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

Doing the Lord's Work in the Lord's Way, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:9-12
Code: 1887

We want to continue in our study this morning of 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verses 5 through 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verses 5 through 12. When I was a little boy I grew up part of my life in Eagle Rock, California, right over the hill here. And up the street from us, we lived on Addison Way for a while. My grandmother and grandfather lived also, but we had up the street from us a very famous man, Keith L. Brooks. I know Nan remembers Keith, lived up at the top of the block. And when I was a little boy, Keith L. Brooks was kind of an awesome man. He was a writer of many, many books and Bible study books. In fact, today still, our bookstore carries books written by Keith L. Brooks, a very gifted man of God. And I guess he was always kind of an intriguing man to me when I was a little boy. Well, he told some wonderful stories, but a story that he told that I've always thought was especially beautiful was this story. And it ties in with what we want to share this morning.

Northwestern University located at Evanston, Illinois, north of Chicago, for many years had a volunteer lifesaving crew. And that volunteer lifesaving crew was used to help ships and their people who were in distress on Lake Michigan. One time, the Lady Elgin, which was a passenger ship, was being broken up in the great waves and the storm that had hit on Lake Michigan. And so this group of people got together, this life saving crew to do what they could to save these people. One of them was a young student who was at Garrett Biblical Institute preparing for a lifetime of missionary service. His name was Edward W. Spencer. And Keith Brooks said that he saw a woman clinging to some wreckage far out in the breakers, and so he dove in the water and swam out, and he got this lady, and he brought her to safety. And then, as he looked back, he saw more victims and more victims, and he swam out again and again until finally he had rescued 17 people by himself.

Then, he collapsed in a delirium of exhaustion and while tossing in his delirium he cried out, "Did I do my best, did I do my best?" And his brother who was standing nearby said to him, "Well, you saved 17 lives." And he said, "Oh, oh if only I could have saved more. Did I do my best?" Sounds pretty good to me, doesn't it to you? That's the only way to do the work of the Lord, isn't it? Do your best. Look at verse 58 of 1 Corinthians 15. "Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Listen, there's our little key isn't it to what we've been learning in the 16th chapter. We're learning about abounding in the work of the Lord. And we've already pointed out to you that God's work deserves the best, the very best. And that every Christian should be saying in exhaustion, did I do my best? Did I do my best?

In 2 Timothy 2:15, it says “Be diligent to show yourself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be,” what? “Ashamed.” In other words, do your best so there’s no sense of shame. Look at Mark chapter 13 for a moment and verse 32. And the Lord is talking about His second coming here, and this is what He says. “But of that day and that hour, knoweth no man. No not the angels who are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take heed, watch and pray for you know not when the time is.” In other words, you don’t know when the Lord’s going to coming. You don’t know how much time you have. In the vernacular of 1 Corinthians 15, you don’t know when resurrection day is going to occur. You don’t know when you’re going to be glorified. You don’t know how much time you have left.

So, he says in 34, “The Son of man is like a man taking a far journey who left his house. Our Lord went away and He gave authority to His servants and to every man His work. And He commanded the porter to watch.” And then, verse 35, “Watch ye therefore, for you don’t know when the Master of the house comes.” Stop there. Listen, he says, you don’t know when the Lord’s going to come, but the Lord has like, He’s like a man who went away and He left every man a work to do. And someday he’s going to come back and evaluate that.

In Revelation 22:12 it says, “Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be.” In other words, how you do that work that He’s committed to you will determine how He will reward you in glory. Now, we don’t know when that day’s going to come. We don’t know how much time we have. And we’re called upon to do our very best. And Paul in 1 Corinthians is saying the resurrection’s coming. The resurrection’s coming, wherefore because you don’t know how much time you have. You should be always added in the Lord’s work. There’s no time to waste. In 2 Thessalonians, I want you to look at the third chapter and I want to show you an interesting statement by Paul. 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 11, he says this, “For we hear,” writing to the Thessalonian believers, “we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly.” Now, watch the next line. “Working not at all, but are busybodies.” Now, that’s the most interesting thing, because it’s a play on words in the Greek. It literally says not busy workers, but busybodies. Paul says, we hear of all horrible things that some people among you aren’t working. They’re not out there giving everything they’ve got; they’re busybodies.

