

1 Corinthians 9:1-23 AM

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Date: 21 January 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this week, assuming there isn't another once-every-40-year snowstorm, I plan on running the first of three come-and-see evenings. At these sessions, a diverse group of people with vastly different religious backgrounds will gather to share a meal and then discuss one of the biggest questions of life.

And this week, the first week, we will ask, what is the meaning of life? And that question comes up in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 as well.

What do you feel this morning is your purpose? What currently gives your life meaning? If someone asked you today, would you have an answer?

Or are you just existing without knowing why? Is your life random, monotonous, and purposeless?

Or does it have a trajectory, a goal, and a purpose?

If you're writing down notes, spend a second now and jot down what comes to mind when you think, what's the purpose of my life? Or think for a minute in your head.

[1 : 1 6] It's a question almost none of us ever ask. Now, don't give me some polite, churchy answer. Be honest. Why do you get up in the morning? In 1 Corinthians 9, our text today, Paul tells us the purpose of his life.

And then he invites us to imitate him. Look at the very last verse, verse 23 of chapter 9. Paul writes, I do this all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with others in its blessings.

What motivates Paul to live his life is the gospel. Everything he does, he says, is for the sake of the gospel. Paul only mentions the gospel 11 times in the entire letter of 1 Corinthians.

But 8 of those 11 times are in our text today. 1 Corinthians 9, a chapter on purpose, is about the gospel. The foundation upon which Paul's life is built is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul doesn't define the gospel for us, perhaps unhelpfully in chapter 9. But he does in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. So if your Bible's open, you can flick two pages to your right.

[2 : 3 7] Go to page 961. In chapter 15, verse 1, Paul shares that the gospel is the good news, that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

In verse 3, he writes that he died for our sins to rescue us from all evil. Paul calls Jesus the Christ, is a churchy word, for the King of the kingdom of heaven.

Sent to earth to bring his heavenly kingdom here, and to invite those who believe to enter in and follow him. And we know that Jesus is the Christ, God's chosen King, the Messiah, because verse 4 tells us that three days after he died for our sins and was buried, he rose from the dead.

And he appeared to hundreds of people, including Paul. And these hundreds of eyewitnesses have now spread the good news of Jesus and shared his gospel with everyone they encounter.

So we find out that Jesus is our Savior. He died for our sins. Jesus is the Christ. He brings heaven and eternal life to us.

[3 : 4 4] And then last week, in chapter 8, verse 6, Paul calls Jesus the one Lord, through whom are all things, and through whom we exist. This is the gospel.

This is the foundation of Paul's life. Jesus is the Savior. He died to save you from your sins. Jesus is the Christ.

He is God's chosen King who brings heaven to earth and eternal life with him. And Jesus is the Lord. He is God himself. God the Son come from heaven.

This gospel, according to Paul, notice, is the exact same as the gospel announced at Christmas by the angel to the shepherds. It was four weeks ago, Christmas Eve, today.

Do you remember what the angel says? Luke 2, verse 11. The angel comes to the shepherds and says, Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. For I bring you a gospel of great joy for all people.

[4 : 43] And here's what it is. For unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Savior, Christ, Lord.

That's who Jesus is. That's the gospel. The gospel is the good news about a person who has come from heaven. Jesus, who comes to be our Savior, our King, and our God.

And we don't earn this gospel, notice. It's graciously given to us by a merciful God. That's why it's good news. It's an undeserved gift. And this gospel, this good news, gives purpose to Paul's life and to all who accept Jesus as their Lord and their Savior.

So let's get back to our text now. Notice in verse 23 of chapter 9 that Paul's purpose is not just to know this gospel personally, privately, but rather to share it.

Paul's purpose is spreading the gospel. He tells us he does all things for the sake of the gospel, that in sharing it with people, they may share with him in its blessings.

[5 : 56] Evangelism, sharing the gospel, motivates everything that Paul does. Paul's purpose is to know and share the gospel.

Paul has been gripped by the gospel of God's grace, and he now strives to share Christ. And if you're a Christian, this should be your purpose as well.

When people believe in Jesus and follow him, he commissions us to go and to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us.

If you follow Jesus, your purpose is to share Jesus, to do all things for the sake of the gospel, that the people in your life may share with you in the blessings of the gospel.

Evangelism is not some pet project for a select few super-Christians. You know, those annoying Christians who are not nervous about sharing their faith.

[6 : 57] Evangelism is not an optional aside for the Christian or the church. It's our purpose, our commission, our call. We exist to share Christ, to do all things for the sake of the gospel, that we may share with everyone we encounter in its blessings.

The purpose of life is to know the gospel and to share it so that others may know the gospel. We exist to know God through Jesus Christ, to receive his salvation, and then to joyfully share this unbelievably good news with all the people we encounter.

That's why you exist. Whether you believe it or not. You were made by God to know God, to love God as he loves you, to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus that is defined by never-ending love, enjoying and sharing in his never-ending life.

