



True Strength – Part 3

Persisting When You Feel Unsupported

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We've been working our way through Second Corinthians and really getting to the end of a section where Paul's been calling himself a fool because he's having to defend himself in a situation that I think is much more understandable to us than we might care to admit, particularly when we feel like we are underappreciated, or we feel like the people who should be loyal to us are not. Or we feel like people who should have our back don't have our back. The people who maybe should say thank you they don't say thank you, or people who we want to support us become our critics. People maybe we've invested in for years they not only seem unimpressed but they are ungrateful. This is where Paul finds himself in three verses that we're going to quickly cover here this morning in Second Corinthians Chapter 12. And if you have your Bibles I want you to take a look at this passage to see how we might want to respond to this. Because if we don't respond this way, unfortunately, our service, our attitude, our work, our energy, our optimism is all going to be tied to whether or not people are going to give you the appreciation or the adulation or the applause that we want and crave. We naturally crave those things.

But if all of a sudden our energy is going to be derived from whether or not people give us the kinds of support that we want we're going to be unfaithful at best. We're going to experience an ebb and flow of work and energy and strength, and that is not where God wants us to be. Our series has been entitled True Strength and true strength cannot be as fickle as people's opinion of us. So we want to make sure that we learn from these short statements in Second Corinthians 12:11 through 13. So follow along with me as I read it from the English Standard Version when Paul really is reaching the conclusion of a lot of what he's been saying for two chapters now. In Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 11, he says, "I have been a fool!" Now, of course he's been a fool and he calls himself that because, you know, a man who wants to be a humble leader, he's having to now defend himself and say things that really put himself in a proper place, which is kind of an exalting of his position, which really is unbecoming and certainly not comfortable for him. But now he says, "you forced me to it." This is your fault. It's your fault that I'm having here to prop myself up and defend myself. And then he really lays it on in the middle of verse 11. He says, "for I ought to have been commended by you." You should have defended me.

Now remember the larger context if you happened to be new here to this study, the critics had rolled into town who had said, you know, Paul, for all that you're making him out to be you Corinthians, you shouldn't be seeing him in that way. You shouldn't hold him in such high esteem because he's not all that. And they started to put themselves above the Apostle Paul. You should listen to us. Don't listen to him. And instead of defending the Apostle Paul they stood by, many of them, I'm sure silently, and a lot of them started to nod their way through what these super-apostles, as Paul sarcastically called them, as he said a chapter earlier, these are really false apostles. And the Corinthians were starting to believe what they were saying and started to denigrate Paul's reputation in the church of Corinth.



Then he says something that he's been having to say in the middle of verse 11, "for I was not at all inferior to these," here's the sarcastic phrase "Hyper-Apostolos," these hyper-apostles, these super-apostles. Now he says that sarcastically because of course they're not. He calls them earlier false apostles. So he says, I'm "not at all inferior to these super-apostles." Now that's an inverted way of saying I am superior to these super-apostles. These are false apostles. I'm a real apostle. Now look at verse 12, he says, "the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience." So I'm leaving out that little phrase because I want to show you he's really putting himself in comparison with these people who they had put on a pedestal. So he's saying, no, no, no, no, no, I'm better than them. Now, that's an unbecoming thing to have to say to anybody. That's why in the middle of all this he puts this theological statement in here. That's not self-deprecation. It's not some kind of, you know, false humility, but it's really a theological truth that we need to look at when we get to it, "even though I am nothing."

Now, that's a statement that he knows he's something because he's just saying I'm superior to the quote-unquote super-apostles. And I know that I'm a true apostle. That's something. That's something big. Matter of fact, Ephesians 2:20 says that's the foundation of the whole New Testament church. So he's something but he also knows that every résumé is derivative, right? Everything that you have going for you, as he says in First Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 7, "what do you have that you have not received?" So there's truth in that statement but just understand it in context. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience." And what were those signs? At least proceeding in the context where look at how I loved you, look at how I served you. Look at how, as I like to put around here, I went the extra mile, I stayed the extra hour, and I spent the extra dollar. That's how I put it at least to try and contextualize it for us. For him, it was I was run out of town, out of Damascus. I was let down in a basket. They threw rocks at me and left me for dead. They beat me with rods. They put the lashes on my back, the Jews did three times, 39 times lashes. Three different sessions. I was run out of town. I was shipwrecked. I spent a night in the ocean. This was terrible the stuff I went through. Why? Because I was trying to serve people with the truth. I was a missionary who suffered and suffered and suffered and suffered.

