

When in Rome: Serving with Passion

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Father God, words can't express our gratitude to you. For your love, for your kindness to us, for your patience with our failings, and most of all, for your forgiveness of our sin.

No one has ever loved us as much as you do. Help us to do our best every day to truly appreciate it and to then show that same kind of love to other people.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your example. That you truly understand what it means to be human. You bridge the gap between us and the Father, and no one else could have ever done that.

Thank you for what you've done, and that you will return again. Holy Spirit, thanks for being with us as our guide, our teacher, and our constant source of encouragement and power.

Father God, we worship you here today and every day of our lives. Amen. Welcome here for this Sunday, August 30th, 2026.

[1:10] My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So this morning we're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome. We're making our way through the book of Romans.

So many of you know that I volunteer periodically as a chaplain with the RCMP, and I was visiting with somebody this past week, and she said, well, our pastor's just about to start a series in Acts. And she said, I have no idea even where to begin, but I should probably read through it. And I said, well, you know a guy who just preached through Acts over the past two years. And she said, what? So then she texted me later the same day and said, well, I'm three sermons in. And I said, you keener. So she said it's helpful to give her a bit of grounding and perspective before their church covers the same passages.

So we're making our way through the book of Romans. Here's where we find ourselves. And looking at these things that Paul says, the apostle Paul says to us, which are no less important or valid for us today as they were when Paul first recorded them.

[2:20] Speaking of that, our passage for this morning is Romans 12, 11. Just one verse. I'm going easy on you. And this verse, Romans 12, 11 says, never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.

Romans 12, 11. Our sermon this morning is titled Serving with Passion. And as you may have noticed last week, we're now starting to spend a little bit more time looking at smaller sections and shorter messages that Paul conveyed.

Why is that? Am I getting lazy or bored? No. I'm zeroing in on important things. So the 12th chapter of Romans contains many exhortations that give us guidance for daily Christian living.

And maybe you've heard that word, right? Maybe you've heard a preacher or pastor use it before. Maybe you've read it in a Bible study or heard it in a Bible study. And you've probably heard that word, exhortations, in relation to scripture in particular.

But have you ever understood or wondered what it actually means? Well, exhortations are strong, earnest pleas or statements. And they're intended to urge someone to take a specific action or follow a certain path.

[3:42] They aim to inspire, to encourage, or to strongly advise us through powerful persuasion rather than force. Sounds fitting for much of what Paul seeks to convey to followers of Jesus, doesn't it?

So looking back a bit, what kinds of exhortations have we seen in Romans so far? Well, Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 urges us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Romans 12, 3 to 8 encourages us to use the gifts and abilities we've been given as members of the greater body. And then last week we learned in Romans 12, 9 and 10, that we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ and hate what is evil or offends God.

So in our passage for this morning, Paul gives us a strong message on how the followers of Jesus should be serving with passion. And Paul's message here is conveyed with three simple commands that ultimately all tie together.

And we'll see that. This brief but powerful message, I think, is worthy of close examination. You may think, well, it's just a short verse, not many words.

[5:00] What can be there, ultimately? Well, prepare to be amazed. So we can begin with the simple question, how should Christians act? But that's kind of a broad idea, right?

I think if I asked the question broadly and gave everybody a chance to answer, we would have however many different answers. Some would be a little bit similar, but they largely differ, depending on how people feel called, how they're gifted, so on.

What their interactions with people every day are like. For someone who is currently in the workforce, you've got different interactions than someone who is retired, obviously. So are we talking about how we should act in relation to how we serve others?

Or is this message just solely focused on our job or our vocation? Well, the best way to understand the message that we should take away from this text this morning is to take a closer look at what Paul says here and how he says it, right?

Context is always so important. So what does Paul say? Well, from our passage that we just heard, Paul says that we're not to be lacking in zeal. How often do you use the word zeal in everyday conversation?

[6:16] Some translations use the word diligence, which may be easier to wrap your head around. The King James translation words it as not slothful in business.

That should be on business cards, right? We aim to be not slothful in business. But maybe that just clouds things even more, right? Maybe that's not helpful at all.

