



How God Works in You – Part 8

The Callings and Purposes of God

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There's an interesting feature in God's description of the eternal home that he says he's going to give to his people. In the last two chapters of the Bible this is repeated twice. The first time in Revelation Chapter 21 verse 25, and it simply says about our eternal home "there will be no night there," there will be no night there. And then in the last chapter in verse 5, Revelation 22:5, it says it again, "And night will be no more." It's an interesting way to describe the place that we're going to live in. And you've got to understand that this reference, along with so many others in the Bible regarding night, it certainly is a description of more than just the absence of light. There is a sense in which the concept of night in the Bible carries with it a deep sense of meaning and understanding. Like when Jesus was approached by Nicodemus in John Chapter 3, you might remember this leader of the Jews had come to Jesus. And it says in John 3:2 that he "came to Jesus by night." That's a weird, even clunky way to say that in our English text, "by night." If this were just trying to describe what time it was you would say "at night," that's how we would normally say it. But the translators of the English Standard Version are trying to carry something of the meaning of the original Greek New Testament, the language of the New Testament in Koine Greek there are certain ways to describe the concept of night, and in this case this noun is delivered to us in what's called the dative case. Well, that's the way you would expect that at least, the dative case, which describes just certainly a simple sense of it just happened at night, it was at night.

And while we would expect the dative case here, we don't have the dative case. This particular noun "night" is presented in the genitive case. And the genitive case in Greek here is describing something of the quality of the cover under which Nicodemus came. He came, as some grammarians have rightly put it, at a night kind of time. It was the quality. It was the sense in which he was coming in the dark. He was coming with more than just it wasn't light outside anymore. But he was coming under the fear and trepidation that is later revealed that the other leaders of the Jews were afraid to come to Jesus because they were afraid they would be ostracized if they were seen as going to seek information from Jesus. There was a sense of uncertainty. And certainly as the text unfolds there in John 3, there's a sense of confusion, a lack of information, a lack of data. There were questions in wondering and concern and fear and trepidation. All that was true that he comes to Jesus at a night kind of time.

That's too complicated of an explanation. Maybe more simply we can all understand the way the darkness is described in Psalm 23, the most famous psalm in the psalter, where it says that the Good Shepherd, as David is recording it, is going to lead us sometimes through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. That lyrical, poetic expression, we kind of get the sense of it just by hearing the juxtaposition of those words. But there is this valley of the shadow of death. That certainly is bringing us, again, that sense of trepidation and fear that we were lacking knowledge and information and data. We don't know what's going to happen. Are we going to live to see tomorrow? It's a scary path that sometimes the Good Shepherd takes us down.



It's good when we run into the concept of night in the Bible to say, well, is there more to this than just describing the time at which these things take place? As we've been studying through the book of Acts, we've reached this very fearful, trepidatious time in Paul's life where he's at threat of dying every single day. And I mean that literally in the narrative every day it seems like people are wanting to kill him. We might remember back in our series that they were throwing their cloaks off on the Temple Mount when Paul was speaking to them and they were picking up stones. I mean, that was the idea. They were rolling up their sleeves to kill him. And then he's taken into the barracks, you might remember, by the Romans. They were just saying, well, what's going on here? And he goes and finds himself strapped to a pillar and they're about to fillet his back and take him down the path they took Jesus down to whip him and crucify him. At least that's what it looked like. And Paul then, by God's grace and providence, is able to pull out his Roman citizenship card and say, well, wait a minute, I'm a Roman citizen. And again he gets out of this jam. And then later he gets sent, after the incarceration with the Romans, he sent over to the Sanhedrin, the court of the Jews, which is right across the Temple Mount there. And they sat there ensconced in the leadership role and authority of Israel. And Paul, then, by God's grace again, gives this sense of what it is to say Jesus is risen from the dead and you guys don't even agree on whether there's an afterlife or not.

So the Pharisees and Sadducees were fighting each other and yet we ended that passage and it seems like, okay, he gets out of that jam and he does. But in verse 10, you might remember where we ended last time, it says there was such dissension among the crowd and such violence was fomenting in this crowd that the Romans now looking on with ears on the ground, it's that they thought that Paul would be torn into pieces by them. And so they again take him into custody and take him back to the Roman side of the Temple Mount. And it's just every single day, it's like people want to kill Paul. So we reached verse 11 in our study of Acts 23. And it starts with the description of what time it was. And I do think, again, this is not just a sense well it just happened that this was at night, although it was at night. I mean, there's much more for us to consider that it's nighttime. It's nighttime in every single day. The Apostle Paul's life is under threat. Talk about walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Paul clearly must have been feeling that and wondering the uncertainty and the trepidation and where's this going and the concern for his life.

And of course, in this verse you'll find, if you look at it with me, Acts 23 verse 11, in this nighttime of Paul's incarceration for like the third time, he all of a sudden now has Christ appear to him in a vision. And even what Jesus says to him in this vision makes it clear that this night was pretty dark. It's a reminder to us when we read a passage like this how godly people make it through the nighttime, how they get through the darkness. I mean, just like when you're a little kid, right? The dark is a scary thing and you need a nightlight just to get through it. And there's that sense in which, even as grownups, you get that sense of a period of your life where it seems like things are dark right now. And the Apostle Paul is going to run through this next dark season and he's going to do it well. He's going to do it in a godly manner. And we want to learn from this passage how we are supposed to respond when things are getting dark for us.



So take a look at this text. We'll study verses 11 through 22 in Acts Chapter 23. So get your eyeballs on this text if you would. I'll read from the English Standard Version as it starts with that phrase that I tried to set us up for the following, here's our word, verse 11, "The following night." And it was and it must have been if you put yourself in the sandals of the Apostle Paul how hard this must have been. What is going to happen next? What happens in the middle of that night is "the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage.'" Why would Jesus show up right then to say that? Well, of course, because this is a time it seems like there's not a lot of courage left. Every single day it just seems to get worse and worse and worse. I mean, glance up at verse 10 that "Paul would be torn into pieces." They were afraid. I mean, they've got him under protective custody right now and who knows what's going to come next. Well, we know what's coming next in verse 12. But this is a hard night and Jesus shows up and says, hey, be brave. I mean, you got to be strong. "Take courage."