Now, in this case, the busybodies were running around speculating about fantastic tales about the return of Christ. They had failed in their ministries to be accomplishing anything meaningful. They had, in many cases, laid down the very tools of their trade and they were just running around talking, speculating about the return of Christ. So, verse 12 he says, “Now, them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, this is the Lord’s command. “That with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” You know what was happening? These people running around speculating about theology or sponging off everybody else for their food because they weren’t working. And he says, I have two suggestions: shut up and go to work and eat your own bread. And

then, he says in verse 13, “But you brethren, be not weary in well-doing.” In other words, to you that are working, don’t get discouraged because of all the flakes. Don’t look around and say boy, it’s hardly worth it. Here I am doing my best and these people aren’t cutting it. You know, you might feel like that if you’re at work on the assembly line or wherever you work and you know you’re giving everything you’ve got, and everybody around you just kind of floating along and it’s very easy to get very, very weary about that.

So, he says look, don’t be a busybody, be a busy worker. Get at it. Not all talk, but be involved. And I think it’s important for us and I’m just trying to point out to you that God expects His people to work. When the Lord, in 1 Timothy 5, picked out a list of widows, He said now when you get a list of widows that are going to work for the Lord in the church you be sure that they are people who have done good works in the past, who have proven faithful, who have loved their husbands, taken care of their children, entertained strangers, washed feet, and all the other good works. You pick hard workers. God wants us to be diligent, undivided and faithful. It’s always this way.

We are to be involved. In fact, Ephesians chapter 4 says that my job as an evangelist and teaching pastor is to perfect the saints for what? For the work, for the work of the ministry. That’s our job people to do the work of the ministry. We’re all in it. Christ wrote to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2. He says, “I know your works and I know that you have labored.” That’s commendable. We are to be working. We are to be at it. We are to be involved. We are to be committed and we’ll be rewarded on the basis of that work.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says the Lord is going to come and He’s going to reward us for our works whether they be good or useless. Whether they be gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble. So, we’re to work. We’re to work the work of the Lord. “We’re to work while it is day,” Jesus said, “for the night comes when,” what? “When nobody can work.” Now is the time to get at it. Now is the time to be lying on the beaches, that we’re in exhaustion saying that I do my best, that I do my best, see. We don’t know how much time we have. Colossians 4:17 says, “Discharge your ministry to the full. Discharge your ministry to the full.” And I guess if you’re going to really do it, if you’re going to work, you’re going to have to redeem the time like Ephesians 5:15 says. You’re going to have to set your priorities like 1 Peter says, “be sober.” That means set your priorities. You’re going to have to get the priorities right, make a commitment to time, and really get at it. And then, just maybe we’ll be able to come to the end of our life and say like Paul, “I have finished the work which you gave me to do.” Jesus rather, “I finished the work which you gave me to do.” And then, like Paul who said, “I’ve finished my course.”

There can only be a sense of accomplishment in finishing when we’ve really given everything we’ve got to the work. You say well, if I give everything I’ve got, what happens? Well, one thing will happen: the Lord will reward you in glory. But another thing that will happen is He’ll probably give you more work to do. That’s right. If you do real good with what you’ve got, He’ll probably give you more

because you're a proven commodity.

In the Olympic Games, many centuries ago, it's recorded that a certain individual won a great victory in the Olympics. And a person came up to him and said, "Spartan, what will you gain from this victory?" To which he replied, "I will have the honor to fight in the front line in the ranks of my king." I like that. If you do good, you know, in the back, you may get right up in the front where it's really hot. That's the way it is in spiritual things too. If you're faithful to the Lord at one point and you prove excellent, successful in your work at one point, He'll promote you to greater responsibility which demands greater efforts, with greater consequences and greater persecution. And maybe that doesn't encourage you a lot, but it does me. The bigger the challenge, the bigger the victory, right? So, the Lord has called us to work. That's the way our whole life is to be, our whole life.

Now, in doing that, there are some principles in 1 Corinthians 16 that we've been looking at. In verses 5 to 12, this very simple little text. The apostle Paul is basically describing his work. He's always abounding in the work of the Lord. He closes 15 with that, and in 16 he describes a little about how he does the work of the Lord. And I see implicit in this little section seven principles for doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. Now, we've already considered three of them and a part of the fourth, and then we'll go on and finish them up this morning.

