

# The Stewardship of Our Outreach

*Building Core Strength*

By Steve Viars

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 5

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**Faith Church**

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I want to thank all those who have been serving all through the weekend. Some of you did a great job. I assume Kelly Keck and those who have worked with her to decorate our auditorium and the various places around the building. Thank you so much for that. And then another team who got ready for living nativity and got that all set up. And another group working on having things ready for the stewardship celebration tonight. It really is a privilege to serve with folks who take serving God so seriously. So thank you for all that was done to get ready for this weekend the coming days of ministry together.

A few weeks ago our country witnessed something that has not occurred for over 30 years, that is the brutal murder of one of our nation's sitting ambassadors. Of course we would all be quick to say that it is tragic whenever anybody representing this country loses his or her life which is why we took a few minutes last week to honor our veterans and to pray for all of our active military personnel and all of our civil servants. But the significance is even enhanced when we are talking about an ambassador because of the nature of that person's identity and role.

Christopher Stevens was in Libya representing our government and our nation and our ideals. So the attack at Benghazi was not just on an individual. It was an attack on our country. Some of the people involved understand that all too well. It goes at the very issue of the significance of the position of ambassador.

Recently I have been reading a book entitled *In the Garden of Beasts* by Eric Larsen. It is a story of Ambassador William E. Dodd who was the chairman of the history department at the University of Chicago in 1933 and on June 8<sup>th</sup> Dodd received a call from President Franklin Roosevelt asking he and his family to leave his post in Chicago and become an ambassador for the United States. And I really {?} well, that sounds like a pretty boring book to me. Well, hear me out. Roosevelt was asking Dodd and his family to move to Berlin and become the ambassador to Germany during the ascendancy of a man whose name you might recognize. Adolf Hitler. And that is the point of the title of the book, *In the Garden of Beasts*. What was it like to be an ambassador of this country and have repeated personal meetings with Hitler and his generals to try to represent our beliefs and our values to them before it was too late?

And just like the sad case of Christopher Stevens, it illustrates the unique significance and potential influence of somebody who is serving as an ambassador.

Now here is why I am raising those two examples this morning. Thankfully God's Word uses a series of pictures, a series of metaphors to help us understand what it means to actually be a follower of Christ. And one of the critical metaphors to know and to understand is that we are called to be.... Do you want to guess? Ambassadors for Christ.

Think about that. Just like William Dodd and Christopher Stevens and so many others have been ambassadors for the United States of America, we are called to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ. What an incredible trust. Do you realize that God could have bypassed all of us and he could have accomplished his plan directly and without the concern that people like you and me might hinder the task in some way. But God has given us a tremendous trust, a stewardship as his own ambassadors.

And the question I would like us to consider is: How faithful are we being to that trust? And what would growing stewardship look like in the days to come?

With that in mind, please open your Bible this morning to 2 Corinthians chapter four. That is on page 142 of the back section of the Bible under the chair I front of you if you need that this morning. Today we are landing the plane on this series we do each fall on the stewardship of life. And, as we have been explaining, stewardship is such a broad topic in the Word of God. It literally involves everything that God has entrusted to you. {?}

We can talk about the stewardship of your mind or the stewardship of your tongue, the stewardship of your body, the stewardship of your marriage or the stewardship of your family, the stewardship of your job. It certainly involves the stewardship of your time, of our talents, of your treasures. It is practically endless.

So historically, we use these weeks just prior to thanksgiving to think about all the ways that God has helped us to be faithful to that trust as individuals and as a church. Now why do we do it?

Well, several reasons. One, we want to be sure that we are offering God praise and thanks for anything that has been accomplished through our lives this year that has been good, right? We want to be sure we are thanking him. To God be the glory. Great things he has done with anything we might have gotten right as individuals or as a church in the last year. We ought to be thanking God for that. Stewardship involves that and then looking to the future because nobody here has arrived. Right? Nobody here is perfect on either side of this pulpit. So we want to honestly and humbly and authentically ask the question: What is the next step? What does growing stewardship look like in the coming days? And then we believe this. It is good to make commitments. Do you agree with that? Absolutely. I am surprised everybody did not shout out a chorus of amens when I said that. It is good to make commitment. It is good to formulate a plan. It is good to write it down.

Ain't it? Yeah. Like a milestone, like a stake in the ground with the help of God and to the glory of Christ we intend to get better in these specific ways in the next year together. And many of us would say that stewardship month over the years is one of the powerful tools I our effort to try to grow and change.

