



Message **Transcript** Making Ministry Count

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You guys ready to hear his word? All right, let's pray. Let's prepare our hearts. Lord, there's nothing wrong with your word. It's always true.

It's always good. It's always living. It's always active. The only challenge is our own hearts and receiving it. So, Lord, we just pray right now that we have fertile soil that our hearts would be right.

Lord, I know what it's like on a Sunday. We can be distracted. Lord, we could even have a root of bitterness towards someone. Lord, we could be thinking other thoughts. We might not even really want to be here.

Lord, I just pray we would bring all those things to the foot of your cross so we could clearly hear what you have to say to us. Lord, you're about ready to speak. So, Lord, we ask your help to all of us. Lord, I ask your help as a preacher, and I'm asking your help in our congregation that we would hear through your holy spirit exactly what you want each one of us to hear and collectively what you want us to hear. And, Lord, for what you're going to do in advance, we give you all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise, and we just want to tell you, Lord, we love you.

We love you, and we're listening to you, and we want to hear you. And so if your heart is ready to receive God's word this morning, just agree with me by saying, amen. Amen. I just encourage you. Open your bible up to one corinthians three.

First corinthians three. We're going to start in verse eight this morning, and while you're turning there, we're really in this section in this series of growing stronger. We're in this section of carnality. We're in this section of people who are Christians, who don't live christianly, people who would say, I've confessed Jesus Christ as my lord and savior, but I'm not living as if he's my lord and savior. And last week, we talked about some of the challenges of what carnality does today.

What we're going to talk about is the point of why it's important that we don't live carnal. And the reason is if you live Carnal, you're going to confuse activity for fruitfulness. Okay. If you're carnal, if you're gonna live for yourself and call yourself a Christian, you're gonna confuse activity for fruitfulness. In other words, you're gonna think if I'm busy or if I go to church or if I join a small group or if I read my bible or if I pray, if I'm just doing the activity, then God's gotta be pleased.

But I wanna tell you, there's a heck of a lot more to it than that. And what Paul's gonna highlight today are four convictions for us that we wanna hang our hat onto for ministry that lasts, okay? Ministry is another name for service. If you're gonna serve the Lord with something that's gonna have eternal impact, these are four convictions that you need to own. Anybody can do activity.

It doesn't mean that it's good activity. It doesn't mean that it's God honoring activity. And it certainly doesn't mean that it's lasting activity. So if you're a believer in Christ and say, hey, listen, I want my life to count. I wanna make sure that when I meet Jesus on judgment day, that I hear the words, well done, good and faithful servant, then these are the convictions that you want to hold.

Now, there's a lot of scriptures that you can read. And sometimes we read God's word and we hear the scripture and we're like, wow, that's so good. I just want to read that again. He loves me so much. There's other times we read the word and we're like, wow, it felt like a cattle prod in me.

I needed to hear that. But, man, that's not very comfortable for me. Let me tell you in advance, this is one of those. Okay, so let's read it. It's first corinthians 3:15.

Let's read it. Let's let the Holy Spirit speak to us through it, and then let's unpack these four convictions right from God's word. As Paul continues to talk about carnality, here's what he says now. He who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building according to the grace of God, which was given to me like a wise master builder, I laid a foundation and another is building on it.

But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident, for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire. And the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work, which he has built on it remains.

He will receive a reward. If any man's work is burnt up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved yet so as through fire. Now, the first time I ever heard this scripture in a way that was convicting to me was in Indianapolis, Indiana, when I was a senior in college. Back in 1993, I was at a Christmas conference, and there were 2000 college students there. And every speaker that got up in this room of 2000, I felt like they were looking right at me and just speaking right to me.

You ever have that feeling when you're in church? Sometimes. Like, how does he talk? How does he know my stuff? And why is he talking to me?

That's what was going on. I was mad about it, actually. And as I was sitting there, I remember this was long before the days of, like, PowerPoint and videos and email and all those things that we just take for granted now. So what they did was they put together this presentation with a slideshow, and slides went in and out, and it was on three different screens. It was like state of the art.

And they did it to this song by a gal named Twyla Paris, who wrote a song about Jim Elliot. Jim Elliot was a man who graduated from college with all sorts of honors,

was a great athlete, had every chance in the world to succeed, and chose to give his life to going to the AuCa Indians in South America to share the gospel with a group of cannibalistic headhunters and a bunch of his friends said, you're a fool. What would you give up your whole life for? And here's what his quote was. He is no fool if he would choose to give the thing he cannot give, to buy the thing he can never lose.

