

Serving with Passion

Serving with Passion Part 1
Philippians 2:16 5-22-2016

Summary: The purpose of ministry is to get one another sanctified so we are ready for Judgment Day, which requires helping each other hold fast to the Word that gives life, which is the power of ministry. Passion comes from investing everything into ministry and having that as your boast (that which you most highly value).

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Philippians 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Introduction

It's your very first day on the job. You're a little nervous when your new boss comes into your office. But he smiles and sets you at ease by saying, "Don't worry, I'm just here to give you the three things you're going to need to be successful at this job." First, he hands you the job description: "This is exactly what is required of you." Then he gives you a sheet of paper that describes your salary and benefits, which are very generous. And third, he shows you your office, and gives you keys to a company car, and introduces your admin assistant – all the things you need to do this job. Those are the three things you need: job description so you know your purpose, the tools you need to get the job done, and a salary, which serves as your motivation – that's why you are doing the job. And the reason I mention all that is because those three things: the objective, the necessary resources, and the motivation, are exactly the three things that God gives us in this passage with regard to our task.

If you are a Christian, then you are a steward in God's household. A steward, in ancient times, was basically a staff person in the home who is in charge of various household tasks. Take a look at the banner over there to your left that says Joyful Servanthood. Those three banners are reminders of the three main things that we are currently working on as a church. And the theme verse for the Joyful Servanthood one is 1 Peter 4:10.

1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as stewards of God's varied grace.

So each one of us is a steward in God's household. Or to use another analogy, Scripture says the church is like a body. Every single one of us is a particular part of the body with a specific role. That's why we have the phrase on that banner: "Every member a minister." If we have 200 Christians in this church, then there should be 200 ministers. God has hired you on as a worker in his field, he has made you a steward in his household, and so you are going to need those three things I mentioned at the beginning: a job description, the tools or resources necessary to complete your task, and the incentive to get you moving. Or to put it simply, we are going to see the purpose, power, and passion of ministry. And the way the Lord does that in this passage is through the example of the Apostle Paul. So let's begin with the purpose of ministry. What are we trying to accomplish? Take a look at what Paul was trying to accomplish.

The Purpose of Ministry

To Get People Ready for Judgment Day

Philippians 2:15 ...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

The purpose of Paul's ministry was for the Philippians to become all of that.

Blameless means people who observe your life from the outside can't find any fault or sin.

Pure - that's more of an internal emphasis – uncontaminated by sin on the inside.

Without fault - that's a sacrificial term.

When God said the people had to offer a spotless lamb, this is that word spotless – no defect. So when people look at your life from the outside, when you look at your heart from the inside, when God looks at the sacrifice of your life from above - from every angle, there is righteousness. And then one more descriptor – **children of God**. They were believers, so they were already children of God by *adoption*, but Paul wanted them to become children of God by *resemblance*. Like when you see someone acting just like his dad and say, "He sure is his father's son" – that's the idea here.¹

True Israel

Paul is using the language of Deuteronomy 32:5 where God makes the shocking statement to the people of Israel: **you are no longer my children**. Because of their grumbling and complaining and rebellion against God, he disowned them as his children. And he calls them a crooked and depraved generation full of fault. So Paul is saying, "Unlike apostate Israel in the time of Moses, who were crooked and depraved non-children of God because of fault, I want you to be true children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation against which we stand out in stark contrast like stars in the night sky.

¹ You see something very similar in Matthew 5:44. **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...** He is already your Father, but you need to *become* his sons by following his example in loving your enemies.

Reaching Stardom

And that phrase **shine like stars** comes from Daniel 12:3, which says after the resurrection, the righteous will shine forever like stars in the sky.² After the resurrection we will shine forever like stars in the universe, but even now that is true of us when, instead of grumbling and complaining, we live lives of gratitude and enjoyment of God's love. And the purpose of Paul's ministry was to get the Philippians to that point.

So this is quite a description of what God wants us to be. The true Israel, the true people of God, are people who don't complain and grumble and reject God's providential work, but instead they are thankful and responsive to God's love, and so they become pure and blameless, shining like stars in the universe. And the goal of all ministry is to make that happen. That was Paul's objective in ministry. That is what he was working for, and that is what he was praying for. We saw that right at the beginning of the book - where he used those same two words: **pure** and **blameless**.