Then we got a purpose clause. God is good to give him some sense of where he's going, "For you have testified about the facts about me in Jerusalem." Just as you have done that, "You must testify also in Rome." Now, this is helpful because we've said throughout this series God's work in you that when we get to a place where we think about our lives and God's plan and purpose for our lives, if we're still breathing and you're still listening to the sermon that I'm preaching then we have to assume God's not done with you yet. There's more that he wants to do with your life. So we're going to strategize as we've learned twice in this series, we've got to strategize to make it into a tomorrow. That should be the default perspective of every Christian to live on in the flesh, fruitful labor for me. So I should make that my default orientation. Let's move through this day. Let's get through it. And the Apostle Paul does that under the assumption that God's not done with him yet. But here we have the explicit instruction God's not done with you yet, just like you've been through all this here. You've been testifying and preaching publicly to the masses in Jerusalem. You're going to do the same in Rome so you're going to get to Rome. In other words, you're not going to die here in Jerusalem. It's been pretty bad.

But instead of day breaking in verse 12 and the light shines, ahhh! It's all great now. Instead, the daytime brings more nighttime. Look at verse 12. "When it was day the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Now I got some people who don't like me. But it isn't to this level quite yet. I mean that like, we're not going to have another sandwich until we kill this guy. I mean, what kind of wild-eyed nut was thinking that? Well, there was more than one. Verse 13 says, "There were more than 40 who had made this conspiracy." Think about it. 40 people saying we hate this guy so much we are not going to have another taste of food until he's dead. I mean, this is their life mission. And it isn't just down the road, one day maybe we'll kill him. It's like we're going to kill him right now. I mean, we are not going to eat until we kill him. So talk about nighttime continuing. Talk about the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He's in the middle of it.

Verse 14, so these 40, "They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, 'We've strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.'" Now that's even bold going to the leaders. And we saw the division in the Sanhedrin in the last sermon where they

were at odds with each other. But I mean, really, what's the general feel of it all? Well, they thought these 40 who wanted to kill him could get the leaders to sign off on it and they're bold enough to say it in verse 15. "Now you therefore, along with the council, give notice to the tribune." So talk to the bosses over there in the Roman and Antonia's Fortress over there, get them "to have him," Paul, "brought down to you," the council, "as though you were going to determine his case more exactly." Now remember, it all fell apart. I mean, the Romans had to go in, sweep in and pull him out because they thought he was going to get torn to pieces in verse 10. And now here are these guys saying we're going to kill him. But what you do is you go tell those Romans, tell the big boss, the tribune, you tell him that you're going to get your act together now and you're not going to break into this, you know, riotous mob, and you are going to hear him out and you're going to hear "this case more exactly." And when you do that, and they go from Antonia's Fortress over to this little place, this place where they ensconced the Sanhedrin, the top leaders of Israel, when they're going from one place to the other, here's the thing, we're going to be ready to kill him before he comes near. He won't even make it. That's the plan.

Verse 16. Yeah, he's going to make it to Rome, all right, because God is going to make sure he gets there with things like this. "Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush." Now, a secret among 40 guys is not a really big secret, I suppose. So the word is out, and Paul's nephew somehow is running around here on the Temple Court and he finds out what's going on. "So he went and entered the barracks and told Paul." Now amazing, God's providential care of Paul, we're going to bring here in a way for Paul at least to be notified. And his nephew, I don't know what he's thinking is going to happen, but "Paul called in one of the centurions," when he heard all this, "and said, 'Take this young man to the tribune,' take him to the big Roman boss, "for he has something to tell him." Verse 18, "So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, 'Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you as he has something to say to you. And the tribune took him by the hand, and going aside, asked him privately, 'What is it you have to tell me?' And he said, 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than 40 of their men are lying in ambush for him, for they have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they've killed him. And now they're ready, waiting for your consent.'" If you make this decision, if you say okay, if you let Paul go back, I don't care if you have two soldiers side by side, there are 40 guys who are going to jump Paul and they're going to kill him. So you don't do this. "So the tribune dismissed the young man and charged him, 'Tell no one that you've informed me of these things.'"

Cliffhanger. More next time on what happens. But for today, I just want to take that night before when Paul is sitting there in the dark, just like you would sit there in the dark and wonder what is going to happen next. This has been bad. I've almost been killed by the mob on the Temple Mount. I've almost been beaten and who knows what, maybe executed for all I know, by the Romans. And then I went to the Sanhedrin and they were ready to tear me into pieces. I don't know what's going to happen to me. And in verse 11, Jesus shows up and tells him to "take courage" to say, I got a plan for you, and I'm not done yet.



Let's take those three elements and let's just think this through. Let's just start with this is unpleasant as it is. It's nighttime for Paul and that means more than what time it is. It's a sad, dark, scary, trepidatious time for Paul. And I just want you to know that God in his providence had made that the norm for his life. And he wasn't at a pastor's conference. He wasn't in a missionary conference. When he stood up in Chapter 14 and he went back through the cities where he had won people to Christ, he told the rank-and-file Christians, the rank-and-file Christians in every city, he said this to them, strengthening and encouraging the disciples. He said, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." He says you know what you're going to see in me? A lot of suffering and affliction. The Holy Spirit's made that clear as I go from Antioch and I go to Jerusalem, I just know there's a lot of pain that awaits me. But he says that to every Christian. Oh, yeah, we're going to the kingdom. We can't wait for the kingdom. We're praying your kingdom come. We want Christ to be dispatched to set up this earth the way it's supposed to be. But between here and there, until you hear "enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" between now and the time you get there, Christian, many tribulations. This path, as Jesus put it, "the way is narrow and the way is hard," Jesus said, "that leads to life." That's a hard thing for us to process, but it's important. When I talk about hard, I mean things that naturally would induce trepidation and fear.

And you and I need to be ready for that. We need to know that, number one, if you're taking notes, just put it down, "Expect Some Scary Patches." As the Good Shepherd leads you down the path there are going to be parts of this that will not be green pastures and still waters. They will be the Valley of the Shadow of Death and everything related to it that makes us say, wow, I am afraid. And this passage is an antidote to that. This passage in this text is a help for us. But what we need to start with, as I've said so often from this platform, that forecasts, just like in the weather forecast, are not meant to scare us. They're meant to prepare us. And when Jesus tells us through the voice of the Apostle Paul "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Or when Jesus himself says it in John 16, "In this world you will have tribulation" that is not supposed to scare you. Even though those events are scary, the warnings are meant to prepare you. And there's something about that that's helpful. It helps us adjust our expectations, because there are plenty of people with Bibles standing on stages all across America today, all across America today, telling you that if you trust Jesus well enough you will not have scary times. It'll only be green pastures and still waters. And I'm here to tell you they're wrong because the Bible is super clear. Let me prove it to you from the mouth of God himself in Genesis Chapter 3. Go back to Genesis 3 and let's just see what God promised for the Christian. Will there be some night times for you? Will there be some dark times? Some scary times? The answer, of course, is yes.

