



Learning to Lead 2

Caring Less about Your Own Comfort

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Well, I stumbled upon a Web site this week that was entitled with big, bold letters at the top, "Reminders To Love Yourself." And as I started reading it, I realized I needed no reminder. I, like you, am pretty good at remembering to do that. It's just kind of built into how we all seem to function as fallen individuals. And yet I read on and I saw all the things you would expect. Phrases and things to remember. Things to say to yourself like, "You're worth it." "Believe in yourself." "Follow your heart." "Seek no one's approval but your own." And my favorite, which was a new one to me, "Be you. Love you. In all ways. Always."

Well, it's not Shakespeare, but you get the point, right? And speaking of Shakespeare, he's often quoted in this regard to that line from Hamlet when Polonius says to his son, "To thine own self be true." I thought about all of this as I read through a lot of this website thinking how much reinforcement we get in this regard just all throughout the week. I mean, we hear this. It's the constant refrain of our culture. And yet I wonder if that really, if you live that way, if that's what you would consider successful life. I mean, really? Is this at the end of your life what you want people saying, "You know what? Oh, mom, she was always putting herself first, you know. And Dad, there was no one better than seeking his own interest than good old dad. He looked after number one. And my sister, she didn't care for anyone's opinion but her own. What a great person she was. Or my brother really loved himself in all ways, always." I mean, that's just not the praiseworthy word you hope someone says about you.

We know that's not successful life and if God were to write the website, it certainly wouldn't have those phrases included on it. But God has made very clear in his word, here is what successful life is, and no one knows better than the manufacturer. Here's the way to live your life. And this is the right way. This is real life. This is taking hold of, to use a phrase from First Timothy 6, of life that is truly life. This is the right way to do it. And thankfully, we don't just have propositions and principles and precepts in the Bible. We have real examples of people who live out their lives and we get to see what it looks like in real time, The kinds of things that people are placed into and how do they respond and what does it look like to live life the way God designed it? The Apostle Paul is certainly a gift to the church in that regard because we see so much of his life played out for us in ways that we can learn from. We've been doing that throughout the second half of the book of Acts.

We've reached Chapter 20 and we find as he's here at Miletus, he's called together the leaders of the church of Ephesus, and he's telling them, recounting to them some things about his past with them that they had been witness to. And then he's going to get into some exhortation about how they should live. But we're going to finish up this little autobiographical section when he talks about his own life. And he really gives us a transparent key into how he views life and how he views his own life and how he would expect those around him to echo the things that he is mimicking from Christ himself.



So I want you to look at just three verses today. We're going to look at verses 22, 23 and 24, and that's why it's taken so long to get this far in the book of Acts. Have you noticed what number sermon this is in the book of Acts? And since I have to do them all three times, this is sermon 300 for me in the book of Acts. Not that I don't love doing it over and over again. Because I got to get to the 11:00 service, my favorite crowd. (audience laughing) But here we go. Sermon 300 in Acts as we deal with Paul talking about his own life and it's very instructive for us. And I guarantee you the key to how we are to live life that is in much contradistinction to what we see in our culture and what you're going to hear for the rest of the week. Let's get our minds recalibrated by these words.

So take a look at this beginning in verse 22. I'll read it for you from the English Standard Version. "Now, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there." And please don't forget, he's talking to a church instead of church leaders who have been really his church home for three and a half years. This has been a place before he went off to Macedonia and Achaia for the last time here, he has been someone who has given his life, his time, his teaching, his counsel, his wisdom. He has shared life with these people and he's going, I'm moving on. I'm moving on, "constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what's going to happen to me." I don't know the details, but I do know this, verse 23, "that the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city imprisonment and afflictions await me. But," verse 24, "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself." Did you catch that? "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself."

That by the way is not a line I saw on the website this week on how to love yourself. But Paul makes a dramatic statement there. "It's not of any value to me, my life, nor is precious to myself, if only," here's the only thing that I really am focused on, "that I may finish my course." What course? "And the ministry." Remember that word? The service, the kind of work that I'm doing for other people, helping other people, serving other people, leading other people to know Christ better. I just want to "finish my course, this ministry that I've received from the Lord Jesus." And that's why it's important. And that's why it's more important than me, because the person it comes from is more important than me. "To testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Now you can say, well, he's a career missionary. Of course, that's his job description. Well, that's true. But I hope we established last time we were together that the reality of us being a light to the world outside the walls of this church as salt and light, not only preserving righteous behavior I trust in your workplace, in your neighborhood, and in your circles that you run in, but also telling people that they need to repent and put their trust in Christ. We call it evangelism. We have an evangelistic mission. We have an ambassadorship that God has given us to represent him in the world. And in that sense, we're all called to testify to the good news, the gospel of the grace, the favor that we don't earn by doing good things, but we get by God's gift in Christ, and we share that message of the grace of God to the world. That's what's going on outside.

Of course, he's talking to these people who he's ministered to within the church, and we're learning about how he does it within the church. And we've said, yeah, not only do we need to



lead people to Christ outside the church, but we need to be doing what Paul was doing in the church. Even if we're not professionals on a stage with a microphone, we need to be helping others, even as it said in Hebrews, "to stir one another on to love and good deeds." We need to help each other move forward in the Christian life. And in that sense we're all called to be leaders. We're all called to help people. We're all called to impact people positively for Christ. And that's something we've tried to accept last week.