Philippians 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more ... 10 so that you may be ... pure and blameless for the day of Christ

The point of being pure and blameless is so that we will be ready for the day of Christ. So to boil it all down we could say this: The purpose of ministry is to get people ready for Judgment Day. And being ready for Judgment Day means when Christ returns he finds you blameless and pure, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from him, children of God without fault, shining like lights in a dark world.

The purpose of all ministry in the church is to make that happen. Everything we are doing – building friendships, having fellowship, visiting one another in the hospital, cooking meals, having Bible studies – it is all to prepare one another for that Day.

Unique Roles

That is the job description for the church in general, but we each have different roles in getting that done. Your role might be very direct – you are the one who actually preaches the gospel to them. Or maybe your role is more of an indirect, support role. Maybe you teach Sunday school where you get kids started on the path toward becoming pure and blameless. Maybe you set up the chairs or you do maintenance on the AC so that people can sit and listen to the gospel in the middle of summer. Maybe God gave you administrative skills so that you could develop a system so all this work we are doing is more efficient. Maybe your role is to be an encourager, to keep the saints around you from getting discouraged and giving up along the way so they finish the race and make it to Judgment Day. We all have different roles, but it's all for one purpose: to get people ready for that Day.

The Power of Ministry: The Word of Life

Now, how is that done? What tools are we supposed to use? Where is the power going to come from that will make people blameless and pure? The answer is in verse 16.

15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life

The *purpose* of ministry is to prepare people for Judgment Day; the *power* of ministry is **the word of life**. That is what gets it done. You can't talk people into being pure and blameless. You can't get people to behave like children of God by coming up with clever psychological techniques or motivational

² Php.2:15 you shine like lights in the world

Dan.12:3 they shine like lights of heaven

φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ
φανοῦσιν ὡς φωστῆρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

speeches or self-help tips. You can't do it through human means. Only one thing has the power to make this happen: **the word of life** (which means the word that gives life).

The Word That Gives Life

In order for people to become pure and blameless and live like children of God so that they are ready when Judgment Day comes, they are going to need supernatural, spiritual life from God. And there is no other way to get that other than from this book. No other way. This is our tool for ministry. It is what we mean by our slogan: "Applying the Word of God to the hearts of men." Everything we do is for that purpose – get the Word in people's hearts.

But it's not enough to just give people the Word. If we just give people the Word of God, and they receive it and accept it and believe it – that might not be enough. They still might not be ready when Judgment Day comes. And Jesus explained why that is in the parable of the soils, where he said a farmer scatters seed, and the seeds land in four different kinds of soil: the hard path, rocky soil, weedy soil, and good soil. Then he explained it: The seed is the Word of God. Some people are like the hard path. They don't understand the gospel, so it's in one ear and out the other and they never believe. Other people are like good soil. They believe and keep believing all the way to the end. But then there are two other kinds of people who hear the Word and receive it and they believe, but it doesn't do them any good on Judgment Day because they don't hang on. The rocky soil people hear the Word, receive it with joy, and believe, but only until they run into suffering.

Mark 4:17 When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

They receive the Word, but they don't hold on to it when the storm hits. And then there is another kind of person who fails to hold.

Mark 4:18 others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

One group doesn't last because of trouble and hardship; the other group doesn't last because they get enticed by money or get distracted by the worries of this life, and they let go their grip on the Word. If we apply the Word of God to the hearts of men, it is not going to do them any good on Judgment Day if they end up being like the rocky soil or weedy soil and fail to hold on. And so Paul says:

15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God ... 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life

(The NIV says to hold it *out*, like you are offering it to people. But that's not the normal meaning of this word. I think the other translations are right to stick with the normal meaning: to hold fast.) If you look at the other times this word is used in the Bible you'll see that it means to either hold your place³, or to hold your gaze - to fix your eyes on something or pay close attention to something.⁴ That is the meaning – hold on. So we can't just give people the Word. We have to give them the Word, and then we have to help them hold on to it all the way until the end. To keep their gaze fixed on it, and to keep their heart fastened to it. That is the only way they will be ready when they face the judgment seat of Christ.

