

And now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not account my life as any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus Christ to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I've gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day, I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[5 : 08] I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I didn't cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands minister to my necessities and to those who are with me. In all things, I've shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all.

And they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word that he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

[6 : 24] And then they accompanied Paul to the ship. What a beautiful, beautiful words. Let's pray. This is such an inspirational text, Lord, that certainly for pastors and those called to oversee the flock of God, but even for all of us as believers, to give our life to something, to really make it count, to be all in on this mission for the Lord Jesus, to give everything that we have, to be willing to do anything you call us to do for the sake of the glory of God.

So come and talk to us. Speak through me your words. Motivate us by your grace, not by guilt, to take seriously this mission, this life that you've given each one of us.

And I pray to that end that Christ would be glorified in all things. And we pray it in his name. And God's people said, Amen. Amen. You can be seated. He went the distance, not just in the movie, but also in life.

When most people think of Sylvester Stallone, they almost immediately associate him with his role in Rocky, one of the most famous movie series ever.

Most of you know the story of Rocky Balboa, and if you don't, shame on you. A washed-up fighter who gives it everything he has to become the boxing champion.

[8 : 03] But while almost all of you or most of you are aware of that story, what many of you might not be aware of is how the Rocky movies even came to be. You see, back in the early 1970s, Sylvester Stallone was an unknown actor just trying to make it.

And he was absolutely and completely broke. He had no car. He had about \$100 in his bank account. And he barely even had enough to eat.

In fact, he said in an interview this, quote, I actually had to go out and sell my dog. Sounds like a country song. I had to go sell my dog because it was either that or my dog wasn't going to be able to eat, close quote.

And so then one night, Stallone goes and he watches Muhammad Ali fight Chuck Wepner. And what happened is that Wepner went the distance, which is where you get that phrase in the movie. He went the distance with Ali. And not only did he go the distance, he actually knocked Ali down a time or two. And that inspired Stallone so much so that he went home and wrote the script for Rocky in three days about a fighter willing to take a stand, somebody that believed in something, somebody that was willing to do whatever it took to be the champion.

[9 : 35] That same commitment and that same passion was also needed in Stallone's life. You see, after he wrote the script for Rocky, he actually went and pitched the idea to a group of producers to which they said, we really like the idea.

We really like the story. There's just one thing we don't like. You. You see, Stallone was committed to the idea that he had to play the lead role.

He believed this was a part that was made for him, but the producers didn't like that. So they offered him, I mean, they wanted like Burt Reynolds and, you know, people like that. So they offered him three.

Remember, he's broke. He doesn't have any money. He's got \$100 in the bank account. They offer him \$360,000 for the script as long as he doesn't play the leading role. Stallone said, no.

He refused to compromise his belief in himself. He refused to compromise his conviction that this was a part he was meant to play. In fact, he said this in that same interview, quote, I may be totally wrong, but I believe in this.

[10:48] I may be totally wrong, but I believe in this. And needless to say, his commitment and his dedication paid off. Eventually, the producers relented.

They gave Stallone \$1 million to make the movie starring himself. And the rest, Faith Family, is history.

Rocky goes on to receive nine Oscar nominations, winning three of them, one of which was the best picture. And the series itself has grossed over, I don't know, \$1.4 billion.

Faith Family, here's my question for you. Have you ever believed in something so much that no matter what, you refuse to budge? Have you ever believed in something so much that no matter what, you refused to back down and to budge?

And I'm not talking stubbornness. Oh, some of you have that spiritual gift really good. I'm not talking about stubbornness kind of won't back down. I mean conviction. I mean commitment. I mean passion.

[11:56] I mean, you believed in something. And you were committed to it no matter what. And that idea of commitment is something that every single one of us knows is so incredibly important in almost every area of life.

If you want to be healthy, you know you've got to be committed to eating right and working out. That's the way it works. If you want to be really good at sports, you've got to be committed to do the kind of training that's necessary.

If you want to succeed academically, you've got to be committed to study. If you want to succeed vocationally, you've got to be committed to your work and be willing to work hard.

If you want to succeed financially, you've got to be committed to following a budget and being on a plan. If you want to be a good parent, I mean you know you've got to commit time to be with them and to be engaged with them.

Here's my point. Everybody, everybody in this room and everybody listening online knows that there are areas in life, almost every area in life, where commitment is required.

[13:01] We would say, of course you can't be that unless you're committed to it. Let me ask you, why is it that we accept that in almost every area of our life then how much more as Christians should we be committed to the mission the Lord Jesus Christ has called us to?

