

Life on Mission

Aaron Brockett | 1 Corinthians 9

So, you still think that's funny after 10 weeks, huh? (*laughing*) Glad you do. I'm glad you do. Hey, didn't Shawn and the team just do an awesome job today? Man. (*clapping*) You know those of you have been around awhile, you know Shawn is a huge UK fan, and so the question I'm having is, man, if he could lead worship after that last night knowing that's so heavy on his heart, just imagine if, God forbid, if they would have won last night just what – he would have blown the roof off the place. Right? So, that's good.

Hey, if you've got a Bible, go ahead and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 9, that's where we are in this text together as we have been in this series called Cow Tipping. And, I just wanted to update you on a couple of things. First of all, I just got off a plane yesterday from New York City, and many of you know that we're helping to start a church in upper Manhattan. And, so on Friday, I had a 3 or 4 hour meeting with those guys and they are doing awesome, doing good. They send you their greetings and their appreciation for you to continue just lifting them up in prayer and supporting them. And, they asked me – coming into 2012 they're trying to recruit about 700 people nationwide just to be prayer partners, prayer support for the new church in upper Manhattan, and, if you'd be interested in maybe taking a few minutes of your week – we're talking 3-5 minutes in 2012 – to just lift up Everyday Church in New York City, then sometime today or this week, would you just email prayfornewyorkcity@gmail.com. Just prayfornewyorkcity@gmail.com. It's an email and you'll just say, hey, Chris, sign me up for this time every week. I'll just commit to praying for, you know, whatever it is – 3-5 minutes in 2012. They just want to know they've got 700 people lifting them up in prayer. And, they asked me if I would consider asking you to do that, and I am happy to do that. But they are doing good.

As Dave said, next Sunday we're going to take a break from Cow Tipping. We're going to jump into our Christmas series so Christmas Eve is coming up – my favorite service of the year. Our Christmas Eve offering, we're going to be telling you next week a little bit about what that's going to go towards, so all of that is coming up. Christmas Day service is just going to be a family service – shortened, stripped back, Christmas carols, a little bit of teaching out of the Gospel of Luke. It's going to be a good time this year.

Let me pray and then we're going to jump into Chapter 9. *Father, we come to you now so grateful for the worship today, so grateful for this time of the year, and I just ask that in these next few moments that your Holy Spirit would speak through this text that I think is really so important. It think it's kind of the pivotal part of this letter, and I'm thankful for it, and I just pray that you would help me to do it justice as I try to walk through it and teach it, and explain it, and apply it to life, and we just ask that You breathe wind into it and that we could leave today appropriately convicted and challenged, but also encouraged where we need to be encouraged. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Hey, I want to start with this question this morning, and it's a question that maybe you've considered before. Maybe you've asked it, but you never knew exactly how to articulate it. You didn't articulate it this way. But, here's the question: What are you supposed to look for in a church? What are you supposed to look for in a church? And I know that if you attend church any more than maybe two times

a year you've maybe considered this question. If you have ever relocated to a new geographic location and you're looking for a church, maybe you've asked that question. Some of you have even pulled out a piece of paper and you've written down a set of criteria that you're looking for. Others, you didn't articulate it in this question, it was kind of more of a, "How do I feel?" sort of a thing. Some of you have never asked this question. All right. But, this is a question that's going to come up periodically at different times of life. Some of you are there right now because maybe you relocated here, and today is maybe your first Sunday; maybe you've visited a few times, and so the question is: what am I supposed to look for in a church? What is that set of criteria? The term that we often use for this is "church shopping" which is certainly a term that people will use, but you could also call it "church dating" because isn't that a little more of what you are doing? You know, it's like okay, "We moved to a new area. Here are six churches we're kind of interested in, and so this Sunday, we're going to go on a date with this church, and next Sunday..." Does that sound weird? It is kind of weird. So, you know, next Sunday, "We're going to go on a date with this church, and hey, we kind of liked you and you didn't have bad breath, so we're going to go have a second date with your church. We're going to try to figure out how God is leading us in this decision." It's a valid question to ask. I would even say for a season, all of us will be in a place where we need to church shop or church date or try to figure out where God is leading us. It's a very, very important question. But, if we're going to be honest, most of us never really move past what we might call subjective personal preferences and opinions, and it needs to go past that. Let me give an example of what I mean.

When I was in high school, as a sophomore in high school, my family decided that it was time to find a home church. We were in that season of life, and so we visited several different churches and then my Mom and Dad pulled me and my sister together and said, "We really think that this is where we should go to church." So, we had a family meeting and we took a family vote. Any of you ever been a part of one of those? They're great fun. So, we went around the table and the votes came back. It was 3 yes, 1 no. And guess who the "no" was? Yeah, your pastor voted no on the church. Okay? And I was the holdout, and apparently, majority rules. So for the next season of my life, when I was a sophomore in high school, I didn't enjoy going to church. You probably never thought you'd ever hear your pastor say that, but that's true. I didn't enjoy it during that particular year of my life. And as I look back on it, none of my reasons had anything to do with theology. None of that had anything to do with philosophy in ministry. In fact, that didn't even cross my mind. It was all personal; subjective personal preference and opinion. I'll tell you what I mean. I thought the church smelled funny. That's deep for you, right? It's like – you know what I'm talking about that kind of like old, kind of musty church smell. Where? Do they ship that in? I mean, how does that happen? The carpet was like this real obnoxious kind of orange color – I didn't like that. And the youth pastor was weird. So, all subjective except for the weird youth pastor because he was definitely loco. That guy – woohoo – nut job. So, it was all personal subjective opinion, and if most of us are going to be honest, if we've ever honestly asked that question, if we've ever been searching for a church, we never really move past the personal preferences.

