

Don't Suffer Loss Like Saul—Sifting through the Crash Site

1st Corinthians 3

Life is so distracting, isn't it? Sights explode before our eyes all day long; sounds and smells flow around us—in fact so much swirls around us and before us, we can get totally distracted. It can become so easy to just float through life going with the flow of the current of the world.

How did Paul and the other New Testament writers operate in ordinary life? How did those who were the most visible servants of the Lord in the Scriptures, operate in all the little things that fill life? What is fascinating is, they all seemed to keep track of life like a day trader—each knew their investment and sought a return on each day's "works".

If you read closely the half of the books that the Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament, you find a common thread—God is going to examine us individually for our "works"—works being what we did with our time, and energy, and resources, and what we did with our bodies. Open with me to Galatians 6.

*Galatians 6:4 But let each one examine **his own work**, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. NKJV*

*Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. NKJV*

*Colossians 1:10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being **fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God; NKJV*

*1 Timothy 6:18 Let them do good, that they **be rich in good works**, ready to give, willing to share, NKJV*

*Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God **should be careful to maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable to men. NKJV*

Peter said the same, and strongly urged the saints to be careful what they did with their days and hours.

*1 Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality **judges according to each one's work**, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; NKJV*

There is also another perspective that motivated them—it was the idea of the end of the race. Let's look at the finish line. Paul had a distinct impression that life was a daily race with an end of life prize, and the only way to get the prize was to finish the race.

*2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, **I have finished the race**, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which **the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day**, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. NKJV*

John the Apostle was also convinced that we would either welcome Christ's coming or wither in shame before Him.

*1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and **not be ashamed before Him** at His coming. NKJV*

In fact, as John records the closing words of the Bible, they point to that very truth.

*Revelation 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to **give to every one according to his work**. NKJV*

So if God is going to analyze our lives and judge us by our works, what should we be doing? That takes us back to Paul and this picture Paul challenges us with—that life is the production of building materials that we present to God. Each day our time was either spent in what is merely earthly and temporal or some of our time was also given over to what is lasting, endless and eternal.

*Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but **I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me**. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 **I press toward the goal for the prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. NKJV*

Paul further expands upon that idea by saying that our works, deeds, actions are transformed into either 'wood, hay, stubble' or 'gold, silver, precious stones'.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 **each one's work** will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will **test each one's work**, of what sort it is. 14 If **anyone's work** which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If **anyone's work** is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. NKJV

Gold, Silver, Precious Stones	Wood, Hay, Stubble
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Permanent	Passing, temporary
Beautiful	Ordinary, even ugly
Valuable	Cheap
Hard to obtain	Easy to obtain.

We have often looked at Paul's record of that great moment in 2nd Corinthians 5, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But this morning, turn instead to 1st Corinthians 3. It is amazing that Paul spoke more about this topic of being careful about not losing your life's work, to the Corinthians—than any other church. He seems to imply that their often out of control lives threatened them with irrecoverable loss.

Lets read 1st Corinthians 3: 1-15 as we stand. Pray

*1 Corinthians 3: 15 If anyone's work is burned, **he will suffer loss**; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. NKJV*

What does suffering loss mean in relation to our lives as believers? The New Testament uses this word several times but the clearest example of what it means is in Acts 27. Remember Paul on the ship that went through the terrible storm and then crashed on the rocks and was destroyed? In the midst of that event in Acts 27 we find a very good picture of what suffering loss is all about in our lives as believers.

Think of life as collecting the cargo in a ship. Everything important you carry down and stow in the hold. Now follow along in Acts 27.

*Acts 27: 10 saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with **disaster and much loss**, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." NKJV*

*Acts 27: 21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and **incurred this disaster and loss**. NKJV*

Acts 27: 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land. NKJV

At the judgment seat of Christ some believers Paul warns, are going to see everything they lived for thrown overboard (burned up in the fire) and they will float to shore on a board.

All that will be left of life will be that they were saved (they shall be saved, yet so as by fire). That is such a description of so many lives that fill God's Word; they began the race with great achievement but failed at the end because they ignored God's rules. They did not lose their salvation, but they did lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). It happened to Lot (Gen. 19), and to Samson (Jud. 16), probably King Saul who is our focus these past weeks (1 Sam. 28; 31), and to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). And, as Paul warns--it can happen to us!

Paul wanted to avoid at all costs the disastrous loss that would come if He ignored God and His will for life. Over and over we hear him say things like:

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, **I myself should become disqualified.** NKJV

DISQUALIFIED — the NKJV translation of the Greek word *adokimos* (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 13:5–7; fail the test, NIV; Titus 1:16). In three others references, the NKJV translates the Greek word as debased (Rom. 1:28; depraved, NIV), disapproved (2 Tim. 3:8), and rejected (Heb. 6:8). The literal sense of the word is “tested and proved to be false or unacceptable.”

- Borrowed from the athletic games, the word describes a contestant who, because of some infraction of the rules, is disqualified from winning the prize (1 Cor. 9:27; castaway KJV).
- Another metaphor is possible: a “counterfeit faith” (2 Tim. 3:8, NRSV). This suggests a coin that has been tested, proven false, and disapproved as legal tender.¹

The word disqualified shows up in Hebrews 6 and is translated as rejected.