I want to thank our pastoral staff members. We decided at the beginning of the year that this year we would share the preaching opportunities during stewardship month and just for a lot of reasons. I believe that it is very wise and very healthy for a church like us to have a team of capable leaders. God has blessed us in that way for sure and I appreciate them. I appreciate their families and all that they do for God around here. They have done a good job this morning.

Well, this morning I would like to conclude this study by talking about growing stronger in your outreach. And what does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? And, by the way, if you follow along in these handouts, you will notice that the handout in your bulletin is the same as last week. That is because pastor Garner's sermon was so life changing new just reproduced the outline again. The one that I am going to be using was actually folded up and put in there just like a last minute random insert. That is essentially what I am.

We are talking about it. It is kind of like the wizard of Oz. Don't pay attention to the one in the bulletin. And what does it mean to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ?

Now let's dig into this text and listen. Ask the Holy Spirit right now to help you lock on to this passage, because this is like way important. 2 Corinthians four beginning in verse 16.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be

absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.<sup>1</sup>

Is this passage like dripping stewardship or what?

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.<sup>2</sup>

What a great passage of Scripture, huh? With the time we have remaining let's talk about three aspects of being a faithful ambassador for Christ. And please tell me already your motor is running, because you want to rev it up for God in the coming days when it comes to being an ambassador. So what in the world does that even mean?

Well, let's think, first of all, about the nature of your calling. We have got to understand that and what does it mean that we are ambassadors for Christ? Well, here is what you need to know. Paul chose a very specific word in order to make this point crystal clear to the Corinthians and to us. If you are going to be an ambassador, even from the meaning of the Word, you have to be growing in spiritual maturity. You just have to be.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16—5:10.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

Why would you emphasize that? Well, it is because that the word ambassador is the Greek word πρεσβευω (pres-byoo'-o). Aren't you glad? That was worth the price of entrance right there. It is the Greek word πρεσβευω (pres-byoo'-o). It literally means old man. That is right. It is related to the Greek word πρεσβυτερος (pres-boo'-ter-os) from which we, of course, get the English word elder.

And you might say, "Well, why in that culture and language would the word ambassador be related to the concept of being an old man?"

Well, think about it, because this task and this trust requires a level of maturity. The last thing you would want as a person involved in diplomacy who was unwise or immature.

Now I realize you might say, "Wait, wait. I have just recently become a Christian."

Good, good. Like we had our intro to faith dinner this Friday night, this past Friday night. We had just a house full of people and we were doing our testimony time, just sharing with one another. We had several people who just said, "I am a baby Christian." That is what they said, "I am just a baby Christian."

I love that, absolutely love that. And you might say, "Old men? I just became a Christian or I am a young person. I feel like I have a long way to go. Maybe, pastor Viars, I am too young. Maybe I am too immature to be an ambassador then."

Well, hold on a second. Who is this book written to? To the Corinthians. They were the poster children for being spiritually immature. If God had to wait until people like you and me had everything figured out before he could use us in his service, he would be waiting a long time, huh? No question about the fact that if we are going to accomplish this task well, then we have to take this matter of spiritual growth and development seriously. That has been the point of our theme this year, of building core strength. And that is also part of what we are trying to emphasize during stewardship month.

In fact, I would encourage you. Open up your bulletin. Just have that baby on your lap. Open to the stewardship commitment portion because I am going to be going back and forth from that this morning or to that this morning, because I want to be sure that you and that commitment card are becoming fast friends. Are you feeling it? Oh, man I love that stewardship commitment card. And I hope you are also saying, "I want to become a πρεσβευω (pres-byoo'-o)."

In fact, if somebody asks you this week: What do you want to be when you grow up? An old man? There is your answer. Yeah, I want to be a πρεσβευω (pres-byoo'-o). I want to be an old woman, because I understand that in order to accomplish this task of representing Christ well—here is the point of it—I have to be growing. I have to be growing. I have to be on that. I have to be growing in Christ myself.

Now what about the person who would say, "Well, I can't focus on that right now, because I am busy getting my degree and that is consuming all of my time"?

What would we say to a person like that? Yeah, you have got your priorities like all wrong. You need to knock that off and today would be a really good day to start. And here is why. Listen to the Scripture.