Now, don't get me wrong. Personal preferences, personal opinions, subjective opinions, are certainly important things, and I would even equate them to the role that physical attraction plays in a dating relationship. That's an important element. You need to be physically attracted to somebody at a bare minimum if you're going to consider them maybe to be a spouse one day, to share life with them one day. We would all have to admit that physical attraction is important, but it has definitely got to go much deeper than that if it's going to be lasting and sustaining and fulfilling. Right? So, in the same way, personal subjective opinions over a church family – should I belong here or not – are important. You need to have that. There needs to be some sort of an affinity. But it's definitely got to move beyond that if it's going to be lasting and meaningful in depth.

This is really much of what Paul is doing in the letter to the Corinthians. These Corinthian Christians – they're not looking for a church; they are actually trying to figure out how to be a church which I would argue is the question that we ultimately have to get to in all of our lives. We need to stop dating the church, and say, "Okay, no perfect church is out there. We've all got our issues. We've all got our problems, but we feel like God has called us here. And so now, how can we be the church in this time, in this place, for this purpose that's beyond ourselves?" That's what Paul is doing in this letter. And what we come to in chapter 9 is – he's going to spell out three marks of a healthy church that you need to look for. This needs to be in a church wherever you land – whether that's here or somewhere else. You need to see at least these three things need to be a part of that church. Now, there are more than these, but these are the only three that Paul highlights in chapter 9. Let me just give them to you – what they are – and then we'll walk through them.

Generosity. That needs to be evident in the church, and that's not just purely financial, that's just everything – just the spirit of generosity, this graciousness among its people and this body. Number 2 is **passion** - just passion for others, compassion to do what we can to meet the needs of others to lead them to Christ. Number 3 is **training** which is another word for discipleship. So, it's this idea that when you pick up your Bible and you read, it's not a legalistic thing of, "Hey, did you read your Bible today?" No, it's a treadmill. All right? You're getting on, and you're studying just little by little – you're taking a *walk* with Christ towards Christ in your training. Those three things need to be evident in every church.

So, as we jump into chapter 9, it's important that we review real quickly chapter 8 from last week. And if you're visiting, if you're here for the first time today, you can jump online and watch or listen or read all the sermons in this series completely for free just to get caught up. But last week, in chapter 8, there was an issue that had broken out in this Corinthian church. They were arguing over this issue that was culturally relevant to them. Not so much culturally relevant to us today, although the principle that Paul spells out certainly is, and they said, "Paul, is it a sin for us to eat meat that was part of an animal that had been sacrificed to a false god?" And Paul's answer to that is yes and no. Not a big deal if you were to eat meat sacrificed to a false or pagan god – those gods aren't even real. Jesus can handle it. He's a big boy; not intimidated. However, if you're with a brother or sister in Christ and it's going to violate their conscience – they maybe aren't there yet in their knowledge – it would cause them to stumble, then, man, absolutely, you should refrain. You have the freedom to refrain. So, he kind of spells out this principle that as Christians we have all kinds of social and cultural freedoms. You're actually more free in Christ than maybe what you even realize; but he says our liberties are limited by love. Love for others, love for God, love for the Gospel. Man, that always comes first. So, it means that I have certain rights as a Christian, but I also have the right to refrain because – is this good for them? Is God glorified? And is the Gospel moving forward? So, man, we really dug in last week and talked about all kinds of practical issues like smoking, alcohol, and tattoos. It was great fun. And I kept my job, and you all came back, so that was a successful day in my opinion. So, that's chapter 8.

Now, here's what you've got to understand as we go into chapter 9, because I'm going to be very, very honest with you. Chapter 9, as I started studying through this – I started studying for it the week of Thanksgiving – when I read through it the first time, my heart sank. This is honestly – I think out of the entire book – this passage makes me the most uncomfortable. The first few verses of this chapter, and I think some of you are going to see what I mean here in just a minute. Paul is going to illustrate – you've got to hear me in this – look right at me. Paul is going to illustrate the principle he unpacked in chapter 8 by talking about a specific experience in his life. You need to understand that; otherwise, especially if you're visiting or if you're new, or if you're naturally skeptical about churches and what they're really after and their motives, it's not going to make sense to you. So, Paul's illustrating what he talked about from last week in chapter 8. Here's what he's going to talk about: he's going to talk about a pastor's

compensation. I read that, and I'm like, man, are you kidding me? It's like, you know, the hits just keep on a comin'. Right? It's like we've talked about discipline. We've talked about morality. We've talked about sex, marriage, divorce, and tattoos. We might as well keep driving this train off the cliff. And I read this, and as Jake said to you a couple of weeks ago, when we set out to do this [teach I Corinthians], we were very serious. We said we want to cover everything that Paul covered. We don't want to just kind of bounce around topically all over the book. Let's just take it verse by verse. And those are the days – these are the days that make me regret that decision. I look at this, and I'm like, oh, man, really? I'd rather preach on sex again. "God, can we just circle back and do that?" But you need to understand my heart in this, and you need to understand that he's illustrating this freedom. He's going to make a case here – these first 14 verses – that a pastor should be compensated and should be compensated fairly; but then in verse 15, he's going to turn it and say, but I don't always exercise that right out of love for you and love for the gospel. That's what he's going to say.

