

The School of Hard Knocks - wimps need not apply

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians 6, verse 4. Paul, in the context there, is talking about how we work us together with God.

! He says, verse 2, Behold, now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. He talks about how he is a minister, a servant of Christ.

In verse 3, it says, Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed. But in all things, approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions.

What is ministry? What is serving the Lord? It takes much endurance, patience, perseverance, persistence, holding on. It goes the distance.

Serving the Lord is in there for the long haul. It means keeping on, keeping on, keeping on going. It means fighting against the odds, against the circumstances of life.

[0 : 54] It doesn't quit. We give up too easily. Proven sisters, we give up too easily. Every one of us. Too many Christians are quitters.

They are weak and immature. Their faith is stunted growth. They don't want to take a risk. To step out on the limb. To serve God.

Ministry. Ministry. Patience in ministry. Patience is evident in Paul's life. For example, in afflictions, he says. Afflictions. Now, none of us want to be afflicted, to have suffering and trouble.

It means difficulties. Hardships. It means distresses and calamities. These are the words that Paul used to describe what serving the Lord means.

It means patience in afflictions, in difficulties, in distresses. Ministry. It means putting yourself out. Brothers and sisters, they don't teach you this in Bible school. I've been to Bible school and others here have.

[1 : 55] Being trained in how to deliver messages or run programs and do things. And you get all that kind of information. But ministry means the long haul.

It means going the distance. It means patience. It means putting up with people. It means putting up with yourself. It means putting yourself out. But wait, there's more. There's more still.

This was no happy, clappy, light and airy fairy gospel. This was no positive prosperity gospel.

Ministry for Paul didn't mean having his names in lights and the praise of men.

Ministry didn't mean for Paul that he had the respect of the establishment and glowing articles in the local media. Paul wasn't running for election. He was doing it tough.

And ministry is what at times can hurt. It can hurt. It can be hard. Some people think that ministry is all about bliss and amusement.

[2 : 53] Some lovey-dovey, light and frothy gospel. And some preachers think it's about position or a stage where they can pray themselves and crack their jokes and receive the applause of men.

There is no cross there. There is no depth there. For some, it's carpet time, they call it. Laughing and joking and lightness. There is no fear of God there. There is no reality of the awesomeness of God there.

There is no challenge there. Friends, ministry. Serving Christ for you. For each one of you here today. Ministry, serving Christ means patience.

It means perseverance, persistence. Patience. Second P word now. Patience. Second P word is pain. You know, this is all good stuff here tonight.

But the second thing about ministry, about serving the Lord, is pain. Pain. Whole new pain. Whole experienced pain. In so many ways.

[3 : 53] In verse 5 it tells us there, the pain of stripes. That meant the lash of the wit. Imprisonments. Tumults. Labours. Watchings.

Fastings. It was arduous for Paul. Ministry was arduous. It was painful. It meant beatings. It meant imprisonment. It meant riots. Ministry means that you're not out to win a popularity contest.

Ministry can mean treading on toes. You know, for any of us, as we serve the Lord, as we might be forthright at times where it's called for, and call sin, sin.

People can get offended. People can get hurt. Not that we're wanting to hurt anyone. We're wanting to help and heal and live. But there may be times when someone feels, well, that's getting a bit personal.

But friends, we're not meaning to hurt. But sometimes ministry can mean treading on toes. When you have to tell someone, hey, that's false doctrine. That's wrong teaching.

[4 : 54] Ministry can mean challenging the hosts of darkness that are waging war against the souls of men and women, of boys and girls.

It means combat against those forces that are arraigned against Christ and his cause. It means a fight. It means a gutsy, manly religion. A fight that is on the offensive.

This is what is lacking, by and large, in Christendom today. This fight that should be attacking, contending, invading, taking back the territory that the devil has taken.

This is the fight that we need, brothers and sisters, in our world today, in the 21st century. This kind of fight that means taking a stand and fighting valiantly for the truth, despite the threat of sword or prison.

