

# Paul's Ministry

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[0:00] I'm talking on the theme of ministry, ministry, serving God and what that is all about, what characteristics! we ought to have as we serve God. I know there are people training for the ministry, they're taking particular efforts to train.

There are lots of ways we can train for the ministry as well as going to a school. And really it's about where the rubber hits the road, it's about the real life of the person.

I know I've got to be really careful myself because I work about 10 metres from someone who fellowships here. My day job is about 10 metres from someone who's sitting here and sitting right now.

I've got to watch how I behave so that what I say on Sunday lines up with how I act Monday to Friday, hopefully Saturday. You know that's the reality isn't it? It's the real world life that we live. Ministry. What is ministry?

You know it's been said that we have become the eggshell generation. The eggshell generation. People today are so fragile, so easily offended, upset, as if we just can't bear any hardship, any test, any struggle.

[1:14] And we buckle under the least weight. And our faith can be so frail. We can easily be wounded and easily quit. Easily throw in the towel.

So the way of the world isn't it? It's the way of not just this generation but many generations, including my generation. It's all too easy isn't it? The Aussie kind of, ah she'll be right and ah, you know, sort of not really be able to handle the hard yakka that ministry can be.

And Paul exhorts us to persevere in whatever ministry and calling that we have. And I know there's people here with different callings and giftings. There's people here with musical talent. People here with certain bents here and there of different inclinations of how they want to serve and what they want to do for God.

And Paul exhorts us all to this perseverance, to a steadfastness in serving God. Not to be put off by some offence or tribulation.

Paul knew what he was talking about. He knew what it was like. He knew he was speaking from experience about his life and how he lived it.

[2:31] In 2 Corinthians 1 from verse 8 through 9. 2 Corinthians 1 from verse 8. Paul says, We would not brethren have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia that we were pressed out of measure above strength in so much that we despaired even of life.

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God which raiseth the dead. He said there's trouble. We're pressed out of measure above strength. We despaired even of life.

Paul was faithful to God despite these stresses and pressures. He despaired even of life. But he was unstoppable and so should we be. Brother, sister, in what God's calling you to do, to be, be faithful.

As Paul was faithful to God. His faith was tested and proven and strong. And he says to us through the pages here, Do not quit. Keep going.

Our trust is not in ourselves. Our trust is in God. You know, the minute you start to rely on yourself or depend on your own strength, your own strength, you will fall and fail.

[3:48] Or sometimes you might be high and mighty and think, Yeah! Super saint! Pride cometh before a fall. A haughty spirit before destruction.

So our trust must be in God. Whether you're feeling like you're on top of the world or you're down in the valley today. Paul's ministry was approved by God. It was credible.

It was authentic. He had to live it 24-7 by 365. It was an authentic faith in action. And because it was stamped with this mark, perseverance.

Perseverance. Now, some years ago someone volunteered to put the signs out for this church. And he's still doing it. That's perseverance. You know, going there, rain, hail, sleet or shine.

Don't get much snow here. But he's out there putting the signs out. Ready for church. And so there's people that see where this church is, thanks to this servant of God.

[4:47] And he's persevering with it. I thought we might have given up by now. But no, he's still going on. Praise God. Amen. 2 Corinthians 6 verse 4, we hear more about Paul and his persevering spirit.

2 Corinthians 6 from verse 4. It tells of the serving of God. He says, But in all things approving ourselves as ministers or servants, ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.

That doesn't sound much fun, does it? Patience, perseverance, afflictions, necessities, distresses. He goes on. Verse 5, in stripes. He had the red marks all over his body to show who he was following.

The marks of Christ. Stripes. The marks of the scourge of the weep. Tearing his flesh. In imprisonments.

In tumults. So in riotous, difficult tumults. Situations where there's upheavals. In labours.

[6:01] In watchings. In fastings. Watchings you could think, sleepless nights. Just watchings. Fastings. Paul embodies what ministry is all about.

Saint of God. Man of God. Woman of God. We all have a calling. A gifting. A service to render. And this is the need of our hour.

