Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Doing the Lord's Work in the Lord's Way, Part 1
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:5-9
Code: 1886

Take your Bible, if you will, for our study this morning. And turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 16, 1 Corinthians chapter 16. We're fast closing in on the end of this wonderful book that we've been studying for two years or so. And it's like saying goodbye to an old friend. Don't say goodbye to it. Keep reading it. It's so rich. But we're coming this morning to verses 5 through 12. Now, when I began to prepare my thoughts to give to you, I read through these verses and frankly, I wasn't real blessed. It really didn't say a whole lot, initially. There are some scriptures like that that you look at and you say what in the world can I possibly say about this?

Let me read the text to you. Follow along from verse 5. "Now I will come unto you when I have passed through Macedonia for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide ye and winter with you that ye may bring me on my journey wherever I go. For I will not see you now by the way, but I trust to tarry a while with you if the Lord permit." Are you blessed yet? "But I will tarry at Ephesus till Pentecost for a great door and effectual is open unto me and there are many adversaries. Now, if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear. For he worketh the work of the Lord as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him, but conduct him forth in peace that he may come unto for I look for him with the brethren. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren, but his will was not at all to come at this time but he will come when he shall have a convenient time."

That's it folks. I'm going here. I might go there and if he comes there well take care of him. And he won't come, but he may come. Amen. Now, this is where you test your ingenuity in dealing with Scripture. And as I began to read this, and reread it, and reread it, and reread it, and thought about it and tried to say now why in the world does the Lord include all of this in this particular chapter. What is it trying to say?

And then, I noticed that basically this text is surrounded by a phrase that is very important. Look at verse 58 of chapter 15. "Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast unmovable," here's the phrase, "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Now, down in verse 10 of chapter 16, the other side of this passage. "Now, if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear for he worketh the work of the Lord." And then, I knew all of a sudden what Paul was talking about. He's talking about, guess. The work of the Lord. He is saying you ought to be always abounding in the work of the Lord, like I am and like Timothy is and then he goes on to describe how he was doing it.

I’m going here and coming there and thinking about this and I might do this and so forth and so on. That’s all insight into Paul doing the work of the Lord. Now, I found, as I began to study this, at least seven vital principles for doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way right here in this passage. And it just exploded on me. In fact it was so full of information that I had to divide it into two parts, one for today and one for next time. It’s amazing isn’t it? Sure. But that’s, it’s just exciting. Now, look back at verse 58. He says, “You ought to be unmovable always,” that means at all times, “overdoing it in the work of the Lord.” You literally ought to be just overdoing it. When somebody comes up to you and says, listen, you’re doing too much, then you’ve just begun to respond properly to 1 Corinthians 15:58. Just getting to overdo it. Now, doing the work of the Lord is a very vital thing. You say well, yeah what is it. What is the work of the Lord? That’s a fair question and it’s very simply answered. All you have to do to find out what the work of the Lord is to find out what the Lord did when He was here working. And basically it reduces to two things. Number one, He evangelized and number two, He edified.

Luke 19:10 says “The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” That’s evangelism. And in Acts chapter 1, he says, “Until He was taken up into heaven, He was speaking to His disciples the things pertaining to the kingdom.” So, on the one hand He preached the gospel to the people who didn’t know Him. On the other hand, He taught the people who did. Evangelism and edification: that’s the work of the Lord. Winning people to Christ and building them up in their understanding of the faith. That’s what Jesus did when He was here. He spent part of His ministry during those three years proclaiming the gospel to the masses. Then, after He was done doing that, He’d go back into the hillside with His disciples so that on the one hand He evangelized. On the other hand, He took those that believed and He built them up.

That’s the work of the Lord. Now, I want to add that it isn’t ever defined in the Bible as easy. It’s always seen as difficult. And even the words that are used here, the words for labor in verse 58, and toil, and work, and so forth, these words have to do with work to the point of exhaustion. Literally difficult, exerting, hard work. Doing the work of the Lord is labor. G. Campbell Morgan said that Paul has in mind the kind of toil that has in it the red blood of sacrifice. The kind of toil that wearies and weakens along the way. This is exertion. In fact, it was said of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:30, “That because for the work of Christ, he was near unto death.” The guy literally worked himself to death.

