

Do You Have A Heart For Ministry?

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- [0 : 0 0] But since we were torn away from you brothers for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.
- Because we wanted to come to you, I Paul again and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord at his coming? Is it not you? You are our glory and joy. Making disciples is just part and parcel of the Christian life, isn't it?
- Not only did Jesus explicitly command us to do it, that's the heart of the Great Commission, right? There's really only one imperative in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, and it's to go and make disciples of all nations.
- But Jesus didn't only command it. And wanting to help other people know and follow Jesus is part of the transformation that God does in us when he saves us.
- [1 : 0 8] Think about your conversion. Everything in your life up to that point was for you, ultimately, foundationally. You pursued your desires.
- You pursued your affections. You pursued your sin. Everything that you wanted out of life, you pursued it. And then you were introduced to Christ, and you realized that all the things you were pursuing, whether it be sin or philosophies, whatever it was, all of those things were wrong.
- That they were not leading you to satisfaction in life. They were leading you to death and eternal separation from God. That it was actually going to be unsatisfying in your life.
- And then you found Christ to be the satisfaction, right? You make a switch. Everything changes at that point, doesn't it? All of your goals change. Your affections change. That's not because you change them.
- It's because God does this work in you. He transforms you. He transforms everything. Now you think, behold, all things are become new, Paul says. A part of that transformation is this progressive change whereby we are turning away from worldly pursuits, maybe good pursuits that just are not the best pursuits, and we begin to pursue other things.
- [2 : 2 4] One of the things we begin to pursue is the discipling of other people. We want other people to know Jesus. We want to help other people faithfully follow him.
- And if you're a Christian, you will happily engage in discipling others when given opportunities to do it.
- In fact, a genuine believer who is an unwilling participant in gospel work is an anomaly, if not even an impossibility.
- Still, being willing to participate in gospel work is not exactly the same as having a heart to do it.
- We understand that, right? We acknowledge everybody has passions, right? We all have things that we love, things that we give ourselves to, and that's different for all of us. I may be a willing participant if Shane ever invites me to his house to watch Lord of the Rings.

- [3 : 29] I may be happy to sit with my friend and endure 18 hours worth of little men, hairy men that are doing some weird thing with a ring. I may be a willing participant in that.
- I may even experience some kind of joy in the process of it. I'm not going to feel that in the same way that Shane does because he loves it, doesn't he? It's a passion for him in some sense. He's going to pursue that in a different kind of way.
- We understand the difference, right? There's a difference between being happy to be involved with something, but then actually having a passion for it, having a heart to do it. And it's a casual approach to discipleship that really is driven largely by convenience and ease that plagues many Christians in our context, isn't it?
- Again, it's not that we're unwilling to engage in gospel work. Most of us really, honestly, we would be thrilled if somebody we know came to us today and asked us about our faith.
- We would be so overjoyed if somebody came and sought counsel from us. If we could just take our Bible and help them know how to be a better Christian or a more faithful, we would be so happy to do that.
- [4 : 42] However, a heart that is driven to that, a heart that's driven by that experience, eludes many of us, maybe all of us to some extent.
- So that rather than having gospel ministry as a priority of our lives, it becomes almost an optional matter. We squeeze it in when we can, and we're happy when it works.
- Unfortunately, it's easy to get so busy giving our hearts to other endeavors that we even eventually begin to miss those clear opportunities that the Lord gives us, isn't it?
- We give our hearts to so many things. We give our time to so many things. How much time, how much affection, how much heart are we giving to the work of the Lord?
- Christ calls us to something different than that, something actually greater than this. The Christians we read about in the New Testament, they immerse themselves in the life of the church.
- [5 : 52] They focus tremendous effort on making disciples in their communities around the world. But those efforts were born from a heart-level desire to participate with God in His saving work.
- And Paul is one of the clearest examples of this that we find anywhere in the Scriptures. And through his letter to the Thessalonian church, we discover what it looks like when someone has a heart for ministry.
- Not that they're just happy to be involved when it works out. But what does it look like when somebody really is giving themselves to gospel work and gospel ministry? I think our text helps us get a glimpse of that.
- And I pray that the Lord will use it to shape our own hearts this morning. Just three things here to point out. A heart for ministry has an unrelenting desire to minister to people.
- As an unrelenting desire to minister to people. Again, not mere willingness, but a serious desire and affection that drives intentional effort and action.
- [7 : 06] Okay? Verse 17. Paul says, You see the two portions here, the two categories.
- There is desire. There's affection on one hand in this verse. And that affection is driving effort, action in the second half of the verse.
- Now it's Luke that records for us in Acts chapter 17 the explanation of how Paul's time ended so abruptly and dramatically in Thessalonica.
- He had enjoyed a relatively short season of fruitful ministry there. The church is coming together. A few people have been saved. They're excited about serving the Lord. And a group of jealous Jews were told incites a mob against Paul.