And let's just start with the things that scare us. Let's start with the most basic and fundamental thing. Let's just not take this passage in order. Let's just jump around in it and start with the things that I think most people, even when we're little kids, that scare us the most. It starts with the most basic, fundamental natural reaction to something that is scary for everyone from the time we were little kids. When God is responding to the sin of Adam and Eve, look at the passage, what he says here in Genesis Chapter 3. Start in verse 16. Let's just start with what he says to the woman here. "I will surely multiply your..." What's the next

word? "Pain." Pain. Women, what kind of pain is that? That's physical pain, right? That's physical. That's hard physical pain. Well, I'm glad only women have pain, physical pain. Right? Isn't that good? Well keep reading. He says here to the man in verse 17, look at the end of that passage, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life." Now, it's an equal opportunity thing here, right? Pain. Physical pain. Okay?

If you're taking notes here, let's think about the scary times in life. Just like a kid doesn't want to go to the dentist or get a shot because he's afraid of the pain. Here are some things in your future. Physical pain. Letter "A" physical pain. There are going to be some scary times and there are scary things coming for your life as a Christian which you are not exempt from that God promises. This is a promise of God now. Men and women are going to have physical pain and some of you are facing the prospects of that right now. And you're saying this is scary. I don't know how bad this might hurt. This is going to be difficult. It's true. It's going to be difficult.

There are other pains. I think the older we get the more profound these pains are. Let's go back up in this passage to verse 12, when God says to Adam, "Adam, you've just sinned, what's going on here?" Look at verse 12. The man said, hey, do you want to talk about my sin, "the woman whom you gave me to be with me." Well, she's the one. "She gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate it." How's that work for marital bliss at that moment? Eve turns to Adam and says, "What did you say?" Like that's rough. Adam and Eve aren't getting along very well here. Matter of fact, the promise is they won't. Take a look at this, drop down in this passage to the bottom of verse 16, where we quoted the first part, multiplying pain. Look at this. This is a different kind of pain. The bottom of verse 16, "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

Okay, that's the second category here, starting with the blame game and all the tension and mismatched desires. Let's call it this. There's not only physical pain but, Letter "B," there's relational pain. Does anybody have relational pain in this room? Anybody? I bet you do. And if it isn't with your wife, it's with your kid or it's with your coworker or it's with your boss, or it's with your partner in some kind of a business endeavor, you have relational pains. Even Jesus, the perfect person who comes and lives this life out in perfect human righteousness. God in his providence had put in the Scripture the promise that among his closest band of people that he relied on and trusted and entrusted himself to, there would be a guy named Judas who would betray him. Stab him in the back. What kind of relational pain is that? He betrays him with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane. Relational pain. You're not going to avoid it. Jesus said you are not going to avoid relational pain. Some of you're going through the massive season of the dark period of your life because the relational pain is hurting like it's never hurt before. There's nothing wrong. The bumps mean you're on the right path, right? This is the path that God himself promised. You're going to have these kinds of problems. Physical pain, relational pain.

Look at verse 15. Verse 15, he's talking to Satan here who's embodied in this scene as this soon-to-be snake about to be cursed to slither around on his belly. Look at verse 15 now, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring."

Well, that's an interesting way to put it. Let's just think about all that that means. The enemy here in the Garden tempting Adam and Eve, he's gone after God by going after people, the people whom God has made. And there are going to be offspring of the woman who are now going to be targeted by this spiritual being and all the henchmen that went with him, the offspring, so to speak, of Satan himself. At least a third of the angelic class went with Satan and now they are pitted against the human beings. And in particular, you want to be a redeemed human being, allied with Christ, now you are the target, according to First Peter Chapter 5 as though Satan himself is "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." And Peter's concerned about the little flock of Christians here, and they're going to be targeted by the enemy, the spiritual enemy, that if you want to know how he works you just read the Bible.

Job Chapter 1. How does Satan go after Job? Well, the Sabeans come and steal all of his stuff. Crooks! Satan uses crooks to steal his stuff. He uses a storm to kill his children. He uses his physical body and the chemistry of his body to have some kind of skin disease and to ruin his health in Chapter 2. I mean, the list goes on, not to mention the people that according to Paul telling Timothy in Ephesus, there are people who are captive by Satan in your sphere of influence, Timothy, who are captive by Satan to do his will. As Paul put it, "we don't wrestle ultimately against flesh and blood." We got a lot of problems with people. I understand that but here's the third thing you have, Letter "C," you have spiritual pain, and the spiritual pain is a spiritual opponent who is opposing you. Particularly if you bear the name of Christ, you're going to have all kinds of trouble coming into your life because of Satan and his henchmen targeting you as the people whom God cares for and loves and if you're a Christian has redeemed. That's a big deal. Physical pain, relational pain, spiritual pain. You got a spiritual opponent.

Go back up to the beginning of this narrative in verse 10. He knows he had sinned. And he says in verse 10, I heard as he's answering because he was hiding. Why are you hiding? "I heard the sound of you in the Garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked and I hid myself." Here they had fellowship and now he does something morally wrong and now he's hiding and afraid and he's ashamed. It's called guilt. And he's feeling guilt because he's guilty. I'll tell you what, there's a kind of pain and you know it as a Christian, I hope, and you know and you learn more and more about God's righteous standards. And the more you look in the moral window of God's Word the more you see you fall short and the more it just chews you up. Let's just call it this. Let's call it moral pain. Moral pain is the kind of pain, Letter "D," where you feel all these things in your life and when the Bible says we all stumble in many ways, you go, man, that's awful. You look in the mirror and say how could you do that again? How can this be? You claim to be a Christian. How could you do that? You have that sense of failure. And you think, well, before I even studied covetousness, I didn't even know I was a covetous person. And now I see it everywhere to quote the Apostle Paul in Romans 7. Yes, there are all kinds of things that as Christians in particular we have pain just by looking at our own failures. We know the right thing to do and we fail to do it. And we feel this unworthiness, we feel this sickness over our own moral failures. And there isn't anybody in the room who has been a Christian more than a week who doesn't know what I'm talking about. That's a pain that we bear. And you're going to bear it because until we reach the presence of Christ and you're like him, you're going to struggle with this. We are going to struggle. "If you say you



were without sin," you're lying, "and the truth is not in you" to quote First John. We have to believe the reality that we as fallen human beings, even with a new heart and a desire to please God, we fail. That's hard. That's painful. Some of you are struggling in this room right now because of your moral failures and it's painful. It's probably worse than a lot of other pains. You'd rather be physically sick than to feel this sense of guilt and the mess that your sins have caused, you've sown to the flesh and you're reaping from the flesh corruption. That's pain.