So, let's walk through some of these verses together because they actually bring some great clarity to some confusing issues that I know have popped up in different conversations I've been in. Look at what he says in verses 1 thru 2. He says, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." So, he starts off with a few questions here, and he basically, reiterates what they just covered in chapter 8. He says, man, just like you, I've got freedoms in Christ. I'm free. I'm not bound up by your expectations of me. I'm not your slave. Then, he says, "I'm an apostle." And an apostle was kind of a unique office. An apostle was different than a pastor today in the sense that the apostles were raised up to get the church on its feet in the First Century, and one of the qualifications for an apostle is they had to have seen Jesus. So, he's like, I think my business card is the only one that says "apostle." That's what he's saying – he's pointing this out. Then, he goes on to say, I've done a good job with you. You are the seal of my workmanship. There's fruit being yielded in your life because I've been laboring and preaching and teaching. So, in other words, to summarize those first couple of verses, Paul says, "I'm in a respectable position, and I'm doing a respectable job." That's all he's saying there.

Look at what he goes on to say in verse 3. "This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink?" So, the word examine here is a legal term. Apparently, there was some kind of a group quite possibly who was beginning to really do some investigative work into Paul's life, his ministry, his leadership. They're like, "Are you being effective? Is it really worth it that you are investing all of your time into this?" And then the question – even though he wasn't a collecting a salary – the question of salary and compensation had apparently come up somewhere. Like, "Should Paul get paid? If so, how much should he get paid?" And Paul says, "Hey, let me speak up to my defense here for a minute." Then, as he so often does, he gets sarcastic. He says, "Hey, man, couldn't you have at least taken me to lunch? Couldn't you have at least picked up my Chick-fil-A sandwich and waffle fries? Could you have done the bare minimum, there?" Right? That's what he's saying.

He goes on in verse 5. "Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?" So, Paul was not married at this time, and neither was Barnabas. They are the two single guys in ministry. But Paul kind of cracks the door open on this, and says, "Hey, maybe one day I'll meet the right lady, and if that's the case, I'd love to be able to making enough money to provide for her, to take care of her, to have a family. If I travel for the ministry, I'd love to be able to take her along with me."

Verse 7, he says, “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?” So, he uses just three very practical life examples here. He says, “Who goes off to battle BYOB?” [bring your own bullets] You know; it’s like, “Hey, want to sign up for the war? If you’ve got a bullet and you’ve got a gun, bring them along with you. Bring your helmet and a Hummer, if you’ve got it.” Okay. He says, “No, if you sign up to serve in a war, you’re going to be issued those things.” He says, “If you have a vineyard, you’re probably going to enjoy some fresh grapes on a periodic basis. If you have a farm, you’ll enjoy some fresh milk and eggs regularly.” In essence, he’s saying, “I deserve to be compensated fairly, but I also deserve to receive the proper tools to do this ministry well.” And then in verse 8, knowing that there would be some objections; he says, “Do I say these things on human authority?” In other words, is this just me angling for a raise or a vacation home in Colorado? “Does not the Law say the same?” So, he actually quotes here from Deuteronomy chapter 25, and listen to what says in verse 9: “For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.”

So, what is all of this? What is he talking about? The Egyptians, whenever it came time to harvest, they didn’t have modern day combines. What they would do is they would take the husks of the wheat and they would throw it out onto this hard floor and then they would tie a large, flat, heavy stone behind an oxen and that oxen would drag that stone over the husks, and the pressure/the tension of that would pop the grain out of the husks. And the law of God said, you’re going to have one frustrated, exhausted oxen if you don’t remove the muzzle every now and then throughout the day and give him a drink. If you don’t take off the muzzle and give him a little bit of food; that would just be inhumane. That would be cruel. Now, this isn’t God purely arguing here for animal rights. This is God arguing for a universal principle. You need to provide some refreshment to the worker.

You know; this last week I was just doing some studying of statistics in ministry, and I actually came across this. I just want to read it out for you and then I’ll make a couple of observations here. This is what I found. For some of you this is going to be surprising; others of you, it’s not because you just know this already. Every month, 1,500 pastors quit full-time ministry. Half of all pastors’ marriages end in divorce. Eighty percent of pastors and 84% of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in ministry. Fifty percent of pastors would leave the ministry if they had another way of making a living. Seventy percent of pastors admit to fighting depression. Eighty percent of seminary and Bible college grads that enter ministry upon graduation leave that ministry within 5 years. Eighty percent of pastors’ wives wish their husband would quit the ministry. In other words, you ask a pastor’s wife, “What’s the worst thing that ever happened to you?” And she might very well say, “The day that my husband decided to become a pastor.” That’s really sad.

Now, to be fair, not all of these guys are victims. Okay. Some guys have just made boneheaded decisions. They’ve morally disqualified themselves. They’ve kind of gone off the rails, and that’s – they’re just reaping the benefit—not the benefits, they’re just reaping the result of that. Other guys, though, have just gotten caught in the crossfire of something maybe really ugly.