Violent mob. And he and his team, which included Silas and Timothy, were forced to escape the city. They had to leave quickly under cover of night.

[8 : 18] And then what we find here in verse 17 is Paul is addressing them after that fact. And what we find is that since their escape, Paul and Silas and Timothy worked relentlessly to do what?

To try to go back. They've been forced out. And now they're doing everything that they can to get back to Thessalonica. But why?

Because their heart's desire was to be with them. But Paul's heart's desire was not merely to be with them, but to be with them in a particular way.

His unrelenting desire was to continue ministering the gospel to them. Discipling them in the faith. These young believers who are being abused and persecuted by unbelievers.

He's concerned for them. He's worried for them. He wants to get to them so that he can serve the gospel. So he can strengthen their faith. So he can help establish and strengthen them. As a fledgling congregation there in Thessalonica.

[9 : 26] And this desire that he has in his heart, it's oozing out of the language that he uses here. Let's look first at the affection with which he speaks.

He references his departure as being torn away. Literally, orphaned is the word here. Since we were orphaned from you, Paul says.

The extent to which we feel loss is directly linked to the measure of our affection for that thing or for that person. If you lose a pen and it means nothing to you, you won't worry too much over it.

But when you have an heirloom handed down to you maybe from a family member or a loved one. And it gets misplaced or it gets lost. It matters, doesn't it? It bothers us.

We feel loss for the thing because of our affection for the thing. Paul's affection for the Thessalonians is so great that being forced to leave them felt like being, quote, torn away from his own family, orphaned.

[10 : 37] That's pretty tremendous love. But their separation wasn't hopeless, was it? He says that it was only for a short time. Now at the time of this letter, we know Paul hasn't been back to Thessalonica.

He doesn't know if he's going to be back to Thessalonica. He's at Corinth at the time. Who knows if he'll actually be able to make it back. So how can he actually say this? How can he say that their separation is but for a short time?

Of course, maybe he's not talking about going back to Thessalonica at all. Maybe, as is a common theme through the letter, he's got his eyes on the coming of Christ.

Acknowledging that even if he doesn't make it back now, he's confident that they would at least be reunited at Christ's return. All we were torn away, but it's only for a short time.

Ultimately, we'll be brought back together when our Lord returns. The gospel assures us of this, doesn't it? Even in the letter, even in his moments of personal correspondence, he's ministering the gospel.

[11 : 43] That's where his heart was. Reminding them that any sense of separation that we feel now, whether in life or in death, we understand as believers, that's but temporary.

It's but for a short time. The gospel gives us hope of a certain future. We will be reunited together when he returns. Paul may have been torn away in person, but his heart was still with them.

And it's this affection that helps convey this unrelenting desire to get back there and minister further.

It's an affection that we must cultivate if we're ever to have a heart for gospel ministry that looks anything like Paul's heart. But it's not just affection here, is it?

That affection is doing something. It's leading to something in the text. It's leading to action. Action. Paul's affection for the people drove him to intentional effort.

[12 : 45] He says, since being torn away from them, he, quote, endeavored more eagerly and with great desire to see them face to face, to get back.