Now, in contradistinction to the false apostles who were, as Jesus often tried to compare, these were the kinds of leaders who said, you serve me, you feed me grapes. You, you know, take the palm branches and you keep me cool. And you guys be, you know, good to me. I'm the benefactor. You take care of me. And Jesus said that's how the Gentiles like to see leadership. But he says, who am I among you? I'm a servant. I'm the one serving. I didn't come "to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." So whoever's going to be great among you, Jesus taught his disciples, let him be the servant, right? Let him become the slave of everyone. So that's how leadership in God's economy works. And Paul has talked now for a chapter and a half about what that looks like. Look at the suffering I went through. So I was the real leader here because I was the real servant here. So that was the sign of the true apostle. And then he's going to use that word since he brought it up the "sign." Oh, there's a technical way that Greek word is used throughout the New Testament to describe miraculous signs. And then he's going to use it and pair it with other words that are describing miraculous signs. And he says, oh, yeah, and the other things that I was doing



among you that these quote-unquote super-apostles were never able to do, I was authenticated in my role with "signs," technical use of the word, "and wonders and mighty works."

I think eight times in the book of Acts we see Paul being attributed to some kind of miracle and a few of those were creative miracles. I mean, Eutychus, right? Here's one of the very few, I think seven or eight different times in all of biblical history, 3,400 years of biblical history, we see someone raised from the dead. And Paul has one of those attributed to him. I mean, this is a miraculous thing. And, you know, the super-apostles running through town who want to be lifted up and put on a pedestal, they don't have any of that. So I was doing that. I did that. And then Paul throws something seemingly out of left field but if you been with us in this study, you remember this. "For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches?" How were you less favored? "Except that I myself did not burden you."

Now, what does that mean? Financially we'd learned that the critics came in and said, you know, in the client-patron relationship, that these rhetoricians and logicians and all the people who came in and said, well, I'm the philosopher and of course if you're any good you'd be on the payroll. And so you'd have to pay these guys to be your philosopher, in this case, your theologian. And the Apostle Paul came into town and he didn't even charge anybody. What kind of philosopher or theologian could he be in the Corinthian society? Because, as I often said from the beginning of this series, you know, Corinth was the Orange County of the ancient world. You don't roll into Newport Beach and claim to be anyone if your services are free. And so come on, he didn't charge you guys? So here they were making this a negative. And Paul says well, you're saying I didn't favor you that way, that I was less than. And then he says, oh, yeah, I didn't burden you. I'm so sorry. Here's more sarcasm, "Forgive me for this wrong!" I guess I should have passed the plate every time I was with you giving you a sermon and teaching you stuff from God. Forgive me for this wrong.

Okay. Seemingly all over the map, but let's look at how this plays into what you and I are tempted to do, and that is to deal with the same kinds of disappointment, maybe in a different way than the Apostle Paul did. And all of us are tempted in this way. So let's start in verse 11, Second Corinthians Chapter 12, first part of verse 11, "I have been a fool! You forced me to it." Let me just focus now on this line, "for I ought to have been commended by you." You should have defended me. You should have commended me. That means this. You should have applauded me. You should have been my cheerleader. You should have said, yay, Paul, you did right. We have your back the Apostle Paul. You ought to have done that but you didn't do that. You didn't applaud me. You didn't cheer me on. You didn't have my back. When the critic came along you didn't defend me, so you didn't do what you should have done.

Now, this happens a lot. Paul comes into town we read in the book of Acts. He spends a year and a half in Corinth. He does good ministry. We don't have any record of him doing some bad thing there. He does good ministry there. And then he leaves, critics come, they criticize Paul because they want, you know, all of the accolades from the Corinthians. They want to take a position of leadership, a kind of leadership where the leaders are served and so they denigrate Paul. And sure enough, these people now start to look askance at Paul and think,



oh, maybe Paul is not all that. And Paul says, what are you guys doing? You should have commended me. That's the way the world should work. But that's not the way the world works. And it didn't work that way for Paul. It does not work that way for you. It didn't work that way for Christ. I mean, people who should have applauded Christ certainly didn't applaud Christ. And if you're thinking of the Pharisees or the Sanhedrin, well, yeah, of course that's true.