Now, that’s always abounding in the work of the Lord. That’s overdoing it. That’s really putting out. That’s exhausting in the Lord’s work. And by the way, when you do it that way, the end of verse 58 says, “your labor is not,” what? “In vain.” It won’t be empty. It won’t be pointless. It won’t be useless. It won’t be unproductive. It’ll matter. It’ll make a difference. It’ll count. There will be some fruits.

You know, there are a lot of people who work and they’re very busy around the church, but I’m not sure they’re doing the Lord’s work of evangelism and edification in the Lord’s way according to the principles we’ll see here. There is busyness without fruitfulness very often in Christianity, and it may

be because they're doing it in the flesh. It may be because they're too lazy to really do it well. It may be because they're really not evangelizing or edifying, they're just busy. But what God wants us to do is to work hard, overdoing it, in the Lord's work, in the Lord's way. And the Lord has some very stringent guidelines.

Now, I remember when all the buildings around Grace Church were going up. When I first came here, was that one little education building and the chapel. And since then all these other buildings have gone up. And I've learned a lot about building. I didn't know anything about it, but just by watching. And I learned at least some basic things, and this was the key thing in relation to what I want to say to you this morning. That you have to build according to plans, according to code, and you've got to pass the inspection. In other words, you've got some plans; it's got to be like that. And then, it's got to be like the code that city requires and then the inspector's got to make sure it's all right. And you know something, when you're doing the work of the Lord, you've got to do it according to the plan that the Spirit of God lays out, according to the code of service which God has established, and you've got allow it to be exposed to the divine inspector who'll tell you whether it does any good or not.

We have to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way to get the seal on it that says this is approved. This is fruitful. This is productive. And that's why 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to show yourself approved unto God. A workman that needeth not to be," what? "Ashamed." When the inspector comes along and says, MacArthur, I'm going to check the work you're doing, I don't want to be ashamed. So, I want to be diligent to work hard to stay with the standards, the code, so the inspector will say that's good. That's doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. I mean, when I build, 1 Corinthians 3, I don't want to build wood, hay, stubble, I want to build gold, silver, precious stone, so it'll last. And someday when the testifier comes at the judgment seat of Christ, it says in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that the Lord at that time will decide what is good or what is *phaulos*, in the Greek it means worthless. There are a lot of Christian folks that are going to stand that day with the Lord and they're going to have their little thing they built and the fire's going to come and, it wasn't bad; it just was useless. It was just activity without productivity. Fruitless, in vain.

Listen, we've been called to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. It ought to get us excited enough that we've even been allowed to do the Lord's work. I don't know how that hits you, but that's pretty exciting to me. I mean, how would you feel if President Carter called you up and said, "Hello, this is Jimmy Carter. I would like to have you be my very personal, special envoy and I would like you to take all the messages that I want to give to the right people who need to receive them for the rest of your life. This is your task." You know, you could hardly restrain your pride. Well, do you realize that the almighty God, the ruler of heaven and earth is said, say, "Would you be my personal envoy, taking my message to the people around the world as long as you live?" That's a higher calling yet, isn't it? You see the incredible reality of it is this: that we have been given a task that is just amazing. And it isn't the man that glorifies the task. It's the task that glorifies the man. "There's no honor," said William Barkley, "like the honor of a high calling." There's no dignity of a great task.

Now, we've been given the responsibility to the do the Lord's work and we want to do it in the Lord's way, and so Paul here, as he talks a little bit about what he's doing in the Lord's work, and what Timothy's doing in the Lord's work, and what Apollos is doing in the Lord's work, gives us what I call seven principles for doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. Seven principles for doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. Boy, these are so practical. This is going to be an exhortation type message, so get ready. Get comfortable, you may get hit.