An Evil Hurricane

Every one of us needs help to hold on, because it's not easy. Sometimes the Bible seems dry, just print on a page. Sometimes it doesn't make sense to you. Sometimes it seems flat out wrong. That happens because of the influences all around us. This crooked, depraved generation we are living in is

³ Acts 19:32

⁴ Acts 3:5

like a hurricane of forces pushing us away from the **word of life**. All our entertainment does it. Movies, games, novels, concerts - all the world's entertainment is filled with ideas and attitudes and perspectives on the world that make God seem unattractive and sin attractive. And those perspectives and attitudes slam into us like a hurricane force wind, shoving us away from the Word of life without us even realizing it. To us it feels like a gentle breeze, but it blows us way off course.

Another force that threatens to carry us away from the Word is religious arguments. Atheists make all their arguments and agnostics have theirs, and evolutionists dominate the education system with theirs, and it would be a full time job just trying to keep up with them all, much less refute all of them. So you end up with doubts swirling around in your heart that loosen your grip on the Word that gives life.

Some other forces that are against you are your own flesh, panting after all the little pleasures of this world that the **word of life** warns us against. And then there's Satan and demons, tempting you and enticing you and trying to deceive you into doubting or just neglecting the **word of life**.

There's an evil hurricane blowing, and our only hope is to hold – hold fast to the Word that gives life. But we can't. The hurricane is so strong, I don't have the grip strength. No matter how hard I try, I won't be able to keep holding on without your help. None of us can, which is why God called every single Christian to ministry, and the purpose of all that ministry and all our spiritual gifts is to help one another hold fast to the only source of spiritual life. Without help from each another, our hearts will turn to unbelief and turn away from God.

Hebrews 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

The Passion of Ministry: Running and Laboring

So, the *purpose* of ministry: getting people ready for Judgment Day. The *power* of ministry: the **word of life**. Now one more: the *passion* of ministry. Look at how Paul describes his ministry in verse 16 – running and laboring. That shows his passion. Not walking, not sitting around – running and laboring. That is a sign of passion, and this passage gives us insight about what gave him that kind of passion. This is really helpful for us because going through life without passion is miserable. Life just becomes a draining, boring, monotony if you're not passionate about what you are doing.

To Get Yourself Ready for Judgment Day

So where does passion come from? Look at what's driving him in verse 16.

16 ...in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

He has got his eye on the day of Christ. I told you the purpose of ministry is to get people ready for Judgment Day, but another purpose of ministry is to get *yourself* ready for Judgment Day. Paul was doing all this running and laboring so that when the **day of Christ** came, he would be able to **boast**.

Boast

When you see the word **boast** in the Bible, don't think of bragging. That's not what the Greek word means at all. Here is what it means: Your **boast** is that which you consider valuable, noteworthy, and of uppermost importance. Every person alive has a boast. Whatever you depend upon, whatever gives your life meaning, whatever you would crawl over broken glass to get, or if you lost it you would be devastated – that is your boast.

Jeremiah 9:23 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me ... declares the LORD.

So if your confidence and hope is in some earthly thing, and that is what gets you out of bed in the morning, that's bad. But if your confidence and hope is in knowing God, and that's what gets you out of bed in the morning, that's good.

So what was Paul's boast? It's right there in verse 16. His boast, the great driving motivation of his life, was getting to Judgment Day and seeing fruit from all his ministry work.

Running for Nothing

And so his greatest fear was that it would all turn out to be for nothing. In the Greek he actually repeats the word **nothing** twice.

16 ...in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run for *nothing* or labor for *nothing*.

If the Philippians end up being like the weedy or rocky soil, and they don't hold on and finish the race and arrive at the day of Christ pure and blameless, Paul's life is a total waste, because he had nothing else going. Getting the saints ready for Judgment Day was the whole ball game for Paul.

You never want any of your work to turn out to be a waste – even little things. If you just spent 20 minutes vacuuming the floor and someone comes along and tracks dirt – that bugs you. It's not that it's that hard to vacuum again, it's just that there is something about doing work and finding out it was for nothing that really bothers us. If you spend half an hour washing your car, and then it rains that day – that's upsetting. Even relatively small things matter to us. But how would you like to do something that required hard work, frequent imprisonments, severe floggings, exposure to death again and again, flogging with 39 lashes five different times, beaten with rods three times, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, a night and a day in the open sea, having to be constantly on the move, in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, Gentiles; in danger in the city, in the country, at sea; and in danger from false brothers, laboring and toiling and often going without sleep, often going without food, being cold and naked – freezing cold outside and no jacket, no sleeping bag, no food, no sleep. And besides everything else, daily the pressure from huge responsibilities with all the churches. Paul invested everything into this work. It cost him everything, including his life ultimately. When you pay that kind of price, and you invest that heavily in something, you get pretty passionate about it working out.