There are some principles. You say boy, I'm supposed to work, but how? What are the guidelines? Well, you watch Paul here and see how he works. Principle number one, the one doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way must have a vision for the future. Remember that from last time? A vision for the future, verse 5. "Now I will come unto you when I have passed through Macedonia for I do pass through Macedonia." Now, this is just a little glimpse into Paul who was always making future plans. He was a man with vision. He was a man with anticipation. He was a man who could see what was not yet being done. A man who could see the open field ahead. The man who could be challenged by what had to be done, or what had never been touched. He was a dreamer in that sense. He conquered worlds in his mind that he'd never been to with his feet. He had future plans. He strategized. He developed means and methods and plans. by which to accomplish future goals. And we asked ourselves the question last week: what are we planning? What are we strategizing for the future? What are we doing to make a dent in this incredibly complex world where Christ yet has not been named? What do we see ahead for us? Or are we simply floating along without goals, without vision, without objectives? Because if we are, we're not doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way.

Secondly, we said that the one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way must not only have vision for the future, but must have flexibility because God may change that future. In fact, there may never be a future. Then, you've got to be willing to shift. Now, look at verses 6 and 7. He says, "It may be that I'll abide. I'm not sure and winter with you that you may bring me on my journey wherever I go for I will not see you now in passing, but I trust to tarry with you," and here's the key, "if," what? "The Lord permits." In other words, there was this little clause of flexibility in the life of Paul, that all of the visions

and all of the hopes and all of the dreams and all of the plans were always predicated on the little thought, “if the Lord permits.”

That’s flexibility, people. That doesn’t mean you don’t make plans. That doesn’t mean you just sit around saying well, Lord I am available. I wish you’d do something. You’ve got to be strategizing and planning and examining and preparing, and then allowing for the flexibility that God brings to bear. The third principle, the one does the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way must be thorough, not superficial. You’ll notice in verses 6 and 7 that he says, I don’t want to see you in passing, in verse 7. I want to tarry with you and in verse 6 he says, I want to abide with you, yes, I even want to spend the winters with you. Now, Paul realized that the level of problems in Corinth demanded time. And he was a person who did things thoroughly. He was a person who did not function superficially. That is not the way to do the Lord’s work. The Lord’s work in the Lord’s way demands thoroughness, completing the job, filling it out, doing it right. And so, we find then that do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way involves a vision for the future, flexibility and thoroughness.

And then, fourthly, and this is where we left off last time, the one who does the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way must have a commitment to present service. A commitment to present service. And I told you last week there are plenty of dreamers planning what they will do, and a lot less doers doing what they can do. Big difference, but believe me the real efficient guy with the great plan for the future who’s going to see that come to pass is using the present as a proving ground. He’s developing himself. He’s developing his strategy. He’s developing his means. He’s preparing his heart for what God may have in the future, if the future ever realizes.

Listen to this from the standpoint of our Lord in Matthew 25:23, the parable of the talents, the master says to this faithful servant, “Listen, well done, good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things.” In other words, it’s faithfulness at the current level of responsibility that gives you the right to be used at a different level in the future. Now, there are a lot of people who want to just go out in the ministry and have some big super success, but there’s never been a proving ground, there’s never been a testing ground. There’s never been a place where they perfected their skills and their gifts. There’s never been the proof that they can do the work of the ministry with excellence and total commitment. And so, somebody who does the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way doesn’t just plan for the future, he functions in the present. He’s at it in the present.

In Luke 12:42, similar word, “And the Lord said who then is that faithful and wise steward?” listen, “Whom his Lord shall make ruler of His household.” Isn’t that beautiful? A faithful waiter becomes a ruler. He was a faithful guy in handling the affairs of the house. He can rule the house. That’s the proving ground. And before you ever can expect God to drop you into some great tremendous exciting ministry that has a great amount at stake, you’re going to have to prove yourself faithfully at the level God has placed you now. And Paul, in verse 8, look at it, said, “I’ve got all these plans and

all these great hopes of coming, but for now I will stay at Ephesus for a great door for effective service is open to me." In other words, I can't leave now because I'm totally committed to this. And until God shuts this door, I'm staying right here. Boy, I like that. You know something about Paul? Paul was never ever discontent about his area of service, never. And I'll tell you something else: he never used one thing as a stepping stone to something else. In Ephesus, he gave his whole life. And when God changed that, closed the door and shoved him somewhere else, he'd give his whole life to that.