Now, I read those stats to you, and I don’t read those stats so that you feel sorry for me because honestly, by the grace of God, I can’t relate. I have gone through peaks and valleys in my own life and ministry. I fully expect to in the future, but this is a healthy church. You are good to me and my family. You are way – you are so good to me. You’re so good, I don’t even deserve it. My wife loves what I do. I love what I do, and you guys bless my kids. You just need to know that. I thank you for that.

When I read through those stats, the first thought I thought about was not me. My first thought I thought about was the pastors on our staff, the church planters of the churches that we'll support, our missionaries that we support. By the grace of God, if God allows us to go multi-site in the future, I'm thinking about our campus pastors. I'm thinking about all of them and saying, "Okay, how do we continue to create an environment as we grow as a church where going into the ministry didn't wreck their family?" It's actually a very healthy thing and their wives are grateful for that.

On Friday, I'm sitting down talking to Chris – Chris Travis is the church planter at the church in New York – and Larry is his kind of right-hand man, and the two of them were just telling us how God's doing great things to get this church started, but they also shared with us some of the trials, some of the things naturally that they're going through. One of the things they brought up is they said, you know, one of the things we're very, very aware of is we just want to make sure our marriages stay intact and healthy through this whole thing of planting a church. And I said, "Man, absolutely. We don't want to support you to plant a church and get the church going, and you blow your marriage apart." I planted a church in California ten years ago, and my wife would tell you straight up the day that we ended up – God called us on from that ministry and we left and that church is actually doing great, by the way. But when we left, as soon as we crossed out of the California border, my wife looked at me and she said, "I've got my husband back." It's just a lot of pressure and even unnecessarily.

I was at a church planting conference where a seasoned church planter stood up and he said, "Guys, if you have a bad marriage when you try to launch a new ministry, you'll blow it up. If you have a good marriage, and you try to launch a new church, it will get worse. The end." And he walked off the stage. It was like, "Is there anything redemptive in that conversation?" Right. Is there anything like, "Hey, here's what you do to ensure that doesn't happen? Can you just give us a little cliché – like couples who pray together, stay together? Can you tell us that?" It's like, "No; it will get worse because there's just a lot of pressure, a lot of undue pressure on that." And so I have just a big heart to say, you know, I obviously don't have control over pastors outside of our church, but I definitely have a big heart for the pastors here. Let me just say this. Some of you need this. Some of you don't need this information. We hire...we try to hire 1 pastor for every 150 -200 people in our church. So, we have a little under 4,000 people that show up on a weekend, and our body is actually bigger than that because nobody shows up on the same Sunday. So, we have about 20 pastors on staff. That's about 1 pastor for every 150 - 200 people, and then we try to hire support staff around them to equip them to do the ministry. Now, every now and then I'll get this question, and it's usually – I think it's well-intentioned, but it usually never comes to me; I usually hear it through the grapevine. It's this question, "Why are we hiring so many people?" It's almost as if I wake up in the morning and roll out of bed and decide to hire somebody willy-nilly, and I promise you that's not the case. I never wake up in the morning and go, "Gee, today would be a good day to hire a pastor of window washing. Let's do that." Right? No, that doesn't happen, and I need you to hear my heart in this because some of you do need to hear this, others of you don't; some of you do. Man, I take very, very seriously the stewardship of every single dollar that you give that is entrusted to the Lord, and I don't want to waste one dollar unnecessarily on staff we don't need. But if we hire somebody, it's because there have been months and months of prayer, strategy, pushback, refining to say, "Is God calling us out - even to a certain degree of faith – to hire this individual?" And the pastors that we hire - none of them are ever going to get wealthy, including me, but we're also not going to keep them in poverty either. We want to make sure that they are compensated fairly; they have the tools to do their ministry; that they get a day off, they get some vacation time, and they can retire some day. Okay?

This last February, Lindsay traveled with me to a pastors' and wives' conference out in California, and how it was set up is that in the morning, we would all be together for breakfast, and then all the guys would go off into a room and we would talk and pray, and all the ladies, the pastors' wives, would all go off into a room and they would talk and pray. On the plane ride home, Lindsay said to me, "You know what, I am so glad I went because as I'm talking to some of these ladies, some of them are just really, really struggling." They were some of these statistics. She said it was just a great reminder to me (Lindsay) of just how healthy our church is. And then Lindsay said this, "You know what, I have a real heart for the rest of our pastors' wives on staff, because they don't all get to go to something like this." So she said, "I would really like to, this next year, develop just a time where I would pour into those ladies, love on those ladies, let them know that they are not alone." Because here's the deal: I would say that maybe even 25% - 50% of our pastors' wives on staff didn't necessarily go into ministry because God initially called them, but they went into ministry because their husbands did. Right? So, now they are kind of with their husbands and there is an adjustment period that goes on. Lindsay said she really wanted to reach out to them.

So, here's what my wife has done. I'm so proud of her. I'll brag on her. She, this fall, decided once a month to just invite all of our pastors' wives over to our house one Friday night a month and they work through a book together called "In Our Shoes" which is a book written to pastors' wives. And they pray together, they love on each other, and they eat lots and lots of chocolate for some reason, and when they come over, I have to be gone. Right? They don't want me there. I thought, you know, I could be a part of the group, but they said, get out of here. So, I always have to have plans to get out of there. And the first Friday night that Lindsay did this – I think it was back in September or October – I was in Texas preaching at a church that weekend, and she texted me at midnight, so apparently, they had a good time. She was so excited. She said, "Man, I love these ladies; they are so healthy." And then she texted me this once again and said, "If our pastors' wives are healthy, our church will be healthy." I think she's right.