Point number one: the one who works the work of the Lord, the one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way, first of all, must have a vision for the future. He must have a vision for the future. Now, I really think this is important. Anybody who's really at it in the Lord's work. I mean, anybody who's really working at it, who's really committed to it, who's really sold out to is going to find that because his heart is so motivated and because his love is so consuming that he's going to see needs that he hasn't touched yet and he's going to always be planning how to meet those. He's got the forward look. He's got vision in his heart. He's going to be working right now, but he's going to be looking ahead to what isn't being done. He's never satisfied with what is being done. He can only see what isn't being done. He's planning ahead. He's looking for new worlds to conquer. He's facing the reality of unmet opportunity. He's waiting for new doors to open up. He's plotting and planning and strategizing and laying out a method. A plan of attack for future. That was Paul.

You say, is that in this passage? Yes, look at verse 5. Now, he says, "I will come unto you when I have passed through Macedonia. For I do pass through Macedonia." Now, let me give you a little background. First Corinthians was written by Paul at the end of a three year stay in the city of Ephesus. Paul took 1 Corinthians after he'd written it, handed it to Timothy and sent Timothy with it. Now, originally according to 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 15 and 16, originally Paul had planned to follow Timothy, just a little while after Timothy left, Paul was going to leave and he was going to come along right to Corinth, then to Macedonia, then back to Corinth. He had a plan. But now as he writes here, he, of course, in 2 Corinthians, he's reflecting way back to his original plan. And here he says, I've changed my plan. "I will come to you when I have passed through Macedonia." So, instead of Corinth, Macedonia, Corinth; it's going to be straight to Macedonia then to Corinth and then I'm going to go back to Jerusalem. So, he had this plan working out. And it had to change now and then, but basically he had made a plan for the future. He says, I'm coming. Back in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 18, he says, "Some of you are conceited or puffed up as though I would not come to you, but I will come to you shortly if the Lord wills."

So, he's planning to come. Why? Oh my, listen, the Corinthian church is a hot spot of paganism. The Corinthian church has got problems all over the place. The Corinthian church is a desperate situation. And Paul says look, I've got to come to be with you. And I'm going to have to do that in the future and I'm even planning, look at verse 6, "to spend the winter with you and have you give me some supplies so that wherever I go from there my needs will be met." I'm going to stay. You've got some needs.

Now, all I want to draw out of that whole idea there is not all of the historical variations. I just want you to know that Paul was planning ahead. He had a view to the future. He was busy in Ephesus and I mean things were popping in Ephesus, things were happening there. God was at work. People were getting saved. The saints were growing. It was tremendous energy being expelled there all the time he was totally lost in the work at Ephesus. He was able also to have a vision for what he needed to do in Corinth, in Macedonia, back in Corinth, and all the way to Jerusalem. What a mind. What a strategist. Like a scout standing on the top of a hill, looking out to the territory unconquered. Paul is looking at what has to be done. And I really feel that anybody who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way is somebody with a sense of vision who was able to analyze what isn't being done and strategize to get it done. It's got to be. You know, you can't just be with blinders, on focusing on your little ditty here and now. You can't just well, look, it's all being done right here. Isn't it wonderful? You've got to look way out and see what isn't being done.

Paul had plans. It's just the way he was. One writer said, "Paul was haunted by the regions beyond. He never saw a ship at anchor, but he wished to board it to carry the message of the good news to the people across the water. He never saw a mountain range, blue in the distance, but he wanted to cross it to build up the saints." End quote. That's right. I mean, Paul had a vision. He always saw a whole world yet unreached. He could never be satisfied with what was going on where he was. He had great this vision for what wasn't being done.

Look with me for a minute at Romans 15 and you get an interesting view here of this in Paul's heart. In Romans 15:24, Paul says to the Romans, "Whenever I take my journey to Spain, I'll come to you." Now, that's interesting. Then, in verse 28, Romans 15:28, "When, therefore, I have performed this and sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain." Now, Paul has got Spain on his brain. Why? Because nobody had ever been there. It had never been reached. And Spain was in a blaze of glory at this time. Spain had been conquered by the Roman Empire. The Roman roads are still there. You can see parts of them in Spain today. The old, some of the old Roman architecture is still there and you can still see it today and Spain was in a blaze of glory. Some of the greatest poets and writers and orators were living in Spain. And one of the greatest of all the Romans who ever lived, the tutor of Nero, the prime minister of the Roman empire, the great stoic philosopher Seneca was the key man in Spain, and Paul was seeing this fantastic opportunity. And so in his heart and his mind was Spain.