But if anyone knew how good Christ was, you'd think it would be his family. Would you think that? But then you read Mark Chapter 3. If you grew up with Jesus, you would know one thing for sure. He was a good kid, right? You would know that, he did right. He spoke the truth. Even as the prophecies in Isaiah said he spoke nothing that was untrue from his mouth. I mean, he was so good he would start to irritate you. And here they were in Mark Chapter 3 and here's what his whole family was saying about him. "He is out of his mind." They were criticizing him when he finally hit his three-and-a-half-year ministry they were saying Jesus is out of his mind. His mother included, Jesus is out of his mind. Now you know what should have been happening when things were going on in Jesus' ministry. They should have been commending him. They should have been defending him. They should have been cheering him on. They should have been applauding him. They should have been saying I'm so proud of my half-brother. I'm so proud of my son. But they weren't. They were calling him crazy.

I wonder if you've ever done anything that's been good. You've worked hard. You've been loyal. You've been faithful. You've done things with a pure motive. And you didn't get the adulation, the applause. They didn't have your back the way that you thought they would. As a matter of fact, people who you think should be loyal to you, they weren't loyal to you. Oh, it happens to all of us. And what does that do to you? Well, it does to you, I'm sure, what it did to the Apostle Paul. I mean, it certainly irks you. It's not right, but it doesn't devastate the Apostle Paul. And do you know why? Because of the topic of our series. We're in the middle of a series called True Strength. Paul does not derive his strength through the adulation of the Corinthians. It's very different for him. And so let me just say this to get started with the first half of verse 11. Number 1, "Don't Draw Your Strength from Applause." Don't draw your strength from applause, because sometimes it's there and that's nice, and sometimes it's not there. And then it will devastate you if you're drawing strength from applause. If what keeps you going, what fuels you in your work is if you get noticed, if you get raises, if you get bonuses, if you get your picture up on the wall as the employee of the month. If that's what fuels you, you're going to be a mess.

If what fuels you as a mom is how many times your kids say mom, thanks so much for making dinner, right? You're not going to do very well. If you as a dad, it's all about, you know, thank yous or respect from your family. I'm sorry. It's not going to work out for you. You're going to be a mess. If in your ministry, you lead a small group and you do it and what you're really driven by, the fuel of your ministry, is when people show you gratitude, it's not going to work. Don't be fueled by the gratitude, the applause, the adulation, the acclaim of the people around you. Just don't. Jeremiah in Jeremiah Chapter 17, this is a bad time for Israel, of course in talking now specifically Judah, the southern tribes. Jeremiah Chapter 17. By the way, what is his nickname in the Bible? They call him what? The what? The Weeping Prophet. Why?



Because he had allergies, right? No. Why? Because he's just a despondent person. His therapist called him the Weeping Prophet. No, because it's a terrible time in Israel's history. Right? In a couple generations before, God had promised you guys have sinned so much, you've been such idolaters, you've turned your back on me, you're going to go into exile. Matter of fact, for 70 years you're going to be locked away. I'm going to let the Babylonian army come in and destroy the temple, and everything's going to be wiped out.

Well, we're here now in the ministry of Jeremiah in Jeremiah Chapter 17, where all of that's going on. And so Jeremiah says something very interesting in Jeremiah Chapter 17 verse 5. And you can imagine all that's going on, the chaos that's going on. And here's what he says in verse 5, Thus says Yahweh, "Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.'" In other words, who makes people, human beings, his strength. Now, a verse and a half later, it says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." That's different. "Who trusts in the Lord." Okay, as though we didn't get it the first time. Is your trust in the Lord or is your trust in man? Does your fuel come from what people think or does your fuel come from what God thinks? And intervening in that verse and a half is the illustration, if your fuel comes, your strength comes from people well then, you know what, you're "like a shrub in the desert," and you know what? You're going to be like someone dwelling "in parched places in the wilderness." You're going to be like someone who's "in an uninhabited salt land." Why? Because when times are bad like they were in Jeremiah 17, in the sixth century B.C., right? When things are going on around you where everything's bad and you're the good person trying to stay faithful to God's Word and everything around you is falling apart and you're not getting any accolades, you're not getting any applause, no one's saying, hey, I'm so glad you're being faithful to the law, to the Torah, or to anything, right? You're getting no adulation for the right thing. Right?