Your chief end is to worship God and enjoy him forever. And if you know the gospel, then you're invited to now live for the sake of the gospel.

Looking to share this good news with the people you encounter. And today, Paul tells us how. So that's the first half of the sermon.

[8 : 18] It's a bit conceptual. And Paul has revealed to us the purpose of his life. And our purpose, too. We exist to know God through the gospel of his son, Jesus Christ, and to share his gospel that others may know him.

Part two now gets practical. If life's purpose is to know and share the gospel, then how should I live? What does it look like for me to live for the sake of the gospel?

So part one was, what's the purpose of my life? Part two is now, how should I live if that's my purpose? And Paul answers this how question by focusing on our relationships with others.

First, he describes how we should live towards other Christians. Paul articulates a gospel-shaped posture toward other believers. This is the first 18 verses of chapter 9.

And then second, Paul describes how we should live toward people in our lives who aren't Christians. This is verses 19 to 23. So the purpose of our life is to know and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 27] And now here's how to have a gospel-shaped relationship toward other Christians and then toward everyone else. So first, how should we live toward the Christians in our lives in light of the gospel?

We have a theologian in our family and her name's Julia. Julia is six. She's my daughter. And she is patiently discipling me in how to follow Jesus.

My kids have learned that the way to extend their bedtime and to get more quality time with their parents is to wait until the precise moment we're about to turn off the light and say goodnight.

And at that moment, they pounce upon us and they ask these really complicated questions about God that they know we're going to be forced to answer and have an extended conversation. It's the

final moment of their day when these existential questions of existence come out in our household. You know, as a parent, I think I'm clocking out for the night. My shift is ending and then they get me with a buzzer beater. So, a few weeks ago, with my fingers on Julia's light switch, she says, Daddy, at school we read this book about feelings.

[10:46] And a special teacher, probably the school counselor, comes to us every week and reads this book every time she visits. And the book ends with this. Above all, look after yourself.

Watch out for yourself above everything else. Julia recites the book to me and then she asks, but Daddy, doesn't Jesus tell us that we should live our lives looking out for others and helping them, not just living to serve ourselves?

Well done, Julia. Jesus' first followers quickly start jockeying around Jesus to be considered the greatest. They're trying to use Jesus' power and his popularity to make themselves seem powerful and popular.

Until Jesus teaches them this. He says, Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. The posture of the gospel-shaped Christian toward other Christians ought to be a posture of self-sacrificial love and service.

[12:04] To put yourself last in order to put everyone else first. The gospel-shaped life is one where you sacrifice your rights and freedoms to serve other Christians.

This is where Paul finished for us in chapter 8 from last week. Look at verse 13. He writes, Therefore, if food makes my brother or sister in Christ stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother or sister stumble.

Even if we have a right to eat meat, if eating meat is unhelpful to another Christian in my community, then I won't do it. I will become a vegetarian for the sake of your faith.

Or as St. Julia put it, Jesus teaches us to live our lives to serve others, not just to serve ourselves. But Jesus didn't just teach this.

He lived it. He embodied that it's better to give than to receive, to serve rather than to be served. If you aspire to be a great Christian, then you must become the lowest servant.

[13:12] If you want to be first, you must become a slave to all. Because Jesus himself, the Son of God, came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So what should motivate the gospel-shaped Christian life is a willingness to sacrifice our personal freedoms and rights for the sake of serving others, and seeing them be built up in faith.

Paul, in our text, uses himself as an example of this. He asserts in verse 1 that he's an apostle.

That means he has been hand-picked by Jesus and commissioned to bring the gospel to the entire non-Jewish world.

Paul reminds us that he has seen the risen Lord face to face. And because of Paul's status as an apostle, the apostle that brought the gospel to Corinth and founded the church that he's writing to, he has the right to certain privileges.

He lists them. In verse 4, he has a right to eat and to drink. Verse 5, he has a right to get married. Verse 6, he has a right to receive funding from the churches where he serves so that he doesn't need to make a living another way.

[14:27] And yet, in verse 15, Paul tells us that he's made no use of any of these rights, nor does he want to. He gladly gives up all of his rights as a Christian leader to serve others, to see others built up in their faith.

Paul's life is motivated by love rather than motivated by a salary or an impressive job title or sumptuous meals or having a family.

Paul's life is motivated by love, receiving God's love through Jesus and then sharing that love with others. This is how Jesus lived. This is how Paul lived.

And this is how we are called to live too. Flip ahead to chapter 11, verse 1, where Paul summarizes what he's saying this way. He says, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

As Jesus lived, so we should strive to live. We should strive to live lives defined by self-sacrificial service to others rather than seeking self-interest and demanding our personal rights and freedoms.

[15:32] This is what Paul is saying through chapter 9, verse 18. Live to love others, imitating Christ. Sacrifice your personal rights and freedoms to love and serve and build up the faith of your sisters and brothers in Christ.