So reading that, some may conclude that Paul's message is just limited to our jobs. I don't know if you've read it that way in the past, but I certainly have. So for anyone who's retired, as we touched on a minute ago, they may read that and think, oh, thank goodness, that is not directed at me at all. Bullet dodged. So the Greek word that's translated as business here is *spoude*, S-P-O-U-D-E.

And this is actually where we get the English word. Any guesses? I heard whispers. Spouse is a good thought.

[7:24] Spoude. Speed. So what Paul's trying to get across here is a sense of diligence, of haste, of earnestness, and that we should be diligent, and ultimately, in all that we do.

In Colossians 3, we read this, and you know it. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not human masters.

So yes, Paul's message here does include our jobs. We read in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 58, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

So Paul makes it clear then that our work for the Lord, now that can apply to your job, your vocation, but also your service. Both should involve the same level of commitment and diligence. Does that all make sense? So what are some examples of the work that we do for the Lord, in which we should be diligent? Well, we read in Hebrews 6, So then we're to be diligent as we consider our ultimate destination, right?

[9:02] We are running a race towards an end goal, an end finish line. And that's the same thing that Paul has talked to us about before, that we're to run a solid race.

We're to be committed. And we're to run that race right to the finish line, not to stop up short. 2 Peter 3, 13 and 14 says this, So then, dear friends, since you're looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.

So we're to be diligent in pursuing holiness. And as we considered last week, steering away from sinful choices in our lives that anger or offend God.

2 Timothy 2, 15 says this, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handles the word of truth.

So what we're getting there is that we're to be diligent in the way that we view, study, and present God's word from the Bible. Doesn't mean you need to be a theology student at all, but we must treat God's word with respect, and its truth should shape our lives.

[10:39] Proverbs 4, 23 says, Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Mark 7, 21 to 23 says this, For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come. Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All these evils come from inside and defile a person. So the consistent message there is that we're then to be diligent in seeking to keep our hearts pure.

I've talked about this over the last couple weeks here and there. The things that we expose ourselves to, the things that we consume, will affect us, whether we realize it or not. So the things that we are fed by and focusing on should be higher things, the things of God.

Woven throughout the Bible is this clear directive that we're to be diligent in repenting of our sins, right? That is a consistent message. And as we've talked about over the years, repenting doesn't just mean saying sorry over and over and over as we continue to indulge ourselves.

[12:04] To me, that's cheap grace. It means saying we're sorry, repentance, asking for God's forgiveness, and then doing differently after.

That's repentance. We read in 2 Peter 1, or chapter 1, sorry, For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, mutual affection, and to mutual affection, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're called to be diligent in developing Christlike character. I've had a couple conversations over the last few days with folks who have come to the realization that either they feel their Christian journey, now it's nobody from our church, just to be clear, that they feel comfortable living their Christian life on their own.

So, don't feel the need to go to church, have been committed to churches in the past, don't see a need for that, feel like it's an unhelpful use of their time.

[13:39] Interesting, right? I have the marks in my tongue from where I bit it. But to me, have you ever tried to do the Christian life on your own? Did you find it exhausting?

Did you find it hard to maintain? I hear some chuckles. Did you find it discouraging? Not meant to do it alone.

We're to be diligent in maintaining a spirit of unity between ourselves and other followers of Jesus. So, this morning, we've so far spent much of our time focusing on being diligent overall, right?

So, I don't want to leave you feeling just guilty. Then we've also detailed some of the important spiritual things that we should also be diligent about, right?

To channel that sense of diligence. So, we're going to spend a little less time on the two remaining aspects of Paul's message here. Remember, I said it was a kind of a three-part message.

[14:47] because these next things flow out of what we've already looked at in more detail. After encouraging us to be diligent in the text, Paul directs us to keep our spiritual fervor, right?

Fervor, there's another word you use every day, no doubt. So, what does that mean? What Paul is saying here is that we should keep our enthusiasm and our passion as we also seek to keep our focus.