Maybe if I turn you to Genesis 3 the first thing you think about is verse 19. I mean, think about this fifth kind of pain. He says, "By the sweat of your face you're going to eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." I'm going to kick you out of the Garden. You can't eat the Tree of Life anymore and you are going to physically die. That's the ultimate, right? Let's just call it this for the sake of my list. Right? Mortal Pain. Being mortal and living among mortals. That's a kind of pain that eventually traverses your path and you feel the loss. I mean, Chapter 4, Adam and Eve, you want to talk about the Valley of the Shadow of Death, have to walk through burying their son because their other son killed him. Pain. At one point, either Adam or Eve had to bury their spouse, one or the other. You think about pain, the pain of death. I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Death is horrid. And some of you are sitting here today as Christians and you feel pain. You feel grief. And that grief is, as Lewis said so well in his book *A Grief Observed*, he says he was surprised how much he wrote this on the death of his wife, he says he was surprised how much grief felt like fear. Oh, that's a good line. Having to help people through their grief. I know exactly what he's talking about. Scary. Without your loved one. You've buried someone. It's hard. There's a fear. There's a trepidation, an uncertainty. Do you want to talk about nighttime? You feel night at that point. God has promised no exemptions from physical pain, relational pain, spiritual pain, moral pain, and mortal pain. Well, this is a great sermon so far, Pastor Mike. Thanks so much for this. What did I tell you? Forecasts are not supposed to scare us. They're supposed to prepare us. They're supposed to prepare us.

Turn to one more passage before I leave this point. It was nighttime for Paul. And maybe it's nighttime for some of you. And if not, it will be. Sooner or later you're going to go through the next scary patch following the Good Shepherd. Turn to First Thessalonians Chapter 3. One of the great things about a forecast is you can prepare to adjust for this. You're not going to be bummed out. You're not going to be setting up your kid's outdoor birthday party, his fifth birthday party at the park if you heard the forecast in the morning that big storms are coming through and it's going to rain all day. You wouldn't plan that because you'd know where this isn't going to work. And even if you say, well, when they get a bowling party or something else and you go to Chuck E. Cheese's or something and you pull the van up, you're still going to get wet going in, and the kids are going to step in the puddles and they going to get their socks wet. You better have umbrellas. You better put the boots on them or whatever.

You're going to have to prepare because you know what's coming. And for us as Christians it's going to rain cats and dogs, right? It's going to rain big time. In terms of physical pain, I said it. Relational pain. Spiritual pain. Moral pain. Mortal pain. All of that is going to be the reality for us. But even knowing it's coming that's supposed to help steady us. Prosperity

gospel preachers up there telling you all day long it's not going to happen if you have better faith, it's not going to happen, it's going to be great. Green pastures, still waters for the rest of your Christian life. It's not true. I hope that gets you to this place. Verse 2. That's First Thessalonians Chapter 3, "We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ," to do what? "To establish you and exhort you in your faith." Do not lose your confidence "that no one be moved by these afflictions." I love that. Don't be moved by it, don't be shaken. You got this. "For you yourselves know that we were destined for this." We are destined for this. Destined for what? Afflictions. "For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction, just as has come to pass and just as you know." You just got to know it's coming. And you sit here today, and one day you're going to walk into the kingdom and it's going to be a glorious day. That'll be great. All of it's going to be behind you. But between now and there "in this world you will have tribulation. "Take heart; I've overcome the world." We've talked a lot about that in this series. Yes, it's coming, but between here and there you just better be ready. Steel. Have the metal to stand strong and say, I understand it's going to be scary. It's going to be scary times.

What does Jesus show up to do? I mean, even the next day. Look back at our passage, verse 11. It's nighttime and it's going to continue to be night even the next day. Verse 12. All this stuff, people want to kill Paul. That's a dark time for Paul. "But the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage.'" Take courage. Note the orientation of this. It's coming not as a voice in the darkness of the night as he's wondering what's going to happen next. "The Lord stood by him and said." He has a vision of the physical Christ standing there saying, hey, take courage. He didn't give him the reason but first take courage. Just notice the orientational crises, he's right here and he's saying, "Take courage." Don't be afraid. This is helpful for us in particular because the Lord stood by him. I don't know how often you think this is repeated in the Bible but it's all the way from Genesis to the end of the Bible. That the constant refrain when it comes to you either being afraid or not being afraid comes down to the truth that he is standing with you. Just every time. Everything from Gideon, Abraham, all the way through the Bible. Jeremiah, do not be afraid. I am with you. I'm with you. I'm with you. This is really hard for people to process but you better believe that the Triune God is with you.

Think about this in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus is telling him in the gospel of John, I'm leaving. I mean, that's one of the overarching messages. One of the purposes of this discussion is I am leaving. I'm going to be crucified, be rejected by the chief priests and scribes. I'm going to be crucified. And then I'm going to die. But then I'm going to rise again. But then it's going to end with the Ascension 40 days later and I'm going to be gone. I'm going to take my fingernails and my eyelashes and my elbows and I'm going to leave the planet. So in the Upper Room Discourse he's going to deal with the fear of Christ not standing with them. And he says in the middle of it all I'm going to ask the Father, Chapter 14 of John, he's going to send another. Remember that passage? And then he gives him the name. Who is he going to send? Right? We know and the whole discussion, this is the third person to God, the Holy Spirit, having all the divine attributes of the Godhead. He's going to come, but he's called here the "Parakletos." That's a helpful word. Parakletos. This noun parakletos, "Para." We talk about these compound words with prepositions in front of para, alongside of. "Kletos" means "the one who is called." He's been kletos'd, "called." He's going to be called in alongside.