But see, first, here it is, you have got to be an old man. You have to get it on, the issue of growing.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”<sup>3</sup>

That is why you need to get some time in your Bible before you worry about studying for that chemistry exam. That is it. I said that. Tell your chemistry professor I said that. I will sign you a note. Seek first his kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

The person will say, “Well, I need not get married and my girlfriend is consuming all my time and my attention, so I can’t work on my spiritual growth and development right now.” Therefore I can’t be much of an ambassador.

What would we say to a person like that? Get up here so we can whack you upside the head. You have got to be busy growing in Christ first or you are going to be a poor husband or a poor wife. Seek first his kingdom.

Oh, I need to land a job and there is no reason to get too serious about Christianity until I figure out where I am going to be in the long term, blah, blah, blah. You hear how lame all that sounds in the light of day in the Lord’s house on the Lord’s day? Absolutely.

You know that guy on the Ford commercial who puts his finger in that guy’s dirty oil and he sticks it up in your face right there on your TV and he says, “Change your oil”? Do you know that guy? It makes you want to change it right away. Well, here is me in a friendly way saying, “Complete your stewardship commitment card.” Yeah. It will help you adjust your priorities and your ability to fulfill this responsibility of being an ambassador for Christ regardless of how old you are in the Lord and regardless of how old you are chronologically is dependent on that.

Now what else flows out of this metaphor being... We can find some more stuff here, you think? We are also talking about people who are living in a foreign land. And I realize you might say, I don’t necessarily care of the people I work with. I don’t necessarily like my neighbors. I don’t like my extended family members. I don’t really want to be an ambassador to them. You might be the kind of person who says... I have been hearing about this more and more as I travel around the country. I am hearing Christian people say this. You know, people just wear me out.

Tell that to William Dodd and the assignment he had to represent Roosevelt to Adolf

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:33.

Hitler. And who are we kidding? Of course we are going to feel out of place in certain ways in our present assignment. That is like Paul said. Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But while we are waiting we have an urgent task to accomplish. And the differences and the challenges of those around us, that ought to motivate us and energize us not cause us to duck our heads in the sand and hope it is all going to pass.

They are bombing Israel, for crying out loud. Iran is trying to develop additional nuclear capabilities. Do we get the urgency of the task that God has given us? I hope so.

Thank the Lord also we are representing a marvelous king. We are not just ambassadors. We are ambassadors for Christ. And that is where the human metaphor begins to break down. I mean, one of the challenges William Dodd had was there was a fair amount of anti-Semitism on the part of our government in the 1930s. And so not everybody appreciated what Dodd was trying to do with Hitler and Dodd was even somewhat conflicted himself about what to do with what many people in that culture all around the world were referring to as the Jewish problem. That is what they called it even here in the United States.

Well, we all know what Nazi Germany eventually did with the Jewish problem. And I am suggesting to you that the challenge that Dodd faced in part as an ambassador was there were some people even in this country who were not exactly innocent on that matter. He was an ambassador for a very imperfect country and a very imperfect president. Well thank God we don't have that, huh? We are ambassadors for a perfect king. We are ambassadors for one who is reaching out to others with terms of peace. Sinless, righteous, holy, Son of God. We are representing a marvelous king and proclaiming a unique message.

See, fundamentally we need to understand this culturally. Sending an ambassador in that culture was a good will demonstration of a desire to live in harmony with the other party. The ambassador was saying, "Our king doesn't want to be at war with you. He wants a cessation of hostilities and here are his terms of peace." That is the very essence of the gospel, that by admitting your need and placing your faith and trust in what Christ did on the cross of Calvary you can be reconciled to him and therefore live in a state of peace with the very King of kings. What a great calling. What a great message we have been given.

Now what happens—I mean, I have been talking to you especially about verse 20 right now, but what happens if we back up and think about this in light of the context that we read? I started in chapter four verse 16 on purpose. We could say it this way. We are ambassadors for Christ with the focus on eternity. I hope you have that. Verse one said we know that this earthly tent, that is our body, is going to be torn down. These bodies are getting older. They are wasting away.

I did a funeral yesterday for my childhood friend, Mikey Sheets who was 53 years old. A couple of years ago he showed up and stood right there, right next to me while I was

getting ready to preach. He had my other childhood friend Chuckie Dollman showed up here at church a couple of years ago just to surprise me. We had a great time together. Chuckie and I yesterday, we had the responsibility of attending and I had the responsibility of conducting Mikey's funeral. He died of a heart attack, 53 years old.