He was committed to the current open door. The concept of open door is a very familiar one to Paul. In Acts 14:27, he says God had opened the door to the Gentiles. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, he says, "God opened the door in Troas." In Colossians 4:3, he says, "Pray for me that the Lord will open the door for the gospel." The open door simply signified an opportunity to preach the gospel. And for Paul, wherever there was an opportunity he was going through the door. And you know, that's the way we ought to be. There are some people who get so picky about what door they go through that they miss the opportunity, and then they're waiting around for some wonderful thing to happen and it never happens because they've never shown a willingness to go through a door that God left open for them. Sometimes people will say well, you know, maybe a seminary student will say well, I've trained for my ministry now and this is the kind of thing I want. I want this and this, and I'd like this kind of climate, and it would certainly be nice if the church was organized this way. It just could be sort of like a perfect church. Well, listen if you find one, they don't need you. And over here is an open door with all kinds of problems and the door's wide open, but it doesn't just exactly fit where I think I should be. Well, the Lord isn't about to just let you sit around doing nothing. If the door is open now, and the present opportunity is there wherever it is, then you better prove yourself where you can.

You know, I was thinking the Philadelphia church in Revelation 3, verse 7 and 8. He says, and this is the Lord, the Lord Jesus says, "I am He that opens and no man shuts and I am He that shuts and no man opens." And He says to the Philadelphia church, "I have set before you an open door that no man can shut, now get at it." And you know something? It's kind of interesting that the church that follows the Philadelphia church is the Laodicea church, the dead church. And I supposed one of the things that can turn a Philadelphia type church into a Laodicea type church is when you've got open doors, but you don't go through them. And then, apathy and indifference, and coldness. And finally you come to Laodicea and He says you're not hot, you're not cold, I'll spew you out of my mouth. When God opens the door, it is, in fact, God who opened it. And if God has opened the door and is shoving you in it, then God's going to empower you to do what he wants you to do when you get in it, right? And that's the proving ground. Don't become content doing nothing. Don't just sit around waiting for the perfect situation. Find the open door and go in it.

You know, every once in a while Paul Wright will say to me "John, we need people to work in the children's division so badly." We just need them so badly in the children's division. There's an open door. There's an open door. There's an open door, but we can't find people to go through it. And I

suppose there are some people sitting around waiting for whatever open door they think they want and the fact of the matter is, the Lord may never really give them that because they haven't proven themselves faithful in the open door the Lord has set before them. Don't be selfish and don't be inflexible. Let God open the door.

Now, let's get to the verse 8 here. He says, I'm going to stay at Ephesus. God had really opened the door at Ephesus in a wonderful way. That city was an incredible city. It was the major city in Asia Minor, a huge province of the Roman Empire. It's now, really, the land of Turkey. But Asia Minor was a great province and Ephesus was the second major city coming east from Rome. The first one was Corinth and the second one would probably be Ephesus on that particular road. And so, Ephesus was a vital city. It was three miles from the sea, but the Cayster River ran through there, so it was navigable, and it could go to the sea, and it was trade and commerce. It had one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Temple of Diana, or Artemis. There was an international bank. There was where the confederacy of Ionian states met, so it was full of Senators. It was a haven for criminals. It was the center of priesthood situation. Dean Farrar says the land was just beautiful. The atmosphere, he says, was salubrious, which means it was nice. It was Southern California on a clear day. It was just a fabulous place. It was green and lush and everything. In fact, and commerce had moved in there at such an incredible rate that it was just flourishing. It may have been that when John wrote Revelation 18, verses 12 to 13, we talked about the Babylon system of the end times, that great system of commerce that he had in his mind, the model of Ephesus where he lived.