Well, then here's the deal. You're going to starve. You're going to starve from not getting what you want. But "blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He's like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream." Now that you can't see. You can still have a bad, you know, summer scorching heat. You can even have a drought. But if it's by the stream, if the stream is still running, well, then he "doesn't fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." Does that sound like Psalm 1? Do you remember Psalm 1? That's what we need. We need our roots to go down by the stream and to grab sustenance there. That's the difference. You can either be thriving by the weather, by the people around you, or you can get strength in a hidden place.

Now, the problem is we like to walk by sight and we like to walk by our ears. We don't like to walk by faith. And faith means you're going to have to wait to hear, "well done" later. You're going to have to wait to hear the rewards and the accolades that come from God or as Jesus put it in John Chapter 12 verse 43, we're going to have to really want to live by "the glory that comes from God," and not "the glory that comes from man." You're going to have to make a decision where I'm going to get my strength from. And the problem with people, by the way, if you know Jeremiah Chapter 17, you might quote verse 9 all the time when it talks about the fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"



Well, a lot of people had problems, including the godly people like Jeremiah, understanding the culture in the deplorable culture, the immoral culture of the sixth century B.C. in Judah. Of course, they're not applauding righteousness. Of course they're not bringing accolades and thanksgiving to people like Jeremiah. They were throwing them in a well, right? They were putting him in prison and in stocks. They were not treating Jeremiah well. Righteousness was not getting rewarded. Integrity was not being applauded. And a lot of times you'll do things and you won't be thanked. Why? Because people don't always do...

Here's the problem. Life is not fair. Did your parents used to say... If you have gray hair in the room, your parents may have told you that. You young people, your parents have lied to you, right? They tell you that you can be whoever you want, right? You can do whatever you want. No. You needed your parents to say what our parents said. Life is not fair. You don't get what you want. This is how it works. You will not get what you want if you're waiting to be fueled by more and more thank you notes and pats on the back. You just won't. And by the way, if you do get that perfect thank you note in the mail and you want to read it 100 times through your tearful eyes. And you cry, ohhh, and finally! Then put it in your hope chest or whatever you do with notes like that. Let me give you some advice. Don't. Okay? Here's my advice to you and this sounds really cruel, I understand. Read it once. You can cry if you want, but read it once, right?

Here's the problem if you do put them in some kind of special locked chest that you have for all those notes that just warms your heart. Eventually you'll keep enough of those notes that one day you're going to find out that whose notes you put in that file cabinet of these wonderful, heartfelt notes of gratitude that warmed your heart and kept fueling you to keep on doing the right thing and serving the Lord or being this great person. It could be a great writeup from a boss at work. It could be the same boss who is going to fire you one day. And in terms of thank you notes, I guarantee you this, eventually you're going to find out that in that hope chest of thank you notes, there's going to be one from Ahithophel. There's going to be one from Absalom. If you don't know those names how about this. There's going to be one from Judas. I know you know that name. And you're going to go, oh, okay. Where do I file that now? Because people who I thought were going to be loyal to me, they're not loyal anymore. People who I thought I was getting all this fuel from the accolades of this person, now all of a sudden they don't care. Matter of fact, they less than don't care, they've turned on me. They're Alexander the Coppersmith. If you know that reference from the Apostle Paul.

Be very careful. It's not that we don't accept gratitude. We ought to. I get it. But we don't read it a hundred times. We're not fueled by it. "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength." My strength is supposed to come from something that is immutable. Immutable. God is immutable. He knows everything about you. You never surprise God. Do you understand that? You never surprise God. He's omniscient and immutable. The reason that there are a lot of people who bail on you is because they're learning things about you. What's great about God is you're sending your roots down to the stream, a God who never changes and knows everything about you. You never surprise God. And this is a good thing. You sit here today, I hope you sit here today as a Christian, repentant, trusting in Christ, rightly reconciled to God and nothing in your life is going to surprise him. And he's already put



his covenant love on you. Oh, the great Old Testament word, the Hebrew word "Hesed." He's given you his covenant love. He set his love on you. And that's where you derive strength. Because the thank you note that comes in today, who knows where it's going to be tomorrow. The Apostle Paul had a lot of adulation from the Corinthians when he left physically and walked out with his sandals, and now all it took was some nice sounding critics of the Apostle Paul for a lot of the Corinthians to go, yeah, Paul, maybe he wasn't all that.