And we've said, okay, now let's see how Paul does this. And there are some interesting things in verses 22 and 23. But the key here is in verse 24. How he views his life in light of Christ and the mission that has been given to him by Christ. And just saying it that way should help you realize, okay, that really puts things in perspective, that puts everything in proportion. To say my life, why is it not important? Why aren't you making websites about how great you are, how you should love yourself, care about no one's opinion but your own? Why is it that you're here giving your life for other people?

Well, because I know that compared to the person, the Lord, the King, Christ, he's the one, Jesus has given me this role. And because it's him, I just know that matters. It matters way more than me and what I might kind of reflexively and innately want to do with my life. His agenda, because of who he is, is more important than me. And in that regard, that's a good thing for us to stop and recalibrate ourselves in thinking about on a Sunday morning as we consider the reality of what matters most. I'd like you to think about that and even make that decision afresh this morning. If you're taking notes jot it down that way. "Decide What Matters Most." And right now, I want you to sit here and think, yes, what matters most. Now, Paul's comparing the service that he's been giving and all the specifics of his particular work in this world in light of God giving him this commission, giving him this. And because it's Christ, the second person of the Triune Godhead, he sees that as more important and his life pales in comparison. My agenda is secondary to his agenda because he is more important than me.

Now I just want to know, even though I've seen it stuck on the back window of your car and because I think you know theoretically God's more important than you, let's just all re-decide this morning that what matters most if we're going to think about people objectively, is that God matters more than you do. I mean, you don't have to nod. You don't have to yell out. But you agree with that, right? That God is more important than you.

I was sitting at my desk yesterday and I happened to see two paper clips, a big paper clip and a little paper clip, and they were sitting on my desk and they were in the shadow right next to my computer. And my computer, I have a little box here and I'm happy to say, a couple of boxes there that compute things. And I'm happy to report that I don't lack for computing power. I got a great, you know, at least a consumer-level piece of equipment. It's high speed, low drag, nifty, cool computer. And it's nice and it's great. And I live most of my life through that computer doing what I do. And next to it I have another box. And that box does a lot of computing stuff. And I happen to be thinking about the paper clips while I was on a break and using those two pieces of computer equipment because I was on the radio live yesterday and I was doing something miraculous through those two boxes.



And I say miraculous, I guess, a GT-2 in a small, miraculous sense in that these pieces of silicon and aluminum and all the boards and all the wafers and stuff that they got and all the wires, all the circuits in them, they were allowing me to talk into a microphone and go through those two boxes and talk to a studio in Chicago and to have that studio in Chicago take calls from all over the country. I took some calls from Bermuda, a tiny little Island in the middle of the Atlantic, taking calls to that studio and that studio piping it through those boxes into my headphones, and then me responding to those people with Bible answers in that microphone through that computer sent back to Chicago in a studio there to an engineering hub, to a bunch of terrestrial radio stations, 230 stations beaming it across wherever the cities were, metropolitan areas where those towers were to get people in their homes and in their cars listening on their drive to the park on Saturday morning.

And I thought to myself, that is amazing. But I wasn't thinking about that at the time. I was on a commercial break looking at those two pieces of tin or whatever they're made of. And I was literally, I'm not kidding, I was musing about how amazing those little tiny, twisted pieces of metal are that hold paper together just so easily and don't leave a hole in it. And they just go in there and do that. And I thought to myself, that's just like, that's amazing. I literally was asking myself, who made that? I mean, that was a great idea, the little twisty shape. And I thought that's cool.

Then I woke back up and realized I was on the radio and the commercial was over. And I went back to doing what I was doing, and I was thinking about how nifty those paper clips were as they sat right next to a bunch of other metal and other stuff, silicon, that was doing its work to do something that was just a minor miracle, having me interact with people in Bermuda so I could answer Bible questions and have it beamed to the person in Idaho. That was a phenomenal thing if you think about what that set of computer boxes could do as opposed to paper clips, which I think are pretty nifty.

But I think you would say objectively the computer is greater than the paper clip. And I don't think you have to think very long to say the computer is greater than a paper clip. That's why the computers cost a lot more than the paper clips. And if I ask you are you more important than God? I hope you would say no. And you would recognize that even my silly little illustration, you would say the infinite distance between me and God is far different than even the paper clip and the computer. Even though you can look in the mirror on your best day after you do something amazing and all your coworkers honor you with some award, you can say I'm pretty nifty. And you can think you're pretty nifty and you can think you're worth it and you could think you deserve it, and you think you should care about no one but yourself. But you do have to realize we all live in the shadow of the computer and you're just the paper clip when you think about it.

And if you want to consider this from a biblical perspective, go home and spend some time meditating on Psalm 8, which reminds us of the majesty of God. And we speak of the name of God and the greatness of God being so majestic. I mean, high above everything. And then it gets to the middle of the psalm and asked this question, what is a paper clip that God would even give thought to? "What is man that God would even be mindful of him?" See, you need



that recalibration, don't you? So that you can sit here listening to me talk about the Bible and say, "Yes, God is greater than me." And I just think we need that because you're not going to get that reinforced throughout the week by the people in the world who are going to philosophize with you about how important you are and how you need to be true to yourself and how you're worth it, how you deserve it, how you should care about number one, which is you. You're not number one. God is number one. And he is so infinitely number one, we need to think of ourselves as so small compared to him if you want to use spatial analogies, we are small, he is big, we are weak, he is strong. We can go back to the Sunday school classes, you know, across the campus here and learn the basics that we're teaching our kids and we need to remember it. You are not as great as God.