If we don't have a focus on eternity, I'm really not sure what it would take. There is a limited amount of time for us and those we are called to serve. It is not just us. It is the people that need an ambassador now.

Well, that puts our suffering, then, in perspective. That is why Paul had said:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.<sup>4</sup>

And you might say, "What does that have to do with what we are talking about this morning?"

Here is the answer. Friends, sometimes the greatest ambassadorial opportunities come in the crucible of suffering. And of those who have a long range view of life we cautiously say, "Lord, if my going through this trial can potentially help me be a more effective ambassador for Christ, that is what I want."

God's people need to stop this lame I want an easy assignment. And God's people need to stop being so comfortable with the word no. God's people need a sense of urgency and God's people need to get off of the I want to be comfortable and convenient. I want an assignment where there is the potential of being effective for God while I have the opportunity to do so. And I know some of you. You know, you are pushing. To which I would say, "Well, you are stubborn." I am glad we now understand one another. And I am saying that with a little bit of a smile on my face, but, friends, we have got to get to a better place. That is what stewardship month is all about. I am glad for where we are. And now I am looking forward—and I hope you are, too, to getting to a better place. That is part of what gives us confidence. For today it is because of the hope for tomorrow.

Twice in this chapter Paul said, "Be of good courage," in verse six and verse eight. And we know that for followers of Christ—sorry, I got a little ahead of myself. We prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. And so there are difficulties and challenges that come with representing our king in this foreign land. Bring that on.

Just like, you remember the old hymn? Soon and very soon. Can you finish that for me? If we are going to see the king. We are going to see the king and we want to faithfully serve him as ambassadors for Christ while we have the opportunity to do so.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.



And I just want to ask you. Do you believe what we are talking about this morning? Do you really? That ought to give us courage for the opportunities that we have today. We are talking about pleasing the king. This statement about being ambassadors is couched in the context of having as our ambition whether dead or alive to be pleasing to him.

And, friends, that is what prepares us for the judgment seat of Christ. Some day we are going to be called into account for what we did with our stewardship. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. I love what Warren Wiersbe said about that. As a Christian I don't fear the fire of hell. But I certainly fear the fire of heaven. I am concerned about the account that I will have to give some day for my stewardship month. That is important for what we are talking about right now, using what God has given to be best prepared for the judgment seat of Christ.

Now let's talk strategy for a minute. How does all of our studying from this marvelous text of Scripture relate to this theme we have been working on this year of building core strength? We told you at the beginning of the year we were doing what amounted to a ministry wide audit of how we go about accomplishing ministry, how we go about fulfilling our mission. And part of what has bubbled up is a commitment to be as strong as possible in three aspects of the disciple making process. One is reaching out to every person who moves into our neighborhood or who visits our church. And we think there ought to be a process. There ought to be a ministry, a system in place to reach out to persons and make it easy for them to connect to the Lord and connect to relationships here. We have to be good at that. We have to be strong.

Then moving sequentially, ongoing soul care and Christian growth. We want to be sure that once a person is a member here, we are offering as many creative resources as possible to help them deepen our walk with Christ, whether they are children, young adults, singles, married folks, widows. That, too, requires a lot of hands serving in order to make sure we are strong there.

And then special counseling or more intensive discipleship, because sometimes along the way we get stuck and we need concentrated help and we want to be sure that we have those kind of intensive discipleship opportunities counseling resources available both here and later at Faith West.

That is why we are asking you to complete the serving portion of your stewardship commitment card. We are asking you essentially to do three things. And what does it take to be a faithful person around this church? Three things. One, to worship Christ, to be faithful to the church services here, to want to worship him with passion. And, two, to walk with Christ. In other words, to be in a smaller group, an ABF or a point man group, a lady's Bible study so you have got some people around your life with whom you are growing. So you are worshipping Christ, you are walking with Christ and then, thirdly, you are working for Christ, meaning that you are part of the serving team here. And I believe this. Try this on for size. And maybe we need to start thinking about serving around here similar to the way we think about giving. In other words, with our giving we

use some to fund the regular ministries of the church. And then some to fund the bonus or the extra opportunities that God has given us. That this the way I give. I bet that is the way you do, too. You get that little envelope and you give your regular tithes. That supports the regular ministries of this church. But because God has given us a bunch of bonuses, like vision of hope, like our community center, like our seminary, et cetera, et cetera, many of us, we go back around there again and we are glad God has given that to us and we are more than happy to step up and do what is required in order to make that happen as well. I want to encourage you to think about serving the exact same way. In other words, I want to be part of making the regular ministries of our church family run well. Everything you have to have in order to make worship possible on Sundays, all of these children's ministries, technologies ministries, music ministries, et cetera. Everything we do on Wednesday nights around here to try to help people grow. And so I wan to encourage you to think about what am I doing in order to serve in that? And then the second pass around is for the extra things that God has given us to do.