And so she wrote a song about it, all about his life. I'm getting choked up thinking about it. I remember what it was like sitting there watching this man's life on the big screen, about how he gave up his athletic career, his business career, and everything to go share the gospel with headhunters. Cannibalistic headhunters. They spent a year flying over this village and dropping presents and doing all this stuff until finally the day came where they were going to go down and share the love of Jesus with this group of people they've been intensely praying for.

And as soon as they got off the airplane, these cannibalistic headhunters came. And as they raised their hands in the air and surrendered, they fired arrows at them and killed all four of these men. And in God's sovereign providence, as he would have it. Some of their wives ended up going in and sharing the gospel as to why their husbands were there. And many of these headhunters became believers in Jesus

Christ, and a church was formed to the glory of God and will meet many of those people in heaven.

And I'm telling you, I was watching this video back when I was 23 years old, and I was crying, I mean, tears, like, God was speaking in my heart, like, would you give your life to me like this? Would you do this? And I was just weeping, thinking, man, I want to do whatever I can for you. But you know what it's like when you're around other people and they can see what you're doing. I mean, so as soon as I could tell, the song was almost over.

My roommate, who was sitting next to me, who I had led to Christ some six months earlier, who had been telling me I need to go into ministry, who had been seeing God's call on my life, even though I didn't see it. I tried drying my eyes. I'm like, you know, you know this? He leaned over to me. As soon as the lights came, I was like, hey, what did you think of that dog?

And I was like, you know, it was all right. It was a pretty good video.

And within five minutes, I said, you know, I'll be honest. I mean, as I was watching that, I mean, I just got choked up. I said, I think God's calling me into ministry. Mistake. He's like, I told you that.

I've been telling you that for six months. He's like, what are you going to do, man? You got to make a decision now. The Lord's calling you. Are you going to say no to the Lord?

I'm like, get away from me. So he went and got our campus crusade for Christ director, who read this very passage to me. And as he read this passage, he said, yeah, you'll still be saved, but you're going to lose all sorts of rewards, and you'll have nothing to present to Jesus. I didn't want to hear that either. So I went up to our hotel room on the 12th floor, and I stood in there.

Wouldn't you know? About 15 minutes later, Aaron comes walking through the door. He's like, dude, did you decide yet? Did you tell the Lord? So I went into the bathroom, and I shut the door, and I turned off the light, and I knelt down by the

commode, and I said, lord, I'll do whatever you want with my life.

I'll preach, I'll teach, I'll do whatever you want, but I'm not going into full time ministry. Amen. And I got up, and that was it. Now, eight months later, as the lord continued to work in my life by his grace, I remember surrendering my life and saying, lord, if you want me to get on a plane and go to New guinea this afternoon and not say goodbye to any of my family, whatever you want me to do, wherever you want me to go for the rest of my life, I'm yours. And just instantaneously, peace came into my life.

But it was this scripture passage that played a huge role in it. Now, as God's providence would have it, that friend reached out to me this week, just happenstance. And I was telling him when I was getting ready to preach on, and he's like, dude, didn't you go into the bathroom and close the door? I'm like, yeah, I did. He's like, man, you were so scared back then.

I'm like, I was because I thought that if I did what God wanted me to do, I was going to be miserable. I thought if God did what he wanted me to do, I'd be poor, miserable, broke, felt sorry for. I'm not doing what God wants me to do because I

know what I need to do. I'm not giving him everything. You can have most everything, but not everything.

That's what the scripture's about. If you live carnally, you'll tell God, here's what I'm doing for you. Aren't you lucky to have me? Hey, look at the money we tithe. Hey, look at my service.

I'm in church most of the time. Hey, look at the way I love people at work. Hey, look what I'm doing for you. That's carnality service is this, Lord, you have everything. I don't even know if you're getting anything done through me, but if you are, to your glory, you can use my body, my life, my resources, my stuff, any way you want.

And if that's the kind of conviction that you want, and all God's people want that deep down, we all want that. It's just the enemy lies to us and says, don't give him everything. Don't give him everything. It's when you give him everything that you're filled with God's peace. That's what this passage is about.

Paul is telling the Corinthians, if you're living carnal, you're going to miss out on being the strong believer God wants you to be. And there's four convictions that he's going to highlight from this. And if you own these four convictions, you'll have something beautiful to present to the Lord someday when you meet him. If you want lasting, impactful service, it owns four convictions. The first conviction it owns is this.