And as he wrote, he was writing from Corinth. He was busy in Corinth. He was working in Corinth and he was going to go to Rome and he was going to do a little bit there, but Spain was there in his vision. You see, he was able to give himself to a task and yet have a vision for the future. Now, this is part of doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. You can't ever get bogged down and get your blinders on and think you've got it all right in front of your face. I'll tell you one of the frustrations of the ministry is the sense that you never do finish the work. No matter what you, there's always something out there that isn't being done. A vision for the future. Now, I think it's important that when you look at the

future, you've got to begin to think what needs to be done and how can it be done, so that you're ready when God wants to give you the opportunity. Now, there are some people would say, well, there's sure a lot to do in the future, but they're doing absolutely zero in the present to get ready.

Listen, Nehemiah, he didn't go up to the king and say, I would like a ministry. Could you please find something for me to do with my people? He said, look, my people have a problem. They need their city rebuilt, their wall rebuilt. I want to do it. I know how to do it. I've figured it out. I've strategized it. I'm waiting. All I want is permission. See? And what happened? The king punched the launch button and fired Nehemiah, and he was ready to go and he did the job. Listen, if you're going to have a vision for the future, then you're going to strategize in the present to make the future a reality if God ever punches the button. And I'm afraid that the reason some people never kicked into ministry that they keep looking for and waiting for it is because they've not done anything in the present either to plan for it or to prove themselves worthy of doing it. So, I really believe that in the present, we have to be working to prove ourselves useful and we have to be planning so that we're ready when the launch button is hit.

I think of William Carey. William Carey the great pioneer of modern missions, cobbled shoes in England. But you know what he did while he cobbled shoes? Right in front of his face, every day, was a map of the world. And he wept over it, and he prayed over it, and he planned over it, and he strategized over it. And one day God hit the launch button and said you're gone from the shoe business, William Carey. And he landed in India and he opened India to the gospel for every missionary who's gone there since. And God used a man who was a faithful man in the present who proved himself a capable man, and it was a man who had a vision for the future. And he planned and when the time came, he was ready. Vital.

I'm afraid that there are some people even in seminary, some young people in seminary, they're just going through the motions of seminary trying to get the grades done. They're not involved in an effective, dynamic ministry now, so they're not proving themselves for a future one. And they're not strategizing for anything in the future and then when they come out of school, they really don't have anything to, because they haven't prepared themselves to do anything by the route of faithfulness, and they haven't planned to do anything by virtue of evaluating the need and setting a strategy. You've got to be ready.

You think God's going to buy a pig in a poke and throw you out and hold His fingers? No. When God wants somebody to do a job, God wants somebody to do it who's ready to do it, proven ready, and has a plan to do it. You know all the time I was working for Talbot Seminary, just to give you a personal illustration. All the time that I was involved in preaching all over the country, I was planning I would pastor a church when God gave me the opportunity. So, that by the time the Lord opened the opportunity at Grace, I knew just exactly what God wanted me to do here. Now, there's been some changes and some growing and development, but those were the years that I was framing the thing

that I was going to do, so that when the door opened, I was ready to do it.

You see, training for service is not just a matter of learning some Bible facts and hanging around waiting for God to drop you like a big guru from heaven into the perfect situation and say go. You see. It's a matter of you being faithful in the present. Of you working hard in the present. Of you being involved in the Lord's work in the present and of you laying out a plan so that when the day comes and the door opens you are ready to go. God had long before broken the heart of William Carey over India. God had long before given him a plan and God gave him an opportunity to go with the plan that had already burned in his heart.

What are you planning to do? Where's your vision? Well, what do you see ahead? There's a whole world without God. What do you see? Where's your part? What are you planning? What's your strategy to reach somebody to develop your gift, to use your ministry to reach out? If you just float from day to day and say, well, I'm just waiting here for God to give me something to do. No, you'll never get it. If you're doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way you have a vision for the future.