Sovereignty of God and Our Responsibility

“Wait a minute, isn't God the ultimate determiner of outcomes? I thought we were supposed to just do what we can, and then trust God with the rest.”

That's exactly right. Do what you can, and trust God with the rest. But if you fail to do what you can, don't expect God to step in and do what he assigned you to do. Of course God is sovereign, but it is amazing to me how many things God will allow to go bad when we neglect our responsibility. If I am lazy and don't work hard at the sermon, God allows it to be a lousy sermon. If I don't put forth effort in a relationship, he allows that relationship to go bad. God allows certain positive or negative outcomes to be dependent on our faithfulness or unfaithfulness, and it astonishes me the massive magnitude and importance of the things that he allows us to have responsibility for. He is not like a boss who says, “That employee isn't very skilled or reliable, so I will only entrust tiny, little, unimportant tasks to him. That way, if he fails, it's not a big loss.” God isn't like that - he entrusts huge things to us. Once we have done all we can, and the rest is outside of our ability to influence, then yes, we need to completely trust God to take it from there. And even the things that are within our realm of responsibility, we need to trust God to enable us to do those things. So we are always trusting God. But if you think trusting God means you can

slack off on your responsibilities, then just go back to your Bible and read about how many things God allows to go one way or the other based on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of his servants.

Fear of Failure

And so Paul lived his life with a compelling, driving anxiety to avoid failure in ministry.

1 Thessalonians 3:4 ...when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

Galatians 2:2 ... I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

Galatians 4:11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

That was his fear, and we should have that same anxiety.

2 John 8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

Epitaph, not Resume

You see, what really matters is not your resume, but your epitaph. Imagine your funeral. Suppose the eulogy has been given, your life has been described to the people, and everyone is shaking their heads – “tsk tsk, a wasted life.” Now imagine God saying that at your funeral. That possibility was such a terrifying thought to Paul, that there wasn’t anything he wouldn’t do to avoid it. It wasn’t enough for Paul to simply have done his best or made a valiant effort. He wanted success. And so he labored and ran to make sure the people not only got the Word, but held fast to it in the hurricane.

Running

Think about those metaphors for a second – first running. Scripture teaches us to think of the Christian life as being like a race.

Hebrews 12:1 ...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

The starting line is the day you become a Christian. The finish line is the day you go to heaven. When Paul got to the end of his life and was about to die he said:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race

That is how Paul thought about death: “Hey, I’m crossing the finish line! I finished the race!”
“What is the race?”

The race is your ministry.

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

Paul’s ministry calling was to preach the gospel. When he was doing that, he was running the race. Finishing the race meant doing that until the day he died.

Effort

Now, of all the metaphors that could be used to describe ministry, why the metaphor of a race? What is the point of comparison? What is it about doing ministry that is similar to running a race? Effort. What’s the difference between a race and a run? If you just go out for a run, you run whatever speed you

want. But if you're in a race, you're trying to beat everyone else, which requires pushing yourself to run as hard as you possibly can.

1 Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

That was written back in the days before they gave ribbons for participation. In fact, it sounds like they didn't even give prizes for second or third place. No silver, no bronze – only the gold. Everyone ran, one individual won, everyone else in the race lost. So people didn't run for second place. Everyone in the race was pushing as hard as they possibly could to finish first. And Paul says, "That's the kind of effort required in ministry." Now, does that mean only one person will be rewarded? No, but we are to run with the kind of effort that we would have if only one person were going to be rewarded, and for you to make it you had to beat everyone else out.

Labor – Hard Work

The other metaphor is laboring.

16 ...in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run for nothing or labor for nothing.

The word **labor** literally means "to weary oneself." So Paul says, "Pick your metaphor." You can think of it as being like running a race, or you can think of it as being like doing hard labor – either way, you get the idea. It requires the utmost effort.