We don't have it yet. Maybe we need some of that in Australia. Amen. Maybe we need a bit of persecution to get people up their lazy bones and into the work of God.

[5 : 58] And into his service. Brothers and sisters, it's time to rise up. In the Psalms, there's a verse, and I've got a book that's based on it.

And it says, the title of this book is, Who Will Rise Up? And it's a quote in part from the Psalms where the psalmist cried out, Who will rise up against the evildoers?

Because there's a call that people need to rise up. And this man is a bit of an extremist. He's a street preacher. He goes into universities in America. He preaches on the university campuses in the open air.

And he suffers. He cops a lot for that. But he says, Who will rise up? And it's time that we rose up and took the offensive. Paul often uses parallels with combat and athletics when he describes the Christian life and walk.

But Christian life means, like athletics and combat, it means there's effort and there's training involved. And for Paul, serving Christ meant not sitting back and enjoying the easy ride, but about aggressive action.

[7 : 11] Christianity for Paul meant aggressive action. About activity and drive. About passion and work. About serving and striving. Agonising was a word that he used in the Greek sense of it.

It actually meant agony. Agonising. And where are the agonisers today? Where are the people of God who are agonised? Who will travail in prayer? It's encouraging to know that people are praying. They need to pray. I need prayer. We need prayer. Our church needs prayer. And friends, we need to agonise in prayer. Where are those who will strive with God for souls? Where are the people of God today?

Will the real men of God stand up? Rise up? And be counted. Will the real women of God stand up? And serve God? Be willing to stand on the line for Christ.

We've got a lot of so-called ministers today. But where are the men of God? Now some people like to have a name badge that says minister or the title of it.

[8 : 13] But where are the people who will serve Christ? Who will serve the Lord? And without recognition or applause or title or esteem of man, are you a man or woman of God who will be his servant?

You know, I thank God for the unsung heroes of this church. And I don't want them to get to feel bragged on. But there's people who do things without any recognition at all. And without them, I'd be flat strapped more than I am.

Well, flat strapped. You know, it worries me, you know, but there's so much that could be done. And we'd love more people to rise up and say, I want to do more.

We can give you a whole lot more to do if you want something to do. I mean, I know when I was a little boy, I used to say, I'm bored. I don't say that anymore. I don't have anything to do.

I don't say that anymore. You know, when you're a Christian, there's always something to do, isn't there? There's always something that you can do for God, for Christ, for himself, for his kingdom.

And where are the agonizers?

[9 : 18] Where are those who will go the extra mile? There's a story about a man who was just an average person. His name was Alvin. And someone said he weighed 90 pounds, but 89 of those pounds make up his big heart.

He had such a big heart. And this man, it was said of him that he kept busy by giving to others. And he joined this nursing home as a volunteer. And he was known for his big heart and his big steps in half.

Alvin went to this nursing home when his wife was admitted as an Alzheimer's patient. And he came in and helped. He rarely missed a meal with May, his wife.

And though retired from a dairy farm, he milked a dozen cows before going to have breakfast with his wife. And then between lunch and supper, he would replenish May's ice pitcher with some more water.

And before long, he was volunteering to fill other people's pitchers of water and helping other residents with their needs too. And at supper, he set out the napkins and the coffee cups.

[10 : 22] And if residents needed help pushing their wheelchairs, Alvin was there. And Alvin explains, life's so much better when you get your priorities straight. It begins when you make the Lord your first priority.

And I'm thinking, when I think of someone like this man Alvin, I think of someone that we knew. A man, Mr. Len Smart. And he was working in his 90s, was he?

About 90. He was still driving for Meals on Wheels. And he died with his boots on. I think the same day that he'd done some Meals on Wheels, he died. And he was pleased to serve the Lord in that capacity of being helpful.

And I'm sure that as he did such practical service, he was giving the gospel too. I'm sure that would be a feature of the kind of guy that he was. And that's how I'd like to be.

That's how we need to be, to die with our boots on. To want to serve the Lord, to just be active as a Christian. And I know a chap that was doing door knocking with a walking stick.