Let's look at the second point. The one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way not only has a vision for the future, I love this, he has a sense of flexibility. You know what? The future may not all come together like you thought it would. So, you've got to be flexible. This is so good. You get some people to say, well, I know exactly what God wants me to do. I have the gift of A and I have the so forth of B, and I obviously have the talents of C. Therefore, that equals that I do this. And until that comes along, I'm certainly not going to go over to that place and do that. That's just not exactly what fits me. Oh, boo on that. That's bad, see. Well, you get yourself all convinced in your own mind that you will do this. You've just eliminated one very great element of Christian service: doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way demands a sense of flexibility. Let's look at the text again. We are in 1 Corinthians 16 and looking at verse 7. This is so, well, let's look back at verse 6. He says, "it may be that I will abide and stay the winter with you that you may bring me on my journey wherever I go but I will not see you now by the way, but I trust to tarry a while with you if," what? "The Lord permits." Isn't that a kind of what you might call gloriously unsettled attitude?

Paul is an adventurer. He says, well, I think I'm going to come with you. I think I might stay the winter, and when I'm done there I might go somewhere else, I'm not too sure, but I am going to stay if the Lord permits. Boy, I like that. I got all these wonderful plans, but I've got this thing in the back of my mind that says don't be too firm, brother; God may change you in midstream. That's a vital thing. If the Lord permits.

You know, the Corinthians were very unkind with Paul. They accused Paul of being fickle. In 2 Corinthians chapter 1, the actually accused of being fickle. He says in verse 15, well I was going to come to you and in 16, I was going to come to you into Macedonia, and then out of Macedonia back to you, and then on my way to Jerusalem and Judea. Well, he says in verse 17, "When I therefore

was thus minded did I use lightness?" In other words, when my plan kept changing and I had this plan, was I being frivolous or fickle or light? "No," he says, "the things that I purpose, I purpose according to the flesh that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay." I mean, I got to do the best I can with what I've got and be ready to change my mind. That's all.

Man, that's the adventure of the ministry. You know, sometimes I may say we ought to do this and we're going to do this, and then three months later I get up and say we're not going to do that. And that's the adventure of it all. Boy, when the adventure's gone, I'm gone. I love that part of it. And so, he says, "if the Lord permits," listen, he'd learned his lesson. Look at Acts 16. He had a plan, see? He had been to Phrygia and Galatia and he was saying to the fellows, now guys, we're going to Asia Minor. We're going to hit Asia Minor, critical area; we're going to hit Ephesus, Laodicea, Pergamos, Smyrna, Thyatira, et cetera, Sardis. We're going to hit Asia Minor for God. We've got this great strategy. I'm sure he had it all mapped out.

And in 6 it says, Acts 16:6, "Now, when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia and were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia Minor." Oh, but we've planned it Lord. It's our strategy. No, the Holy Spirit says you're forbidden. Now, I don't know how the Holy Spirit stopped them, but He did. Verse 7, so they said well, it must be if we can't go south, we must be to go north. "Let's go to Bithynia." Here we go. And the end of verse 7, "but the Spirit allowed them not." Oh okay, well, we can't go east, we've been there. We can't go south, He won't let us. We can't go north, He won't let us. There's only one way to go, let's go guys, charge. West, 250 to 300 miles they kept walking west. You think they knew where they were going? No, but they knew that was the only place to go. They could have said, well, we must go back to Antioch for more training. No, no. They didn't need more education, they didn't need to go back and get their doctorate. They just needed to go. Just keep moving. The door is there somewhere. So, they kept walking and they came to Troas and they had a vision at night and a man of Macedonia said come over to Macedonia. Verse 10 says, "After he had seen the vision immediately we endeavored to go to Macedonia assuredly gathering the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them." Isn't that great? What flexibility. They had their plans. Their plans were scuttled, but they kept moving.

I don't know if you've ever tried to steer a Mack truck that's standing still. It's very difficult. But once it gets rolling, God can steer it. God can move it. And so, they were flexible. Did you know something interesting? Did you know that all his life David Livingston had his heart set on going as a missionary to China? Did you know that? David Livingston all his life wanted to go to China. David Livingston was disappointed all his life because he never got there, but one day God punched the button on his life and he wound up where? In Africa. And David Livingston did for Africa what William Carey did from India. He opened it to the missionaries who've been there ever since. Flexibility.