And here was this incredible city, just a sea of people, and interchange, and all these things that were going on there. And Paul said and God has opened the door wide for effective service, for *energs*, energetic service, product service. I mean, this place is just wide open. I mean, it may be crawling with sorcerers, and magicians, and prostitutes, and imposters, and philosophers, and all of this, but it's wide open. And you know, you look at Ephesus and you say, well, they've got idolatry and they've got sorcery and they've got prostitution and homosexuality, and they've got all those criminals taking this place as a haven. I don't really feel that that's a good place to go. I don't know whether my wife would adjust, you see, or whether that would be good for me. But the door was open and God opened it.

And it hadn't always been open. Paul had in his heart for a long time to go to Ephesus. When he came in Acts 16, going west, he said, "And we determined to go south into Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit forbid us." Remember that Acts 16:6? We couldn't go there. So, he went forward further. And in the 18th chapter he was coming east again, and he went by there and he went to Ephesus for one day and he said, oh, I hope I can come back. I hope I can come back. And now, God let him come back, but there had to be a timing in there. God wanted to do the preparation of the city and used Apollos to do that. In Acts 18, Apollos came to town, cracked the city open, spoke mightily with the word of God, and so forth, had a great time there, and cracked the city open. They needed to be kind of warmed up for Paul. He was a little too much to unload on a city like that. So, you had to get sort of

Apollos to come in and dig up the dirt a little bit. And Paul wasn't quite ready for the flack he was going to get in Ephesus, so Paul had to go through Philippi, get in jail and stocks, beaten and all that stuff to toughen him up.

So, they had to loosen the ground at Ephesus, toughen up Paul, when the time came, zap, God put them together. And Paul says, "All that trouble to get me here, I'm staying until the work's done. When God shuts this door, I'll leave, not until." And so, the door hadn't always been open, but now it was and he said, I'm going to stay. Don't ignore the open door, people. Where God has opened the door, somebody's got to go in it. Tremendous opportunity for ministry if we are committed to it. And I really worry in my heart about people who are always saying someday, someday I'm going to get in the work. I'm going to do it. I've got this plan. Someday I'm going to be this and someday I'm going to do that. And some day I'm going to get my own church or someday I'm going to have a class or a Bible study. And they're not doing anything now, and they're dreamers with no proving ground, with no testing ground. With nowhere to frame their ministry, and their methods, and their means, and their strategy.

And so, it needs to be said that the one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way has plans for the future, but he also has a great sense of present commitment to pour his life into the now because there may not be anything but the now. This may be it. You know, I always loved that passage in Acts 13, it just kind of goes by without making us a think it. First reading, it says, in the church at Antioch had five pastors and it names these people, and then it says, "And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit said separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the work, to which I have called them." In other words, it was as they were pasturing, as they were ministering, as they were proving themselves faithful that the Holy Spirit says I'll take them to the ministry I've had all along in mind for them, but waited until they were proven. See? Being in the ministry isn't a matter of education necessarily. Serving the Lord effectively isn't a matter of just getting the input. It's a matter of proving yourself faithful in the output. So, doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way balances the future vision, flexibility, thoroughness, present commitment.

Fifth, doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way demands that you accept opposition as a challenge. You have to accept opposition as a challenge. Like I said earlier, if you find the place that doesn't have any problems, they don't need you. You accept opposition as a challenge. Paul says, amazing, he says, verse 8, "I will tarry at Ephesus till Pentecost." Why? "Because a great door and effectual is open to me and there are many adversaries." You say, now, wait a minute. You're staying because there are many adversaries? Of course. G. Campbell Morgan said "If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you're serving in the wrong place." You better find a place where opposition is.

Paul had an amazing reason to stay. He says, I have to stay because I can't leave the troops alone. There's too much here. Too much opposition. And I mean, it was rough there. In Ephesus they had a vast system of organized idolatry in the Temple of Diana. They had sexual perversion just

everywhere and orgies, and prostitute priestesses. They had a crowd of wandering Jews to add to the problems, roaming around supposedly claiming exorcist powers, trying to cast devils out of everybody. They were creating havoc all over the place. There was prejudice, there was superstition, there was racism, there was sexual vice, there was a synagogue of Jews who hated people and had actually tried to plot to kill Christians. I mean, heathenism, idolatry, superstition, sexual perversion, demon possession, religious prejudice, racism, everything that exists in any city in the world today existed right there. It was a hot bed of it right there.