Now, in secular, Greek and other places we might find this word meaning that if you're in a jam you need an attorney, right? You need Larry Parker or Sweet James or whatever to come in and stand by you in the midst of your trial. You need someone to help you, an advocate. And sometimes this word *parakletos* is translated as an advocate, someone standing by you in your trial. But what's interesting is the word in its noun form, "*Parakaleo*" is the word that's translated throughout the Bible "to comfort." Right? Someone who's encouraging you. The word encourage, comfort, both translate the word *parakaleo*. And so the person who is coming in is sent to give you comfort. And the next line there in John 14 he says, "I will not leave you as orphans." I am going away, right? Jesus right now, with his fingernails and eyelashes and elbows he's somewhere else, right? Now he has all the use of his divine attributes now, his independent exercising of his attributes, he now has awareness of everything. He knows everything about you. So in that sense his perception is omnipresent. But he's not physically here. But the third person of the Godhead is physically here even though he's not a physical being. But the awareness and the power of God is here, present and here's what the Bible says, he is your comforter. He comes in alongside of you. There's a lot of spatial analogy here. He comes in alongside of you and he comforts you. Because you're not going to be left as an orphan. The scary thing about the title orphan is if you're scared who's going to take care of me? Who's going to pay for my college? Who's going to buy my food? I'm an orphan. I'm not going to be an orphan. You're never going to be alone. And it's said that way throughout the Bible. "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." And the only way to be encouraged by that, to have the steel within your own character is that you got to believe it. And you've got to believe it right now. The invisible God is present with you through whatever affliction between now and the time we reach the kingdom. He'll never leave us, he'll never forsake us. He is with you.

Number two on your outline, you need to "Believe Christ and Be Courageous." Those things go together. The promise is that he'll be with you. And once you write that down, turn with me to the Old Testament passage of Isaiah, Isaiah 43. Isaiah 43. Let's make a parallel to our lives as Christians having the Spirit of God, the *parakletos*, now dispatched to be with us through every trial, whether it's relational pain or physical pain or whether it's moral pain, whatever the pain is that you have, there's going to be the presence of God to comfort you through it all. And you've got to believe Jesus when he said, "I'm not going to leave you as an orphan." And you've got to think about Israel in the Old Testament that had, by the way in the book of Isaiah, a lot of bad things promised were going to happen ultimately, the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonian army, is going to come and ransack Jerusalem, take a bunch of you captive, kill a bunch of you. It's going to be a bad time and yet, in the middle of all these prophets talking about the bad things that were coming for Israel in the fifth, sixth century B.C., there are all these statements of comfort. And here's one of them. Take a look at it. Isaiah 43. Are you with me? Look at this. "But," now thus says Yahweh, "thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob," that's a title for the nation. "He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I've redeemed you.'"

Now created is one thing. Everyone on the planet, your non-Christian next-door neighbor, your atheist friend at work. They're all created by God. Their spirit is designed by God. Their



bodies are designed by God. And they are by virtue of being a creature of the creator, they are owned by God, whether they want to admit it or not. But we are Christians. We're not only made by God, we're doubly gods because he's redeemed us and he's put his name on us. I hope you proudly would stand up today and say, I'm a Christian. I bear the name of the Messiah of Christ. And so in the Old Testament, "Called you by my name." You're mine. I've redeemed you. You're mine. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned; and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." I think back in your history. "I gave Egypt as your ransom." The plagues, think about all that. I gave Egypt and "Cush and Seba," historically, "in exchange for you." Look at what I did to other nations to protect you "because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you. I give men in exchange for you, people in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Now just think about this. The people who hear these words for the first time are going to be dead. 70 years in exile. But their sons and daughters under Zerubbabel and Nehemiah and Ezra, they're going to come back and settle in the land. But what about me? What about me? You read this passage in verse 2. "You're going to pass through the waters, I'll be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." What are you talking about? They're all going to die in exile or die in the battle.

We've quoted this twice in our series so far, and that is the last words of the Apostle Paul in Second Timothy Chapter 4. As he says, my time is up. I know I'm going to die this time. I'm under Roman custody. I think it's over for me. "My race is finished." "The time of my departure has come." And a few paragraphs later he says this: God has taken me through everything, he's delivered me through all of this stuff and I know now "he will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." That's like the third time now I've quoted that in this series. Bring me safely. Now I'm thinking to myself, if you're just telling me the Romans have incarcerated you for the second time now and you're going to have your head lopped off and you're going to die, you know the time of your death has come, what do you mean you're going to be brought safely into the kingdom with your head under your arm? You're dead, right? What are you talking about? Safely into the kingdom?

These people are going to die. You read, for instance, the second part of verse 2, "When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned; and the flames shall not consume you," I know you think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right? Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They're going to stand there and the angel of the Lord is going to be with them, and they're going to get through the fire, and they're going to come out, and their clothes aren't even going to smell like smoke. There you go. That's what God's going to do to me. Because when I get cancer, I got faith. And I'm going to say, "God, you just take those cells and kick them out of my body. Walk through the fire." Right? Threatening divorce? "It's not going to happen. I'm going to pray. My small group is going to pray. It's going to be okay." I'm going to lose my job. "No, I'm not going to lose my job. I'm going to trust the Lord." You understand that



everything that Paul said happened to him. He was going to die and he was going to be persecuted to death. His view was where we were last week was bigger. It's not about the "here and now." It's about the "then and there" and ultimately guess what?

Verse 6, he's going to have the north give up and the south give up and not withhold the sons and daughters from the ends of the earth. The regathering we could think about Zerubbabel and Ezra and Nehemiah we can think about the post-exilic regathering. But this is much bigger than that. This is about when the Bible says, like in Jeremiah or Daniel, when the dead will come out of the dust and they will be raised up to glory and the bones will come together. There will be a reassembling not just of the nations but the individual people who've trusted in God. There's going to be a new life, a resurrected life, and there will be eyelashes and there will be kneecaps and there will be toenails. The real resurrected bodies will be enlivened by spirit and people will live in a perfect place. Now we preached that message last time. But it's important for us to see the big picture that we believe Christ will walk us through everything including our own death, everything to bring us safely into his kingdom. The picture you got to have is bigger than the prosperity preachers, the health and wealth guys are always thinking about this, hoping that you're like Jack LaLanne in your 90s. You're so healthy. Everything's good. You're eating your smoothies and your vegetables and your blenders and all the things you do, your oils, and you're just a healthy man. Until, of course, what happened to Jack LaLanne, you die. And then oops, I don't know. He lived a good life. He was healthy right up until he wasn't. I mean, really, that's the best they got for you. And what I've got for you is something much better than that. God is going to take you through relational pain and physical pain and moral pain and mortal pain, and you are going to be brought safely into the kingdom. That's the whole point. It's not about the "here and now." It's about the "then and there." And what you have to believe is God's going to get you through it all. He's going to walk you through it all and he will not leave you and he will not forsake you.