Now you say, "Pastor Viars, I really don't know where to start."

This would be a great blessing. Take out this card and on the back of it write these words. "Wherever I am needed." There you go. And make a decision right now based on the Bible, not based on me, based on the Bible, what we have just been studying that when you get a call from someone who says, "I would like you to serve in this particular way," what is the answer going to be? Yes. In fact, let me just {?}. I just want to know can people say that word anymore in this culture? We would like you to serve for Christ. What is your answer? Absolutely. And unless Jesus whispers in your ear 25 strong reasons why you ought to say no, the answer from now on is absolutely.

Now right now you say, "Nobody would ever be crazy enough to do that."

Oh, yes, they would. Let me introduce you to the crazy folks right now. Brian and Carolyn Barrett who were asked to take on a very important ministry of this church even though they are relatively new they have done a fabulous job. Praise God for them. May their tribe increase. I want you to hear from what Brian and Carolyn have to say.

[ Voice ] Good morning. We are the Barretts. I am Brian and this is my wife Carolyn. We have been attending Faith since April of 2010 and our youngest son Alex is a freshman here at the school. We have been married a little over 23 years and in the sovereignty of God didn't realize until after we were married that we were in the same Sunday school picture in first grade. You see, we both came to know the Lord later in life at the age of 36. Fast forward a few years and God had placed it on our hearts that we needed to be finding a church body where we could serve, grow and get connected. We had heard of Faith, but had never visited or had any information about the church. Keep in mind that we live just a short distance from the church and presenting in the current outreach of project Jerusalem.

We visited Faith and were greeted by many individuals and welcomed like we had been attending for years. The offering of kindness was evident from the moment we walked

though the doors the first time and every time afterwards. If you have been around faith for even a short while you know there are many opportunities to serve. And while those in the church need to be met, what about those outside the church that just need to know the love of Jesus? Sorry. Maybe even our new neighbors around the church.

After joining the church later that fall I signed up for Monday night biblical counseling training and I felt like I had jumped into the deep end of the pool. It was like drinking out of a fire hose. But what I learned and where my heart still rests is that there are so many hurting individuals outside the church that have no hope, don't know where to turn and simply need to know the love of Christ.

Our family is like any other and we experience the same life trials and we have been able to rest in Romans 8:28 which says:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

But there are still many others outside the church that need to have that same assurance and peace. One of our prayers has been that we would be able to serve together in a capacity where there was a need. When we were approached to consider being the coordinators of project Jerusalem, which is, simply put, an outreach to new neighbors and welcoming them to the area, it didn't hit us for some time that we were actually serving along with others in one of these same areas that brought us to Faith in the beginning.

[ Voice ] Through the ministry we have heard many stories by those serving and have been part of many where the neighbors that is being greeted has expressed extreme gratitude and thankfulness for our church's outreach and generosity. Some use community center, some the daycare, the food pantry. Students who are planning to attend and yes, even visited a current church member.

[ Voice ] I do remember another... one evening when Mrs. Viars and my wife went out together to deliver packets and I pulled into the neighborhood to deliver packets myself. And I saw my wife's car there, but I didn't find either one of them. Forty five minutes later still no sign of them and I started to wonder what the conversation with pastor Viars was going to look like. I don't know where your mother and my wife are. However, they had spent almost an hour with a kind lady who had just moved and was excited for their visit. Normally visits are just a few minutes and with the many servants we have been able to each out to over 120 new neighbors {?} properties occupancy is now at 61 percent and even though each of them have already received a welcome letter from Faith by the time they have signed their lease, there are still many opportunities to serve our new neighbors in the future with the welcome to the area packets.

[ Voice ] We personally have been provided an opportunity for growth by stepping out of our comfort zone, including meeting many new people and attending ABFs and giving short presentations about the ministry. Even though it may not have been easy in the

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:28.

beginning we realize that each of us are simply the instruments and we don't know what the circumstances are of the person on the other side of the door. And a brief visit from one of our members giving them a gift card and some information on the church and community center and letting them know that our church feels that we are called to be a blessing to those around us and maybe the one point of connection that they need to the other ministries within the church.