[11 : 27] And I know there's a fellow who's giving up tracks actively for the church, who's driving a gopher doing it. And we need to stop making excuses, brothers and sisters, and start serving him.

Start serving him. Even if it's just that little bit that you can do. That little something that you can do. Just incremental steps. Just small steps.

You can serve the Lord. It's about stopping making excuses and getting involved in the ministry.

You are a minister. Every one of us here is a minister, a servant of the Lord.

And ministry means labours. It means hard yakka. It's hard work. But Paul was working to exhaustion. Missing out on sleep and rest. Paul had sleepless nights. Missing out on food.

It says here, fasting's often going hungry. It means expending energy and effort. This was Paul's nature. This was Paul's nature. Friends, what about you tonight? Where has the keenness gone?

[12 : 26] Where has the zeal gone? We can easily be so sluggish and slothful, inactive, stagnant, lifeless, dead. And we can be, as the Aussie expression that we so often use, so go easy, take it easy, mate.

She'll be right. Don't get too fanatical. Too many sleepy, lazy, drowsy, shirking Christians. Go easy, they say. You know, that's what the devil would whisper in your ear as he rocks your, what do they call it?

They have your hammock. You know, the devil would like to, you know, he'll sing you a nice lullaby and just rock your cradle and rock your hammock. Brothers and sisters, let's be about his work.

Time is short. It's the last hour. It's the last time. And do we take the pains? Sometimes we shy away when it's a little bit uncomfortable, discomfoting, when it's inconvenient, when we don't have time.

You know, there's always a reason, there's always an excuse. And do we take the pains? Do we exert ourselves when we think of what Christ has done for us? Do we go the second mile? Do we try to care?

[13 : 34] Do we try to reach? Do we try to minister and serve the Lord? Will we consider the end? It says in Proverbs, consider the end. We would be busy like the ant, like the bean.

Diligent. Plodding. A zealot. Seize the day. The saying goes. The year was AD 155.

The persecution among the Christians was sweeping across the Roman Empire and came to the city of Smyrna. And the proconsul, the authority of Smyrna, was swept up in this persecution.

They put out an order that the bishop of Smyrna, the pastor of Smyrna, Polycarp, was to be found, arrested and brought to the public arena for execution.

And they found Polycarp and they brought him before thousands of spectators in this big amphitheatre, screaming for his blood. But the proconsul had compassion on this man who was almost 100 years old.

[14 : 34] And he signalled the crowd to silence. To Polycarp he said, curse the Christ and live. The crowd waited for the old man to answer. In an amazingly strong voice he said, 80 and 6 years have I served him and he has done me no wrong.

How dare I blaspheme the name of my King and Lord. And with that Polycarp became a martyr. Now the word witness means martyr. Are you prepared to witness for Christ that it's going to cost you your life?

I think sometimes we use the word witnessing as a pretty glib kind of, just, you know, try to air bash someone. But it means martyr.

It means that you're willing to die for your faith. That's how much you love Christ and his salvation. You want to share it, not keep it to yourself. So turn with me to another passage.

The second passage is 2 Corinthians 11. There's some more descriptions of Paul and what he meant by ministry. What ministry meant for him. In 2 Corinthians 11, verse 23 he goes on to describe in the context of talking about some who call themselves ministers.

[15 : 43] And from verse 23 of 2 Corinthians 11 he says, Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I am more. In labours more abundant. In stripes above measure.

In prisons more frequent. In deaths oft. Ministry. Again, you see this amazing description of what ministry means. Paul describes it. He details it here.

Labours, beatings, facing imprisonment and death. It's serious stuff, isn't it? Are we ministers such that we would serve the Lord to go through such inconvenience to put ourselves out?

Or would we rather go the easy way, the way of the flesh, the way of ease and laziness? Do we have what it takes to minister? To really serve the Lord? To work for him? Or is our faith really dead?

Because faith without works is dead. It's dead. Dead as a dodo. Dead as a corpse. Is your faith working? Or is it alive and living?

[16 : 42] Is it alive? If it's alive, it's going to be working. Do we too easily quit? I know for men, they're just really big spiritual babies. You know, I see them all.