Now, God tells us to do some things and there are things that I want to do. I have things I want to do. That's my agenda. And God has things that he wants me to do. All the paper clips have instructions from the great computer, and that should be compared to my wants and my list. And we should say, okay, greatness of God, smallness of me. I can do some nifty things like a paper clip can, but I'm not God. And God has said, here's what I want the paper clips to do. And then the paper clip is saying, here's what I want to do. And we should say, okay, my agenda, his agenda, which one's more important? And I would say it's infinitely incomparable. There's just no comparison. And so whatever God's agenda is for you, that's more important.

Now, if I can do this, let me step out of that for a second and say, just think if you can about the common grace of God setting up the world the way that he has and allowing us to experience some things where his agenda about how human beings ought to operate is instilled not just to Christians, and they're not revealed to us in Scripture, although they're spoken of in Scripture, they're basically impressed upon humanity by God in the natural revelation in this world. Things like this: the importance for the human race to continue on and to propagate. So what we'll do here is create all this stuff that goes on within you and within that other person, and there's this romantic attraction and a connection, and it leads to some kind of commitment and covenant and marriage. And then we have the product of all of that, which is human life. And this amazing miracle takes place, and here comes the crystal ball of flesh that comes into the world. And all of a sudden now, when those little squinty eyes start to open, everyone falls instantly in love with the kid, no one more than mom and dad.

And here they are now, all of a sudden, because of God's arrangement in natural theology, how he says, "Listen, here's my plan. My plan is the propagation of the world to be fruitful and multiply." People are being fruitful and multiplying. And in my arrangement, I have made it to where now you and all that you would naturally want to do as a finite paper clip is for you to set aside your agenda and now you're going to do my agenda, which is to care for your children. And as we recently read through the book of Job in our Daily Bible Reading, there are some parts of the creation that don't even reflect the wisdom of caring for their young. It speaks of the ostrich, if you might remember that passage, and the realities that God by his grace, has instilled in us his agenda for caring for little babies so they might grow up and become independent and shoot off into the world into adulthood.



But he's allowed us to experience his agenda imprinted upon us to where it really overrides our desires. And we start setting aside our agenda for the little ball of flesh that sleeps in the bassinet. Do you follow me on this? And I'm saying, if that little ball of flesh starts screaming out at 2:30 in the morning, even though I'd like to say I'm not interested, I want a pillow over my head. I'm not going to deal with this. Right? We instantly figure out by God's common grace and the programming of us made in the image of God, we start to set aside some of our agenda to go deal with the agenda of a screaming baby. And that continues on, as any parent will tell you, who has any experience, it's just not when they're in the bassinet. Right? The sacrifice, the grief you put up with, the cost involved, we all start doing all of this and watching how to grow into maturity is to start setting aside some of our agenda for the agenda ultimately of God.

Now, is that the interest of the infant to get fed in the middle of the night or get changed? Absolutely. But this is God's arrangement and God has said this is how it works. Lots of examples we could give of that in natural theology. Let me just tell you now in special revelation, God has said now here's how it works if you're going to be a Christian. You want to be a Christian, it's not about you just figuring out on some mountaintop that you need to be right with God, confess your sins, trust in Christ, get saved, BAM, done. You got your name now written in heaven. It's great. Everything's fine. God says no. You are going to be a part of a community of people. You're going to be a part of the community of people who now are going to be something so integrated we're going to call this the body of Christ. And in the body of Christ, you have a role to play that goes beyond your agenda. You set your agenda in the back seat and you put the community's agenda in front of your own. You start serving them just like you would a child in a sense of self-sacrifice to be able to say, here is what God has called me to do.

Now, that may be partly innate, I suppose, as we start to recognize our need for social connections and all the rest. But God has to prompt us along by saying here's the right thing to do when you're part of a church. Not to mention at the very outset of Jesus calling his disciples to himself, he says, come follow me, and I'll not just make you a part of the body of Christ. "Come follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." You're also going to be a light in a dark world. You're also going to propagate my message of calling people persuasively as though God were making his appeal through us, to be reconciled to God. So I'm going to call you to two specific things that are going to involve other people and taking the agenda I have for you because I'm greater than you and therefore my agenda prevails over your agenda. I want you now to be an ambassador outside the walls of the church, and I want you to be a servant to the body of Christ within the walls of the church. And he's saying my agenda is more important.

And Paul caught that so clearly that he says my life, it's not of any value. It's not precious to myself. I just want to finish the course. And this course is what I've been given, the service that I've been given. And he's thinking primarily, at least in the way he describes it here, of the work he's done evangelistically as a missionary. But trust me, he's settled into this pastoral role for three and a half years in Ephesus, and he knows what it is to shepherd the flock within the walls of the church. And he's writing all these letters about pastoral concerns. And



so he knows this is why my life comes not just second, but way, just cavernously way into the back seat, because I want to see the greatness of God's agenda prevail in my life, even if it means the sacrifice of my own personal interests, my comforts, the conveniences of my life. It's secondary. This is what I want.

That is the key. It is the key to the whole thing. And you and I need it all the time because you're not going to get it in the world. This week you're not going to have people reminding you unless you're listening to some Christian radio station or you're reading a good Christian book or you're streaming some kind of sermon, you're not going to hear people say, you know what's more important? God is more important than you. You know what's more important? God's agenda for whatever he's assigned to you is more important than whatever it is you want to do this week. You're not going to hear a lot of that. So it's time for us to say, whoa, this is the key to successful life. This is why at the end of this speech, they're hanging on his neck crying because they can't even believe he's going away.