Is that not greater than eating right and exercising? Is that not greater than being successful academically? This is what God has put us on the planet for.

Are we committed? Are we willing to give our lives for this mission? You say, why all that set up? Because I believe the verses that we just read, that is exactly what we see, isn't it, in the Apostle Paul's life. A man who gave, and remember, I had the opportunity last summer to go on sabbatical and travel the footsteps of the Apostle Paul.

And I mean, it's brought the book of Acts a lot. I mean, I literally was under a tree close to where this very conversation likely happened. Where Paul pours out his life, lays it all on the table with these individuals to say, I have given my life for this.

[14:27] Let's pick it up in Acts 20. Paul's in Miletus. That's about roughly 30 miles or so from Ephesus where we left Paul. in Acts chapter 19.

And he's about to depart. He's about to leave and go to Jerusalem and then he's going to go on from there to Rome. And as the text tells us, he spent significant time, three years, with the Ephesians.

And he realizes in this moment that he is likely never going to see them again. I hate goodbyes. So Paul calls all the elders together and he's about to say goodbye to them and he reminds them of how his life has been spent, how he has given them day and night and tears and sweat, how he has

worked hard with his hands for the sake of the mission, for the sake of the gospel.

Look at verse 22. And now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, underline this, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to be there, except the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city imprisonment and afflictions await me.

How would you like for that to be your life verse? I don't know what's going to happen, but the odds are I'm going to be in prison and they're going to beat the snot out of me. Those two things are probably going to happen. Keep reading. But here's the thing.

[15:51] Except that the Holy Spirit, we're not ready for verse 24. So, but notice the phrase that Paul says he's constrained by the Spirit. What I want you to see, first of all, in Paul's life is that he lived life with a sense of calling.

He lived life with a sense of calling. It wasn't about where he wanted to go. Remember, he wanted to go to Asia, but the Lord wouldn't let him and sent him to Macedonia.

So he understands that this life isn't about where I want to go. It's not about the circumstances that I want to be in. I wouldn't choose prison or getting the snot beat out of me. That is not exactly how I would want to spend my days, but this is my lot.

This is what God has called me to do. Paul realizes that when he surrendered his life to the Lord, his life is now lived for something greater than himself.

There's a call on his life. He is constrained by the Spirit. And even though he knows most of the time suffering is going to come with this, he is called of God.

[16:57] So he must go and he must serve and he will do it with everything he has. Paul lived with a sense of purpose that controlled his life.

And the question I have for you, the question I have for me is do you? Do you wake up in the morning with the sense of calling, of purpose, that God has you here to do something?

Do you believe that the things that you're doing, you're doing because this is what God has called you to do. You are constrained by the Spirit. You might want to work somewhere else.

You might want to live somewhere else, wouldn't we all? You might want to be somewhere else, but God has you right there, right here for a purpose.

And you are constrained by the Spirit of God and you must do what God has called you to do.

That's how the Apostle Paul lived. Some of you will remember the old movie Chariots of Fire about Eric Lindell, the famous Olympic runner, back in the 1920s.

[18:09] Many of you know he was not only a Christian, he was also a missionary. And he took a lot of heat for why he didn't give up running to spend more time as a missionary.

I mean, why waste your time on all that running stuff and Olympics and competition and give more time to the mission field? And here was his response. Here's what he said.

Many of you know this quote. It's very famous. I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.

I'm going to get in your grill. What has God called you to do? Listen, it's not going to be a missionary. I mean, it might be. God has called some out of faith family to do that.

But it's not going to be everybody in the same way that it was for the Apostle Paul. It's not going to be to be a preacher of the gospel like God has called me to do, but he's called you to do something.

[19:08] And don't over-spiritualize it. Eric Liddell understood that his running was a gift that God had given him and that there was an actual call on his life to run, not just be a missionary.

And so I'm trying to get you to think, what is that for you? What is it that you do constrained by the Spirit of God and you cannot do otherwise? Martin Luther King Jr.

said this. This is one of my favorite quotes of his. He says, quote, If it falls on your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep the streets. You have to say that very carefully. Sweep the streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

I love that because we want to, oh, I'm no Apostle Paul, right? I'm, you know, God's not going to use me to convert thousands of people. We ain't talking about that.

[20:20] What is the sweeping of streets? What is the running that God made you fast? What is it that God's called you to do? He's gifted you to do.

What are the relationships He's given you? What's the work environment He's given you? You have a calling on your life. God has entrusted you with gifts, with this life.

Don't waste it. You say, Pastor, I can't change the world. And my response to you would be this. Notice it on the screen. Hello, you're not called to change the world, but you are called to change something in the world.