Paul and his team, they didn't wait for opportunities to present themselves. No, they labored. Relentlessly, even it seems, to find ways to minister to the people.

That's what a heart for gospel ministry does. It has an unrelenting desire to minister the gospel to people, to disciple people, to share the gospel with people.

And what we find here in Paul's example, this is why it's so convicting. What we find here in Paul's example is it's a far cry from the convenience-based form of ministry that pervades our hearts.

When's the last time you could say that you endeavored more eagerly and with great desire to minister the gospel to someone else?

[13 : 54] That your priority at that moment was to do whatever you could to remove any obstacle possible that you could in order that you could go and serve the gospel to that person, to comfort them in Christ, to share the truth with them?

Why so different for Paul than for us? It's not a difference in calling or gifting, though Paul had a unique call and was certainly a gifted apostle.

But that's not the key difference here. It's the spiritual cultivation of a heart that prioritizes gospel work.

I think that's the difference. It's not that Paul's example is unattainable. It's just that he cultivated a heart to do this thing. Now, there's one more thing that's worth our note here in this verse.

Paul's desire is further demonstrated in his effort to see them in a particular way. Did you pick up on that in verse 17? We endeavored more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

[15 : 07] This is a portion of the text that is especially relevant today, isn't it? I find it actually maybe the most convicting thing here.

Face to face, personal, embodied presence with these people so that he might most effectively and fruitfully minister the gospel to you.

Communication technology can be wonderfully helpful to gospel ministry. It really can. It can also render it powerless and ineffective when our use of it is really aimed at efficiency more than effective ministry.

Here's what I mean. We're in an age where the prevailing thought, and probably my prevailing thought is, why schedule a meeting when an email will do?

Why go to coffee if we can just make a phone call? Why make a phone call if a text message will suffice?

[16 : 28] Why go through all the trouble to type out 10 words in a text message when you can just give the thumbs up, right? This is how we think, isn't it?

And it's not all bad. Efficiency can be a good thing. And I'm certainly not saying that use of communication technology is something we should avoid in gospel ministry.

That's not at all what I'm saying. Clearly, Paul is using communication technology in this letter. He's writing a letter because at this time, he can't be with them. And yet he uses what's available to him in the moment to minister the gospel, to minister effectively as he can to the people in Thessalonica.

But he understood the different implicit, explicitly here in the verse. He understands that there is a power in the written word, but it pales in comparison to the power of personal embodied presence to effectively minister to someone.

When it comes to gospel ministry, we might do well to kind of reverse the typical thought. Why send a text message when I can call them and I can hear their voice and they can hear mine?

[17 : 44] Why call them when I can take the time to sit down and show my heart and bear my heart in a letter? Why sit down and bear my heart in a letter when I could change my schedule to go to their home or sit down at coffee or invite them into my home in order that I might especially encourage them in the faith?

Do you see? There's something here for us. We'll miss it if we don't pay attention, but it's there. Oh, I just wanted more than anything to see you face to face because Paul knew the most effective ministry happens when we are embodied in presence with someone else.

Now, can I just encourage you as a church to take this part seriously? And let me just say, I understand my weakness here. You know my weakness in this better than anyone.

What must we do? What must we sacrifice intentionally in order that we might effectively minister to one another face to face?

Is what we would have to give up worth it? And I think we'd have to say, almost exclusively, yes, yes.

[19 : 10] What stands between you and embodied ministry to others? Most often it's just busyness, isn't it? We're busy.

We're too busy. What can we do this year to be less busy so that we can be more intentional in our efforts to one another?

Having that unrelenting desire to minister to one another the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, Heart for Gospel Ministry recognizes recognizes and fights against Satan's hindrances.

It recognizes and fights against Satan's hindrances. Look at verse 18. Because we wanted to come to you. And then Paul inserts this very personal note.

I, Paul, again and again, I wanted to come to you. And the reason we haven't come to you is not because we don't want to. He says, Satan has hindered us.