But he is going away, which is the amazing part of this passage in verse 22. He's leaving them. This is what he's doing. Look again at verse 22, "Now, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem." I'd think, why would you go to Jerusalem? What's there for you? I don't even know. I don't know what's going to happen to me there, but "I'm constrained by the Spirit." Now, I know there's more to that sentence we'll get to in a second. But look what he says. "I'm constrained by the Spirit" to leave you and to go on to Jerusalem. Now, that's a critically important thing for us to recognize. But it all is predicated and founded on verse 24, which is who's more important? The Lord Jesus. Well, what's more important? His course that he set out for me and the course set out for me is not going to be the one that I would choose for myself if I were just thinking about my relationships, my comfort, the kinds of comfortable situations I'm used to. I would probably stay here and in Ephesus and finish out my career and retire there as a pastor, an elderly pastor in Ephesus.

But instead I'm constrained by the Spirit. And the Spirit has got some adjustments coming in my life and he's forcing this issue for me. And so I have to go. Why? I consider my life as nothing. I just want to finish the course, and the course is taking me into a different arena. Number two on your outlines, you better expect the same. You better "Expect God's Adjustments" to your life. You're going to have them and you're going to have them even, by the way, if and you can say objection, and say, "Hey, there are pastors who live out their career in their churches and there are people like me that may stay in the same house for 50 years, raise my family here, bring my grandkids back here. I might be here... You tell me I got to leave geographically to be a godly person." I'm not saying that. I'm saying you better be ready. And it better not be your goal or your idol to stay where you're at.

But even if he keeps you right where you're at, I guarantee you this, there are going to be adjustments along the way even in what I just said. The way you parent your kids now I guarantee you that's not the way it's going to be ten years from now. Your roles continue to change. The things that God calls you to do, even in your relationships with non-Christians. The way that you deal with them, the way that you interact with them, the way you discuss the gospel with them, the way that you're able to answer the apologetic questions that they ask,



the concerns that they have, the defense of the gospel, how you weather the whole process of leading people to Christ in the world and the way that you serve people within the church, those are always going to involve adjustments, always. Because God is continuing to invest in you. But you need to see that this is the Spirit compelling him to leave Ephesus and the work that he's doing even in Achaia and Macedonia, and to go back to Jerusalem.

By the way, let me just step out of this for a second to remind you 100 sermons in, that at the beginning of Acts I told you that because all the commentaries like to make this point and so it's not original with me but it's a good point to make. And that is if you read the Acts of the Apostles, that's the formal title of the book that we've become used to throughout church history, the Acts of the Apostles, you find the Spirit making these moves. Like when they all congregated in Jerusalem, you know, not that it's equivalent, but it's like the Tower of Babel. They were there, it was strong, they had a mega-church going and the apostles were pastoring it. And then God says, no, no, no, I told you to reach "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth." So persecution breaks out in the Church and God, by his Spirit, scatters them when they didn't plan on it, they were comfortable where they were at.

Paul here again, "compelled by the Spirit" to move on from what he's doing, and he's going to go now to testify in Rome and he's going to get arrested in Jerusalem and we'll read about all that, Lord willing, as we continue through the book. But the reality of it is that God is working his plan throughout the book. And that's why the commentators like to say and I mentioned it 100 sermons ago, this could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is building his Church and he's using people like Peter and Stephen and Philip and Paul to get it done. And as he moves them around on the chessboard we understand that God, particularly the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead who is guiding the construction of the first generation of the Church, is making it all happen.

And in that regard, you need to know, again, he is greater than we are. And when he wants to make a change to what I do or how I do it, or where I live, or what kind of ministry I'm involved in or what kind of evangelism I do, he has the right to do it, and he's moving people around the chessboard all the time. And you need to say, okay. Why? Because I am his servant. All I want to do is finish the course. And if the course is going to turn this way, just because I'm used to going that way, I'm going to turn the course wherever God takes me. God is sovereign and sometimes those sovereign changes become very clear for two reasons. Let me just if I can go down another level on this, think with me. There are changes that take place because if you get the first point right, which is that God matters more than me, his agenda matters more than mine, then you start opening yourselves up to opportunities that you never would have before.

There are some of you, and I've watched it happen, you come to church, you get saved, you become a Christian and you are like in a certain, you know, cast of life in terms of how you are designed and what you do and the things you like to do in your free time. And then all of a sudden you get turned on to the fact that God is a God who's got a plan. His agenda matters more than you. And you start saying, well, then, however, God would like to use me. And before I know it, Mr. Big Executive who is making a lot of money in Irvine is out here with a



whistle around his neck on a Thursday night and a red shirt on running games for little sweaty kids at AWANA. And I think, wow, that's something I never would have expected. And guess what? It's something he never would have expected. And it's happening because when he recognizes who should set the agenda for his life, all of a sudden now there are opportunities that open up and he feels compelled to move forward. He never would have unless he got the first point right. He's got to understand God is greater. His agenda matters more.

So you're going to have this draw to ministry opportunities you never had before. But it starts with this: God's agenda matters. He'd like to use you to bring people forward, maybe even kids, right? Maybe it's children. Some people think, "I don't know how to lead this whole series about, you know, bringing people along. I'm not very far in it." And that's my point. It doesn't matter how little you know about the Christian life. There's some area where you can help people move forward, even if it's children. Right? Getting a foundation for life in programs where they learn the Bible and you have some role in that. This is how God works in changing your schedules, changing your priorities, changing the way you spend your money, sometimes just because you've opened yourself up to the fact that I'm looking for God's opportunities to use me, to be a servant to him. I want to be open to whatever might open up. It might be an announcement that someone's making. "Wow, I should do that. I had never thought about that. But I'm seeing now that here I am. Send me. I just need to know where I need to go."