One more passage on this, Luke Chapter 12. You have to process this about Luke. Please get your eyeballs on Luke Chapter 12. I want you to look at this text starting in verse 4 and just to see how crazy these words are. These are crazy words. Luke 12. Let's just say your kid is going off to war. He's in the military. Let's just say he's a marine down at Camp Pendleton and there's a new war and he's going to get shipped off to this war. And you're praying with your small group. "I just don't want him to die. I'm afraid he's going to die." Verse 4, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who can kill the body." Well, that just ruins my whole prayer request. Like that was the whole point. I'm afraid. I'm afraid he'll die. I tell him to pray. Pray that you'll come back. Come back alive. He says, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of that. Don't be afraid of the person who can kill you. Oh, don't be afraid of that. "After that there's nothing more they can do." Well, that seems like a lot that they're doing, right? I know they can't do more than that but that seems like a lot. That would kill all my dreams and hopes. If, of course, all my dreams and hopes are about the "here and now." If my dreams and hopes are the way it says what they should be in Colossians Chapter 3 that we looked at last time, that my mind is set there when "this glory is going to be revealed to me, and the present sufferings don't mean anything compared to this greatness that's coming," Romans 8:18. If that's the truth, think about this now. Now it's a whole different thing. What I should be afraid about is the whole thing. Not only this life but the next. I warn you and Jesus says it in



verse 5, "I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he's killed you, has the authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you," Jesus says, "fear him." You won't find that on a Dayspring card, "Fear God who can cast you into hell. Have a great Sunday." We don't have sweatshirts like that. Right? Jesus says, "Yes, I tell you, fear him." That could be some of the best truth to drop into your mind when you're walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Relational pain or physical pain or moral pain, whatever your pain is. So this is scary. But you know what's not scary? Like this can't really ultimately do anything. I grew up in a Christian home. That just means my parents were Christians. I wasn't a Christian, I was born a pagan like every other person. Well, my parents want to protect me from stuff. And one of the things, you know, I think it was back in the 60s, they finished the haunted house at Disneyland, and I think to protect us they were like, no, you can't go in the haunted house. You can go on the Matterhorn, you can go on all that stuff, you can't go in the haunted house because that's like, I don't know, that's scary. Okay. Thanks. But that's fine. That's fine. I mean, I had to be a rebellious college student to finally get into the haunted house at Disneyland to see what was in there. This is what it was all about? This is nothing, stupid. But with all that going on in my Christian upbringing, there was something going on in the 70s, it was really trippy and weird. I mean, I look back and I go how did this happen? Christian organizations used to run haunted houses. You may remember Campus Crusade for Christ here in Southern California used to have haunted houses. They would get old storefronts in Downey or whatever and they turned it into a haunted house in October. And then they, like we had one in Long Beach at the Los Altos parking lot. And they put this big tent up and it was the Campus Crusade haunted house. And, I mean, it was a haunted house. It was scarier than the haunted house at Disneyland.

There were people there with strobe lights, black lights, people with axes coming out of their heads and blood everywhere. The youth group went to this, like mom and dad you're not getting this, right? I'm in the youth group going to the haunted house, which, by the way, I find out, you know, ten years later is way worse than the haunted house at Disneyland. And here's the thing about that. We went as a youth group, which means there are some cute girls there. They're going to watch how I respond in the haunted house who I hope are kind of clinging to me as we're going through the various sections of the haunted house. And so what I got to do is make sure I don't hyperventilate. I've got to act like I got this. And so I remember just psyching myself up and knowing this. Like this isn't real. This isn't real. This isn't real. I know that people have been hopping out behind things and people screaming and yelling and strobe lights, but I know at the other end you come out the other end and I've done this every October now in our youth group and I just know I'm going to survive. It was helpful for me to remember this is not as scary as it seems to be. As a matter of fact, I had to keep reminding myself of this just so I could keep up appearances in front of the girls in the youth group. I had to remember that the guys who were there acting in this were all the dweebs from the drama department, right? And I thought I could take every one of these guys. (audience laughing) So I think to myself it's not that scary.

And yet, of course, I jumped several times, right? Every single year. I was startled, whaa whaa whaa. And yet I knew I was going to get out the other side. And since I did I couldn't

watch scary movies as a kid. I couldn't go to the haunted house at Disneyland, this was a hard week for me to go to the haunted house. And yet I psych myself up and I said it's okay. You have to realize your kid dying in a war, you dying of cancer, you going through a divorce, you losing your job, you getting evicted from your house. Those things seem catastrophic. But even the worst it says right here in Luke 12:4, "Do not fear it." Don't fear it because you know, Second Timothy Chapter 4, he's going to bring you safely into his kingdom. You are not going to hear, "Depart from me. I never knew you." You're not going to hear, "Into outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth." If you are a Christian, you've solved the problem. And that's why he can go on to say this in verse 6, he can say in verse 6 to us because he started, look at the one, two, three, four, fifth word in verse 4, how this, "I tell you my," what? "Friends," you're my friends. You don't have to fear being cast into hell. You're the friends of the second person of the Godhead. And he says in verse 6, now, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God." I mean, those birds. God takes care of the birds. Why? Think about it. Even the hairs on your head are all numbered. I mean, how tuned into God are you? I mean, God knows everything about you. "So fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." Do you realize how important you are to God? Yeah, but I could not. You're right. Matter of fact, you're not only can die, you will die. It was the promise of Genesis 3. Pain. Affliction. Tribulation. Trial. Yep, yep, yep, yep, yep, yep, yep, yep, yep. But he says don't be afraid. And ultimately because not only does he know you, he said you're not going to be orphaned. I'm not going to leave you orphans. I'm going to get you through this.