By the way, one little footnote on all this. Can I say this really quickly? You should commend the commendable. You should. You ought to have done this, right? It's very clear in this text, middle of verse 11. Right? "I ought to have been commended by you." So one of the earliest letters which came before First Corinthians and Second Corinthians was First Thessalonians and this is how it started, right? Probably the first letter he wrote, if not Galatians, was First Thessalonians. He says this, "we ask you, brothers," First Thessalonians 5:12 and 13, "to respect those who labor among you and who are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." So yes, someone does good at your job, if you're a boss or a manager, you should recognize that. If you are talking about your small group leader or somebody who should be recognized and commended, you should commend them. Paul says you ought to do that Corinthians. If I am sitting in the Corinthian church and let's just say I'm the pastor in Corinth after Paul left and I get up and read this letter or the messenger comes in and reads a letter from the Apostle Paul, this is going to sting to hear you ought to have commended me. I know if it's not the next Sunday, I mean, soon after I'm going to preach a sermon that's going to have the title "Commend the Commendable," because I'm going to say, yeah, we ought to have commended Paul but we didn't. So it is a godly thing for you to commend the commendable.

I am saying you should write the thank you note, even if I know that the guy I'm sending it to he's only going to read it once. That's okay. But I want to be able to give honor where honors are due and respect where respect is due. That is the right thing to do. So that's just a footnote on all of this because it should be done. But we're not going to be fueled by it because our trust goes way deeper than human fickle approval and disapproval.

Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 11, the middle of the verse, "For I was not all inferior to the super-apostles, even though I'm nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works." Now you're not an apostle so this is not your resumé, but you have a resumé. And that resumé as I said, when it says in the bottom of verse 11, "even though I am nothing," every resumé is derivative, every resumé is derivative, every resumé is not possible were it not for God. And you should always think that this is a passage that always comes to my mind, Acts Chapter 17 verses 24, 25 and 26. Acts 17:24 through 26.

Here is a passage of Scripture where Paul is speaking to the Athenian professors at the Areopagus in Acts Chapter 17, and he starts with the fact that God created everything. So God created everything. He created you. He designed you. He's the architect. He set this thing up through biology to have you be born of your mother. And so you were born. But when you were born it says then that God picked the time on the timeline when you'd be born, and



he picked the geography where you'd be born, you had nothing to do with that. You had nothing to do with designing how your brain would work. You had nothing to do with how your ears would work. You had nothing to do with how your cardiovascular system works. You had nothing to do with how your pulmonary system works, and nothing to do with how your nervous system would work. God designed all of that. He'd designed all that. And then you, your spirit, he was going to emesh you with a body in your mother's womb and knit you together, the Bible says and he put you in the timeline somewhere. You didn't pick the timeline and you didn't pick the geography. That's what it says in Acts Chapter 17. He picked all of that.

And then he wraps it up by saying this, which is really good, I love the way the New International Version puts it, and "he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else." So everything about you is derivative. It's what we call in Scripture a gift, or another word for a gift is "grace," in Greek "Charis." It's a gift. God gives you grace. God gives you a gift. And another way to say that is without the gift you're nothing. So with the gift you're something. Jot this one down, First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 10, First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 10. Paul is making another comparison in First Corinthians 15:10 to the real apostles, to the eleven apostles. And he says this in that passage. Let me read it accurately and carefully. First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 10, "by the grace of God." What is grace? I just said it, charis, a gift. By the gift of God, "by the grace of God I am what I am," only because by myself I'm nothing. "And his grace toward me," his gift toward me, "was not in vain." He did give me a gift and I didn't bury it in the sand. No, I did something with it. "On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them." Now, them, that demonstrative pronoun, is going to point back to verse 9, and he's talking about the other eleven apostles. I worked harder than the other eleven apostles.

Sounds pretty prideful. No, I just said, all of this is a gift of God. But when I got that gift I worked hard. And then he says even the work itself, I understand it's a gift to be able to have the strength. Because I could be dead, right? I could get sick and never be able to get out of bed. "I worked harder than all of them, though it was not I." Right? Not inherently I, not ontologically I, not I without any God working and moving to give "me life and breath and everything else." "But it was the grace of God," the gift of God, "that is within me." So you wouldn't be here this morning listening to me. You would have the brainpower to listen to me. You wouldn't be able to get up and do anything after this service. You wouldn't be able to work tomorrow were it not for God sustaining you. So we're going to say this: without God, you're nothing. But with God, that's called the gift of God, you can be able to say well, I am better than the false apostles. And Paul could even say in First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 10, "I worked harder than any of them." He's making comparisons and he's stating his resumé. His resumé is an apostle. You're not an apostle.