Secondly, and I'll get back to the first category, it could be forced upon you by the sovereign circumstances. We're going to find this in Jerusalem when a bounty is put on his head, he gets taken to Caesarea, he's put on trial, he's put in prison, and then he's hauled off to Caesar. That whole thing, he was ultimately conscripted. He did not have a choice as to when he was going to get on that ship and leave because the circumstances beyond his life were now sovereignly moving him. And it may be that way for you. Right? Something massive might happen to your health and change the complete schedule of your life. And again, all I'm trying to say is you need to say, hey, this is an adjustment. It's foisted upon me by the sovereignty of God, and I need to just keep on looking. My job is to find God's agenda. How can I serve? I want to finish my course. And he's going to make a left turn or a right turn. Or move me up a hill or down a hill. Whatever this is, I just want to know. How can I finish the course God has for me to serve him by being an ambassador outside the walls of the church, by being a servant within the church?

And I guarantee you, whatever is happening, your health crisis, your relational crises, your financial collapse, your house being foreclosed, whatever is happening to you, I assure you God is using those things sovereignly to work out his purpose in your life. You know that verse that's quoted all the time? Romans 8:28. You know what it says. "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to" living their lives to the fullest and being worth it and loving themselves in all ways, always. Do you remember that verse? "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to HIS purpose." Right?



So what you're looking for here is God sovereignly things have happened. Like the thorn in the flesh, and Paul reflexively cries out to God to take this thorn of the flesh away. I have a disease, I have an ailment. It's a lot of pain. I don't want this. I don't want this tumor. I don't want this cancer. I don't want this problem. I don't want this broken leg. I don't want it. God, please fix this all. I don't want it to be a chronic problem in my life. He prays. He prays. He prays. And guess what? God didn't take it away. You know this story. Second Corinthians 12. And then he says, oh, that's okay. "God's grace is sufficient." Now, think about that, grace. His favor on me is sufficient. All I care about is serving him in the context he sovereignly puts me in. And I'm looking for opportunities.

I can't tell you how important that is not to gripe about the circumstances. You could go blind this week, have some terrible ailment. You're blind. I just want you to think this through. John Chapter 9, there's a blind man. And they said, what in the world went wrong here? Now he was born blind. So they were baffled by it because they always look for cause and effect. And this is God's punishment for some sin. Well, they were wrong in their theology, but Jesus said, "You seem to know this man is blind because he is going to glorify God in this blindness." And of course Christ is going to reverse that to become this huge thing in the synagogue. And you can read about it all in John Chapter 9. But what's the point? A disability is there upon this man and that man is going to use that disability. And you don't get there until the end of the passage and see how he's even using it in his parents' lives because of the reality of God wanting to have him walk the course in which he was going to glorify God.

So whatever the situation we got to say, you could be Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael or Azariah yanked out of Jerusalem because Nebuchadnezzar's army has marched in and taken your capital city, gone to the most sacred place in all of your worship center on the Temple Mount, taken the gold vessels out of the temple and dragged them off with his armies back to the temple of Marduk in Mesopotamia and put all those things in there and saying, see Marduk won over Yahweh. The God of the Babylonians defeated the God of the Israelites, succeeded, "I win. I'm going to take the best of the land. I'm going to take the best of the young people, the brightest, most intelligent, healthy people. I'm going to bring them in and conscript them into service in my kingdom." Before I get back to the first category, which I said I would get to, this is the foisted upon you will of God to change your circumstances. That's an adjustment, a nice way of talking about it I guess.

Turn to Daniel Chapter 1 with me. I just want to show you a verb that shows up twice in the first nine verses. It's super helpful for us just to realize God's sovereign hand. Now, if I asked you if the good guys, if they're the people of God, the children of Abraham, the people of the promise, the people of the covenant, and you had even godly men like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, and they're godly men and they love God. They want to keep his rules. They want to do what he says. They want to be of service to God. If their city got ransacked, their temple got defiled and desecrated, and they became slaves, separated from their families and put into a foreign land. If I said, is that good or bad? You're going to say that's bad. And I would agree with you, that's bad.



But even in the bad of this situation, even in the bad of Paul's thorn in the flesh, even in the badness of not being able to see to be the blind man in John 9, here's what we cannot miss. And it's the verb found in verse 2. Daniel Chapter 1. Look at verse 2. I just want to remind you of God's hand in all of this. Daniel Chapter 1 verse 2. You might remember all this happened because of the sin of Israel. Johoiakim was the king of Judah. But here's the fourth word in the sentence of the English Standard Version, verse 2. "And the Lord GAVE Johoiakim of Judah into his hand," that's Nebuchadnezzar's hand, "and some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god."

Okay. Who did this? "Well, Nebuchadnezzar did it." Who did it? "Nebuchadnezzar's army did it." Who did it? "Well, the sin of the people in Judea did it." No. The Bible is very clear. God did this. Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 11. "God works everything after the counsel of his will." You can hate that doctrine if you want because you can't understand it. But the reality of it is this is God at work. And if you don't have that, you'll bemoan all the circumstances of God adjusting your life. And when you get your life adjusted, you should like Paul say, all I'm concerned about is the favor of God and the opportunity to finish my course. How can I win people to Christ and how can I serve Christians to simplify it? That's what I'm looking for.