The need of the hour is what Paul had. That's what we need. We need Paul's get up and go and keep on going. His gusto. His gutsy, determined, non-stoppable faith.

And Paul's credentials were God given. He was an approved minister of the gospel. You know, he didn't have the BTH or the DD. But he had the life experience of a minister of the gospel.

He was approved unto God. Approved unto God. And 2 Corinthians 6, verse 6, it goes on. It gives us further of these markings.

[7:04] His life was marked. It says, By pureness. By knowledge. By long suffering. By kindness. By the Holy Ghost. By love unfeigned.

By the word of truth. By the power of God. By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. By honour and dishonour. By evil report and good report.

As deceivers and yet true. As unknown, yet well known. As dying and behold we live. As chastened and not killed. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

As poor, yet making many rich. As having nothing and yet possessing all things. Paul was a marked man. Marked by these marks of ministry. He wore the armour of righteousness.

In case you didn't realise it, it is war. War. We're in it. It was declared in Genesis.

[8:05] War. War against the saints. It is war. Blood and mud. Warfare. Relentless attack. That's what you can expect.

You that stand up for God and want to do something for Jesus. Expect it. Expect it. Expect it.

Expect warfare. Spiritual warfare. Relentless attack. Attack after attack after attack.

This is no place for eggshell Christians. Paul knew what it meant to be in the thick of the fight. On the front line.

Where the battle was. He was there. In the thick of it. And when we step out for God. And each one of us can. And are doing. And can do. More so.

As we step out to serve God. Expect opposition. You know some people preach a kind of gospel.

Your best life now. You know you're all going to be really warm and cosy and fuzzy.

[9:08] And everything's going to be a breeze when you become a Christian. And it's all going to be laid on for you. No worries. Whereas the word tells us what Paul experienced is the norm for the Christian.

Expect it. Prepare for it. As you step out to serve God. And you can face some things in your life as a Christian. As each one of you.

As a Christian soldier. Steps out in faith and does something. You know I've asked some people to do some things today. That was new for them to do in this place. You know it takes a bit of.

Oh I've got to take a breath and think about that. You know. But it's about that first step isn't it. And then there's other steps. As we serve God. Expect opposition. Expect it to feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Difficult. And as you face some things. As you enter into that spiritual conflict zone. It is par for the course. We need to have some British bulldog tenacity. I'm not praising the British necessarily.

[10:15] Although I think highly of them. But that dogginess. That spirit that keeps on keeping on. And to press through the pain barrier.

As that champion athlete in the marathon. That's what we need brother. That's what we need sister. In this eggshell world. And I've had some experience of eggshells lately.

We've got some chooks. And you've got to get those eggshells nice and hard. We've got to get a thick skin about us. A thick skin. Is a good thing to have. Not that you become.

Callous or hardened to people. But you can take the punches when they punch you. Or stab you in the back later. That's what you have to have in ministry. That's life.

That's the Christian life. And that's Paul's model for ministry. What our world needs now. Are people who will be true servants of Christ. Who will go through the thick of the fight. Through that hardness.

[11:14] Because it will cost you dearly to serve God. Now some people think. Oh I'm going to do this course or that course. And I'm going to get qualified. And look you can go on the internet. And get ordination certificates.

And it tells you. I know I was reading lately. Some blog that someone wrote saying. Yeah everything's there on the internet. How to start your own church. And how to do this and that. And you know you could have that kind of mentality. That it's an easy breezy. Anyone can do it. And but what our world needs now. Are true servants of Christ.

And it's going to cost you dearly. Not just the cost of the course that you might do. Which will help you. But the course is just one element isn't it. It's more about where the rubber hits the road. The real life.

As you take up your cross. Daily. And follow Jesus. We must pay the price. All of us. It's a costly price. It's going to cost you. The cross.

[12:12] Take up your cross daily. So. I'm just giving you some thoughts here. To stir you. To help you to. Get that sense that.