[20 : 14] Satan's hindered us. But implicit in his statement is, though Satan has hindered us, we keep trying again and again. We're trying to overcome the obstacles.

We're trying to get there. We want to serve you. We want to be with you. There's always obstacles to gospel ministry, isn't there? And the reason there's always obstacles to gospel ministry is because we have a real, real spiritual enemy fighting against us every day.

Paul didn't explain exactly how Satan continued to hinder him. It's probably many different ways. But that's not the point anyways. The point in the statement is that he recognized Satan's opposition and he fought against it.

Again and again. He didn't quit on it. He wasn't unrelenting. He was unrelenting. He pursued it, recognizing that the obstacles that were in his way were not God's obstacles.

They were Satan's obstacles. And he had the discernment to see that. Now, I think these traits are essential marks of those with a heart for ministry. They don't easily give in.

[21 : 34] But as Peter said, they're vigilant, watchful, faithful to resist the devil in faith, trusting that God's in control, leaning on God's providence in those moments.

Scriptures routinely call us to be alert to Satan's devices and fight against them in the power of the Spirit. But here's the rub. How can we know when a particular obstacle or hindrance in our life, a real thing, a tangible thing, a hindrance or an obstacle, how can we know when that is something that has been brought to us by God because he doesn't want us to pursue that any further versus something that is actually an obstacle by the evil one in order to fight against us?

How can we know? After all, in Acts 16, Luke tells us that there were multiple occasions where Paul was trying to go to certain places to minister, but it was the Holy Spirit that hindered him.

And when the Holy Spirit hindered him, he submitted to that. He didn't fight against it. He submitted to it and he went a different direction under the leadership of the Spirit. But how can he know the difference? How can we?

At least part of the answer has to come down to our personal walk with God, doesn't it? If you're a Christian, God's Spirit dwells in you.

[22 : 56] That's a promise that we have from God that when he saves us, he indwells us. It's a new covenant promise. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that it would happen.

At the day of Pentecost, it was demonstrated that it had happened. And now it's a promise we cling to that when God saves us, he lives within us. And what is it that the Spirit within us does?

Well, the Scriptures tell us that he guides us into all truth. He teaches us his word. He reminds us of the things that Christ taught. He guides us.

He directs us. He gives us the discernment we need to understand the day. As we give ourselves to meditating on the Scripture, to communing with God in prayer, to gathering for corporate worship, all of these things are ways that the Holy Spirit directs and informs our hearts in godly wisdom.

There is just some Christian discernment that cannot be explained by any other thing than the indwelling presence of the Spirit at work through his word and through his people in us.

[24 : 06] therefore, we walk by the Spirit in faith, don't we? We submit to his direction and then we persevere when he exposes the work of the devil in our lives.

You say, that doesn't really answer my question. I don't know what else to say. We must lean on the Lord in this. I think there's something else here for us to wrestle with for just a moment as it relates to Paul saying that Satan has hindered him.

Paul's doing a good work, isn't he? We understand why Satan would want to hinder him. We also understand that God's sovereignty rules over the power of Satan.

There is a sense in which the problem of evil that so many people wrestle with is something that we continue to wrestle with as believers, isn't it? We might come to a passage like this and we see, look at the effectiveness of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

Why would God ever allow this kind of hindrance to stand in his way from something so good? Maybe we can wrestle with this for just a moment.

[25 : 19] God is sovereign over all things. We believe that. Even what's possible for Satan to do. And I do believe that we can trust the Lord even when the forces of hell are at war against us.

Who else will we trust? Now evidence of this truth is found all throughout the scripture that what Satan means for evil God often uses for good.

We see that phrase especially in the story of Joseph, don't we? We get to the end of the account. He's finally reunited with his brothers. They think he's going to kill them because he's one of the most powerful people in the world now and they keep apologizing.

And do you remember what he said? He said, listen, you meant it for evil. God meant it for good to save much people. There's no way that as he's in the pit in the wilderness or as he's in the prison after being lied about by Potiphar's wife, there's no way that Joseph can see what God's doing.

but he trusts that God's doing something. He knows that evil is present and God is allowing it but he trusts the Lord in it. Now is there any better place or more clear place for us to see this truth so evident than at the cross?