So all of that doesn't apply to you in our passage in Second Corinthians. Right? You're not out there working miracles. You're not being the foundation for the church, Ephesians 2:20. You're not any of that, but you are something. You're a mom, you're a dad, you're a worker, you're a whatever. Great. You have a job to do. You ought to do that. Whether or not you're getting applause or adulation or whether or not you're getting a raise or a bonus, you should



do it. Number 2, "Keep Doing What God Wants You to Do". What is your job? Paul's going to do his job. He's going to do it, it says in our passage, look at how it's stated once you write that down, it says it was "performed among you," his job that he had "with utmost patience," in Greek, "Pas-Hypomonē." Now, you've heard the word hypomonē probably because I like to point it out because it's a great compound word. "Hypo-monē." "Monē" is the word over there in John Chapter 15 verse 4, "to remain." A branch should remain in the vine. Should remain. Should stay there. Okay? Monē means to remain. "Hypo" is to "remain under," hypomonē. I often talk about the burro in Tijuana that stays under the big pack on its back. That's often how I illustrate hypomonē. He used the word "pas" which means "all." All hypomonē. I did my job with all endurance, all perseverance, all hypomonē. It's translated in our text with utmost hypomonē.

Now, patience when I read this did I talk about "Makrothumia" did I use that word? Makrothumia is the normal word for patience, patience, "Makros." I only say these Greek words because in this sense we know these words. Makros. You know what makros means, a lot, big. Makros, big and then "Thumos." Right? Thumos, you get a thermos to keep your coffee hot. We look at a thermometer to see how hot it is. Thumos in Greek is hot. So Makrothumia. These combination in the word "patience" usually means it takes me a long time to get hot. Right? Makrothumia. I'm not going to get angry right away. You can pester me but Pastor Mike is really patient because he doesn't get angry right away. He doesn't get hot under the collar right away. He's not going to explode with anger right away. He's a patient man. Makrothumia.

Now, that's not a bad word, but usually when you see the word "patience" in English in the New Testament, the Greek text underneath it is the word makrothumia. But sometimes it's hypomonē. But usually hypomonē is the word "perseverance" or "endurance." I like it, I wish it were endurance or perseverance here because hypomonē has the sense of, and so does, I guess makrothumia, there's some kind of provocation. But hypomonē is even stronger. It's like it focuses on the pressure; it focuses on the push. It focuses on the fact that there's some kind of push that makes you not want to stay under. And that's, I think, is what we should think of here. And it's weird and maybe it's the reason the translators translated patience not endurance is because when we think of endurance we think of trials, we think of pain, because the pain here is not just his resumé of things that hurt him but the hurt is deprivation and that you didn't defend me when I should have been defended. But that's almost as painful as when someone does something. In other words, you didn't give me what I needed when I needed it. That's hurtful. And sometimes I get stuff thrown at me that hurts, right? Like rocks and rods on my body or the whip of the Jews on my back. All of these things, Paul says, all of this is stuff that I need to keep doing and I need pas-hypomonē, I need all or utmost hypomonē, I need perseverance, I need endurance or patience. We need that stick-to-it-iveness. That's how I used to hear it taught when I was a kid. Stick-to-it-iveness. We need that endurance to keep doing what we're called to do, regardless of the feedback of the people around us.

So I'm just saying to you in the middle of all this, if I've really said I'm not going to find my strength from the applause of people, now I just need you to look at whatever you're called to



do and just keep doing it. Keep doing it, keep doing it. What are you called to do? Keep doing it. And because we're in a generation right now where people are so stuck on getting adulation. If they don't get it, they quit. We're really living in a generation where people are quick to quit. They're really quick to quit. And I'm just saying the old days, think about your grandfather, your great grandfather, they get a job in the factory or whatever and they would just do it for 50 years and get their gold watch and be done. Why? Well, they just did. It was honest work. They were paid for it and they didn't care how many times their name was up on the wall. They were providing and they were just doing the work. And today, I don't think I'm getting paid what I'm worth, and I didn't get the bonus I should have, and I even didn't get promoted when I should have been promoted. You know, at some point we're going to have to look over the shoulder of our boss or in the case of the church, how many people thank me for what I do, and look at Colossians Chapter 3 verse 23 and say I'm working ultimately for God. "Whatever you do, work heartily." Put your whole soul into it literally is what it says, right? Because you're working "as for the Lord and not for man." You're working for the Lord from whom you're going to receive the reward, right? Your paycheck ultimately, the real paycheck that matters, is going to come from God. God is going to reward your work.