As you serve God. Don't be put off by anything. That's the point. That's the bottom line of this message here today. Is as you serve God. Don't get put off. Don't get put off. By anything. Nothing at all. You know. You think. What the missionaries of old went through. When their wife. Their. Their husband. When their children passed away. On the mission field. When they suffered privation.

And. And hardship. And. There were stretch beyond measure. The missionaries of old. You read the stories of their lives. People like David Brainerd. And.

The. The physical. And mental. And spiritual afflictions. And torment. And combat. That they went through. Now you hear of people like John Wesley. His own wife was against him.

[13:08] And would. Speak out against him. And. And make a riotous situation. Undermining John Wesley. And. Yet. Servants of God.

Must not be deterred. By anything. And so we must pay the price. Will we commit to serve the Lord. In this way. Or will we just. Be an eggshell. Kind of Christian.

Just. I'll do it when it's easy. When it's comfortable. Or will we commit to serve the Lord. Through tears and trials. As Paul did. In Acts 20. 19.

We read further about Paul. Acts 20. Verse 19. It tells. Serving the Lord. With all humility of mind. And with many tears. And temptations. Which befell me. By the lying in wait.

Of the Jews. And how I kept back nothing. That was profitable unto you. But have showed you. And have taught you. Publicly. And from house to house. Testifying both to the Jews.

[14:03] And also to the Greeks. Repentance towards God. And faith towards. Our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says. Serving the Lord. With many tears.

And temptations. Many tears. Many trials. He said. Yet. I kept nothing back. He was all out for Christ.

And so should we be. Brother. Sister. Go all out for Christ. Go all out for him. As Peter said. Think it not strange. When you get.

Various trials. When you get these. Trials that you undergo. Don't think it's strange. In other words. It's not unusual. It isn't unusual. For you. As a Christian.

To go through some. Storms. To go through some. Great trials. And yet. God will give you.

[14:59] And faith. To get through. It's not unusual. It is normal. Paul was ready to serve the Lord. With all humility of mind. Have we that readiness to serve. Now.

Ministering has its share. Of suffering. And testing. After this message. You might think. I'm not going to volunteer then. Yeah. I'm not meaning to put you off people. I'm. Urging you.

To press on. Regardless. That is the message. As we serve the Lord. In whatever capacity. We are called to. A sharing. In Christ's suffering. We're called to. Suffering for Christ's sake.

Suffering for the gospel's sake. Suffering for the brethren's sake. By the testimony of his own life.

Paul exhorts us still. To endure hardship. In faith. It's an integral part.

Of following Christ. And it's not for wimps. Perseverance is a quality. We can pray for. Persevering faith. Persevering prayer.

[15:56] Persevering in Christian service. God's very character is one of such. Long suffering towards us. Isn't it? Of his faithfulness. And he calls us to that.

So we have to model Christ. As I say. When I'm at the workplace. When I'm in the home place.

When you're in the school place. Wherever you go. We are to model Christ.

And we're called to self-sacrifice. And friends. I fail. I've blown it. Big time. Now and again. But God picks me up. And gets me back on my feet again.

But Paul didn't learn how to be a minister. Through some stale textbook. Or some theoretical teaching. He had all of that. And he wasn't saved. But he rolled up his sleeves.

And got his boots on. His learning was applied. Action learning. At the coalface. In the trenches. On the front line.

[16:55] Of the battle front. Paul was authentic. His ministry was proven. Proven. How? It was proven in the. Suffering. And this must be our resolve too.

People of God. Don't be. A weak need. Wimpy Christian. Roll up your sleeves. And get your boots on. And die with your boots on.

That's what we're called to do. There's no retirement plan. And so this must be our resolve. Nothing. Shall deter us. Paul was ill treated. He was attacked. He had committed enemies.

He had committed enemies. He had committed enemies. Expect that. We've had ten years of it. In particular with one person. Who's a delight in our lives.

A committed enemy. Without cause. And I can only pray for her. That she gets saved. That she trusts God.

[17:53] And gets right with him. And we love her. And we love all the enemies we've got. I can give you a list of them. It's possible that even true Christians may have to have taken a while to trust Paul himself.