Paul said this is too good a place to leave. And most people say well, you see, I'm looking for a little different type of place. What a challenge. What a challenge. He went into that place and he began to teach the world of God and he taught the word of God every day in the school of Tyrannous for two years, and in doing so people got saved, and they got discipled and they went out and they founded all the other seven churches of Asia Minor mentioned in revelation. And the word of God spread all over Asia Minor. And you know what happened? People started burning their cult books, they wouldn't buy the little idols anymore and the people who sold the idols got so hot, they had a big city-wide revolution. I mean, the gospel became an issue. And one of the greatest churches in the early years of the church was founded, the church at Ephesus.

Listen, Paul saw opposition as a challenge, a tremendous challenge. Well, when you look for the ministry God has for you find one that isn't all the way it ought to be and see if God can't use it to change it to His glory. Those are the people that need you the most. Find a city where the gospel's not preached, they need it. Find a church where the word of God's not taught, they need it. Find a structure within a church that isn't biblical and go in there and teach them what is biblical. I mean, be where God can really use you. There are many adversaries and the troops need you. Paul looks back on the battle in Ephesus in 2 Corinthians 1:8 and this is what he wrote reading from Philip's translation. He wrote this, "We should like you our brothers to know something of what we went through in Asia." That's Ephesus he's talking about. "At that time, we were completely overwhelmed. The burden was more than we could bear. In fact, we told ourselves that this was the end. Yet we believe now that we had this experience of coming to the end of our tether so we might learn to trust not in ourselves, but in God who can raise the dead." Isn't that great? You know, they were actually so sure they were going to die in Ephesus, he says we just figured that God could raise the dead so if we die, He'll have to raise us from the grave. They were that sure they were going to die.

But you know what happens when you get into a situation like that? You do not trust yourself. You know that? You do not. You get so desperate, you turn to God and when you turn to God the power begins to flow and then the enemies begin to drop one by one. That's exciting. In 2 Corinthians 4:9, he says, "Every day, every day, we experience something of the dying of the Lord Jesus so that we may also know the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours." In other words, we face death every day and it is in that facing of death and facing that opposition where we have no resources and depending on God that we see the power of Christ flow. Boy, what excitement. I mean, that's the

adventure of the ministry, right? I mean, to get right out there in the battle and confront the thing with Jesus Christ and see God give the victory.

Take a challenge, find a hard place. I always think of John Paton when I think of this, and I've told you his story, but I'll remind. Paton was a Bible student, a Bible college student in London. God called him to go to the New Hebrides Islands where there were man-eating cannibals. You know, that would be a hard thing for a young Bible college student to say yes to, wouldn't it? I know what I'd have said. I would have said, Lord, you've got the wrong guy. Are you sure my gifts are fit for that? Or I would have said look I graduated Lord. I can make it in the ministry. No sense in me being somebody's lunch. All this effort? I would have said look Lord, I've got a great idea. I know a Bible college dropout who'll never make it in the ministry. Send him there; they'll eat him, and who'll know. The guy will be a hero right. And live me alone will you? I can cut it. But John Paton didn't argue with God. The Lord said go, so he went. He took his little wife, a ship let them off, they paddled to shore in a little rowboat. They were there on an island inhabited by man-eating cannibals whose language they did not speak. And they had no way to contact them. They set up a little hut at the beach and the Lord marvelously preserved them. Later on when the chief of the tribe in that area was converted to Christ, he asked John who that army was that surrounded his hut every night. God's holy angels protected him. After a matter of weeks there, his wife gave birth to a baby, and the baby and the wife both died. He was all alone and he says in his biography that he slept on the graves to keep the natives from digging up the bodies and eating them.

And he decided he'd stay. The challenge was great, the adversaries were many and that was where God wanted him, so he stayed. How do you do that by yourself? You do that by being totally depending on God. Accept the challenge, because it's in the challenge where your resources run out and you depend on God and it's where you depend on God that His power flows to victories that you never dreamed possible. It's to the one who really labors for the Lord and does the Lord's work in the Lord's way has a vision for the future, a sense of flexibility, a thoroughness, not superficial, has a commitment to present service, and accepts opposition as an opportunity or a challenge.