So, the principle that Paul kind of unpacks here in this chapter is don't muzzle the oxen. Now, don't go around calling our staff oxen, okay? Bunch of cows. All right? But the principle here is leaders – if they are crushed unnecessarily – by personal or financial pressure, they don't lead very well, and so we want to make sure that they're taken care of.

Look at what it says in verse 11. "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?" So, this is this idea that we don't necessarily want the servant of God like overly wealthy, but it's also this warning to say, "Hey, let's not keep them in poverty either." So, just as a rule of thumb, the servant of God, a pastor, a leader, should not be rolling in an Escalade with 27" rims and living in 10,000 square feet. Okay? That's an abuse of that right, and yet, at the same time, Paul warns and says, "Hey, don't keep them in poverty either." Let them be ... give them an opportunity to be generous. Give them an opportunity to steward this. In 1 Timothy 5, verse 17 - that's another passage you can look up – Paul says that those who labor in preaching and teaching are worthy of double honor. Now, that doesn't mean pad their salary; that just means make sure that they're not facing this unnecessary pressure. In Philippians 4, Paul writes to the church in Philippi and he says, "You guys were the only church that supported me financially, and you actually gave me too much." So, that's what he says in that chapter, but then he says this, "Really glad you did – not because I needed, in fact I'm going to give it away – but because that shows the degree of your spiritual maturity." So, that generosity is a mark of a healthy church.

He goes on in verse 13: “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel.” So, a person ought to earn their living out of what they do. Why do you think that is? Why do you think a person should get their living out of what they do? Paul kind of implies three reasons here. The first one is that it’s just the cultural norm. Right Jesus said in Luke 10:7, the worker’s worth his wages. And so, he uses these examples of a soldier, a farmer and a shepherd, and we all expect that. Right? You do a good job with something you want to be compensated fairly. The other thing that he says here is that it will sharpen your focus. If you do something full-time you get compensated for it, then you’re really able to become an expert at it. Some of you are at the top of your field because you are able to be compensated to do that, and you actually are more effective in that area than someone else who maybe is just kind of doing it for free or doing it as a hobby, and it just sharpens your focus.

And so, I realize that I even have some friends who really are of the opinion that no pastor should ever be paid or that there should be a non-profit. You shouldn’t get paid because wouldn’t it be great to take all of that money and just really leverage it into the mission? I would agree that that actually sounds really good, and yet, at the same time, I’m sitting here thinking I don’t think we would be as effective because you’ve got to have people full-time pushing the gas forward to be better. That sharpens your focus. The last thing is that man, isn’t it such a blessing to be appreciated? When your boss gives you a Christmas bonus and a raise, do you feel less motivated or more motivated? Yeah, more motivated. I don’t know of anybody that says, “Thank you for the raise; thank you for the bonus, now, I’m going to go steal some office supplies.” Right? I mean, you know, “Thank you for the bonus. I’m going to come in late all this next year.” Right? No, you’re actually more motivated than that. It’s a blessing. So, that’s what Paul says here.

Here’s what I want all of us to do. Here’s kind of a practical application that you can choose to do or maybe not to do. I really want to ask you to think about a pastor maybe on our staff, but maybe even better yet, maybe just somebody that’s a pastor at another church – maybe here in Indy. Maybe you know a church planter or a missionary, and go out and get a gift card to your favorite restaurant, maybe to Target or something, and just write a little card to them and say, “I don’t go to your church; actually, we go to Traders Point, but you know what, we love you, we appreciate you, we know ministry can be tough at times, be blessed.” And, I’m telling you, you’re going to blow their minds with generosity, and that’s what healthy churches do. Let me say this: do not send them to me. All right? I will just turn right around and mail them off. I am not angling for anything here. I want you to bless other people here. Okay?

So, Paul goes on and this is where he turns in the passage. He illustrates this. He says, “Now that I’ve kind of built my case to show you that I deserve a fair compensation ...” this is what he’s going to say in verse 15, “I never took it. I didn’t ask it of you. I didn’t demand it of you. My love for you and my love for the gospel caused me to limit the exercise of that liberty.” Look at what he says in verse 15. “But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.” So, he’s saying, guys, I’m not angling for a raise here. I don’t have any other ulterior motives. “For I would rather ...” what’s the word? **Die** ... Really? It’s like, “Paul, couldn’t you use a little milder word there?” I don’t know if that’s what I would say. I would rather be frustrated – I don’t know. But he says, “For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.” So that’s his way of saying, “Hey, man. This is a calling. I didn’t get into this for the money. I don’t want that to ever be confused here, and so I did this for much higher reasons than that.” He goes on, “For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do

this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward?" And here he spells it out. "That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel." So, Paul specifies here that what he's doing in ministry is an eternal calling and it's a temporary stewardship. It's a very high calling – we're dealing with people's lives here. It's going to be eternal things at stake, but it's also a temporary stewardship in the sense that our life is smoke or vapor. We're not here very long.