Let me say that again. You're not called to change the world, but you're called to change something in the world, to give your life to something for the glory of God.

And you say, how do you know that I have a purpose? Here's my answer. Your breathing by your being here means God has something for you to do on His mission.

[21 : 26] I don't know what that is for you, but I hope that you do. And if you know what that is, then ask God for His grace to do it well. If you don't know what that is, then you know what you're going to start doing tonight.

You're going to start praying and you're going to start going before the Lord and you're going to start talking with other believers and you're going to have people speak into your life so that you can figure out what your calling is.

Are you with me? Oh, good. Two of you. That's really, really deep. Here I am pouring my heart out, not shrinking back from preaching the Word of God. And you with me?

Eh, eh, kind of. I'm teasing. How could Paul take this approach, right? Why would he be so devoted to the mission? And again, verse 24, I think, really spells this out.

This is a life verse. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself. This is the only thing I care about, that I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

[22 : 35] You see, where I end up, I don't always want to go. And what happens to me when I'm there is not how I would have planned it. It's usually quite painful.

But the reason why I keep going, do you remember back in chapter 18 when I was in Corinth and I was so discouraged I wanted to give up? This is Paul talking, okay? Do you remember when the Lord had to come to me in a vision and say, you're going to keep on speaking?

Don't be afraid. I have people in this city. Nobody's going to harm you. Do you remember when I was that low? Do you know why I keep going? I keep going because the Lord has taught me that this isn't about me.

It's not about my life. It's not about what happens to me. It's not about whether I'm in prison or not in prison or they like me or they don't like me or they, whatever.

I don't count my life of any value or precious to myself. There's only one thing I'm concerned about and that is finishing this race of being faithful to the ministry I've received from the Lord Jesus which is to testify to the grace of God.

[23 : 49] Paul understood what we should understand which is when we said yes to the Lord Jesus we said no to ourselves. We crucified ourselves. It's no longer I who live it's Christ who lives through me.

And we see this in other areas of life. We see examples of this. I mean take for instance a parent. I mean how many parents say I don't account my life of any value if only my children are safe and loved.

Right? Do you not sacrifice yourself for your children or a police officer or a firefighter? I don't count my life of any value if only I can keep those in my community safe.

Or maybe somebody in the military. I don't count my life of any value as long as I can serve my country and protect my brother or sister. In other words if that's true for children for our community and for our country how much more for Christ?

I don't count my life of any value. I have crucified that with Christ. It is now about finishing this course that He's called me to.

[25 : 00] So when the mission of Christ becomes something that we're fully committed to work changes the neighborhood we live in changes our parenting changes life changes because it's no longer about our life it's about Christ's mission through us and in us.

So Paul here lived with a sense of calling. Here's the second thing I want us to see and that is that Paul lived with a sense of conviction. He not only lived with a sense of calling he lived with a sense of conviction. Look in verse 18.

And when they came to Him Paul said to them you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day I set foot in Asia serving the Lord with all humility and with all tears and trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews how I did not shrink back underline that

from declaring to you anything that was profitable in teaching you in public and from house to house testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now jump down to verse 25. And now behold I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of you all.

Here it is. I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. So twice in this passage Paul says I did not shrink back.

[26 : 26] I didn't hold anything back. When it came to the word of God when it came to the gospel when it came to the grace of God I didn't shrink back in telling you the truth of God.

There was not a compromising bone in my body. I declared to you the gospel. That phrase to shrink back it's the idea of putting up a sail of like a boat that's just kind of drifting at sea.

In other words ultimately literally what Paul is saying is when I was with you I didn't drift. There wasn't a single time night or day with tears and hardship I never drifted.

I didn't shrink back I didn't hold back because I was convicted about the word of God convicted about the gospel. And so I spoke it to you faithfully and obediently before the Lord.

Do you know any Christians faith family that are drifting? And is that Christian you? Have you just kind of been floating around?

[27 : 37] There's no real sense of conviction that's driving you in your life. Paul says don't live that way don't throw it in neutral don't be like a boat just drifting at sea have conviction and live with calling.

And I thought about this I thought why would listen if Paul said I didn't shrink back from declaring to you the grace of God and I asked this question why would you shrink back anyways from telling somebody about the grace of God?

Are you tracking with me? Who doesn't love grace? Right? I mean why would grace be something you would ever be tempted to shrink back from declaring anyways? Doesn't everybody want to hear grace?

So what would the temptation have been? Here's what I think it would have been notice it on the screen to fully understand God's grace you have to fully understand your sin amen?