Now there's no connection in our passage if you look at the outline here. Right? I've got verses 11a, 12 to 15 because it was a dark day and a dark night and a continued darkness. And then, point three, verse 11c, I got verses 16 to 22. There's no correspondence, it's just a promise. The Lord stood by him and said, take courage. If I just take that phrase, all I've got is that promise. You got to hang on to the promise even though you don't see it realized. Even though you can't see God, even though you can't see the Spirit of God. The parakletos. You have to believe him. "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." We're banking on God's promise. A promise, by the way, from one who's got a perfect batting average in every promise he's ever made that's been able to be fulfilled yet. Every historic promise was fulfilled. So I trust him. Well then, he gives specific and unique information to Paul at the bottom of verse 11. Take a look at it. You can take courage because if you're afraid about dying here, which is clearly in the middle of the night after being killed almost three times now, I can see why you're afraid of what tomorrow holds. And sure enough it's going to be nighttime tomorrow. Even in the daytime. Got a lot of bad things happen. But you can "take courage" because you should know this. You're not going to die in Jerusalem. "For just as you've testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify" also where you're going to get "to Rome," you're going to get to Rome. You're not going to die in Jerusalem. Which, by the way, goes all the way into Chapter 27, when they're on the sea of the Mediterranean in the middle of a terrible storm and there's a shipwreck. And Paul was able to say to them, I know I'm going to make it. Why? Because he knows God promised him. I'm going to make it. I'll make it to Rome. I'm not going to die in the middle of the Mediterranean. I'm going to make it. So this is unique, is it not? God hasn't shown up to you and he hasn't shown up to me and said, here's the thing, Pastor Mike. You're going to pastor that church in Aliso Viejo for a long time, and then I'm going to take you



on a missionary thing. You're going to do that thing in China. And so you should just know you're not going to die in Aliso. I don't have that promise. I could die this afternoon. I don't know what's going to happen. But I do know a few things about what God has destined and purposed for me. I know that.

Back to our passage in Isaiah 43. Look at Isaiah as it says here in this passage we think about God's presence in verses 1 through 6. I stopped at verse 6 but we didn't end the sentence. Let's read the end of the sentence. "Everyone who is called by my name." Right? And we know. Look back up at the passage, verse 1. "Fear not, I've redeemed you; I have called you by name." So we're talking about redeemed people here. God has taken these people and called them his own. So if you're a Christian, that's you. "Everyone who was called by my name, whom I created." Now there's a purpose clause for the Apostle Paul. You're going to get to Rome, just like you got to Jerusalem and you're going to testify for me there. So there's a purpose clause here as to why you shouldn't be afraid for Paul. But here's your purpose clause because I know you qualify if you're a Christian for being made by God and called by God and redeemed by God, he's created you. Here it is "for my glory." Middle of verse 7, "whom I formed and I made." I made you, and "I made you for my glory." So I know this: there was a time when Paul made it to Rome and in Rome he sat in a Roman cell of some kind and he wrote to the Philippians and he says, I'm not sure if I'm going to get out. He says, I'm not sure, but I know this: having "full courage both now and always, I know that God will be glorified in my life, whether by life or by death." So he knew that he had a purpose because he finally made it to Rome. And I don't know, he didn't promise me Spain. He didn't promise me any other place. So this could be it for me. And he says this, but I know this: I'll be courageous because I know my goal is to glorify God, and I'm going to glorify God whether I live or whether I die. So that's my purpose and God's going to fulfill that purpose. So I know this about you. You have a purpose and you should prayerfully seek to fulfill that purpose. God's got a plan. And I know this: I don't know whether you're going to go to Rome or whether you're going to go to Jerusalem, but I know you're going to, for now, continue, if you're a Christian, to seek to glorify God.

Number three, you need to "Prayerfully Seek to Work God's Plan." And Letter "A" would be I know God's revealed plan is that you as a Christian should seek to glorify God. That's why all the great Protestant Catechisms start with that. What's the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. Glorify God. What does that mean? That means I'm supposed to somehow honor God with my life. I'm supposed to do things where he'll look at me and say well done. That's the goal. And I should prayerfully purpose to do that. Seek to do that. And I should say I'm alive and called right now, assuming if I'm still breathing, that God's got a purpose for me. What's my purpose for the rest of the day, the rest of this week? As long as I live to glorify God, I want to honor God. All of this is in the context of the dark times, right? In the middle of the night you're having a hard time relationally, legally, financially. I don't know what your hard times are. But in the hard times here's the problem with Christians, we make dumb decisions when we're scared. When we're afraid. When Jezebel's chasing Elijah he makes some dumb decisions. When we're scared. Job was scared. He made some dumb decisions doing some things and said some dumb things. So I don't want you to make dumb decisions when you're scared, when it's nighttime. Here's what you should do. You should be

praying, "God, how can I honor you in this? What can I do to honor you? What can I do where you say that's the right thing, well-done son? You've done well here, daughter. What can I do that you would say that honors me?" So I want a purpose to live that. I don't know if I'm going to make it to Rome. I don't know if I'm going to go to Jerusalem, but I know this. I'm supposed to glorify God all the way to the end. So I need to start thinking in the middle of my scary times, God, what's the next step for me that is going to glorify you?

Secondly, I know another thing about God's revealed plan for your life. First John Chapter 3 verse 16. First John Chapter 3 verse 16, "For this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and that we too should lay down our lives for the brothers." I know the definition of my life is to love not only God but to love other people. And here's how it's defined in First John Chapter 3 verse 16, that I am supposed to serve people. So I know this: in the scary times of my life, when I'm thinking I'm sick or I'm broke or I'm alone or whatever my problem is, and I'm afraid I'm walking through the valleys, the shadows, the night times of my Christian life, I know this: I should think to myself don't make a dumb decision. Don't make a wrong step. What will honor God? And secondly, what will help me serve people? How can I serve people in this? That's the purpose God has for me. And I ask God, God, how can I serve people? What can I do to better people's lives? Now it says in that passage "the brothers," but just so hermeneutical you can say, well, I'm not stretching this. Let's go to other passages in our mind. How about Galatians Chapter 6? "You are supposed to do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith." So I know I'm supposed to serve people, right? First and foremost priority is our Christian brothers and sisters but secondly is everyone else. And I know that God wants me to serve people. And you need to think about your job, you need to think about your life, and you need to think about your purpose. And you say, I know God wants me to honor him and God wants me to serve people. How can I best do that, particularly when you're scared? And we start to think about, well, I got to protect myself, right? Okay. Naturally, reflexively, we care about ourselves, I get that. But you got to be thinking about purpose. My purpose and calling. How can I serve people? That's helpful. Because you know what? God's purpose for you is not to be rich and famous, not to be comfortable, but it's to serve people. I know it's that. It's to love people. So I want to honor God. That's love for God. I want to honor people. That's love for people.