*Hebrews 6:7-8 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is **rejected** and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.* NKJV

“Rejected” is *adokimos*, the same word Paul used when writing to the Corinthian believers, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). “Castaway” is the same word *adokimos*, meaning “not approved.” In effect, Paul is saying, “When I come into His presence I don’t want to be disapproved. I don’t want the Lord Jesus to say to me, ‘You have failed. Your life should have been a testimony but it was not.’”

The chilling fact of God's Word is the individual life analysis that God Himself then performs—an autopsy not of the cause of death, but of the purpose of life. That is why the constant theme of Paul's exhortations to us in the church revolve around the idea of finishing well at the finish line, a life that survive the fires of the judgment seat, and a ‘well done good and faithful servant’ analysis of our race by the Lord Himself.

God's Word has some sobering portraits of those who suffered loss. One of the greatest of these lessons in how to waste your life is Saul. What a great start and what a terrible ending. In God's race it is those who finish that get counted for reward—all the rest suffer loss. All the rest have their life's work burned up before them, thrown overboard and sunk in the depths of the sea, irrecoverably lost.

¹Youngblood, Ronald F., General Editor; F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, Consulting Editors, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

If you want to not suffer loss, God has given us the tracks of one who walked before us, had the Spirit, knew God—and yet failed completely. The life of Saul stands today as an example to all of us of how not to live, how not to end, how not to invest these precious days we have on earth!

So what was God's summary of Saul's life? God only needs one word—rejected. God says five times in just three verses (1st Samuel 15:23, 26; 16:1) that Saul rejected God by disregarding His Word, so God rejected him.

So Paul said, don't load your ship with what God is going to throw overboard. Don't build with flammable materials if your house is going to go through a fire. Don't waste your life!

We could sum up the tragic shipwrecked life of King Saul by saying that you don't serve God by doing what he did. Why not re-examine his life and see what made Saul the man who wasn't after God's heart. Or as I have come to look at Saul after sorting and sifting through all God left for us—25 ways to be sure that your life will amount to nothing!

1. Neglect God's Leadership of your life so that you underestimate the strength of your enemy—and get completely defeated. 1st Samuel 13.1-7

King Saul faced a whole new type of enemy, he was the King—and he didn't even know how strong his enemies were! The times since Joshua's conquest had produced a whole new type of enemy. Fresh in from the islands of the Mediterranean, the sea peoples settled on the coasts and mixing with the ancient inhabitants became the Philistines. Saul needed God to defeat his enemies. So do we. Saul neglected God's leadership and failed. So will we if we also neglect to allow God to lead our lives.

*1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, **seeking whom he may devour.** NKJV*

If you want to waste your life—**neglect God's Leadership of your life so that you underestimate the strength of your enemy—and get completely defeated.** 1st Samuel 13.1-7.

2. Get impatient and use your impatience as an excuse to do your own thing instead of obeying God. We can't serve God by—Impatience. *"Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. **But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him"** (1 Samuel 13:8).*

Saul was impatient with God's plan. He sought the approval of man before he sought the approval of God.

If you want to waste your life—**get impatient and use your impatience as an excuse to do your own thing instead of obeying God. We can't serve God**

by—Impatience.

3. **Neglect your primary responsibilities that God has entrusted to you by only taking care of your own needs. We can't serve God by—Neglect.** *"So it came about, on the day of battle, that **there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people** who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son" (1 Samuel 13:22).*

Saul neglected to provide for those entrusted to his care. He made sure he had what he needed to defend himself, but not that those he cared for were armed for the battle. In the New Testament, God says such a person is worse than an infidel:

"If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

If you want to waste your life—**neglect your primary responsibilities that God has entrusted to you by only taking care of your own needs. We can't serve God by—Neglect.**

4. **Get so out of touch with the battle raging around you—that God can be doing mighty things, and you miss them completely. We can't serve God by--Lazy indifference.** *"AND SAUL was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men. Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. But the people did not know that Jonathan had gone" (1 Samuel 14:2-3).*

Saul became lazy and indifferent; he was unaware of his son, the battle, and even the victory. He missed it all!

If you want to waste your life—**get so out of touch with the battle raging around you—that God can be doing mighty things, and you miss them completely. We can't serve God by--Lazy indifference.**

5. **Allow your anger and pride to rule so that you say and do things that disable, wound, and harm those around you. We can't serve God by--Rash words.** *"And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had **placed the people under oath**, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.' So none of the people tasted food" (1 Samuel 14:24).*

Saul spoke with no thought of what the implications were to his family or nation. Instead of his mouth being a fountain of blessing—he was a curse.

James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not

produce the righteousness of God. NKJV

Now look at James 3.

*James 3:5-10 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See **how great a forest a little fire kindles!** 6 And **the tongue is a fire**, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 But **no man can tame the tongue**. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. **My brethren, these things ought not to be so.** NKJV*

If you want to waste your life—**allow your anger and pride to rule so that you say and do things that disable, wound, and harm those around you. We can't serve God by--Rash words.**

6. **Ignore clear and direct statements about what God wants you to do.** 1 Samuel 15:1-3 Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" NKJV

If you want to waste your life—**just ignore clear and direct statements about what God wants you to do.**

7. **Pick and choose from what God clearly tells you to do so that you offer God selective and partial obedience.** 1 Samuel 15:8 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. NKJV

Remember that the clearest way to declare that you love the Lord is by obedience.

- *John 14:21 He who has My commandments **and keeps them**, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."* NKJV

If you want to waste your life—**just pick and choose from what God clearly tells you to do so that you offer God selective and partial obedience.**