That is you have to realize how messed up you are and you are really messed up I am too you have to realize how much you have rebelled against God and in all of that the one that you offended eternally that is the holy God of the universe the one you offended not only wants to forgive you he wants to welcome you home in other words faith family notice on the screen before grace comforts you grace offends you you you have to declare that we are all sinners in order to enjoy the overwhelming amazing reality that's called the grace of God grace is amazing only in light of our sinfulness but when I realize just how rebellious I am towards God and yet God loves me anyways unconditionally and eternally that he's that father to me then grace becomes amazing so why would it be tempting to shrink back because nobody wants to hear about their sin nobody wants to be told that they're sinners we live in a culture of self-help we're all snowflakes that are just beautifully independent and nobody's you know like you you're so special and sweet it's not what the gospel says the gospel says you are a sinner rebellious towards God you deserve eternal condemnation and judgment because of your sin but here's the good news of the gospel the Lord wants to welcome you home the Lord wants to receive you anyways the Lord wants to forgive you of all your rebellion and give you a new heart you gotta have both amen and so there would have been a temptation as I think there's a temptation in a lot of pulpits in America to preach the grace part but not the sin part but it's the sin part that makes us amazed at the grace part and Paul is saying when it came to the grace of God when it came to the gospel and it came to the whole counsel of God's word

[30 : 49] I didn't shrink back and that is why he will say in verse 26 I'm innocent of your blood look at Ezekiel chapter 33 Ezekiel chapter 33 you'll notice it here on the screen Ezekiel chapter 33 this phrase that I'm I'm innocent of the blood of you all actually goes back to this Old Testament example in Ezekiel 36 33 verse 1 Ezekiel 33 verse 1 I'm turning and you're just staring at the screen so give me a second alright some of you are like hurry up verse 1 the word of the Lord came to me son of man speak to your people and say to them if I bring the sword upon a land and the people of the land take a man from among them and make him their watchman and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people then if anyone who hears the

sound of the trumpet doesn't take the warning and the sword comes and takes him away his blood shall be upon his own head he heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning his blood shall be upon himself but if he had taken warning he would have saved his life but if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet so that the people are not warned and the sword comes and takes any of them that person is taken away in his iniquity but his blood

I will require of the watchman's hand do you see like if I don't warn you that's on me I have a responsibility to declare to you the word of God if I warn you and you don't listen that's on you because you've been given the whole counsel of God's word you've been given the truth of God and you didn't listen to it and so what Paul is saying here is listen I proclaim to you not only I proclaim to you the gospel which was your sin and that you could turn from that sin and experience the amazing grace of God if you didn't do it I'm innocent of your blood and tonight for you as well week after week after week you come to faith family we try to faithfully proclaim to you the gospel of Jesus Christ have you turned to him have you received Christ as your savior listen all I can do is proclaim the word to you how you respond is on you and Paul says

I am innocent of your blood I did my job I did what God called me to do I preached my conviction I didn't compromise it at all how you respond will be what you are accountable to notice this on the screen faith family conviction is more than just a belief you hold it's the courage to act it isn't just the I really believe this I believe it so much I gotta say it I gotta declare it I gotta tell them here's what Charles Spurgeon writes if sinners be damned at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies and if they perish let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees imploring them to stay if hell must be filled let not one go unwarned or unprayed for that is our responsibility to be witnesses of the Lord

Jesus and Paul felt called and convicted to give his life to that you with me faith family does our conviction about the gospel compel us to live boldly for the gospel I guess kind of what I'm asking is the sail up or down are you drifting or could you tonight be inspired by the life of the apostle Paul to give your life to this thirdly quickly at the same time Paul didn't live with reckless abandonment right he wasn't just wild and reckless in his living note number three Paul lived with a godly caution a godly caution just note a few things here verse 28 verse 28 pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood for I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves are going to arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them so be alert remembering that for three years

I didn't cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears Paul warns them to pay attention to be alert because and we've talked about this before faith family if you've zoned out zoned back in okay the enemy is always lurking the enemy is always lurking so it's important to live with a sense of calling amen it's important to live with a sense of conviction but it's also important to live with the awareness that you're in a battle that you're in a war so this isn't like yeah calling and conviction we're just gonna go out with you know little water guns and we're gonna take hell and just it's just kind of reckless abandonment no no no Paul's saying there's an enemy out there there's a real enemy that wants in fact how does Peter describe him he's a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour that's not cute okay he wants to destroy you and so