They all come crying to me. Have their tantrums. They're big spiritual babies. They still need their dummies. Matthew's changed, spiritually speaking. Friends, we need to grow up into Christ.

To grow up into him. To mature in Christ. There's many years old as professing Christians, yet they're just big spiritual babies. They've gone nowhere in 10 years. 20 years.

Friends, where are you? Are you growing? Or are you stagnant? Have you stopped growing? Is your growth stunted? Brother, sister, wake up! Sometimes easily we let the things of the past stop us serving God.

There's always a reason why it's too hard. It's too hurtful. We give up. We need to keep on keeping on. Don't let the past stop you from serving the Lord. We could all think of hurts and hang-ups and reasons why it's too hard.

[17 : 44] Look at Paul again. Verse 24. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one. One hundred and ninety-five lashes on his bare flesh.

That's what Paul took for Christ. One hundred and ninety-five lashes. His body bore the marks. His shoulders and back. His frame was scarred.

It was wounded, beaten and battered. Paul was sold out to the cause of Christ. He wasn't playing church, caught up in church politics and power plays.

He wasn't playing games with God. He wasn't living in ease and comfort and having some applause from men. Ministry serving Christ meant physical punishment.

And verse 25. Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once was I stoned. Thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I've been in the deep. Three times he was beaten up.

[18 : 41] Bashed up. Bashed up for Christ. With heavy rods. This wasn't just some pushed around kind of fight. He was beaten with heavy rods. Christianity for Paul wasn't joining a club.

It was receiving the club. It was being bashed with clubs. Bashed up with rods. It meant being stoned. Being a minister for Christ means having rocks on your head.

You know, sometimes you feel like you've got rocks in your head. But you get rocks on your head when you're serving Christ. This is what Paul had. And ministry for Paul, it meant taking a cruise. But not in first class comfort. He was on a prison ship. And it meant being shipwrecked three times. And being set adrift on driftwood in the high seas waiting to be rescued.

Friends, ministry. Are you ready? Are you ready for the school of hard knocks? Patience. Pain. And thirdly, the third P.

[19 : 40] Perils. Verse 26 we see. Paul says, he describes it. In journeyings often. In perils of waters. In perils of robbers. In perils by my own countrymen.

In perils by the heathen. Paul was often travelling. And ministry means peril. Now the word peril, it means taking a risk. It means stepping outside the comfort zone.

Peril means danger. It means stepping outside the comfort zone. And entering the war zone.

Entering the battle zone. These were people, Paul and his fellows, were people who had hazarded their lives for Christ.

The cause of Christ. They didn't stay inside their nice, smoked, cosy, comfortable walls. They had built around themselves. They weren't wrapped up in cotton wool balls. Isolated from the real world. They were in the thick of the battle. Being a Christian means being a man of God. Being a woman of God. Ministry is dangerous.

[20 : 36] It's harmful. It's violent. You go to places in other countries. And then, it's a life or death then to stand up for Christ. To make a public witness of being baptised.

To attend a worship service. To be seen carrying a Bible. Or going to a fellowship of Christians. It means death for you. It means imprisonment. And punishment.

And torture for you. These were the people of God. In their Bible days. And I think if Christianity was under that pressure. Under that microscope in our world.

How many would be here tonight? How many would be here in the morning service? How many would dare to come and to gather with their fellow believers?

If it meant that there was a peril for them? There was a danger for them in doing that. And I mean, there's no peril in you still. I see scarcely some of them. But friends, what if there was real peril?

[21 : 34] It's real danger. What then? How many would we see then? And these were people who had hazarded their lives for Christ and his cause. They were there in the firing line.

Ministry is violent. It's harmful. It's dangerous. It means going into the lion's den. As Daniel did.

Putting yourself on the firing line. And engaging in hand-to-hand combat.

Ministry. And we're saying this is for you. Ministry for you. Serving the Lord Jesus. Which every one of us is to do and must do. We're called to. Every one of us is called to this.