Consider him the Christian killer. He held their coats while they stoned Stephen to death. The Christian killer. Even the true Christians would have found it hard to trust Paul.

Because he headed up the band of the Christian killers. Then Christ gloriously saved him. Now Paul himself became one of those ones that he had persecuted.

And he endured much for the cause of Christ. As I say we're just scratching the surface really. Just touching on a few references here and there. That show the nature of the man. Paul. Paul who endured a Roman flogging.

A public flogging. The shame of that. Let alone the pain of that. And thrown into a Roman dungeon. Can you imagine that?

[18:59] You know Julie and I had the blessing of going to London. And we went to a place called The Clink. That's where you get the name The Clink from.

It was this old London jail. Dungeon. Dungeon. And we went down in there as they kind of tried to I suppose reflect what it would have looked like.

And it was a dark, smelly, damp, dingy place. And when the Thames rose, the water rose inside the cell.

Inside the cell. Quite high. Quite high. Apparently quite high. That the prisoner was actually just about like that. Trying to keep alive. In the cell. And then the, the, the, as the Thames went up and down.

The water would have come into this dungeon. And friends, what, what would a Roman dungeon have been like? Paul was thrown into The Clink. And having his feet in the stocks.

[20:02] That's what he went through for Christ. It wasn't water, breezy and easy for Paul. And it won't be for you and me. And when we really serve God. God. As he helps us to.

And don't be deterred. Don't be. In advising Timothy, Paul urged him to Timothy 4 verse 5. But watch thou in all things. Endure afflictions.

Do the work of an evangelist. Make full proof of thy ministry. Endure afflictions. Endure hardness. Elsewhere it says. Do the work of an evangelist.

We can all evangelize, can't we? As I say, even holding a sign. Can we do that? Get a core flute with a Bible text on it. And stand. And with the word.

On the word. For the word. Proclaim it. Without saying. Fulfill thy ministry. And so it has been said that the best Christian leadership.

[21:01] Cannot simply be appointed. It is forged by God himself. In the fires of suffering. Taught in the school of tears. There are no shortcuts. There are no shortcuts, brother.

Sister. It's going to take the hard yards. As we serve God. We can expect difficulty to dog our steps. And as we submit to God's plans for our life. It will mean that.

We're going to go through some discomfort. Paul said, endure the hardness. The hardship. Don't shy away from the way of the cross.

We're all called to that. To the way of the cross. To be his disciple. And it is normal for us to face trouble. Now, you might say you're talking to the air.

You know, you don't know what I'm going through. What I've been through. What I am still in.

People of God. We've all got crosses to carry. You don't know my crosses. And I don't know yours.

[22:01] But we've all got crosses to carry. God will give you the grace to carry your cross. He will help you carry your cross. He'll help you every step. Every breath. He'll help you to get through it.

He is with you. With you. With you. Talking more about that tonight. To whet your appetite. John 16.33 These things I have spoken unto you. That in me you might have peace.

In the world you shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Now, this is ministry. In me you can have peace.

It doesn't matter whether the world is at war. But in me you shall have peace. And so be of good cheer. Take comfort in this. This is ministry. This is the normal Christian life.

Dear saint. Dear saint. Your troubles are normal. And God is with you in them. And he always will be for you.

[23:06] And with you. Trust him. And keep treading the way of the cross. Step by step. One foot after the other. One foot after the other. One foot after the other.

When we follow Christ. As we minister. We can expect opposition. Paul was torn and bruised. Physically beaten.

To the point of near death. And then ultimately martyred. Martyred. And as we look back through the word. And we see. Through the record of at least tradition.

Is that. Certainly. Tradition tells us that. Eleven of the twelve disciples. Were martyred for Christ. They.

They. Stood for Christ to the bitter end. And were executed. For their faith. And witness. So. What. Less can we expect.

[24:02] Really. As we minister. We can expect. These things. Rejection. Difficult people. Misunderstanding. Gossip. Murmuring.

It's normal. Discouragement. We've got to go through that. And shake it off. Amen. You might say.