[26 : 47] Jesus himself on the night of his arrest at the last supper he says the son of man goes as it has been determined for him to go. In other words all of this is happening according to the will of the father that was predetermined before the world began.

But then he pronounces a judgment on Judas he says but woe to him who betrays the son of man. Now how could it be both ways? Judas the Roman soldiers the Jews who turned him over all the people involved it was their real sin out of their desire of indwelling sin that carried out those acts and yet God was sovereign over every evil act that they committed and it was for man's ultimate greatest good because God allowed that evil tragedy to take place to his only son we have eternal salvation we have life we have forgiveness and this is something the apostles picked up on if you read through the sermons in the book of Acts they mention it over and over Peter in particular that God determined this God determined this but you killed him he said as he preaches to the Jews what does he mean?

yes there's evil yes that's a result of our own sin yes there's an enemy that's fighting against us yes God is sovereign over it yes we can trust that he's working the good for his people in all of those things and I think it's with this view in mind that we come to verse 18 when Paul says Satan keeps hindering us but we keep fighting he's fighting because he's fighting against an enemy he's not fighting against God in that sense and yet he trusts the Lord with it doesn't he he trusts the Lord so while trusting God's sovereignty he fights against Satan's hindrances and so should we so what does a heart for gospel ministry do?

well it's unrelenting in its desire to minister to people it works hard at it it's an intentional purpose of life and when obstacles get in the way it cultivates through its own personal worship a discernment to know is this something that God is telling me to change course in or is this something I need to continue to pursue because the enemy is at work does that fight against it thirdly a heart for gospel ministry is motivated by the joy of presenting others to Jesus at his return verse 19 Paul says what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming is it not you he says you are our glory and joy this is the purpose statement for Paul's longing for his desire it's the explanation it reveals the motivation to return to Thessalonica his hope to present these Christians and others to Jesus when he comes and returns his joy was for God to use him to make more disciples for

Christ his reward to be a witness of those to whom he ministered the gospel to see them escape God's judgment that's what's motivating him here at least in the text right he's got this desire he's fighting hard against the enemy what's motivating all of this he just wants to minister to more he wants to present more people to Christ and we need to be careful not to misunderstand what he means here how can this be true and then Paul also say in another place that he was determined to boast in nothing but the cross of Christ is there contradiction or do those things somehow fit together of course they fit together this isn't about recognition Paul knew only God can be credited and glorified for anyone's salvation and anyone's sanctification his glorying in the Thessalonican

[31 : 10] Christians recognizes the partnership that God affords us in his saving purposes look just a couple of verses later in chapter 3 we'll get there next week notice what he calls Timothy in chapter 3 in verse 2 we sent Timothy our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel not my co-worker God's co-worker Paul wasn't looking to revel in his own achievement he's looking to revel in God's achievement through him his ultimate desire is not his own glory it's God's glory and he knows that God is glorified by every soul that turns from sin to Christ and he recognized this wonderful opportunity afforded to him by God to participate in that work to be a co-laborer with God in the salvation of souls and that motivated him it drove him my joy is to see

God glorified by your salvation and he's allowed me to have a part in that so why do I want to get back to you because you're my glory and joy because my glory and joy is the glory of God and the joy of God his desire to minister again in Thessalonica it's motivated by a zealously for God's glory and a love for those whom he served the one with a true heart for ministry their hope and joy and glory is to see others faithfully follow Christ and what drives your gospel ministry to others what motivates it we might have to be honest and say well to be honest I'm motivated by guilt I know that if I don't engage it would be wrong and it is the avoidance of guilt that actually drives me to do the thing