Ministry for you. It's going to be dangerous for you. It might be dangerous for some of you. When you're witness to family and friends. You know, when I first became a Christian. When I spoke to my schoolmates.

You know, they weren't my friends any longer. I just suddenly lost them. Because they didn't want a bar of it. You know, they didn't want anything to do with it. And that's what can be. It's dangerous.

You know, you suddenly lose all those that considered you their friend.

[22 : 36] It's dangerous for your health. It's dangerous for your lifestyle. For your welfare. For your comforts. For your ease. Ministry. It might cramp your lifestyle. It might mean some things are going to change.

It might cost you something. It might cost you time, effort. Stress. It might mean inconvenience and discomfort. In danger. Paul says it's dangerous.

In danger from waters. From thieves. Think of missionaries today. They're the real ministers of the gospel. Aren't they now? I think of these ones. You know, I just look in awe at them.

I think, well, what they have done. That they would dare to cross the seas. And leave their comforts. To go to a foreign land. And learn a language. And ministries today.

They put their health at risk. Their finances. Their family. They leave everything. You know, what a statement. What a challenge. And friends, we should be challenged by that.

[23 : 32] And disturbed by that. In perils. Endangering the city. Endangering the bush.

Endangering the sea. Endangering from pretend brethren. You know, the son. They're fake brethren.

We can't always tell. When you're for real about your faith, it upsets the fake ones. And sometimes the fake ones will have a go at you. Those who only talk about it and don't have a real heart for the

things of God.

They just want to criticise from the sidelines. When you stand for Christ, you're going to attract criticism. It's going to mean you're going to be a target. There's some who call themselves Christians who are going to... Still, even they will be your critics.

And that will be a shame. A shameful thing. What about you? Are you part of the ministry? Are you part of his service? Verse 27 talks about weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, nakedness.

Ministry. That's ministry, brother, sister. Do you think it's going to be easy serving the Lord? It's not so. Ministry doesn't mean a life of luxury and laxness.

[24 : 34] It doesn't mean a life of slackness and ease. It doesn't mean life on easy street. Paul says ministry. It means weariness, painfulness, agonising, excruciating, torturing, torturous pain.

So, I've sold you on it yet? It's horrible, hard to. It's a slog. It's a strain. It's a sweat. It's a pain. Paul poured his heart and soul into ministry. The minister of Christ, this is what Spurgeon said of ministry.

This minister of Christ should be like the old keeper of any stone lighthouse. Life was failing fast, but summoning all his strength, he crept round once more to trim the lights before he died.

May the Holy Ghost enable his servants to keep the beacon fire burning, to warn sinners of the rocks, shoals and quicksands that surround them.

You know, we must give and be given in ministry. We must pour our life into ministry, into others. You know, we talked this morning in brief about investing our lives in other people as the Samaritan.

[25 : 37] Investing our lives in strangers that we might be a witness for Christ, that we might be a testimony. Paul hadn't heard, listen, I want to tell you right now, Paul had not heard about the health, wealth and prosperity gospel.

He certainly hadn't heard about it. Paul had not heard about that gospel. Health, wealth and prosperity. He wasn't confessing riches, luxuries and comforts for himself.

Paul wasn't confessing any of that. He says all the good things he counts just as dross, as rubbish, as dung. All that he had credit, could take credit in. He was busy about ministry.

He was busy doing the long yards of ministry. He was busy despite the stabbing pain. I'd imagine being hit with rocks a few times, he might have a few aches and pains and been beaten with rocks. I'd imagine, I mean I hurt my elbows a few months ago and I still saw. But I just wonder how he would have felt. He would have had bruises and wounds, wouldn't he? And ministry for him might have meant he had a few memories that were a bit painful, literally.

[26 : 46] And he was busy despite that stabbing pain, despite the heavy load, despite the spasms, the cramp, the suffering of fastings often, of the missing out on meals and of the anguish of sleepless nights, of watchings often, which means sleepless nights.

And are you there yet? Are you willing to bear Christ's suffering? To share in Christ's afflictions? To take up his cross and follow him?