I've tried to serve God. And this happened. And that happened. And. Oh. It was awful. And people. Said this. And that. And I'm not going to do that again.

I'm not going to go anywhere near that. Get back. On the way of the cross. Don't stop. Don't stop. Difficulties are normal.

Look at Paul again in 2 Corinthians 4. We're getting to. The last legs here. Difficulties are normal. Look at 2 Corinthians 4. Where Paul again tells us. Of his.

[24:57] Model. For ministry. 2 Corinthians 4. Verse 5. It says. For we preach not ourselves. But Christ Jesus the Lord.

And ourselves your servants. For Jesus sake. For God who commanded the light to shine. Out of darkness. Has shined in our hearts. To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. In the face.

Of Jesus Christ. We have. This treasure. In earthen vessels. That. The excellency of the power. May be of God. And not of us.

We are troubled. On. Every side. Yet not distressed. We are perplexed. But not in despair. Persecuted. But not forsaken.

Cast down. But not destroyed. Always a bearing about in the body. The dying of the Lord Jesus. That the life also of Jesus. Might be made manifest in our body.

[25:55] For we which live are always delivered unto death. For Jesus sake. That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest. In our mortal body. So the life of Jesus is.

Is revealed. Is. Is. Through our mortal flesh. So whenever we serve God. We're just vessels. That's all we are. Vessels of clay.

Of dust. Shaped into a vessel. That's all we are. It's what fills us that matters. Isn't it? Yeah. It's who fills us that matters.

And so we are to be those available vessels. Just be available as a vessel. Say Lord fill my cup. Fill me. As that vessel. Indwell me.

Paul didn't seek glory from men. He knew God given grace. And we are meant to be such vessels that manifest the life of Christ. Troubled.

[26:52] On every side. Yet. Not distressed. 2 Corinthians 11. From verse 23. We get a further record. Another amazing list. Of the credentials.

Not the letters after his name. But the credentials of Paul the apostle. The man of God. Of the list of hardships that he suffered for Christ.

You know this was his CV. If you like. If you like. 2 Corinthians 11. 23. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I am more. In labours.

More abundant. In stripes. Above measure. In other words. His back was cut with the whip. Above measure. More abundant.

And in prisons more frequent. In deaths. Oft. He got to death's door. Often. Of the Jews five times. Received I forty stripes. Save one.

[27:49] Now that's a lot of stripes isn't it? 25. Thrice was I beaten with rods. Beaten with rods. Once was I stoned. Thrice I suffered shipwreck.

A night and a day I have been in the deep. Imagine that being in the ocean. A night and a day. In that ocean. In the darkness. In the depths of the ocean. Verse 26.

In journeyings often. In perils of waters. In perils of robbers. In perils of my own countrymen. In perils by the heathen. In perils in the city. In perils in the wilderness. In perils in the sea. In perils among false brethren.

Verse 27. In weariness and painfulness. In watchings often. In hunger and thirst. In fastings often. In cold and nakedness. In watchings often. In hunger and thirst.

In fastings often. In cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without. That which cometh upon me daily. The care of all the churches. Paul wrote down this list.

[28:46] And apparently in the early stages of his ministry. This was when he was just starting out. This was just the start of it. About 55 AD.

At this stage he still had 10 years ahead of him. 10 more years of suffering. Including 3 more imprisonments. 1 more shipwreck. And many other things.

I mean just think of it. That he was stoned and left for dead. You know. I don't know whether he suffered broken bones. Or you can imagine. He'd have been black and blue.

Bleeding. Left for dead. When you serve God. Expect opposition. People of God. We're in the western world. It's easy for us. Isn't it?

It's easy for you to serve God. When you serve God. Expect opposition. You might think. Well. Oh. You know.

[29:43] Some people are so easily offended. So easily offended. You know. It can happen in a church. Where. I hope it's not the case for any of you. That are a bit new here. Today. But you go to a church. And.

Oh. Nobody spoke to me. Or did you speak to them? Or. Or you know. No one came and talked to me. Well. Did you get up out of your seat. And go and talk to somebody? What's wrong with you? You know. When. I'm not saying you. But I'm just saying. That's that kind of principle. Isn't it? We're so easily offended. Oh. So and so looked at me funny. Or. Or.