You see the need and the door is open and you're a prepared heart and you've got a plan, God may launch you in an area you never dreamed possible. I always think of the story of Marty Wolfe which I

put in that little book, “Found: God’s Will.” Marty and I used to ride to school together when I was in seminary. Marty was such a sweet guy. And Marty wanted to be in the Lord’s service. And Marty knew he was going to be a missionary. He just knew that in his heart. He just prepared. He strategized. He planned. Boy he just, he was with it. He always had a ministry going all the time. Witnessing to people. He used to drag me over to the houses of Rabbis to confront them. And we used to have a great time, you know, and they would smack their Talmuds and everything. We just had a great time. And I would smack the Scofield Edition, you know, and away we’d go. But anyway, Marty and I had this great fellowship. And Marty used to say John, where do you think God wants me? Where do you think God wants me to minister? And I’d say well, Marty where do you want to minister. Oh he says, I’ve been to France, I’ve lived in Paris. I could reach those French speaking Jews for Christ. I said that’s wonderful Marty, just do that. Just go there. Oh, that was on his heart. So, he joined a mission organization, Bible Christian Union it was called, and set out for France and we, I’ll never forget we put a plaque in our church said “Marty Wolfe goes to France.” And it was exciting. And God really honored that man. Today he’s serving Christ in Canada. Flexibility. You know where he is in Canada? Montreal, working with French speaking Jews. Different city.

You see, that’s what God’s after. God’s after a willing heart, prepared heart, a heart with a vision that’s got a little flexibility to go where the Spirit directs. By the way God has blessed his ministry immensely. So, the servant of the Lord, doing the work of the Lord in the Lord’s way must have a vision for the future and flexibility.

Third point, one who does the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, this is important, must not be superficial, must not be superficial. Verse 6, “It may be that I will abide.” Notice, he wants to stay. “Yea and winter with you.” And by the way, Paul did winter with them. No doubt he wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring, stayed in Ephesus till June, and then he went on to be with the Corinthians and spent the winter there, the great portion of the three months right there. He says, I want to stay. Verse 7, “I trust to tarry a while with you.” I don’t want to just see you by the way. I don’t want to wave while I’m passing. I want to stay. I want to be there a while. Why? Because he had a commitment to thoroughness in the ministry. He wasn’t interested in superficiality.

When he looked at the Corinthian situation and he saw the need there, the only thing he could do was commit himself to a long range involvement. By the way, this goes all the way back to the commission the Lord gave us in Matthew 28 when He said, “Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I’ve commanded you.” Listen, you can’t teach somebody to observe all things that God has commanded without investing your life in them. You can’t do it superficially. You can’t pass out tracts and beat it out of town. There’s more to that. Doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way is not superficiality; it is thoroughness. Now, Paul’s intention wasn’t a quick stop. He didn’t want to wave on the road. He knew the needs were great as evidence by the contents of this Epistle. He knew the burdens were great and he said, I want to abide there. He’d spent 18 months the first time; he wanted to spend at least another winter there. In Ephesus, he

spent three years ministering there. He went to Galatia on the first missionary journey. He went to Galatia on the second missionary journey. He went to Galatia on third missionary journey. Why? Because he wanted a thorough work in Galatia. He was thorough. This is so important. I think anybody who does the Lord's work, in the Lord's way, according to the plan, according to the code, and to be approved by the inspector, is going to do it with a thoroughness.

I'll tell you, that's why I'm in the pastorate because that's where I feel I can do that. You know, and I used to travel on the, I'd preach 35 to 40 times a month for two and a half years before I came to Grace, just traveling all over the place preaching, preaching, preaching. You know, I'd go in for one or two days or three or four days at the most and I'd zap, and then I'd be out of town and I had this terrible sense of frustration. You know usually when you go in for a special series, they'd want a certain topic, like prophecy or evangelistic leadings or a series on the Holy Spirit or something on worldliness and sin and sex and materialism and all. And you're just going around and around with the same old deals, you know? The typical evangelist with 25 sermons and 25 suits who just keeps moving and you know, that was just kind of the road game. You know? And all the time that that was going on in my life I was being frustrated, because I was saying, but I'm not really doing anything that has any depth. And then, Grace Church came into my life and I was very fortunate. I preached here one time and they'd had two pastors, two wonderful men who died of a heart attack. And they said look, we don't care if he's any good, just get him young.