Or do we want to take the easy road? Now, don't want me to put you off ministry. I want to encourage you. But I'm just letting you know this is what you can expect, brothers and sisters. So, be encouraged.

I'm not wanting to put you off. I'm wanting you to see and go for it. Go for it. Leading for Christ and serving the Lord is work. Long, hard, tiring work. Fatigue, pressure, weariness, exhaustion.

And if you feel that way, it's normal. It's normal. It's natural. It's scriptural. It's scriptural. And if you're worn out and worn down in his service, you are a minister of Christ.

[27 : 51] It's a blessing. It's a blessing to give and be given in his ministry. You may feel tired, frazzled, battered. There may be times of stress, of defeat, of people wounding you.

You know, you're a tall poppy and people will go for you and go hard at you. And, you know, this is what can happen. And yet, we know that bless them.

Bless those that persecute us. Bless those who revile. Bless those who despitefully use us and say all manner of evil against you.

Falsy for Christ's sake. Friends, don't be discouraged. Whatever happens, whatever happens, do his work. He is the one who will one day say, well done. Doesn't matter what anyone else says, really.

Because there may be times of defeat, of stress. Don't give up. Don't give up. Don't get discouraged. As they're saying, pressure produces power. And you see that in steam engines and so on.

[28 : 50] Pressure produces power. And count it all joy. You know, sometimes I think, where has the joy gone? And, you know, when you're serving the Lord, sometimes you feel so...

Any of us can feel that we're a bit flogged, a bit frazzled. And you think, where has the joy gone? But the word says, count it all joy.

Count it all joy. When all of these things might be against you, count it all joy. Count it all joy that you can partake of his sufferings. And Paul had these things many sleepless nights.

He even lacked the basic needs of life, such as food and warmth and clothing. He knew what it was to go without, so he could give to God's people. Have you that heart for God? Friends, I want to encourage you today to see that blessing.

That blessing of what awaits. You that serve him. You that serve him in so many ways. You that serve him in many unrecognised ways. In a way, it's good that you don't get a pat on the back for it.

[29 : 55] Because the Lord says, you know, for those that do, that they've got their rewards. So don't say anything nice about me. I want the Lord to do that. In a way, it's much better, isn't it?

Don't pat people on the back. Because you're taking the praise that God will give them. Because the Lord Jesus says, you know, you've got your praise down here. You're not going to get it up there.

So I'd rather wait for it, wouldn't you? I think it's going to be much nicer and much more a blessing, much more glory when we see his face. And we hear his voice, well done, that good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of our Lord. And there's a preacher called Warren Wearsby. He said this, and just coming to a close. He talks about ministry. He says, the foundation of ministry is character, not professional skill.

The nature of ministry is service, not being served. The motive of ministry is love, not money or power. The measure of ministry is sacrifice, not success.

[30 : 53] The authority of ministry is submission, not pulling rank. The purpose of ministry is to glorify God, not to glorify ourselves. The tools of ministry are prayer and scripture, not a marketing handbook and an ingratiating manner.

The privilege of ministry is growth, which may be in depth rather than in numbers. The power of ministry is the Holy Spirit, not programs. And the model for ministry is Jesus Christ, not a corporation or a man.

Friends, Christ is, you want to see Christ glorified. And like I touched on this morning, that Christ might be formed in his people. That's what Paul wanted.

That is what drove him. That's what was his mandate, his call, was that Christ would be formed in the people that he was ministering to and talking to.

And verse 28, just to wrap up, Paul says, Besides all these things, besides all these things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

[31 : 57] Now, I'm sure it's probably quite scriptural that they didn't have church buildings back in the New Testament. I think church buildings are bad enough. Because all the work that church buildings create, it might be better just to not have one.

But the care of all the churches, he's talking about the people. The care of people. And the care of people, the care of the saints, is what Paul suffered from. He said, besides all of that stuff, is the care of all the churches.

And we know, brothers and sisters, that people can be hard work. And we love people. I love people. I'm trying to love people more. And, you know, God's helping me to love more people. But, you know, sometimes people can be hard to love. And people can be hard to help. Especially when we've known them for a long time. They don't seem to be getting anywhere. But Paul has this care, this concern for all the churches.