Oh. She looked like she was whispering about me. Or. This or that. And they're so easily offended. And say. I'm not going back to that church again. Or whatever it be. The sun.

Something. They walk off in a huff. And you wonder. Are we going to make it? If we really. Really. Have to go through some things. People of God.

[30:38] In this nation. What's around the corner. How easily. Offended we are. How weak we are. As a people. People of God.

And please. I'm not accusing you. I'm just talking in general fashion. That it's so easy. To be. A fragile. Egg shell. Christian. Let's not be that.

Labor's more abundant. Perils and dangers. Heartache. Weariness. Painfulness. Don't be deterred. It is. War. That's what it is. This world.

It's hostile. To this message. It's hostile. To Christ. As it always has been. Way back in Genesis. And it will be. Till the end of Revelation.

This world hates the gospel. It hates the truth. You see. You know. My heart breaks. For loved ones. That have been deceived. By. Falsehood.

[31:33] And atheism. And skepticism. And these attacks. And even the. The trash. That is on the YouTube. That calls itself teaching. And the garbage.

That's down in the. Curon bookstore. That people are buying. And. And believing. And feeding their soul with. And it's lies. And falsehood. And error. And this world is hostile.

To this message. And even the Christian world. Doesn't. Always get it. It gets off track. So we can expect attack. And opposition. Much opposition. But know this.

Victory. Is assured. Victory. Is assured. So what is your attitude. To suffering. Take the path. Of suffering. It leads to God's power. And glory. You can expect to be weary.

You can expect pain. You can expect the cross. But we must take this path. We must. Take this path. We are called to the fellowship. Of his sufferings.

[32:29] 1 Peter 4.13. It says. Rejoice. In as much as. You are partakers. Of Christ's sufferings. It's a badge of honor. You know. Those martyrs.

I know. Ian loves to pray for. Our brothers and sisters. In other lands. Who are right. This very day. Being killed. For the gospel's sake. They will be ahead. In the queue.

They will. They will be closer. To the throne. I believe. We will have. That recognition. Of that crown. Of the martyr. And we see. As we know.

These ones. Have gone through. The greatest of trials. And we. As. In our. Little measure. In this land. Must take this path. We must.

Not be deterred. Realize the shortness. Of eternity. Sorry. The shortness of time. And the reality of eternity. That's what we have to get hold of. And it says in Romans 8.17.

[33:24] Those who suffer for Christ. Will one day be glorified. So. People of God. Today. Close here. May we line up.

With God's word. And. Don't be afraid. To stand. You know. As a younger Christian. It took me a while. To actually get the gumption enough. Corruption enough.

But. Once I got through that little barrier. Of nervousness. Of shyness. You can be stronger. And you can be more fervent.

You don't have to be a quiet Christian. You can be a stronger Christian. Such that people know you're a Christian. You're not afraid of it. You're not ashamed of it.

Of him. but in this eggshell generation, we can be just like the rest of them. We can be just like the rest of them, but rather be persevering servants.

[34:20] So I trust today you've been challenged and encouraged. You might say, Preacher, there's no way I'm going to serve God now. It's just too hard. There's no way I'm going to step over the line. I don't want to be shot down in flames.

I can't handle the flack. I can't handle that discomfort level. I can't handle it. God will help you. God will help you through.

Amen? And ministry calls for us to have the right actions, the right attitude, the right heart, to have that meekness as a servant, to have that grace-filled heart of love, and to know that Christ is all-sufficient.

You're not on your own. You might say, I am on my own. I'm the only Christian in my workplace. But Jesus is with you. Amen? Jesus is with you. The Lord Jesus is all-sufficient.

Our all in all, our everything. And he will enable you. He will enable you to stand. To stand. To be more than a conqueror.

[35:19] Through him that loved you. And so be encouraged today as we press on. It's the way of the cross. He says, take up your cross daily and follow me.

Let us pray. Okay.