[36 : 39] Paul is saying yes live with a calling yes have conviction about the gospel but be alert be careful be aware that there are powers and principalities around you all the time that want to trip you up Paul speaks here of fierce wolves I think there are three categories actually that Paul gives us here I'm just gonna hit them quickly and then we're gonna move on the first category is external false teachers external false teachers these are the fierce wolves of verse 29 and there are people that I would put and groups that I would put in this category things like the prosperity gospel let me just say it this way okay Pat will appreciate this anybody that says Jesus plus something is a fierce wolf because the gospel is Jesus plus nothing it is Jesus alone that was a great place for an amen I thought you would like jump out of your seats and shout hallelujah over that because that's what we believe it isn't

Jesus plus baptism or Jesus plus follow the law or Jesus plus whatever a certain denomination says it's Jesus plus nothing anybody that adds something to Jesus is a false gospel or teaches a false gospel and there are lots of them out there the prosperity gospel again Jesus isn't the treasure Jesus is the means to get you to a treasure moral therapeutic deism break that down that's simply the idea that yes there is a God and you just need to be a good moral person there are so many

external false teachings that you must be cautious of number two is internal false teachers Paul says that men will rise up and twist the truth this tends to happen in church life in two different ways I'm almost done so hang with me the first is legalism and the other is liberalism and I'm not talking politics there I'm just talking about the idea that you can do whatever you want or you have to follow my rules this is what tends to happen within the church it's not the external false teaching it's an internal where we take the gospel and we twist it just enough to either enslave people or justify anything and Paul says you've got to be cautious of that as well thirdly is internal false motives internal false motives

Paul goes on to say in verse 28 and then in verse 33 through 35 you know I didn't desire silver right I didn't desire money or accomplishments or gratitude that's not what I was I was motivated by in fact you remember what the Lord Jesus said it's more blessed to give than receive like my motive is just to pour my life out to be a fragrant offering to be a drink offering poured out for the mission of Christ I'm not asking for anything in return I don't want a monument to the apostle Paul in Ephesus it's not what I'm in it for okay what I want is just to see you fall in love with Jesus and live for Jesus and protect his church do you see so Paul's saying listen listen listen in fact I wrote this in my notes to kind of summarize that he's saying to these leaders don't put the sail up and don't let the guard down don't drift and don't lose sight of the enemy that is lurking and so from his life live with calling to live with conviction but to also live with a sense of godly caution and then I will close with this I close with this last and very brief point and I mean that is Paul's impact look at the impact this man has because he lived with a sense of calling and conviction alert look at verse 36 I think this is just just beautiful when he said all these things he kneels down and he prays with them and there was much weeping on the part of them all and they embraced Paul I want you to picture that in your mind they embraced Paul and they kissed him being sorrowful and here's why they're sorrowful because of what he had said that they would not see his face again I mean God used this man in such an incredible way that there were tears at the idea that we won't see you again this side of glory why because he poured his life out because he had given everything to this ministry because he didn't count his life as valuable that only he would finish his course in the ministry he'd received from the Lord here is a man that lived with conviction that lived with calling that lived with a caution but also made a huge impact for the

Lord Jesus Christ I close with this faith family never underestimate never underestimate how God can use your life for his purpose I mean that and I hope you'll believe that don't underestimate how God can use your life for his purpose and if you feel tonight like you are lacking commitment if you feel like you're lacking conviction for this mission what I often have you do is take time and think on your Savior meditate on the Lord Jesus remember that he was the one that was much more than Paul committed to the mission of the Father do you remember what Jesus said in John 4 quote my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work in John chapter 6 Jesus said [43 : 02] I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me you see faith family much more than the apostle Paul the greatest example of commitment is the Lord Jesus who through his personal suffering who through relational conflict and through his physical death was committed in every way to the ministry God had called him to pray with me Lord thank you for this passage tonight where we get to look into the apostle Paul's life as he pours out his heart with the leaders in Ephesus a man dedicated to the calling that had been placed on his life who believed in this mission to the point that he was willing to give it all night and day and tears and hardship and whatever it took he was willing to pour his life out and you used him in incredible ways and

I pray tonight that there's this like are we going through the book of Acts for nothing Lord stir in us and stir in this faith family are we in this are we just drifting at sea or do we really believe in this mission and are we willing for the sake of Christ to give everything we have so Lord I don't I don't know what that means for everybody I pray that through your spirit we begin to understand that this is what you called us to do these are the gifts!

you've given us the opportunities you've given us the relationships you've given us and all of that is on purpose so Spirit of God would you come and talk to us and give clarity to the calling constrain our lives for what it is that you would have us do where there's fog bring clarity for the sake of your work in Jesus name we pray amen he