And so, you know, here I am and the Lord fulfilled that desire in my heart, to be here to do something thorough that wasn't superficial and God has blessed. And I think that's the only way to do the Lord's work is to make a commitment to do it. Look at Colossians 1:27 and 28. It says in Colossians 1:27, talking about Paul, "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of the mystery among you Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." In other words, Paul was the minister of the mystery. His message was Christ in you. And he says, "Christ whom we preach," now watch here's the key, "warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ." Now, that's incredible. Paul says look, we want to teach everybody, everything, all the time that they may all be mature. Now, that's a commitment to thoroughness, isn't it? Thoroughness.

And I really mean it. If you're not willing to commit yourself to a thoroughness in the ministry, you're going to short-circuit your effectiveness. The Lord's work, done in the Lord's way will not be in vain when it is done with thoroughness. In Ephesians 4:13, it says, "That the Lord has given evangelists and pastors to the church to bring the body to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ to build the saints to real maturity." And that's why Paul said to the Ephesians, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God," Acts 20:27. I mean, I told it to you all because I want everybody to understand everything that can bring them to maturity. If you're going to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way be thorough.

Jesus said in John 17 to the Father, he said, “Father, you gave me the work to do, and I’ve done it, and I gave them Your word and they received it, and they’re ready to do it on their own now and I can return to you.” Jesus was thorough. It took Him three years, but He did it. Paul was thorough, doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way is thoroughness, giving complete testimony. Paul says in Acts 20, “I testified of the gospel.” He uses *diamarturomai*. He gave thorough complete testimony. That was always his way. Listen, if you’re preparing for a service or if you’re in service to Christ, and by the way, every one of us is, we’re all His emissaries and ambassadors. We ought to be doing it thoroughly. We ought to be doing it excellently. We ought to be doing it to the limit of our capacity. You should never teach a lesson until you’ve made a total commitment that that should be excellent and it should be done thoroughly. You should never go out to minister to someone unless you’re willing to make a commitment of thoroughness to that someone. And then, your labor will not be in vain. So, the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way involves a vision for the future, a sense of flexibility, and a work that isn’t superficial.

Fourth, and we’ll cover just the first part of this point and we’ll pick up next time and finish it. The one who does the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, and I love this, must have a commitment to present service, present service. And by that, I mean this: you can’t just be a planner; you’ve got to be a doer. You’ve got to be doing it now for God to want to even use you in the future. There are plenty of dreamers planning what they will do and a lot less doers doing what they can do. Plenty of dreamers. I know when you sit in seminary, you say, oh, when I get out this is what I’m going to do. This is what I’m going to do. And then, I’m going to do this. I’m going to have this great ministry and this and this is going to happen. And then, the question comes ringing from the apostle Paul, oh that’s very interesting, what are you doing now? Because now is the proving ground. Now is the testing time.

I’ll never forget talking to a seminary student graduating in about a month, he said to me, “I finished four years of seminary, I’ve got all this education in my head.” He says, “I’m going to go out to pastor a church.” “John,” he says, “I don’t have idea what’s required of me.” Oh boy. If you think that’s bad for him, imagine those poor folks. You know, I mean, you’re not just going be dropped out of heaven on these people with all the answers. You’ve got to be a proven commodity. You know what happens when people write us? We get letters almost every day of the week. I’m sure just about every day, from churches and organizations wanting us to recommend people for ministry and they always say the same thing. We want somebody who’s proven to be effective. And I don’t blame them, God’s the same way. God is the same way. You never give a novice a strategic place of ministry. That’s why it’s vital that anybody planning for the future also has a commitment to the present.