Many of you know that I became your pastor here about 4 years ago, and Howard Brammer had been the pastor here for about 24 years. Many of you grew under his leadership and his teaching and much of the fruit that you see in this church today is the direct result of Howard's farming. I remember the first time I sat down with Howard over lunch. I said, "What words of advice do you have for me?" And he said, "It will go by faster than you think. Steward your day. Steward it. Make sure that you realize that there will come a day when people will go, Aaron who?" Right? You are a vapor here.

So this is an eternal calling, and it's a temporary stewardship. And Paul says here – I really resonate with just his words in this. This deep sense of calling. Now, how many of you – if you've been in church for a while, you've heard this phrase: I felt called to ministry. What does that mean? It's basically this idea that you have nothing to do with it. It's like God dialed your number. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. God dialed your number. You didn't instigate it and you've got to decide, "Do I ignore the phone call, do I put it off, or do I respond to this?" This is a calling that didn't begin with me; I just answered it. I've shared with some of you, if you've been here for a while, just kind of my own personal calling into ministry. Man, I never, ever, ever – not in a million years – ever thought I would ever go into full-time ministry, let alone do this. I'm a shy kid from southern Missouri, and I remember very vividly when I was like 18 or 19 years old that – it's even hard for me to describe just how that all went down – this kind of stirring, this fluttering within my heart in which God was calling me into the ministry. And not once did I ever say, "You know, I really enjoy doing a research paper on a weekly basis and then orally delivering that to a group of people. What job could I do? Umm, I really enjoy having – I'd really love to have a job that no matter what decision I make, somebody doesn't like it. Hmmm, let's see, what can I do for a living?" Right? "Oh, let's be a pastor of a large church." Right? No. I remember very clearly when I kind of felt like God was moving me into this, I was just the opposite. "God, are you kidding me? Man, you've dialed the wrong number. Here's 5 other numbers. Go call those guys. I think those guys would do a better job." So, it's this calling. God grabs a hold of your heart.

I really resonate with what Paul says here. He says, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Man, I really resonate with that. Some of you who know me well know I'm a little bit of a nut job when it comes to preaching. I mean that literally. I've seriously got mental issues when it comes to preaching. If I go longer than 2 or 3 weeks without preaching, I start to develop a twitch. If I go longer than a few weeks without preaching, I'll just break out spontaneously around the house and start preaching to my wife and kids. During the middle of the day, I'll just break out – out loud – just start preaching, going over stuff, and our walls are thin, so the staff used to just laugh; now they just roll their eyes. It's pathetic. But it's just this whole idea that I feel this "calling" toward this. And Paul says, "Woe to me if I don't." And he takes it as far as to say, "Man, I'd do this for free because it's a calling that I have." I want to say the same thing to you. I think you need to know my heart in this. If there ever came a day when the church couldn't offer me a salary or if I had to disqualify myself morally, I'd do this for free; and I mean that. I'd figure out a way to make it work. I'd deliver pizzas. I'd bag groceries. I'd do whatever because I believe in the mission and the vision of this church, and I owe it to you to be honest with you, and I owe it to you to have a strong work ethic, to be faithful to the scriptures, to lift up the name of Jesus, and to move the Gospel forward. I owe that to you. I owe it to you to put God first, then my wife and my kids,

and then, you're a distant third. Don't you feel loved? I owe that to you to put it in that order. I do not want to get to the end of my days of ministry and look back and say, "Whoa, man, what a ride. That was awesome. The church grew and people came to Christ, and look at all we did for world missions around the globe," and then my kids hate the church. I didn't have an affair physically with another woman, but I had an affair with you because I gave the best of my time and my efforts to you. I owe it to you to keep that in order.

So, Paul says all of this. He says, "It's a calling." He says, "I'd do it for free because I feel so strongly about it." Then, the next point that he makes here is that he didn't want to accept a salary because he didn't want that to be a hindrance to the Gospel, and here's what he means. This is a young, fledgling church, new Christians, skeptics, people that are uncertain about his motives for ministry, and he says, "Man, I'm telling you what, if I accept a salary and that causes you to be a bit skeptical of my motives and you don't really hear the Gospel because of what I get paid, then, let's remove that. I want you to hear the Gospel." So, this is all this motivation of passion - this passion for people.

Look at what he says in verse 19. "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." He says, "Listen, man, I'll restrict myself. I'll take on the nature of a servant if it means somebody is going to get saved." The two big reasons that most people reject God have nothing to do with the Gospel. The two big reasons that people give for rejecting God are personal suffering and the hypocrisy of Christians. Those are the two big ones. "God, I can't believe you allowed that to happen ..." and "Those Christians are so phony." So you reject them, and you're not even rejecting the Gospel. Those are the things that you reject. Paul says, "Let's remove those barriers so that if they reject the Gospel, let's make sure it's really the Gospel they're rejecting and not because I get paid, or not because of my personal hypocrisy that they end up turning against."

Look at what he says in verse 20. He kind of goes on to explain this, "To the Jews I became as a Jew," (Why?) "... in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law." Listen to this. "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Who does that sound like? It sounds like Jesus, "To the weak, I became weak. I clothed myself in human flesh so that there wouldn't be this barrier between Me and you."