It's a conviction that repudiates isolated ministry but joyfully serves Christchurch together. Listen to this conviction. This conviction repudiates isolated ministry but joyfully serves Christ church together. Notice what he says in verse eight. He's just gotten done.

He's using a field analogy here. He's using the agricultural analogy for the church of watering and planting and sowing and harvesting, all this kind of stuff. And he just got done saying, hey, you know, Apollos and Paul, what are we? We're just servants. That's all we are.

We're servants. You know what a servant is? A servant is one who takes orders

and just says yes sir. That's what a servant is. Paul's saying that's all we are.

We just say yes sir to Jesus whatever he tells us. Notice what verse eight says now. He who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building. Notice what he says.

We're God's fellow workers, we're one. We're in this thing together. Paul doesn't look at himself as I'm better than Apollos or Apollos is better than me. There's no comparison in the kingdom. There's no comparison.

It's just I'm a servant and here's what God does through me and he's a servant. And here's what God does through him and she's a servant. And here's what God does through her. For we're just God's fellow workers, which means we're partnering with God and he's working through us to get his work done. You're the field, you're the church.

We're pouring into you so that the Church of Jesus Christ can be elevated. It repudiates isolated ministry. Paul didn't start the apostle Paul Evangelistic association and Apollos didn't start Apollos ministries and Peter didn't start, you know, we're the Jews and we didn't start all that. What are they about? They're about one thing.

They're about God's people in the church growing to their full potential. That's what we're about. Because they understood the words of Jesus when he prayed on the night that he was betrayed. Now, you can learn a lot about people when they go through stressful times. It's usually the time where you squeeze a person and you see what kind of fruit comes out.

You can kind of squeeze a person when they're going through tough times. And is it sweetness or is it sourness? I mean, it's usually those difficult times that reveal what a person's true heart is. And Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, we get one of his prayers recorded here. It's called the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ.

It's recorded in John, chapter 17. So this is the very night Jesus is being betrayed. This is when he knows he's gonna be shackled and chained and whipped

and beaten. He knows he's going to the cross. He knows he's going to die.

And here's how he prays for his disciples and future disciples like us, in John 17:21. Here's what he prays. That they may be what future disciples? Church one. That they may be one even as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they may also be in us.

Why? So that the world may believe that you sent me. Why does Jesus want oneness in his disciples? So that the world will know that he's God. He goes on to say, the glory which you have given me, I have given to them.

That they may be one, just as we are one. That they may have the same oneness in the church as Father, that you and I share, which, by the way, was perfect oneness. Then he goes on to say this in verse 23 of John 17. I in them and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you have loved me. What's Jesus prayer for the world?

What's Jesus number one prayer for global evangelization? Yeah, it's going to be the filling of the spirit that's going to come. To do what? To bring the church together in unity, to be one. Because when the world looks on and sees people of different skin colors and different socioeconomic backgrounds and different family backgrounds and everything different, they see the world different politically in every other way.

But the one thing we agree on is that Jesus Christ is Lord, and therefore we love one another with an unconditional, radical love. Then the world looks on and says, who's this God that you believe in? Well, it's Jesus, and he loves us the same way that he loves you. That's what Jesus said. It's oneness.

So Paul repudiated isolated ministry. Paul was all about serving the church. And just a word on that, okay? We live in a day and age where we think what we're missing out on is more Bible knowledge. Okay?

The Bible says, my people fail for lack of knowledge. I mean, knowledge is important. God wants us to preach and proclaim his word. It's important. But that's not why we're failing, okay?

We're failing because we don't take what we have and put it into practice by serving. We don't put into practice what we do know. We're kind of waiting for that next sermon to tickle our hearts or tickle our ears just right so that maybe one day I'll get there. Here's what Jesus says. Serve.

Here's what Paul says. Serve. Here's what the word says. Serve. Let me tell you something about a servant, because a servant just says, yes, sir to the one who's giving the commands.

And because the Church of Jesus Christ is the most important thing, and because God's appointed leadership in the church, what would it be like? I mean, just for fun, just play along with me. I know you can't imagine this, but what would it be like if instead of coming into church and saying, here's what my gifts are, here's how good I am, here's what I do, here's where I can serve, here's how much time I have to give you? What if. Well, just what if?