And let me prove it to you with the same verb down in verse 9. Are you there in Daniel 1? Look at verse 9. After Daniel, remember the whole thing about the food? He resolved himself, not to eat the food along with his three friends. Verse 9, "And God GAVE Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs." And so the favor of God was transferred now to the people who were his captors. And now all of a sudden Daniel's going to have a platform to do some things in an influential way. God cares about his ministry. God is the chess master as I often say. He's moving pieces onto the board and then he's moving them into the slot he wants them. And guess what? If you like your slot as the pastor of Ephesus, be careful. You may not be there your whole life. He might move you to another part of the board. And even if you're in the same church, the ministry you have may not be the ministry he wants you to have next month, next year.

And here's one reason why. Because he continues to invest in you. Back to category A. Category A is things that I say, "Here's an opportunity. Maybe I should take that opportunity." And that causes an adjustment. You may be teaching fifth-grade boys at our church for years, but maybe God is going to move you into something else. And that happens often because of the investment God is making in you through experience, through learning, through teaching, through all the things God is going to move you into something else. And you'll have to say goodbye tearfully to the area in which you've served and you're moving into something else because God is investing in you. We try to make that very, very clear in everything that we do, that this is an investment as God makes it in you. You become a steward, a steward of the varied manifold grace of God as it's put in some old translations in First Peter 4, and you as that steward now have to steward that in a way that's going to be effective and "to whom much is given," to quote more Scripture, what is required, right? "Much." "To whom much is given, much is required."



And here's the thing about the Christian life. You continue to progress. You continue to learn. Matter of fact, pull out your bulletin and look at this front little picture here of Mr. Anonymous, a faceless man, he's climbing this mountain, this cliff. He's climbing this cliff because that's your sanctification and you're always going to be climbing. You get to know God better this year than you did last year. You know more of the Bible this year than you knew last year. You're going to continue to move up. Now, you can take your focus and continue to look up and say, "I can't wait to be the godly Christian that the Apostle Paul was." Well, you're never going to be that godly Christian unless you recognize that one of the hands of the faceless black man here is to pull his hand back and say, "I got to pull someone else up." And then there's someone here that needs to move up because you have been invested in and he is going to be pulled up by your work and your ministry and your service. Do you see how this works?

You are growing as a Christian, and that's going to mean that you're going to have more opportunities to say I need to have a ministry post, I need to have a place to serve, I need to have a place that is recognized as something that's helpful, where my help is helpful and I'm ready to serve. Don't get comfortable where you're at. Here's one thing about the Christian life you should know. There's always going to be adjustments from God, always going to be adjustments. If they're not foisted upon you by the sovereign hand of God that you can't change, there'll be things you volunteer for and you'll say, I can't believe I volunteered for that. I wouldn't have ever done that five years ago. But I'm doing it now and I'm ready.

I'm ready to go do evangelism on the campus at Irvine College with our Bridge ministry. I'm ready to do that. I'm ready to go door to door on Saturdays and share the gospel. And you're going to start doing things because God has invested more in you. You've taken some classes. You've read some books. You've had some experiences. You've counseled people through their trials. And God's going to say, great, I've invested in you. Now you're going to invest more in those people in this part of the body of Christ, because you're constantly saying, I'm moving up and trying to bring other people with me. That's the picture. That's this whole thing. If that sounds like leadership and that's a scary word. Now I don't want to think of it that way. Just think of it this way. You're pulling people forward.

One of the ways we do that in our church and I think you know this because you've seen this little manual around. Have you seen this little manual around? 250 pages. I guess it's not that little but here it is. It's called our Partner's Program. We encourage people to go through our Partner's Program and a lot of people go through this program, which teaches you about the elements of the gospel. Make sure we understand that. Look at the attributes of God. How to think that through, how to study the Bible. How do I go through basic biblical interpretation? What about my prayer life? How should that work? What are the problems that I can have with that? Fighting temptation. What is the church? How is it structured? This little Partner's manual rooted in biblical truth trying to take you through ten sequential topics that will help root you and establish you in the Christian life. A lot of people get into this because they say, "I want to grow. I want to grow, I want to grow." And they get into it and they start to grow.



Then they get to chapter 10. They should know this from chapter 1, but it starts to become very real to them, the whole point of this is that they will take this same material and grab someone else and start taking them through the Partner's Program and all of a sudden it comes from getting to giving. It comes from receiving information and growing to having to help other people grow in the Christian life. That changes everything. You can enjoy the church as a new Christian going through the Partner's Program, I'm in chapter 7 of Partner's, and you just eating it all up. Here's the thing. Church is going to change for you because God is going to invest in you and he's going to use you then to start investing in others. And therefore, when you're pulling into the lot you're not just saying, "I can't wait for a good spiritual meal. I want to learn more from the sermon. I want to meet those Christians that are spurring me on to love and good deeds. I want to go through my chapter in Partner's this week." It's going to be different.

You're going to be like, yeah, here's the person I'm helping through that crisis. Oh, here's the person in my small group I've been praying for. You start to bear the burdens of the people in the church. You start to say, "Now I'm done with this. Who am I taking through this?" And I know some of you have been through this and you don't have to bow your heads right now in shame. But you've been through this program and it's been invested in you, the information. And this is the difference between a one-on-one discipleship relationship and what I'm doing right now. This is a one-way conversation. I'm talking at you. That's called preaching. This is talking WITH another Christian about these elements of my life. Having opportunities to do some Bible study and work through some questions and grapple with some texts.