So this week, I want you to go to work, whatever your work is, and I want you to say I'm going to do this and I'm going to endure in it. Whatever it costs me. And whatever I don't get that I think I deserve to get, it's okay. It doesn't mean you can't change your job, but I don't want to be the hair-trigger quitter that I think this world is producing by people who feel so entitled. Please don't be an entitled person. PLEASE don't be an entitled person. I mean even in the end of verse 11, I'm nothing. In the end everything I get is derived from God's grace. And it's okay for me to go without the thank yous or the bonuses or whatever. I can handle that. Just do the work. Do it with *pas-hypomonē*. Do it with all or utmost patience.

Signs and wonders are rare things in Bible, obviously to authenticate the message of the apostle or the prophet in the Old Testament. Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 13. One more thing he adds from what "were you less favored than the rest of the churches," I explained this when I read the text, "except that I myself did not burden you?" What's the burden? It's a financial burden. I didn't ask for money. I know they came in these talkers, these teachers, and they said well, if you're a real teacher you should get paid for it. And look at Paul. He didn't even speak that well. He's not very good with the rhetoric that we use. And, you know, he's not trained like we are. And so maybe you shouldn't be listening to him. They denigrated the Apostle Paul and his speaking skills because he wasn't charging them. That was part of it. And he goes, oh, forgive me for not charging you. And this is dripping with sarcasm. So the idea here is that Paul was sacrificing. Why was he sacrificing? He didn't want to be a burden to them. Do you think that's a good motive or a bad motive? It's a good motive. What was happening now with a good motive? It was being turned on its head. Oh, now you think less of me because of my good motive. You now see that as a foothold to tear me down, when I did that because I loved you, right? I did it because, as he explained earlier in the book and in First Corinthians, I did it like a parent who was trying to not burden my child. This was a good thing. I was spending and being expended for your souls. That's why I came as a missionary and not charging you. He was sacrificing for them and they didn't see it for what it was. Do you know who sees it for what it is? God does every time. God never misreads your



motive. People are going to misread your motive. God never will. Number 3, "Realize the King Cheers Every Sacrifice." If your sacrifice is rightly motivated, God is cheering it on and that's all that matters. That's all that matters.

There's a famous painting in a Phoenix museum that has fueled a lot of Hollywood movies, and it's a picture of a gladiator who is besting another gladiator and has his foot on his chest and a sword that's drawn, and he's looking to the crowd. The crowd in the foreground at least, and there are all these people who have their thumbs up or their thumbs down that are yelling at the gladiator and it, you know, filled with a little folklore and fable, the historians will tell you some of this is, you know, make believe. But a lot of Hollywood movies came from that painting and in the background it's kind of blurry and smaller, there's the Emperor seated in his box. And of course, what really matters and if you have seen some of the movies that are derived from that image, it's of course what matters is the emperor. And it's true that in ancient Rome whoever the patron of the games was, and if it was in Rome and it was the emperor, of course the emperor is all that mattered. If the emperor, you know, is giving some kind of approval to the gladiator to finish off the other gladiator, well, then, of course. I don't care what the crowd says. The crowd can be booing and if the Emperor's cheering, well, then that's all that matters. And you know what? If the crowd can be cheering and the emperor can be booing and that's all that matters. You have to be able to choose your audience. And unfortunately today we love to have the people around us, you know, deciding, they're kind of the thermostat for how we feel. And we have to get our audience very clear.