Just imagine this. I know it's really hard to imagine. Imagine if everybody that came into the church said, Jesus, I'm here for you. Yes, sir. Hey, wherever people need to put me, as long as the work gets done, I don't care where I go.

I don't care how much time it takes. If I get put in children's and I don't like it, it's okay. As long as you're pleased with me, God, I'll do whatever you want and give my best here. What would the church be like? Can I just.

I know it's hard to imagine, but let me tell you what it'd be like. It would blow people away. There'd be so much radical fruit that would be taking place because when people come in, they'd realize, I'm not coming in to be somebody. I'm coming in for somebody. I'm coming in for Jesus to serve him.

It doesn't matter if anybody notices me. It doesn't matter if I get a name badge for the thing that I'm doing, so long as I get to be your servant and contribute to the greater good of your church. I'm in. Can I just go out on record and say one other thing, too? The field or this building that we're going to talk about, it's the church.

He said, well, how do you know that? Because Paul is writing to a church. The church is the hope of the world. There's two mistakes that we make oftentimes. I just want to learn.

I just want to be fed. I just want to. It's great to learn. It's great to be fed for one purpose, so that you can take what you know and serve, so that you can become better servants in the church, better servants in your home, better servants in your community. Serve.

Okay. We sometimes make the mistake that, well, church isn't doing it for me. Church. I didn't church. I'm just going to leave church and I'm going to go over here and go to this Bible study because that'll feed me.

Don't neglect your service to the church, no matter how spiritual you think something else might be. Because what's Jesus care about when you own. The conviction of what Jesus cares about is that he died for his church. He rose for his

church. He's coming back for his church.

He loves his church. He intercedes for the church. This is God's vehicle, the church, you might say, well, I don't like harvest Bible chapel in Denver. That's okay. Jesus loves it.

Jesus died for it. He shed his blood for it. He cares about it. Maybe you either need to realign or find someplace that you do love and go serve it. Paul is saying, hey, I'm nothing.

I'm just a servant. Apollo says nothing, just a servant. But guess what? We are. We're one.

So we repudiate isolated ministry. We celebrate what each other does, all in the purpose of building God's church around the world. And I can tell you this as a pastor, I mean, we had a prayer conference here a couple weeks ago and had a number of

different pastors come in and speak. You know, pastor from Las Vegas spoke. Pastor from Brooklyn, New York spoke in the evening.

I love those guys. They're on team Jesus. They're on my team. I've been praying for them since they left. I've been praying for their churches, especially the pastor who lives in Las Vegas that's been sorting through all the pieces in their ministry in this last week because of what's going on and how they can be a light in a very dark time in a city that God wants to resurrect and show his glory in.

Amen. We're all part of the same team, repudiating isolated ministry. When you have the attitude, what's in it for me? When you have the attitude, who's going to notice me? When you have the attitude, I don't really care about the church.

I just care about making sure my ministry gets done. You don't have the heart of Jesus Christ. You have to have a conviction that we're his fellow workers. Now, when you do this, understand this, that means there's no prima donnas in the church. It means there's no lone rangers in the church.

Notice what Paul says. He says, you know, one plants, one waters. We're doing different things, but we're all one. But notice this. But each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Each. You'll receive your own reward according to your own labor. And I'll talk to you about that in a minute. How you contribute to God's church is the reward that you'll get. That's the word of God, right?

So we all serve. We can all serve in different capacities. We can all serve in different gifted areas. But how you contribute in your area to the church is how you're gonna get rewarded. It's kind of like this.

And I've shared this analogy with you before. I mean, you might think you're a great basketball player. You might think you're a great shooter. I'm the best shooter ever. Well, you're only good to the extent that you can contribute to a team where your gift is actually used to help them down the field.

I mean, just cause you shoot on the playground and say, I'm awesome, I'm awesome, I'm awesome, who cares? I mean, just cause you were so gifted in the lord and you can do all these things if it's not contributing to the church, here's what Jesus would say. Who cares? I'm trying to build my church. I gifted you to serve the church.

That's a conviction. I wish I could tell you that my entire ministry, I've shared that conviction, because I haven't. I've told you, and I've been very candid with you, how many times I felt like, you know what? God's gifted me to do this. I'll just do this.

And who cares about the church? I mean, they're just miserable people anyway that sit in the same seats and do the same things and never, ever change. I mean, honestly, that's just me sharing my heart. I've repented from that. I've repented from that because the more I read the word, the more I saw.