I think that's reasonable to some extent but it can't be all of course we want to obey the Lord we don't want to live in disobedience we don't want to live under his guilt for sure but that can't be our main motivation perhaps sometimes our gospel work is out of a sense of obligation oh pastor's asking again that we do the thing I guess I should sign up for the group or I'm going to be scowled at obligated to do stuff I gotta go do the evangelistic thing I gotta I need to say this we feel an obligation to it maybe that's related to guilt I think the thing that drives those with a really a sincere heart for discipling I think it's driven by joy it's just joy in knowing that you get to be a part of God's work there's really nothing quite like seeing someone grow in their faith because God uses you to minister to them in a particular way there's joy what motivates the work that you do in our church through our church and to our church what I've tried to do is lay out for you from this text through Paul's example what it looks like to have a heart for ministry it isn't casual it doesn't work it's an unrelenting desire to build others up in

Christ it fights against the enemy its efforts are driven by joy we just want to see people come to Christ and glorify the Lord it's as passionate for God's work now as it was for sin prior to knowing Christ and it's not a reality reserved for those who like Paul have unique ministry callings I think this is something God delights for all of us to possess but the fact is that many of us if not all of us are going to fall short of this I think we probably all say yeah probably all of us I don't mean to lay a burden on you with that I think we understand the progressive sanctifying work of God so let me close by giving a few suggestions how might we cultivate this heart for gospel ministry number one pray pray

I really do believe this is a divine work I think that work is initiated at conversion God changes our affections doesn't he but we don't go from being lost in sin to being an immensely mature Christian in a moment do we there's a progressive work of sanctifying that God does in us it's initiated at our conversion and it's progressively grown as we walk in the spirit and in the word it's a work that God does in us so I think we should ask him to do it ask him to do it make it a part of your prayer Lord my heart is weak give me a heart for ministry give me a heart for worship give me a heart for you for Christ

[37 : 01] I think that's a prayer that God delights to answer I think we just need to be willing to pray it number two repent repent developing a heart for gospel ministry requires at some level it's going to require sacrifice isn't it it's going to require the abandonment of lesser things that stand in its way so what good is it for us to do the first thing to pray that God would grant us this heart if we refuse to repent of the idols that grip us instead number three study the gospel preach the gospel to yourself every day the most effective tool that God uses to do his work in us is the gospel itself the gospel is not just for our conversion it's for all of life isn't it and the more we glory in the good news of

Jesus the more we will have this desire to share it with others again that's a work of the spirit in us as we stare at the cross and we begin to plumb the depths of God's love in the death and love in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the freeness of salvation that he offers to us to anyone who will come to him how will it not motivate us to want to engage in that work oh stare at the cross four think about eternity one of the things that has been so apparent to me lately!

is how often the apostles in particular in the New Testament had their minds fixed on the future they were active in the present they weren't living in a dream world but they were always looking ahead they had heaven on their minds they had the return of Christ on their hearts imagining no doubt what it will be like to worship with myriads and myriads of people who have been saved by the lamb that's what revelation tells us will happen a myriad of myriads uncalculable numbers of people what will it be like to worship the Lord in eternity with them and when our minds are set on heaven and the glory of it and the glory of the gospel will that not then cause us to look at our husband and our wife and our children and our friends and our neighbors and think I want them to be there with me I want to help them get there to minister this wonderful gospel to them final thing fifth how do we cultivate this heart you just do it right you just do it there really is nothing quite like leading someone to

Christ I don't know how many of you have had that personal experience where the Lord has graciously allowed you to sit down with someone and see that moment of rebirth when their eyes are opened and their heart is transformed and they believe the gospel and they trust in Christ there is nothing really like that the same goes for when you are!

sitting down with! Christian and you know they have things going on in their life or maybe there is sin that you need to confront and whatever it may be you are sitting down with them and the Lord is using you to transform them to do his work in them and you see it and you sense it and they sense it and you understand it there is nothing quite like that!

[40 : 42] the more you intentionally engage you'll see the fruitfulness of God's work through you and you'll crave it more and more to pray remove the distractions the busyness whatever whatever's standing in the way oh stare at the cross think about heaven and then just do it make the call schedule the appointment send the text if that's the best way to get at it do what you must so that you might joy in the presentation of other people before Christ when he comes