Now, you look at that, and you're like, now, wait a second, Paul. Are you saying that you're compromising your beliefs and your values so that people will get saved? That's not what he's saying. He's saying, "Look, I'm going to go out of my way to relate to you. I'm going to go out of my way to earn your trust." And the word for that is contextualization. Contextualization is simply defined this way: it's translating the truth of the Gospel in word and deed into the understandable terms so that the culture might respond to it. That's a word that I think is important for you to understand; because that's what God did through Jesus. Through Jesus, God contextualized Himself so that we could understand how He feels for us that we would understand the great extent that He would go to have a relationship with us. So, what did Jesus do? Jesus stepped down, out of heaven and wrapped Himself in human flesh, oily skin, pimples, adolescence, sickness – sounds like a lot of fun, right? He never experienced any of that before. He clothed himself in human flesh. He learned to eat our food. He learned to speak our language. He breathed our air. He walked among us. What is that? That's the contextualization of the Gospel. That's God's heart for you; and thus, that should be the heart of the church. The church

contextualizes that message – not watering it down, not forsaking the truth of the Gospel, not telling itching ears what they want to hear, but, “Hey, man, I’m willing to go to you to be all things to all people; to take on the nature of a servant.”

You know, we see this illustrated all throughout the Bible. Oftentimes, we don’t even know it. A great example of this is Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which are the what? Four Gospels. What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the telling of Jesus’ life, His perfect sinless life, His substitutionary death and atonement, His resurrection of the dead so that in Him you could find favor with God. That’s the Gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contextualize it for their audience.

Have you ever asked why do we have four of them? Don’t they contradict themselves? Aren’t they saying different things? No, they are written with a specific audience in mind. So, let’s walk through that. Who did Matthew write to? Matthew wrote to the Jewish crowd. So, Matthew’s goal is to trace the lineage of Jesus back to Abraham. So, in the Gospel of Matthew, you’re going to see a lot of Old Testament quotes. The book of, the Gospel of Matthew begins with what? A genealogy. That’s so riveting. Right? It’s all of this Old Testament that goes all the way back. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic prophecy. Matthew is writing with a Jewish audience in mind. That determines – that influences what he chooses to write and not write. Come to the Gospel of Mark. Mark is short and simple and clean. Mark is like a traffic cop, “Just the facts, ma’am. I don’t care about the color of shirt. I don’t care about the make and model of the car. Just tell me what happened.” So, you read through Mark. It’s filled with lots of present tense, active verbs. Mark’s like, “Jesus did that, then He did this, then He did that.” [He’s] very judicious with his words. He’s a male through and through. There are even a couple of times he just grunts. Right? Chapter 16 (*grunts*) and then he moves on. Right? Love Mark – he’s short, simple, to the point. Then, you come to Luke. Luke was educated; he was a doctor. Luke is writing with Gentiles in mind. So, he doesn’t trace Jesus back to Abraham; he keeps going all the way back to Adam. He says Jesus is who God intended all of us to be. Jesus is, in a sense, kind of a new Adam; and Jesus came to bring us back to God. So, we see that it’s very chronological. It’s in-depth, and it’s filled with all of these emotions and details – it’s the most detailed Gospel we have as Luke writes this. It’s a very thorough record.

Then, you come to John. About 80-90% of John is unique to John. John just kind of takes a totally different angle in this. You start off with the Gospel of John. How does he start? He says, “In the beginning was the Word” – the logos. You’re like, “Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I don’t know. What are you talking about John?” Right. Like, none of the other guys started off that way. Who is John writing to? John was writing to the Greeks. They loved words. They loved philosophy, and so they were heavily influenced by Aristotle, Socrates and Plato, so what does he do? He contextualizes, and he says, “You love words? Man, Jesus is **the** Word. Jesus is the logos. It all began; it all started with Him.” So, we see this modeled in the Bible this contextualization of the Gospel and now God has called the church to have the same heart beat.

Now, let me say this. There are churches all over the United States right now that are plateauing and declining and dying a very slow death because they refuse to do this. The natural tendency of a lot of churches is to put their past – to value their past over their children. So, we’re not going to change. Now, let me tell you straight up. It is a sin not to change. It is a sin to change the message, but it’s also a sin to say, we’re never going to change the methods. Now, the natural pushback and the pushback you should have is, “Wait a second, Aaron, how do you make sure that you stay anchored to the truth? How do we know that we’re not watering down the Gospel? How do we know in this effort to contextualize

the Gospel that we don't take it too far and we lose our bearings? We wake up one day and we realize, whoa, we've even gotten away from the heart and the message of Jesus."

The answer to that is the final thing that Paul addresses here in this chapter. It's **training** - training. The word for this is discipleship. It's this idea you can't outsource your Christian growth. You can't sit around and wait for it to happen, but you have to actively be involved in it. When you have a body of believers who are actively training (picking up their Bibles; knowing what the Bible says; they're serving; they're studying), man, then all of a sudden, it just becomes a natural thing, "Hey, I know I'm anchored to the Gospel, but I'm also reaching out and I'm connecting to the culture around me." You know when you've gone too far and when you haven't. Look at what he says in verse 24. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." So, it's like every trophy that you've ever won (right?) ends up in a storage closet, all tarnished, it doesn't last; but we are running to receive a reward that will last forever. "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." One of Paul's favorite analogies to use, to equate things to the Christian growth/Christian life, is athletics. Paul is an old ex-jock with a bum knee. Okay? He loves athletics and he always used that analogy and really helped people to understand this, and the Corinthians would have understood what he was talking about because the Olympic Games and the Isthmian games would have come to Corinth on a regular basis. So, these Corinthians would have been up-close. They would have seen these world class athletes training, and Paul says, "Just like you see those athletes training, that's what you need to do in your Christian life. You need to grow." So, we go back to this. It's not just picking up your Bible and reading it to say I got through it or God says, "Wow, you can check that off your list." This is a treadmill. These are weights and you're going to it and you're training and you're learning.