God loves all these people. God loves me. I don't always get it right. I'm not doing it right all the time. But God still loves me, and he loves everybody, and he cares

about his church.

So I've aligned my whole life to serve his church. Some people ask, well, how do I know where to get involved? Where do I get involved? I just want to serve God.

Okay, here's it.

Ready? Let me just answer it for you. Find a church where God is at work and serve him your best you ever can, and you'll see him come alive in your life. It's that simple. You may not always live in Denver.

If you move to some other city, move to another city where there's a life giving church, find out where God is at work and go serve it with everything you have. Serve your pastors, serve your staff, serve the people. Just serve. If you do, you will see God show up in your life. That's conviction I have.

That's conviction from the word of God. That's conviction number one. How about conviction number two? Conviction number two is this. Conviction number two relies

intentionally on intentionally investing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conviction number two. It relies intentionally on investing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your service must rely intentionally on investing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice what Paul says in verse ten. According to the grace of God.

Okay, according to what? God's grace. God's the one who's gifted you. God's the one who's empowered you. God's the one who's made all your service possible, which was given to me.

Here's what Paul said. Like a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. In other words, when you lay a foundation, be real careful.

How important is a foundation to a building? How important would you say? I

mean, if you were gonna buy a home, let's say it was, you know, somebody's gonna give you this home. And it was like, let's say it's a million dollars. And somebody said, I'll give it to you for 100 grand.

And you walked in, and it was just beautiful. And it was, you know, had all the wooden beams, just the way you wanted, the contemporary, huge kitchen like you'd see on HGTV and everything. And they said, only one problem. The foundation's really shaky. We don't know if it's gonna hold.

It might last you another three, four months. Would you buy it? It wouldn't even be worth a dime. Foundation is everything. Foundation holds everything up.

Paul says I laid a foundation, but I want to tell you something about that foundation, because no other foundation can be laid except what? The foundation of Jesus. Any ministry not built on the gospel of Jesus Christ is no ministry worth being involved in at all. Now can I just tell you why? Because if it's not built on Jesus, what's it being built on?

It's being built not on Jesus, which means it's going to crash and it's going to fall and it's going to be a terrible day. You say? Yeah, but on the side of their church it says Jesus, and they talk about him sometimes. If it's not built on the foundation, what's the foundation? It means the bedrock of everything.

In every ministry. It's all about Jesus and his glory. Okay, now, let me tell you the gospel. I mean, we talk about this a lot, but it's so important because it's so foundational to everything else we do. We get this wrong, nothing else matters.

What we do. It's just activity. I mean, God so loved the world so much, the father sent his son, Jesus Christ into the world on purpose. Here's why he came. Cause you screwed it up.

Cause your parents screwed it up. Cause their parents screwed it up. Cause their parents screwed up all the way back to Adam and eve, who screwed it up. Their sin was invested in us. It was imputed into us.

We were born sinners, we're separated from God. We don't live for him, we don't fulfill the law, we don't do it right. We never will. God, in his mercy, knew that. So God the father sent his son, Jesus Christ, God of all God, flesh of all flesh, who fulfilled the law, who lived out what you couldn't do.

Everything that God demanded for you in your life and still demands for you, that you can't do, Jesus already did for you. And then because of that, Jesus laid down his life for the death that you deserve by dying on a cross in your place, shedding all of his blood and going to the grave and being buried. Okay, great news. Three days later, God the Father raised him from the dead, offered life to anybody who would call upon him, where you can take your sin and exchange it and put it on Christ. And Christ will exchange it for his righteousness and put it all on you.

That's the beginning of the gospel. That's entrance into the kingdom. That's called new birth. But can I just tell you, the gospel doesn't stop there. Gospel is good news.

Good news is not. I trust in Jesus. I'm going to heaven. Everything in life's hell, and it's going to be miserable until I get there. It's lousy and I hate church, but one day I'm gonna be saved.

That's not the gospel. Let me ask you this. See, who was paying attention when they were here before? Who's the gospel for? Believers or non believers?

I heard eight people tell me, believers or non believers? It's for believers. It's for believers. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that what whosoever believes for believers would not perish but have eternal life. I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

Right. Gospel is for believers. See, in our day and age, we think the gospel is for nonbelievers. And so what we think is, we think it's a sales pitch to give them four spiritual laws so they can come into the kingdom and then be just as bored as we are. That's not good news, right?