One more. How about this? First Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 7. First Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 7. It says this in the context of the Church, but it works beyond that and I'll prove it to you in a second. But it says that "each of us has been given a manifestation of the Spirit," the Holy Spirit, "for the common good." And then it goes on to talk about all the differences among people. Now, one of the things in the list is apostle, and Paul is an apostle. Now, Paul's got a particular role. He's a preacher, he's a missionary, he's an apostle. He's representing Christ to the Gentiles. And so he's going to say, I'm going to fulfill my purpose. A lot of passages in the Scripture where Paul's talking about fulfilling his purpose as an apostle. Now, I have a purpose. I'm not an apostle, right? You're not an apostle. But what is your purpose? We've got to think about God's manifestation of his work in your life for the common good. That can make it even more narrow. I love God, I love people. I honor God, I serve people. But now I got to say, okay, God, I want to make sure that when I'm in those scary times my purpose and calling is to see you continue to work out your plan for me. You're



going to do that through my nephew. You're going to do that through me figuring things out. You can do that through strategy. You can do that through providence. All the things we've seen in the passage, which I wish we had time to dive back into. But here's the point. I know that God has equipped me in a particular way by his Spirit, the certain gifts he's given me, the proclivities he's given me, the tendencies he's given me, the personality he's given me, the opportunities he's given me. And I got to say, with all of those, how can I be a good steward of your manifestation of your work in my life?

And it's beyond the church because I can think about the manifestation of the Spirit in the Old Testament. For the artisans constructing furniture, it says the Spirit of God was within them and it was all done by God's empowerment. And if you're a Christian you need to think about how is God empowering me to fulfill my purpose and calling in this generation. And in the midst of your scary times when you're just like fight or flight or you're all about yourself or you're concerned about self-preservation, I just need you to say, how can I honor God? How can I serve others? And what specific things has God invested in my life where I can be a good steward in effectively doing something in this world? That's good, that's good stewardship thinking. That's thinking about your calling and your purpose in every situation. And then everything beyond that, I don't know. I don't know. All I know is James Chapter 4 says, you shouldn't just be presumptuous about what you're going to do with the rest of your life because you don't know what your life's like. You should say, "If the Lord wills we'll live or do this or that." So I need to hold everything else loosely. That's why it's all prayerful, "not my will but yours be done." I'm going to purpose though to glorify you, I'm going to purpose to serve others. I'm going to purpose to use the particular things you've invested in me to leverage those in some effective way to serve, to love, to honor. That's my goal.

Consecrate. Do you know the word "consecrate"? It's the word "holy" in a verbal form that God sets people apart for particular things and ultimately discern about God's work in you, your purposes and callings. There are a lot of things that God's doing to set you apart for a particular role and sometimes it's the pain and the struggles and the scary times that kind of make that clear. But the consecration is an important concept in our Daily Bible Reading we read about that. Like in the book of Leviticus when we read in Chapter 8 where that concept of setting apart Aaron. Right? That's Moses' brother and the nephews of Moses, Aaron's sons, to be the priests. This is the first worship center that Israel has, the tabernacle. And in Chapter 8 they build this tabernacle. And now they're going to take Moses' brother and nephews and they're going to lead this first. They're going to be the priests and they're going to consecrate themselves for seven days. They're supposed to camp out in front of the tent of meeting, at the place where they worship God, and the leaders now who are being consecrated, set apart for that purpose, are supposed to stay out there day and night. Now, we read that quickly, the end of Chapter 8 of Leviticus, which is wow, yeah, yeah. Well, think about that. Two in the morning at some point you're there dressed as a priest and you're being set apart. Yeah. You got to eat your sandwiches and your meals but you're in the middle of the night. You're out there at night and in the daytime for seven days to set you and your descendants apart to be the priests in Israel.



Matthew Henry writes public domain commentary now. Great Puritan thinker. I mean, it's a good commentary for how old it is. He writes about this passage in Leviticus Chapter 8 and doing what he does so well in trying to apply it to where we're at. Here's what Matthew Henry said on that text in Leviticus 8:35. He says, "We have every one of us a charge to keep," just like Aaron in a sense, "an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, needful duty to be done, our generation to serve." That's just so good. It's just such a pastoral response from Matthew Henry. Well, in 1762, Charles Wesley was reading this section of Matthew Henry's commentary, and when he reads it he picks up his quill and starts to write out the words to a hymn, a hymn that ends up and you know one of the great hymnals of Wesley's, you know, worship leadership. And he calls this right out of the words of Matthew Henry's commentary, "a charge to keep I have" making this person. And it starts with, "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify." And it goes on in that first verse. So good. But it's the second verse I want to end with. Listen to these words. Verse two, "To serve the present age," I love that, "my calling to fulfill; O may it all my powers engage, to do my Master's will!" So good. "To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; O may it at all my powers engage, to do my Master's will!" I want you to know the thing that probably thwarts more than anything else the fulfillment of our calling to serve our generation is fear. And you've got to get over that. You've got to say hard times are going to come. Affliction is going to come. I'm going to be courageous. Christ is going to walk me through it. I got to focus on what God has for me to do in this trial, or even if you're in the green pastures and still waters time. Just serve. You're to honor God, you're here to serve people. You're here to take what God's invested in me and leverage that in my business, in my place of work, and wherever God has planted me to serve him, serve him well, serve him without fear, serve him courageously.

Let's pray. God help us, like Matthew Henry said so well, to serve our generation. You put us here. We know that if nothing else, we know the time and right now we know the place that you've set us in to serve. And just like in the desert of Sinai, there were scary, scary things to think about. And being a priest and consecrated, set apart for a role, sitting there in the middle of the night for seven nights thinking about our lives, thinking about where we are, thinking about how we're going to get food, thinking about how we're going to do all the things you've asked us to do, what we can be overwhelmed with worry or anxiety. Just like Matthew Henry so well said. Not only did they have to overcome those fears, we have to. We have to serve you with all of our faculties. Eschewing the fear and the anxiety and saying, we're here, we're ready, we're ready to serve you, ready to do your will, to say that we're not going to be afraid. We know that you have not left us as orphans. So, God, please be honored by our service. Let us serve you well. Let us please you in what we do this week with our lives.

In Jesus name, Amen.