How many of you have ever run a marathon? Have you ever run a marathon? Okay, we've got a whole lot of athletes here. So, how many of you have ever tried to run a marathon without training for it? That's a dumb idea, and yet, what we know to be true when it comes to physical exercise, we totally overlook when it comes to our Christian life. Now, I'm just telling you man. You're going to get the wind knocked out of you, if you haven't already. Sickness, relationship issues, financial issues – life has a tendency to punch us in the gut when we think that things are going great. The question isn't, "Are you just going to get through life without ever having a scratch on you?" You're going to. The question is when that happens, have you been training ahead of time; or are you going to pull a spiritual hammy and limp off to the side of the road and say, "Okay, obviously God's at fault, He didn't protect me from this." I don't remember God saying He would. I think God said that He would give you all that you needed to be trained. Athletes are durable, aren't they? They're resistant. They get up and they run.

I want to show you a video of a young lady by the name of Holland Reynolds. She's a cross country runner at San Francisco University High School. Take a look at the screens.

Announcer 1: It's now Girls Division 5, CIF, Cross Country Championships. The gun is up and they are away.

Announcer 2: There's number 3 who was previously number 2 is now walking the last meters. She is in severe duress here, trying to finish up.

Announcer 1: This is the guts that cross country brings out in athletes.

Announcer 2: This is very gutty here. All the way through giving for her teammates. She's got about 30 meters to go.

Announcer 1: 9:93?

Announcer 2: She's holding her so, so well. Oh, boy, about 5 meters – hopefully, she will get back up. This is a decision here if she gets assistance of course.

Announcer 1: This is...

Announcer 2: It's decision time. They're asking her how she's feeling.

Announcer 1: This is cross country.

Announcer 2: If they touch her, that would disqualify her so they are asking her, can you make it? Look at her. Such a courageous effort trying to cross that finish.

Announcer 1: The crowd is giving her all they can here at the finish.

Announcer 2: As soon as she crosses, they will scoop her up and take her to the medical table right away.

Announcer 1: And there she did it.

Man, I've watched that like 5 or 6 times, and I get choked up every time I watch that because you see that determination in that athlete. What a great picture for life. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon. It's not how you're doing today; it's how you're going to cross the finish line. Some of you are going – some of you are right there now. You're doubled over in pain, body's locking up; you don't know if you can go on. When you fall, it's how you train that gives you that extra energy to cross the finish line. That's the determining factor. So, you can tell that she obviously had been training. She's durable. She's resistant. She collapses. She gets up – on all fours she crawls across that finish line. You want to know what I love about that picture? The coaches, her parents, and her team are around her at the finish line, and as soon as she crosses, they scoop her up. She's limp as a noodle, and they support her and they carry her. Man, what a great picture of the church. You cannot do this alone. Do you want to know why you should be a part of a church? You cannot follow Christ by yourself – you need a community around you. So, the question I want to leave you with is, "How are you training? How are you doing in that?" Whenever you get kicked in the gut, whenever you start to double over in pain, that's going to be where the rubber meets the road and you're going to have the ability to muster up all of the courage and the strength you have to cross the finish line. I promise you there will be a church that will scoop you up.

Now, I've been your pastor now for 4 years and my goal has never been - it is not currently and it never will be - to grow a large church. My goal here is not to try to see how many seats that we can fill. My goal is not even so much who all comes into this church. My primary goal is the day you leave our church. What did God do in your life while you were here? Were you part of something bigger than yourself? Did you grow in your knowledge of the truth and grace? Do you look more like Jesus the day you leave here than the day you came – whether you're in our church for 60 days or 60 years? That's my goal. I want to know: did you leave well? That's going to require you to do more than just showing up here on a sporadic basis and attending a church service. I want you to be in training so that way you grow to look more like Jesus in your time here. Man, that's how God is going to judge me one day. He's not going to say, way to go, Aaron, you built a great big church. No, he's going to say, way to go, you released an army of people who are missionaries.

Let me pray.

Father, we come to you now to thank you for your love and your grace, and I just pray that today we could take to heart this teaching because it is so applicable to where all of us are at today. God, we want to be, I think all of us want to be a part of a healthy church. We don't want to be a part of a hypocritical church. We don't want to be a part of a selfish church or a greedy church. We want to be a church that gives itself away and trust that You'll give the resources to do all that we can do to make the name of

Jesus known and to meet the needs of people. So, God, help us to be generous. Help us to have a passion for people just to take on the nature of a servant that they might be reached. And God, I pray that we would continually commit ourselves to training – not to have all the answers, not to get all of life perfect, but to just be running with You so that way when life punches us in the jaw, we can get up and keep going. We ask this in Jesus' name, and the church says: Amen.

Love you guys. There will be prayer counselors here down front. Hope you have a great week, and we'll see you next Sunday.