Now, there's a number of churches that he had a care for, a burden for, a heavy responsibility that he had to carry. And, brothers and sisters, we have a care for one another. We should have brotherly care, brotherly love.

[33 : 00] So think of the souls that we've all had, in a sense, as the preacher, I've got souls to give account for. And for me, it's a heavy responsibility as someone teaching and leading.

That there's a weight to carry. That there's a heavier judgment for me. And for any one of us, too, in any ministry we might be involved in, whether it's in teaching, our friends and family, in preaching, in evangelizing, in the bus ministry, in the Sunday school, in teaching young people, in the youth ministry.

When the soul's in your care, there's a great weight, there's a great responsibility that the words that you speak is true. That the doctrine that you preach is true. That the counsel that you give is true. And what a greater judgment we are under, as we that might minister in different ways. And for any one of us, there's a responsibility for you, for me, to care for one another.

The care of the churches. How can we care for our church better? How can we care for the people in our church? And sometimes it's those that are the abased. Those that are the least.

[34 : 04] It's interesting, in 1 Corinthians it talks about that the judgment should be given to those that are the least in the church. So, you know, sometimes there's a sense where those that are the ones that are discounted, God counts them as valuable too.

No one's in greater measure. There's no lesser or greater or there's no, there should be no status or caste or, you know, levels or, you know, someone's higher or lower than another.

We're all on an even keel. The ground is level at the foot of the cross and whatever a person's background or status in this world, it counts for nothing. Every one of us here, whether it's someone who's got an intellectual disability, whether it's someone who's getting dementia, whether it's someone who's a little child, whether it's someone who's got some great social lack and is on the bottom of the heap, everybody is equal in God's sight.

Everyone is important. Every one of you is as important. And souls are so valuable and so precious that no one is greater or of lesser value. And we should never esteem another above another, that there should be no respect of persons with us.

And sometimes we can do that. We can make that judgment as natural as humans that we can't esteem some that are higher than another. And it must not be. It's the care that is equally, evenly spread.

[35 : 30] This constant source of loving, of caring, of considering. This desire that Christ be formed in his people, that we might grow up into him. Can we have that love?

Can we have that care? We must. We must, brothers and sisters, and we must put aside our own preferences or prejudices and love, evenly and equally.

Everybody that is in our care, in our circle of fellowship. And take thought for those. You know, it wounds me at times when I see people that seem cast to one side and no one caring for them.

And, you know, sometimes it's hard to spread yourself to say hello to everybody. And we know that can happen. But, by God's grace, if we can have that consideration for everybody, that we care and love for everybody, I know it doesn't always happen.

And yet, what would Christ do? He would care for everyone. He took the time, didn't he? Listen, he took the time and the care to consider everybody. Like I said this morning, he walked through the crowd slowly.

[36 : 31] There's a sense where he touched everybody that was about him. And David Brainerd said this to Jonathan Edwards. David Brainerd, a great missionary, he says, I do not go to heaven to be advanced, but to give honour to God.

It is no matter where I shall be stationed in heaven, whether I have a high or low seat there, but to live and to please and glorify God. My heaven is to please God and glorify him and to give my all for him and to be wholly devoted to his glory.

Will you have that as your heaven, to glorify God, to be devoted to his glory? While travelling in Ghana, there's a fact that a missionary learnt this about the dominant language of Ghana, that the only way to ask the question, what is your religion, is to ask, whom do you serve?

That was the question they would ask, whom do you serve? And that was the answer was, whatever religion, whatever belief they have. And it's true, isn't it? Whom do you serve?

Whom do you serve? Do you serve him? Do you love him? I think, you know, it's interesting, isn't it, that the word for Jesus is Lord. And I love the way Joshua prays, he says, Master.

[37 : 47] Master. And here we stop and think, is he our Master? If he's our Master, we're his servant. It's automatic. If you're a Christian, you're his servant. So serve him.