[ Voice ] I read a devotional once that summarized the message by saying that we were made like rubber bands so that we could bend, change and be stretched beyond what we think is possible for God's will. He has shown us that while the stretch may seem difficult or even uncomfortable at times, nothing is impossible with God. We would like to thank each of the pastors for their instruction they provide to help each of us become better equipped to serve and our encouragement to you, if you have been considering an area to serve in, just try and see what growth God has planned for you. Thank you.

[ applause ]

[ Voice ] Great stuff. Aren't you thankful for people like Brian and Carolyn? And they are busy people. They had every reason in the world when we contacted them with that important responsibility to say: What is the cuss word we are never saying around here anymore? Yeah, it say no, but they said yes. And they took that responsibility on. I have the view, that if a church like this has so many people moving in right around us in high density housing, it would be wrong for us if we believe what we have been reading in this text, it would be wrong for us not to have a ministry to try to reach out to them. And Brian and Carolyn and those who are working with them have done a fabulous job and I am so very, very thankful for them.

See, that is what it means to... let's not talk about ambassador in some ethereal way. That is what it looks like.

Now what else can we learn from this passage? We talked about the nature of your calling. Let's talk about the significance of your calling for a moment. The text says God is making an appeal through you. Are you hearing that? Are you letting the Word get into you deep this morning? As though God were making an appeal. What an unbelievable concept. It may remind you of this great text. Galatians 2:20.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."<sup>6</sup>

Please contemplate what that means. When we are serving as an ambassador it is like God is making an appeal through us. It is like Christ living in us. What does that look like? Right now what does that look like right now? Well, there is dozens of faithful old people in the nursery. Do you know that? Holding babies, caring for babies, signing to

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<sup>6</sup> Galatians 2:20.

buried babies and all that other stuff that goes on with babies. That is part of being... part of the ambassadorial team.

And then those little babies are going to transition at some point into children's ministries. And what does that child find? More compassionate ambassadors, representatives of Christ teaching the Word in creative and age appropriate ways.

Do you believe this right now that there are supernatural transactions taking place there? Where God is making an appeal to those young hearts? And who wouldn't want to be used that way? It doesn't matter if it is convenient or pleasant. If we really believe what we are studying this morning, we are going to be all over those kind of opportunities. And I would just ask you this morning: Would your life suggest that you understand that when you serve as an ambassador God can actually be making an appeal through you? Do you have anything in your life that is more exciting than that? I can't imagine what it would be.

We had a great example of that in the paper on Tuesday. I was so glad for this article. I hope you saw it about Pete's pals. That is a program for special needs kids organized by some folks at Perdue and they had trouble finding a place to host it and we have been able to do that, because our church family sacrificed to build the community center together because there is a lot of folks around here who are on with what we are talking about this morning about being ambassadors, of being an ambassadorial church.

The story featured a young man named Riley Von Toble. Our family knows Riley. He plays on our son Drew's softball team. What a great way to try to demonstrate the love of Christ because of the generous sacrificial giving of the people of God where God is making an appeal to people in our community through you that is significant.

Another emphasis in this text is that God is worthy of respectful fear. I don't like a god like that. Well, it doesn't matter. We believe in Scripture here and the text says:

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.”<sup>7</sup>

Stewards understand that. Just like Solomon said:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>8</sup>

In fact, thinking about motivation for being an ambassador, we agree with this, too. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, if we are not prepared. And understand ultimately every person in our community and every person in our world is going to have to decide what they believe about Christ, but just like Paul said, “Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel.”

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:11.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 9:10.

Is that where you are coming from that woe is me if I am not an ambassador like every week? Woe is me if I am not finding opportunities to be a good steward of this particular challenge and privilege that God has given me.

Paul also said this, “I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” God help us to be faithful ambassadors, huh?

I would also point this out. I really do believe this God is worthy of a bit of fanaticism. I believe that. The text says:

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.”<sup>9</sup>

Why is it you can paint your face blue and go down and watch the Colts and be viewed as perfectly normal? Put a cheese thing on your head if you cheer for that other goofy team. But if you want yourself and your church to be faithful ambassadors, some label that is being beside yourself, if that is what it means to be beside yourself, bring it on. Don't you hope that after you are gone and your kids look at your check book they say that dad and mom were devoted to the proclamation of the gospel? And if your kids love God they will be thankful for that. And if they don't who cares what they say about your checkbook. Don't you hope that when they talk about your schedule they will say the same thing?

