with Simon searched for him, and when they found him they said, 'Everyone's looking for you.'" Where have you been? We wanted you here and you weren't here. Why did Jesus spend time alone in a deserted place that morning instead of having breakfast with the guys? Why was he by himself? He said no to social situations. He was willing to make a sacrifice because of his devotion to God, his love for God.

See, when you sit there and do things, and a lot of it, by the way, in the Christian life, is you sitting there with a Bible. You sitting over there with a Christian book, you being on your knees in prayer. You're saying no to sitting in front of a TV with a bowl of popcorn on your lap. I'm saying, "No, I can't do that. I'm going to do this right now." Everything you choose to prioritize is sacrificing something else. And oftentimes, it's relationships, good relationships, relationships that would be fine to engage in. It's not sinful. It's just you have those priorities and glorifying God, which is a far better value, sometimes is going to sacrifice your



relationships, even relationships that are good because you are prioritizing things that develop your love and devotion for Christ. Did you catch all those? Right?

Sometimes I lose relationships for ministry. Sometimes I lose relations because people don't want to be with me because I'm a Christian. Sometimes I lose relationships because I have to step away from you because of my sanctification. And sometimes it's just because I'm so busy being in my study or being in my back room or in my bedroom or in the corner of someplace studying God's word or praying. Yeah, you're not going to be as social. You've sacrificed socially. You've sacrificed vocationally. And I'll bet there are areas and probably areas you probably should step up in sacrificing personally for the sake of your devotion, concentration on and service to the Lord.

There are a lot of things that are not sacrificed that you don't do. Your neighbors do a lot of stuff you wouldn't do, right? There's stuff I see them do. I think, I don't want to do any of that. Right? And it's not a sacrifice for me not to live the life they live in certain areas. But there are certain things that we need to say, okay, it is a sacrifice. And it's not called a sacrifice unless it is a sacrifice. And a sacrifice has got some barbs to it. Right? That hurts. I would like to do it, but I can't do it. I'd like to do it, but I'm not able to do it. And that's the kind of thing that isn't a bad thing every now and then to stop, look at it, quantify it and say, okay, it is a sacrifice.

Here's a passage for you. Numbers Chapter 10 verse 10. It talks about sacrifice and bringing our free will sacrifice. This is not a duty. This is something I choose to sacrifice, he says, and I just love this imagery, "Blow the trumpet over ... the sacrifice." Right? Blow the trumpet. Have a celebration. Be glad. Rejoice. Right? And I'll paraphrase now, because you know that you have the Lord as your God. Why are you sitting here instead of enjoying something else somewhere else, some brunch somewhere at the beach? Right? You're here because you're supposed to be here. You're commanded to be here and you choose to be here. And I'm saying that is something you've sacrificed. But let's rejoice in that sacrifice.

Philippians Chapter 1 started with Paul saying, I might be killed here. Right? I'm going to glorify God encouraged by life or death, but they're threatening to kill me. I think I'm going to get out, but they're threatening to kill me. At the end of the book, he says this in Philippians 2:17. He says, "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering," which is a double entendre, there's an imagery there. If my blood gets spilled by the Roman sword, if my blood's being spilled, the life is going out of me and I'll just quote it so I don't get it wrong in Philipines. He says this, "Even if I am, it's on the sacrificial offering of your faith, and I am glad and I rejoice with you all."

Likewise, verse 18, you should be glad and rejoice with me." All I'm saying is there's nothing better than us saying we sacrifice this for a value that is so great, which is I don't care what you didn't get to do in your career. I don't care what money you didn't get to make. I don't care what relationship you didn't get to have. I don't care what things you gave up for the service of the Lord. If it's really for the Lord, you should say with the Apostle Paul. You should say with Numbers 10. "Blow the trumpet. Rejoice." You're doing for the best and most valued reason in the universe to glorify God and enjoy him. Not just now. But forever.



Let's pray. God, we want to willingly sacrifice for you, not just willingly. We don't want to mope around about it. We don't want to complain about it. The days that we spend studying your words, studying good Christian books, on our knees in prayer. Things we miss out on, hobbies we miss out on, trips we don't get to go on, raises and promotions we don't get, awards we don't receive. God, I pray that we just gladly spend and be expended as an offering, a sacrificial offering. Glad to do it, free. Freely giving of things that we could otherwise do because we know the value that it is to bring glory to you and to enjoy you. God, we want to love you more. And I know all of us can think of human relationships in which we're happy to sacrifice for others. It brings us joy to sacrifice. I pray even that today, as we think about what we might sacrifice this week to love you, to serve you, to concentrate on you, to be consecrated for you. That we find great joy in that. And as an expression of our love for you. And we know we love because you first loved us. We're thankful for that.

In Jesus name, Amen.