Sometimes it’s tough to keep that balance. You know, you’ve got to sell yourself out to the present and pour it on, and be diligent, and faithful, and hardworking, and absolutely committed; and at the same time feeling the tug of what isn’t being done. And you’ve got to keep that tension. Once you bail out of the present in favor of the future, you’re gone. The testing ground is gone. And once you’re lost

in the present and you miss the future then you've lost the vision. Got to have that tension.

Look at verse 8, this is so good. Paul says, oh, I've got these plans. I'm coming here, going there, coming here, and so forth and so forth and then in verse 8 he says, "But I'm going to stay at Ephesus till Pentecost." Why, Paul? "Because the door is open," he says in verse 9. I've got a ministry here. I don't want to quit on this one. Boy, here's a guy who not only could plan for the future but could really do it in the present. His great plans for the other churches had to be deferred until Pentecost. He had some work to do. He could plan for the future, and at the same time pour out all his energy in the present. That's the man doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way.

Mike McKellup and I were talking the other day about this, and I asked Mike if I could share this with you. Mike is with us this morning. Mike had an operation on his brain for an inoperable brain tumor, and they told Mike that he had about what? Six months to two years or something like that, perhaps, to live. And Mike has eight units short of finishing seminary. And I know what Mike has planned all through seminary because I've heard it from his friends, and he's even shared it with me that he wants to be in the pastorate. He wants to pastor a church. He has this vision. He's had these plans. But I'll tell you something wonderful about Mike, I've never known Mike to just plan and not be doing something. All the time I've ever known Mike, he's been up to his neck in the ministry. In fact, Mike, when I first met him he was starting some Bible studies at UCLA. He didn't have an organization or anything; it was just Mike. And he started some Bible studies. And they grew, and they grew, and they grew, and there were dorm Bible studies and God started to work. He started to disciple people. Some of the people he discipled are now running those ministries there. Others are in seminary. This has all been going on in his life. And we were talking about the fact that if the Lord takes him home in six months, he's not going to go home saying but I was planning it all, I was planning it all. He can go home, but I was doing it. I was doing it. It's got to be there.

You know, it's great to be a visionary, but get at it, man. There may be no time for your vision. I don't know. And don't expect God to plop you down in some perfect situation in the future unless you're really doing something that's proving you in the present. That's vital.

I think of Stephen and Philip. You know how they started out? They were waiters. That's right. The apostle said look we can't serve dinner and also study the Bible, Acts 6. So, you're going to have to choose some waiters, get some guys who can pass the food out. We want the right kind of waiters. What are their qualifications? Well, they ought to be able to carry two plates in one hand without falling. No, what is the, what are their qualifications? We want men full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, amazing qualifications for waiters. And so, they picked a few really sharp guys; two of the best were Stephen and Philip. Have you ever heard of them? You know what? They started out as waiters and they were faithful waiters and God made them evangelists. That's what God's in the business of doing. You see Paul says, hey, I've got a lot of great plans, but those plans don't ever make me lose the perspective of now. And this is where I give my life, now. So, if you're going to do

the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, that means you’re going to have a vision for the future. You’re going to have a sense of flexibility. You’re going to have a work that’s not superficial, and you’re going to have a commitment to a present service, a present ministry that’s fruitful and effective.

And then, when the time comes for God to punch your launch button into that future you’re going to be ready, you’re going to be proven, and you’ll have worked through the principles that’ll work in that new dimension of ministry. People, let’s us be always abounding in the work of the Lord, and let’s do it so it’s not in vain but so it’s to His glory. That means every one of us, whatever our gifts, and abilities, and callings are. Well, let’s pray.

Lord, it’s so good to be refreshed again in the testimony and the pattern that we see in the life of this man, Paul. What a choice servant. Father, make us more like Paul, who was like Jesus. Help us to work the work of the Lord in the Lord’s way. Help us to do it the way You want it done. Help us to be totally sold out to it, totally committed to it. Help us to be like Epaphroditus, to work ourselves if need be to death if that’s what You ask. To be diligent, to show ourselves approved unto God, workers that have no need to be ashamed. Use us Father, to do Your work in Your way, that You might get all the glory. Amen.

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