And this particular way of learning gets you to a place where you realize once I've been invested in I realize now I have tools to help other people. I'm bringing now my arm down to say, "Who can I move up?" And some of you have been through it and you're not taking anybody through this. And I know what you're going to say. "Well, you know, no one called me and they will find me if they want me somewhere." This is your job to go out and find someone on the patio while you're eating your donut this morning and say, "Hey, have you been through the Partner's Program he was talking about? I'm willing to take you through it." But some of you will say, "Oh man, I'm not a teacher. I'm not a preacher. I'm not a certified biblical counselor." You don't need to be any of that. You need to be someone who's got this under their belt and you're willing to say, let me help you.

That microcosm of a ten-week program helps you to understand that the entirety of your Christian life is going to feel that way. God's going to invest in you, and you then are going to invest in others, which is what leadership, affecting people positively for Christ, is all about. And that's never going to happen unless the agenda of God, which we're not saying this is the only way, but it's the way we do it at our church, is always more important than your agenda. It's going to affect your money. It's going to affect your time, it's going to affect the efforts of your life. I understand it. It's going to change things. But that's the priority sorting of saying God is more important than me, his agenda is more important than mine, and that means changes.



Some of you don't have a ministry post right now, but people drive onto this campus say, "I don't have ministry post." They're not coming to more than one service a weekend because they just come to get. Here's what's going to happen when you realize his investment in you requires investment in others. It's going to change your whole experience. You going to come to church, you're going to spend more time here. That's how it works. And so we need to say, that's okay. I'm ready for the adjustment, whether it's something upon me through the sovereign circumstances of God or whether it's me just recognizing, that's right. His agenda is more important than mine. I see the opportunities. I'm going to jump on one of these opportunities and start to invest my life there.

He's leaving something that would have been much more convenient and easy for him, even though it would come with trials to go to something harder. And we know it's going to be harder not only because it's uncertain, bottom of verse 22, now we're back to Acts Chapter 20, not only because it's uncertain, there are parts of it that are uncertain, but because of the certain part. And the certain part is that he knows this: "that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me." And I'm thinking if I'm listening to him saying this, I'm saying, "Paul, well, that's why we don't want you to go." Duh. Have you not read the website -- Reminders to love yourself? I mean, you shouldn't be going into something that you know is going to be more difficult. Imprisonment, afflictions. No, that's dumb.

Here's the deal. You are going to have within your life a compulsion, either through circumstances or desires of opportunity to serve God and it's going to move you into a season or a place or a position in your life and you know it's going to be harder. And all I'm telling you is something very familiar. I don't need to belabor this because you've heard it many times from this platform. You should not let the pain deter you. Number three, "Don't Let the Pain Deter You." It's going to be hard. You're going to pull onto the campus of this church, if you really begin to live this way and you are going to have experiences that are going to be more difficult than the experiences you had when you weren't thinking this way. And all I'm saying is, it's okay. That's okay. Everything in life that is valuable in a fallen world, it's going to cost you some pain. It's going to be difficult. This is the expectation. There's no doubt about it.

One passage on this maybe two, go to Second Corinthians Chapter 6. Second Corinthians Chapter 6. If we are afraid of the difficulties. And let me just illustrate this. I said maybe two, I'll just give you the second one verbally. Numbers Chapter 13. The children of Israel went into the desert and they were supposed to go into the Promised Land, and this was the opportunity they had just to trust God and do it. But they sent in twelve spies. And the twelve spies, as you might remember, ten of them came back and said, "Whoa, did you see how high the walls are in those cities? Man, we saw some of the guys working out, you know, and they're huge and they got a lot of weaponry and their armies looked pretty organized. And yeah, the land is great. Look at the fruit, produce, milk and honey. This is a great place, but it is a lot harder than we thought." That's what ten of the spies said, Mike Fabarez paraphrase. But that's what the ten said.



The other two who you name your children after and our nursery is full of them. Joshua's and Caleb's. What did they say? "It's okay. We know it's hard, but it doesn't matter. Yeah, there are some big people there. But God said this is the course for us. This is our course. Here we are at Kadesh Barnea and it's time for us to walk across and make this happen. So let's go." You name your kids after those people because why? Because those are the kinds of people that we want to be. You want your kids to be. And that means that it doesn't matter if it's difficult. Paul doing what he was called to do, including leaving Ephesus to go to Jerusalem, was going to be really hard.

But notice how he describes this. And I want you to picture a musical score, you musicians, you know musical notation, you know, the Latin words above the score. You know one of these things looks like a less than sign and a greater than sign. This is telling us how loud to play it. Watch this and imagine a musical score as I start to read for you here in Second Corinthians Chapter 6. Look at verse 4. "But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger." Do you see how this is going? I mean, you're walking down the steps of a horrible list of things that no one is going to say, "here is real living!" This is horrible. "Endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights and hunger." I don't want to sign up for that.

And then right there in the middle of it, verse 6, "by purity." I'm trying to please the Lord in this. "In knowledge," continues to grow, "in patience," which gets stronger, "in kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left." Can you see Kadesh Barnea in all this? This is hard. It's going to be hard. I'm going to have a strap... I'm going to have to sharpen my sword. I don't know how we're going to do it, a lot of strategy. We're going to sit out there and sweat all day in the sun. And there are a lot of people to defeat. It's hard, hard, hard, hard, hard. But then there's this shift in this list of his looking back on his ministry, "purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, the power of God, weapons of righteousness for the right and the left through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We're treated as imposters, yet are true."