It's just not. That's entrance into the kingdom. If that was all the gospel was, I'm telling you right now, our job as a church would be collecting email addresses and phone numbers and sending out tracks until everybody heard. And then we'd say, our job is done. They heard it.

That's not what the Bible is. The Bible is talking about investing the Holy Spirit into the lives of believers who live out the good news. Because I'm a believer. God is still working out his salvation in me, and God is still going to present me faultless before his throne in heaven. That's the good news.

Okay, if it's not built on that, what are you doing it for? Well, we just play games in our ministry. It's kind of cool. It's a way to get people in. So what?

The YMCA is doing the same thing. We have great tasting coffee, and that's what brings people here. Starbucks is better. Doesn't matter. Hey, but, you know, our building is really, really cool.

Hey, so is the Taj Mahal. I mean. I mean, what's your ministry built on? What's your family built on? What's your marriage built on if it's not built on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Where in every relationship, in every vocation, and in everything you do that you're living for Jesus. It ain't lasting. Now, just so you know, I gotta be clear on this. Just because you're a born again believer and just because you're fired up for Jesus does not mean that he's calling you into christian vocational ministry. Okay?

So some of you can be like, right? For some of you, he is. But here's the question in what you do, then, whatever it would be, guess what? However you get dressed in the morning, those are your missionary clothes. Wherever you take your paycheck, that's your missionary paycheck.

To do what? To serve Jesus and his church with everything you have. That's what it means. So the question would be, not if I followed you around, because Jesus

is already following you around. He's with you all the time in his holy spirit.

Is Jesus pleased with every way you're doing everything in your ministry, as a dad, as a husband, as a mother, as a wife, as a child, as a student, as a teacher, as a banker, as a lawyer, as a coach? I mean, in the clothes that you wear, that you put on on Monday morning, when you do those things, is Jesus Christ foundational in all of it? I mean, do you have that conviction? Everywhere I go, everything I do, and the way in which I do it is to reflect the glory of Jesus Christ. Because if you're not building on that, you're going to build on something else.

And I can tell you there's all sorts of ministries that are built on other things. I'll just list a few. I don't even get into detail about them. Tradition. Tradition trumps Jesus.

We've always done it this way. I mean, I think, like, in 1487, somebody chose this and it just seemed right, and we're still doing it today. Tradition, style. This is the way we do it. This is our style.

I like our style of worship. I also like going to Brooklyn Tab, where people have a choir. I like going to a place where it's more reverent than what it is here. I mean, there's all sorts of ways to worship the Lord. There's not a style.

Denominations, we can even get into this. I mean, Jesus teaches us ethics. I mean, the sermon on the mount, one of the best sermons ever. The best sermon ever, in my opinion. I mean, a lot of moral ethics.

But if all we're gonna do is teach moralism, like, hey, you should love other people. Oprah Winfrey can teach you that. I mean, Doctor Phil can teach you that. Here's what they can't teach you here's. What I say.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you and don't harbor unforgiveness. Where are you going to get that? You can get that in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Or we can make it political. We can make it right wing, we can make it left wing.

We can make it libertarian. We can make it about social work. I'm glad we're doing compassion week this week. I'm glad we're going to be the hands and feet of Jesus. But I'm going to tell you right now, we're building our ministry on the hands and feet of Jesus, not social work to our city.

Red Cross is doing great social work. I love them. We're bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ that has eternal significance and value. And I want to tell you, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it has become the power of God. You want your service to last, build on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

He says you must be careful how you do it. That means you may make a careful assessment. You must go painstakingly to make sure that in every relationship you have, you're showing other people that God loves them because of the way that you're receiving his love to you. Let me give you conviction number three. Conviction number three.

If you want to have lasting ministry, lasting service, service that counts, it requires giving your best efforts to Jesus Christ and his church. It requires giving your best efforts to Jesus Christ and his church. Okay? Notice what he says now. If any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident.

Hey, how you invest, it's going to be seen, right? You do shoddy work, it's going to be seen as shoddy. You're going to see this in a minute. If you do quality work, it's going to be revealed. However you serve, you can serve any way you want, and nobody knows the quality that you're putting in except for Jesus Christ.

Each man's work will become evident for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire. And the fire will test what? The quality of each man's work. It's not going to test the quantity. It's going to test your quality.

Well, I got to do more for God. No, not necessarily. You just got to give him your best quality. Are you giving them your best effort? Now when I played high school football, I learned a lot about what it meant to give your best effort.