Put their needs above your rights, just like Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, humbling himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Imitate Christ. That's how we ought to relate to one another. Paul now pivots to show what a gospel-shaped life means and how we relate to the people in our lives who aren't yet believers. This is verses 19 to 23, and we'll finish here. Listen to what he says, beginning at verse 19. For though I am free from all, I'm not under the authority of any person.

I've made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To those outside the church, Paul has made himself a servant to everyone he encounters.

[16:46] Why? What would motivate Paul to live this way? Look again at the end of verse 19, that I might win more of them.

He goes on, starting in verse 20. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are outside the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak.

I have become all things to all people that by all means I may save some. And I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul's not under the authority of any human person or institution. He's an apostle and servant of Jesus Christ and he's responsible to Jesus alone. But the way that Paul exercises this total freedom is not by demanding money or respect, but by giving himself to be a servant of all.

[18:02] And what motivates this self-sacrificial servitude is his singular motivation to see people be saved. Sharing the gospel with his neighbors motivates everything that Paul does.

Evangelism is everything to him. He accommodates himself to every person God has put in his life. Serving them and striving to relate to them in any way possible.

So if the person he encounters is Jewish, then Paul will practice all the Jewish disciplines and laws so that he might share Christ with them. If the person isn't Jewish but is following the Jewish law, then Paul will do likewise.

If the person's outside the law, meaning they don't know or obey what God says, then Paul strives to relate to them too, on their terms. Not compromising his morals or his devotion to Christ, but meeting the person where they are at.

If the person's weak, then Paul will make himself weak rather than exhibiting his strength. The point is this. Become as your neighbor.

[19:11] Meet them on their level so that an opportunity to share the gospel may present itself and so that God may work through you to save them. I live in a townhouse complex in a cul-de-sac and our neighbors are generally really, really nice people.

But very few of them are Christians. One neighbor is a really lovely man. He's married to his high school sweetheart, and together they have a young daughter who my kids adore.

They have not expressed any interest in coming to any church events, despite subtle, gentle hints or non-threatening general invitations.

But through talking to this neighbor, I've learned that he's an avid frisbee golf player. He plays all year. He played this week. At all the courses around the Lower Mainland.

He even puts tape that glows in the dark on his discs so that he can play at night. I didn't even know that was a thing. Now, he may not be comfortable coming to my home turf, to church, but he's invited me to his home turf, playing frisbee golf.

[20:23] I've never played real frisbee golf with the actual, like, small golf discs, but at the risk of embarrassing myself, I will go.

Because to the frisbee golf enthusiast, I shall become a frisbee golf enthusiast. That on the drive to the course, or over drinks afterwards, I may get an opportunity to share with him in the blessings of the gospel.

Another neighbor on the other side is similarly fantastic. He has a family with two kids around my kid's age, and he's a Muslim, and he's really interested that I'm a Christian minister.

We have great garbage day conversations about education and faith and soji and raising kids in a secular city. He said that he's glad he has a God-fearer living next door to him.

And once he mentioned that I should go with him sometimes to daily prayers at his mosque. I should go. Not to worship or to pray to Allah, obviously, but to love my neighbor and to meet him where he is at.

[21 : 28] To take an interest in his life and his faith and to look for opportunities to share Christ and the gospel. Maybe if I go to his mosque sometime, he'll then come to my church.

And maybe he'll bring his family. Maybe all of them will hear the gospel and perhaps even share in its blessings with me. Evangelism should motivate everything we do.

That's the point. We often think evangelism, sharing the gospel, is the work of the church. It's my job to tell your friends about Jesus and to get them to believe in him.

But that's not Paul's understanding. Because here's the problem. I'm never going to meet your friends unless they come to church. And realistically, none of them will ever come here if you haven't taken an interest in their life, met them where they were at, served them, and then invited them when an opportunity has arisen.

Evangelism must begin with you. It doesn't begin with me. I sometimes describe my role here as a spiritual midwife. I'm around when a new Christian is born.

[22 : 41] And I do my best to receive them and to nurture them in their first steps of faith. But the seed of faith planted in our friends and neighbors and coworkers and family members is almost always going to be planted by you.

Out there, rather than by some minister in here. Christians out in the world are the ones who are sowing the seeds of the gospel and sharing Christ with our city.

Most of our neighbors and friends wouldn't be caught dead at a gathering like this one. And so if all of our evangelistic efforts goes to these services that the people who need to hear the gospel will never attend, then what's the point?

The purpose of Paul's life is to know and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. To imitate Jesus by loving other Christians and serving them and by making himself a servant to those who don't know Jesus yet so that there may come an opportunity to sow the seeds of faith.

And if you follow Jesus, he calls you to imitate him. In view of God's mercy, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, sacrifice your rights and freedoms to serve God by serving others.

[23 : 54] Strive to become all things to all people that by any means God may save some of them through you. That's what all of us are called to today. That is the purpose of your life.

And may God help us to joyfully give ourselves to follow Jesus by serving others. Amen.