There are two things, of course, that the emperor could do. He could signal that the guy who you just bested can have mercy. That's one thing he can do and that's historically validated. And you just let him go, and he could humbly and in humility and, you know, really being shamed, he could stand up and walk to the tunnel and get off the, you know, the fighting field. Or he could give the signal for you to kill him, and that fighter's career would be over, and the gladiator would kill the other gladiator. There's one more thing the emperor could do. In history what was said to be the sign of that was something they'd given a Latin word for but ultimately all it was a wooden sword, a replica of a sword made out of wood and to be run down to the gladiator. When the gladiator got the wooden sword that was the sign that you were now retired as a gladiator, you were now given freedom. You're no longer conscripted to be a gladiator. You can enter society and your fighting days are over. It was a great thing. I mean, it came with all the benefits and all the rewards. I mean, you had done your job and it was over with all the rewards with it. It kind of brings you back to the words of the Apostle Paul in Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7, when he says, you know, "I have fought the good fight." In the next verse, by the way, he says, And I'm going to be receiving this reward, this "crown of righteousness," and it's going to be rewarded to me. It's been "laid up for me." God is going to give me that. The fight is going to be over. And I know he's given that other analogy in Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7, to "have finished the race. I've kept the faith."

But the idea here is that when we get to the end of all this, it's all going to be clear. It takes faith to be able to say, okay, I can wait for the ultimate approval. I want the "well done" to come. But I have to realize the crowd matters a whole lot less than I think. Now it's great when the crowd is going to agree with the emperor. I want the king to cheer and I want my



best friends to be in tune with the King enough to have the same opinion as the King. But sometimes they don't. A lot of times they get it wrong, and I don't want to be discouraged when they get it wrong. And just like Jeremiah Chapter 17 says and Psalm 1 says, I want to be able to have a connection with the King so I know that what I've done is what I should have done. And Paul knows he shouldn't have charged. He knows that what he's done on the mission field was the right thing. And I don't care if it's used as a foothold to denigrate me. It was the right thing to do and God is going to reward it. Matter of fact, Hebrews Chapter 6 verse 10 says God would be unjust if he didn't reward the love that you've shown for his saints. Here was Paul showing love for the saints in Corinth, and they were twisting it into a negative. I mean, think about it. It's worse than just not saying thank you to Paul. He had sacrificed for them and they didn't thank him, they criticized him for it because someone whispered in their ears, that's not a good thing. Yeah. I don't think that is a good thing, is it?

It's worse than that. They impugned his motives. But God says, no, it's going to be unjust if I don't reward you and I will. God's going to reward you for everything you do that you ought to do. I know it's hard, but there's probably not a single character in Scripture who has anytime in the narrative of Scripture that didn't feel at some point alone and unsupported. Job, Elijah, Jeremiah, Moses, David, the Apostle Paul repeatedly in Second Corinthians already we've seen him admit to much of it. And the question is what are you going to do when you don't feel appreciated for your sacrifice, your hard work, when your loyalty is not reciprocated, when those who should defend you stay silent? When the critics are louder than your supporters. When those you've invested in for years seem worse than unimpressed. They seem like ingrates and critics. You have to keep going, *pas-hpomonē*. You have to have utmost patience, perseverance. And just know that your reward is coming. Look to the emperor. Look to the King. If he has his thumb up then it's all okay. It's going to be fine.

I know there are times you have to defend yourself just as Paul has done here. I wish the world were fair, but it's not. What we need is the reminder to endure. Let me leave you with these simple words that I know if you're a Christian you probably have gone to this text many times. First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 58. First Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," which, by the way, is not just for preachers and missionaries and pastors. This is for people going to work tomorrow driving up the I-5 freeway to Irvine. Right? Colossians Chapter 3 makes that so, "Whatever you do." "You're serving the Lord Christ." That's how that passage ends. The Lord, the boss, Christ. "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain," regardless of who applauds and who doesn't.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, in our world. It's filled with things that are so easily discouraging us. All it takes is a stretch of time where we pour ourselves out and we don't have the pats on the back that we expect. Maybe we pour out a lot of gratitude to others and it doesn't get reciprocated. We give and we give and we feel like it's never appreciated. God, I pray we wouldn't lament. We wouldn't be despondent. We wouldn't get down. I know it's easy to say that and yet some of the best in Scripture have done that. I think of Elijah just sitting there and being so alone in his fatigue after doing good ministry, and you had to remind him



that he wasn't alone. There were plenty of people who were just like him serving, giving, and you ministered to him and it's so good to see him strengthened by you. We need that kind of strength, the strength that goes beyond the people around us. Even as he's chased by Jezebel, we remember the fact that you're a God who sustains, who strengthens. It gives us perspective. So do that for us, please. Let us continue to continue on with that kind of endurance that we need. God make that the reality for us even as we get into our work week, we get into doing the things you want us to do. Let us not be faint. Let us not be fatigued. Let us wait on you to see our strength renewed.

In Jesus' name. Amen.