Direction (Caring About Outcomes)

And it is not just effort for the sake of effort – with indifference about the outcome. Another thing about the metaphor of a race is the fact that a race is very intentional. In a race, you don't just scamper around like a dog in a field. You are fixed on a certain direction, and you move as quickly as possible in that direction in order to arrive there. And when you labor at some job, you're not doing it for exercise. You want that job to get done. Again, if your understanding of the sovereignty of God causes you to be indifferent or dispassionate about outcomes, you don't understand the doctrine. Look at Paul – or Jesus. They weren't like some government worker in a bureaucracy somewhere who cares absolutely nothing about the work – just puts in his hours and clocks out. They didn't say, "I'll just put in my hours and leave the rest to God." They lived like, "I need to do this hard work or people will go to hell!" There should be an intensity behind our ministry. If God gave you the gift of encouragement, you don't just say, "Well, I offered encouragement and she didn't receive it, so that's her problem." If you think of your calling as a task that must be completed, you won't be satisfied until she is encouraged, and you will climb any obstacle, endure any adversity, put forth whatever effort is required. You will rack your brain to think of another approach, Satan will try to stall out your efforts and make it seem useless, but you will not be deterred. You will keep pressing forward like in a race.

Conclusion: Consider Your Task!

I think if I had it to do over again, instead of putting Joyful Servanthood on that banner, I would make it say Passionate Servanthood. We already have the joy concept in the Culture of Encouragement one, but the real issue with ministry is passion. Passion that drives you to run and labor. So let me close by urging you to do this: give some thought to why your calling is so important. Think long term – Judgment Day. Maybe you work in the nursery. Think about the fact that Jesus said anyone who welcomes a little child in his name welcomes *him*! You are welcoming Jesus Christ when you take care of that wild little kid in the nursery. Think about the fact that for many moms, this couple hours she is at church is literally the only break she ever gets, where she can focus completely on God without a

distraction every 30 seconds. And if someone else were working the nursery, she would still be distracted because she would be wondering, “Is my baby ok? Are they going to be able to handle it if she starts crying? Will they keep her safe?” But since *you’re* in there, that mom can rest easy and not be distracted because you have the gifts you have.

Think through things like that. Think about the fact that many people drift away from church when they go to college, and they haven’t set foot in a church in 10 years, but now they get married and have their first child, and very often at that time in a couple’s life they will make the decision, “We need to get back in church.” And the experience they have that first Sunday with you taking care of their child might be the determining factor on whether they get back on track with the Lord, or drop out of church forever. Your service could make the difference between them falling away like the weedy soil, or holding firmly to the Word and being ready for Judgment Day. Consider the gravity of your calling!

Maybe you’re working with the youth. Think about what a pivotal time of life that is. Most kids who grow up in a Christian home will go along with whatever their parents believe until they hit middle school and high school. Then they make the decision about whether that’s for them, or they are going to go another direction. Most go another direction by the time they go off to college. But of those who continue to walk with God, very, very often a big factor in that is some youth leader, or some relationships they developed in youth group. Many of you can hardly remember what happened last week or last year, but to this day you can vividly remember things that happened in high school. Such a watershed time of life. There might be just one, single encounter you have with a student that ends up making the difference between them holding firmly to the Word or letting go. Such an opportunity!

Maybe God has given you an eye for detail, or for beauty and aesthetics. You can spot little things that are wrong, or you have the ability to make a room feel comfortable and welcoming. Think about the fact that there are people who are in desperate need of what they could receive here, but they are so shallow spiritually that they won’t come because of the discomfort they feel in this building. So maybe you serve on the aesthetics team, or you just say, “I can’t take care of this whole building, but I’m going to adopt one zone.” (In my mind this building is divided into about 10 different zones on the inside, and seven or eight on the outside.) And you take a zone and use your gifts with dedication and passion, knowing that there are people who might stay or leave based on how they feel when they walk in. And so by using your gifts you could turn that around, so that there are some people who will be ready for Judgment Day instead of not being ready because of you.

If you are a ministry coordinator, instead of complaining about the lack of workers, ask God to light your heart on fire with passion for the importance of your ministry area, so that you can inspire people and catch their hearts on fire with passion.

We are not going to get everything right. We will make plenty of mistakes as a church. But when the Lord returns, let him at least find us fired up and passionate about the task he has assigned to us of getting one another ready for Judgment Day. Let’s obey Romans 12:11 - **Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.**

Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) What are your main roles in getting the rest of us ready for Judgment Day?
- 2) Other people are doing ministry to get you ready for Judgment Day – which of those efforts do you think you need to become more responsive to?