Verse 9, "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything." That's a masterful piece of artwork right there, that whole section. I mean, amazing. Down into the depths of the basement, up out of the stairway, and then BAM, BAM, back and forth. The antiphonal contrast of these concepts. This is rich. What's the whole point? Yeah. Your life is going to be harder when you put God's agenda before your own. Your life's going to be hard if you try and win people for Christ in your family and in your workplace, in your neighborhood. Yes, your life will be more difficult when you start to see church and your church as a place where you serve. Absolutely.

You're bringing people up through Partner's. If you're leading a small group, if you're engaged in the kinds of ministries we have all over, it's going to be harder, but it's going to be better. I mean, through all the things you go through, it's going to... you'll be more powerful. I mean, if



only the ten would have agreed with Caleb and Joshua and said, yes, let's take this land. It would have been rich. Would they have sweated? Yes. Would they get blood on their hands? Yes. Would it be hard? Absolutely hard. But they would have come through it with their chests filled with air and a sense of honor, a sense of nobility.

I know ministry and service and leadership in affecting people is hard work. I get that. But we need to see it as a commitment to the first point of this whole sermon. God is greater. His agenda is more important than mine. And saying if that's the case, as the doors open, as the attraction and compulsion to do something greater for his glory starts to present itself and I start to walk down that hall, right up that stairway. I need to just say I'm going to do whatever the next thing is. I will do whatever comes next.

I love that line and I grab that line and you might remember it or know it, but from a position in a story about a horrible criminal. And I thought of that when I saw this video this last week of a mall here in Southern California where, you know, criminal activity is caught so often on cameras, particularly the kinds of crime that's taking place in the malls. This is a mall. When three guys came in with hoods on into a jewelry store with hammers, some of you saw it. If not, you can imagine it because it's playing on a constant loop with a lot of other crimes going on in the country. And these guys come in. And here's what I learned by watching the video. The cases of glass in those jewelry places are thicker than you would think. They all brought hammers in and they start banging on the case. And it didn't break immediately. And they're there. They got a bag in one hand, they got a hammer in the other, they got a mask over their face. And they're in there as people are walking their kids through the mall and they're smashing these glass cases with Rolexes and gold chains and diamonds in them. And one guy starts to break through and the other guy, he's just winding up like a baseball player, smashing on them, and finally he gets it smashed. And the other guy, he didn't hit on it and go, "I can't get it, Fred. You know I can't."

And he's like they were there with a purpose, a selfish purpose, a criminal purpose, to do whatever they had to do to serve their own selfish thievery. They were there to serve that, and they were going to do whatever it took. And if some mom came up and said, "No, no, no, you shouldn't do that," they wouldn't say, "Oh, yeah, you're right, I'm sorry," and put down their hammer. They would have done whatever it took. If some security guard walked in and said, "Hey guys, stop it." They would have done whatever it takes, even if it meant going into their waistband and pulling out their handgun and killing someone, they would have done whatever comes next because they had a purpose and they were committed to that.

That's maybe a bad analogy for you. But we're marching in the other direction. We're not here to steal or to hurt people. We're here to help people. We're here to pluck people from the fire. We're here to build up the body of Christ. We're committed to righteousness. And I hope we're as committed to righteousness and to God's service of his people as much as the criminal is to getting stuff in his loot bag. I hope that you're as committed as they are. And here's the thing about them. Whatever obstacle were to present itself next, they would have fought through it because they know what they're there for. And I'm just saying, do we know what we're here for? And are you ready to do whatever comes next?



And for some of you, it's signing up for Partner's. For some of you, it's taking someone through Partner's. For some of you it's going to a small group. For some of you it's leading a small group. For some of you is opening your mouth up about the gospel at work. For some of you it's taking someone to lunch or bringing them in your house and explaining to them that their objections to Christ don't make sense. Whatever it is that you going to the next level, taking a class at Compass Bible Institute, training to do something you never thought you'd do five years ago, thinking about doing something in some kind of missions work, being a part of a church plant, going into ministry. I don't know what God's got for you, but it's moving you into some kind of adjustment, I'm sure, for the glory of God, because you are so committed to the greatness of God and his agenda that you will do whatever comes next, whatever comes next. Whatever comes next.

God, we'd like to be people committed to you and to your cause. Because you're certainly worthy in what you have done for us and what your Son has sacrificed on our behalf. As the old hymn writer says, demands our life, our soul, and our all. God, we see people all the time in our culture so committed to their selfish endeavors. Sometimes their criminal endeavors as I just called to mind. But God, we want to be committed to a righteous endeavor. It helps us to say things, to do things, to engage in things, to sign up for things, to enroll in things that we never thought we would do because all of our concern about our own comfort or self-preservation or protection or our own stuff, our own agenda has taken a backseat to your agenda. Because we just start with the basic reality that God is greater than I am. And therefore it's got to affect everything in my life as I seek to serve you and finish the course that you've given to me.

So God help us all, whatever the next thing is for us this week to do it. Maybe it's going out to the lobby right now and signing up for Partner's or finding someone to take through our Partner's Program and reporting it at the Partner's table this morning. But maybe it's just getting involved, getting enrolled, doing something that is going to help contribute to the common good of the church as a good steward of God's varied grace. Work in our hearts to have us take that next step and be happy about the adjustment, even if it's an adjustment that we are not signing up for, one that we would never choose. Maybe we just need to look at our circumstances differently. So yeah, the cities are more fortified than we thought, or this pain is more difficult, more severe than I thought. But I'll rejoice in my weakness if this is the course you've called me to and in this weakness I'm going to find an opportunity to serve the people of God and reach the lost for Christ. Help us in that regard. To be committed to evangelism and discipleship in a way we never have been before.

In Jesus name. Amen.