Number six, one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way must have a team spirit, a team spirit. I love this about Paul. He was a team man. He wasn't any great superstar all by himself. He was very dependent on other people. Very loving toward other people. Look at verse 10 and 11, verse 10, "Now, if," literally "when" it would be better, "Now, when Timothy come," because Timothy was coming in chapter 4, verse 17 he said he was sending him along with this letter perhaps and also probably accompanied by Erastus. But he said, "When Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear." Don't you intimidate this young, shy, sensitive man. Some of these Corinthians were crusty, self-willed, puffed up, hot shots. And he says, now don't you intimidate this man, "for he works the work of the Lord as I do." In other words, you're messing with God's worker. Don't you fool with him not because of his great upbringing or his money or whatever, but don't you touch him, don't you hassle him or intimidate him because he is a worker for the Lord, just like me. I love that. Paul didn't

see himself at any other level than the level of Timothy. Even though Timothy was his son in the faith, Timothy was young; Timothy didn't have all that Paul had in terms of knowledge or in terms of giftedness. Yet, they were equals. He is my fellow worker.

Paul didn't see any strata. He didn't see himself as some super-saint. Sure, there was a difference in their ministry. Sure, Paul was the upfront guy. Sure, Paul was a leader in many ways among leaders. But still in his heart, he was simply a co-worker like everybody else in God's work. And he had a great sense of team. The dignity of Timothy's task gave him honor just like it gave Paul honor. And Paul says you treat him in a proper way.

I love the fact that Paul had no personal ambition. Even in Philippians 1 when he was a prisoner and a new breed of preachers was coming up, and a new group and all of a sudden Paul was kind of fading away. He was the prisoner now, and his life was kind of waning, and he was in the sunset and new guys were coming along, and they were saying, "We're the new preachers," and the church was beginning to turn to them. And they were the new breed, and they were the hot ones, and they were the ones everybody wanted to hear. And they were saying, some of them were saying, oh, Paul's a prisoner because he blew is ministry. The Lord had to shelve him. His methods are old and he's, you know. So, and Paul says look, he says, "Some preach Christ of contention. They want to add affliction to my chains. They want to hurt me." He says, "What do I care? Christ is preached and in that I will rejoice." Philippians 1. He had no sense of ambition. He had no sense of pushing himself up. He couldn't be more thrilled to support anybody who is in God's work doing the Lord's work the Lord's way. Now, if they didn't do it the Lord's way, he told them. But anybody doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way was on his team. In Romans chapter 16, do you realize he writes that marvelous book, Romans? He takes an entire 16th chapter to mention 24 individual people, and two individual households, among them seven women who helped him in the work of the Lord who are on the team. You can never minister for God in isolation. You've got to realize that you make a contribution to the team. You can't go out and be the star. You've got to give yourself to the team.

And it was always Paul and Silas, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Luke, Paul and Aristarchus, Paul and Mark, Paul and Timothy, Paul and somebody else. The one who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way realizes he's just a part of the fellowship, and it's his job to build the others up, and encourage the others, and support the others, and say you take care of Timothy as much as you take care of me. He said, you know, Epaphroditus was near unto death, and I'm so glad he didn't die. He said this in Philippians 2, "Because I needed him so much." I needed him so much. And when he was old, he said, I want you to send Mark to me. I need Mark to be with me, John Mark. He had a sense of team. You know, I think this is so important. I think all of us need to learn that.

There's an interesting thought I had as I was thinking this through. In 2 Timothy 4:5. Listen to this, just listen. He says to Timothy, "Watch thou in all things Timothy. Endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry." Hey Timothy, go to it my friend. You want to know

something? That was a dramatic moment in Timothy's life. You know what Timothy had done up until that time? Timothy had served Paul, served Paul, served Paul. Then, one day Paul said, "Timothy, goodbye. You go now and you do your work." But the proving ground for Timothy was how he served Paul. Now, God has called some people in leadership and other people to serve those who lead. And sometimes those who serve those who lead will do that all their days. Other times, they'll serve for a time of apprenticeship and learning and then the Lord will call them out to lead on their own. But, it's always with a sense of team and Timothy grew up in the ministry serving somebody else.