And you say {} shouldn't there be a balance? Of course. In fact, next year we are doing a strategic planning process and we are going to do zero based strategic planning meaning we are going to look at everything around here. In fact, we are going to decide whether we continue to do the living nativity. We are going to decide if we are going not continue to do the passion play. We are not wanting to have unreasonable expectations in the lives of our people but I really do believe this. We have many faithful ambassadors in this church and we have many who it is time to get to the next place. That is why what we are doing in stewardship month is so important. I really do believe this. If everybody does a little then nobody has to do a lot. There it is.

It is amazing, by the way, how God blesses us if we are really all about being faithful ambassadors. You may remember when we bought this property over at Faith West that is a site plan of the 6.4 acres that we bought and are developing. We paid 1.8 million dollars for it. We had that little L portion that wasn't really part of what we were planning and so we put that on the market to sell. And we have a signed purchase agreement now for a half a million dollars on that corner. God blessed you this week. And I can't say exactly who it is yet as they do their due diligence, but I am just simply saying when you want to be all about being an ambassador, it is amazing how God will choose to bless you. Have you been watching this? That is the safe haven home right next to vision of hope. That thing is going up out of the ground. I want to thank Barry Redding. I want to thank Jeff Brand, Mike Wilson, Arvid, a lot of people working on that. A Japanese car plant gave us the funding in order to build a home on our campus

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:13.

for victims of domestic violence and fire and flood so we can, in collaboration with our city and the Red Cross, serve victims in that way. And I am just simply saying: When you do your part, wanting to be an ambassador, God will do his in a bit way.

Now so much more on this passage than our time allows this morning, but I do want you to think about this. Think about the intensity of your calling. This text says, “We are begging you on behalf of Christ. We beg you on behalf of the Lord. Be reconciled to God, because the love of Christ, that is what is controlling us. That is what is motivating us. The love of Christ controls us. Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.”

The job of an ambassador is to explain the terms of peace. And what is our explanation? It is that the price of sin is infinite, but that God sent his Son to die in our place as an act of incredible mercy and grace and now there really is new life available here and now. And if all of that is true, there is nothing fanatical or inappropriate about begging others in behalf of Christ. And I would just say to you this morning if you have never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, we want to beg you to do that today. We are not beyond begging. We want to beg you today to place your faith and trust in him.

If you have done that, have you ever demonstrated it publicly by believer’s baptism? If not, you need to do that. I love you. You need to do that. You need to identify yourself with a local church that is trying to be ambassadorial, that is trying to be passionate about outreach. And you have one last opportunity to do that, one more church family night yet this year. Send me an email. We will be happy to get that organized, but we would love to have you be part of that team.

That is also why I really want to encourage you to be part of the stewardship celebration tonight. Are you planning to come? I believe it would be offensive to God for this church family to scatter to the winds without looking for corporate opportunity to thank God for all he has done this year. He has blessed a lot of us. He has helped many be stewards and we need to praise him for that. In fact, that is our church’s 25 year growth graph. We are on track to have a record year. In fact, it looks like we are going to have received over 200 new members, 70 of them by baptism this year. That will actually make this the largest growth year in the history of this church. Now that is because a lot of people have been faithful ambassadors. That is because a lot of folks have been working very, very hard. And I believe we need to get together tonight, don’t you?

What in the world are you going to be doing tonight anyway, for crying out loud? I want to encourage you to get one of those tickets. They are free. I want to encourage you to have you and your family over at the community center tonight and we are going to celebrate. We are going to celebrate what God has done. To God be the glory, great things he has done.

And if you say, “Well, I am not ready to complete the financial portion,” just complete the part of it that you want. But before we scatter to the winds, let’s, as a church family be the kind of people who make some commitments, drive some stakes in the ground

because commitments are good, aren't they? If what we are talking about in this passage is true, then making commitments as individuals and as a church are very, very good.

And let me just close with this. God will bless us as we do. I do believe that. In fact, think about this text as we conclude where Paul said:

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!<sup>10</sup>

Stand with me, would you?

*Father in heaven, thank you for calling us to be ambassadors for Christ. My, oh, my, oh my. And, Lord, forgive us for letting silly things get in the way of that. And I do pray that you would help us be people who take a good hard look and make whatever adjustments need to be made so that we can be growing stewardships of the proclamation of the gospel. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.