So, maybe you can relate to this, but some folks seem to be begrudgingly enthusiastic or passionate, right? Their focus or their passion seems to flow out of a sense of obligation, commitment, structure.

The Greek word Paul uses there is *zeo*, which is fun to say, and it literally means to bubble or boil. Isn't that a great way to look at it?

So, we're to do our work with all our hearts and then seek to do it with passion and enthusiasm because ultimately, we work for and serve the Lord.

[16:08] See how it's all kind of coming together there? Serving the Lord should be more than enough to motivate enthusiastic labor is what Paul's getting at.

Since it's the Lord that we ultimately serve in both secular and spiritual work, we are to work with enthusiasm and diligent effort. But what's the reality all too often?

Well, I'd suggest that we tend to be diligent and enthusiastic in our own pursuits. Right? The things that you like to do, the things that you feel passionate about outside of your faith journey, those are usually easy.

So, we really need to deliver at our jobs to be paid and cover financial responsibilities, don't we? Working away at a hobby or another leisure activity can make diligence and enthusiasm easy. And I'm not saying that there's anything bad about hobbies or things that bring us casual joy. I get hassled at home often that I don't have enough hobbies. So, I'm the overthinker.

[17:25] I am the planner. And so, when I sit down to rest, there are leaders in our church, Michelle is also a good taskmaster.

No. Sounding board, maybe, but a filter. Right? She observes firsthand what I'm not doing, which is I'm bad at resting. I'm bad at unplugging.

I'm bad at just being at peace. So, are we too casual at spiritual things is the question. So, people may work 40 hours a week or more at their job to cover financial needs.

Then, they balk at spending even just a couple of hours a week in worship and Bible study. Right? I know people who check the box on Sunday and that's pretty much what they do.

Some folks will get up early to work or play, go to the gym, things like that, but many complain about getting up even later on Sunday to worship God.

[18:31] I have to go to church on Sunday. Have you heard that? Have you felt that? Or maybe we watch TV an average of 14 hours or more per week according to a stat that I just read.

But then we seem to be unable to find three hours a week even to read the Bible. As you all know, I'm in the midst of an apologetics course online.

And I, the best way I can put it, I chain-smoked a huge section of that this past week. And so, I was consuming all of this content and I was feeling passionate about my faith in new ways.

And that was exciting. But I spent eight hours so then I looked back and thought, boy, that didn't feel like eight hours. So it was a different kind of focus, right?

It was a godly focus and one that challenged my brain in ways that I haven't stretched in a little while. Maybe we let or even encourage our children to miss services for a sporting event or a school function, but then not the other way around.

[19:42] So how often do we say, oh, I can't do that because I have church on Sunday? How often does that happen? So how did Jesus feel about this?

And this is not to make you feel guilty, it's just to remind us. Jesus taught that those who put personal pursuits first would not enjoy heaven.

He taught the danger of sloth in the parable of the talents, right? So Jesus was always reminding us to keep our focus where it needed to be.

He even condemned the church in Laodicea for being lukewarm in their faith and service. So if after hearing this message this morning we recognize ways that we may have fallen short or could have had better priorities or focus, the question we can close with this morning is what are we going to do about it?

Well, some folks, I mean, I know reality, some folks may not do anything. They may choose to not really hear this message or hear the part that didn't make them feel too uncomfortable or feel just fine about being stuck in their ways and unwilling to change.

[20:59] That happens to the best of us. Folks may just think, well, I'm just going to keep carrying on doing what I've always done because it works for me.

Others might make an effort, might leave today and say, you know what, I'm going to refocus, I'm going to recommit because their hearts are still soft and teachable. But even those folks, remember I said going it alone is not always great, even those folks may find themselves sliding back into old patterns and habits because we are human and that is generally more comfortable.

Friends, my prayer is that each of us will make whatever changes God asks us to make, whatever changes are called for in Paul's exhortation that we've heard this morning, and that those who have yet to serve the Lord in dedicated and intentional ways will begin a new life of faithful service, serving both God and others with focus, passion, and enthusiasm until Jesus returns or our race is done.

Amen.