In Philemon, that wonderful little story of the slave, verse 10, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus whom I've begotten in my bonds. Who in time passed was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and me whom I have said again receive him that," that is, "receive my own heart." In other words, Paul says, I love this man. He served me well. I've used him in my ministry. He's profitable to me, now you treat him in the same way. And here was the man, Philemon, who gave himself to Paul; and in return, Paul gave himself to that man and carried his case to Onesimus, I should say, was the servant, and Paul carried his case to Philemon the master, and said you take care of this dear man. He had a sense of team. He supported everybody in the ministry.

Now, maybe we're called to support somebody else. Maybe we're called to be on our own. Maybe a little bit of both. Maybe one for a while, and then another. But we have to realize we're on a team. And you know, when Jesus said that it was, "We are to love one another, by this shall all men know that you're my disciples," He meant that. When the world sees the team in love working as a great evidence of our validity.

A last principle, doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way involves being sensitive to the Spirit's leading in others. I wish we had time to develop this fully, but it struck me as what verse 12 was saying. "As touching our brother," rather, "Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren." Stop there a minute. Now, Paul says Timothy's coming. He's coming to be with you. And he says in verse 11, "Don't despise him, but conduct him forth in peace." That is, send him back to me because I'm going to be looking for him and I want to hear a good report. Timothy's coming and he's going to take this letter, and he's going to find out what's going, and then I want you to send him on his way peacefully so he can come back to me. And then he goes on to Apollos and he says, "And as touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come to you with the brothers." Now, why did Paul want Apollos to go along with Timothy and Erastus? Because what had happened in the Corinthian church, people were saying I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, right? They were having these little factions. So, he said, Apollos, you know, it'd be super if you'd go and you'd just say look this is ridiculous. I don't want your admiration. I don't want this fanfare. We're all together in this, the servants of the Lord.

Paul was saying to Apollos: you can straighten this whole deal out. You can settle this whole deal. So, he says that, boy, I greatly desire you to go with the brethren. And after all, Paul is the biggest

shot there is in the church. I mean he's an authoritative guy. But I like it, in the middle of verse 12 it says, "but his will was not all to come at this time." Isn't that good? Apollos said, no thanks Paul, I don't want to go. I'm very busy with some other ministry. You say, well, what did Paul say? He says, "but he will come when he shall have a convenient time." Isn't that good? Paul didn't steamroll the guy, and say, do you realize who the apostle of the Gentiles is? Do you know who is talking to you? I am Paul, you know, Paul of the Damascus Road experience? He didn't lay any of that stuff on him. He just said, I told him what I thought. I told him what my idea was. He said that's not my idea, but he'll come when he gets ready. That's so good. You can't ever cram people into the work of the Lord. You've got to wait until the Spirit of God works in their heart. Here was a man who had authority, who had ideas, who had strategy, who had plans, and who had patience for God's Spirit to work in the heart of anybody else on the team. And that's why it's so important for somebody who works in a ministry to have a sense of team, and to realize that God's spirit works not just through you in calling all the shots, but in everybody's heart. And you've got to be sensitive to what God is saying. Don't dictate, don't dominate; just let the Spirit of God generate and be patient.

Well, those are just practical things folks. How do you do the Lord's work in the Lord's way? With a vision for the future, flexibility, thoroughness, present commitment, accepting opposition as a challenge, with a team spirit, and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading in the lives of others. I wish we had time to develop these more, because we could really develop them further, but we're limited.

Let me just close with some thoughts. Now listen, the old preacher Sydney Smith was a great old preacher in England. And he was once asked, "Mr. Smith, how do you account for the great success the Methodist revival has had in England? How do you account for it?" This is what he said, and I love this. He said, "The answer is simple, sir: they are all at it, and they are all always at it." I like that. You know what I would like to have said of Grace Church? You know, those people at Grace Church are all at it, and they are always at it. Now, in the terms of 1 Corinthians 15:58, that would be, "Always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." May it be, that we are all at it and we are all always at it, that when the Lord Jesus comes to reward us, He will reward us with, "Well done, good, faithful servant. You have fulfilled the work which I gave you to do."

Lord, we thank You as we close our time this morning for just the practical nature of this passage, and how it again confronts us with the need to set our priorities, to order our lives around service for You. The only thing that really matters. Help us to be faithful, diligent. Help us to fulfill Your work in Your way that Your glory may be the result. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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