We used to run this drill called perfect plays. And perfect plays consisted of a drill where we'd huddle at the 50 yard line. We'd call the play, we'd break the huddle, we'd sprint ten yards to the line of scrimmage, and then we had to perfectly run that play. When we did, everybody had to sprint 40 yards to the goal line. Not to the goal line, but through the goal line.

Now, you may not know what that means to the goal line means that you get there and then you slow down. As soon as you touch it through the goal line, means you run through it about five yards, and then you can start slowing down. Okay. All eleven guys had to do it perfect every time. If one guy came out of the huddle and didn't clap at the same time, you still ran the play, you still did the sprint, but it didn't count.

And I don't know how many times I heard the whistle because it went something like this.

That meant that didn't count. Then we had to go back and do it again. Then you jog all the way back to the 50 yard line, and you do this. I mean, sometimes we were out there in the midwest after the time change, it'd be like nighttime. You couldn't even see the football anymore, and we'd just be running.

Right. Why? Because our coaches used to tell us, this practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. That's what they used to tell us.

And whether that's true or not, I don't know, but I believed it by the time I graduated high school. Right? Here's the deal. Think about where you give your best effort in life. Just as this.

Rhetorical. If you approached your workplace tomorrow, if you approached being a student tomorrow with the same intentionality and focus that you do when you come to church, how well would you do? It's rhetorical. I mean, if your attendance at work was similar to your attendance at church, if your service at school and your service at work were similar to your service and attendance here, what would happen? Just think

about it.

Your best work goes here. Your best intentionality goes here. Your best resources go here. Your best talents go here. Your best time goes here.

Why? Because God's testing the quality of your work. Gold, precious stones, right? Silver. We don't know.

Exactly. There's just quality stuff, right? Which one's more valuable? In the first century, pearls were considered as valuable or more valuable than gold. I mean, just making a.

You can build with quality, or you can build with just stuff that's left over. How are you building your life? Let me tell you this. Let me let you in on a little secret. You're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Two Corinthians 5:10 says, for we all must stand before it not to be judged for your sin. That was judged on the cross. Nobody's going to be judged for their sin. If you've trusted Jesus, you're saved. You're saved to the full.

He loves you. It'll never change. But if you're not living for him, the work that you have done is going to be burnt up. It's not going to count for anything. And you're going to show up into heaven with nothing to show for it, right?

That's what he's saying. It's a conviction I have because it's God's conviction. How well are you serving the church? Not how well are you serving, but how well do you give your best effort there? And best effort is quality.

It's not quantity. It's not comparative. I told you, my kids are ten, eight, and four. My four year old is still at the age where she loves to draw me pictures. Any of you have kids that draw you pictures and give it to you?

What do you do when they give you that picture? I mean, do you look at it and grade it based upon the best artists in the world and say, seriously, you call that a drawing? Do you do that? No. What are they doing?

They're giving their quality work. They're doing something to please my heart. So I take that picture and I look at it, I'm like, wow, tell me about it. Well, dad, that big fat person in the middle, that's bald, that's you, dad. Hey, thanks.

And dad, that's a tree, and that's this. And that big circle there, that was just kind of like the stars. And I'm like, wow, that's awesome. Why? Cause they're bringing me their best.

Bringing God your best does not mean compared to somebody else, it means you're doing your best to bring God. What you have doesn't matter what anybody else is doing. I love that. When I get to heaven and Charles Spurgeon walks across the platform and receives all his rewards and gives them to Jesus, and then Billy Graham's coming down the aisle, and there's John Wesley. I thank God that I don't have to come and compare myself to what their ministries were.

Isn't that great news? And you don't have to compare yourself to anybody else because, oh, by the way, remember that story in the bible of the woman that put in two small copper coins worth less than a penny was that quality work? She threw in two cent. And here's what she's gonna hear. Well done, good and faithful servant.

As the cheering crowd is gonna go crazy at the way God was able to work through her. Quit comparing your service. Comparison is deadly. In the christian faith, God doesn't want you to be like anybody else. God doesn't want you to be like me.

God doesn't want you to be like the person sitting next to you. God created you uniquely to bring him your best work in a way that glorifies and honors him. Amen. For we are God's workmanship. Ephesians two.

Sin says, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand so that we'd walk in them. God wants to do good works through us. Did

you know that sometimes in church, especially a church like ours, that gives God so much glory and puts Jesus Christ at the center and God's great and we're not that good and all that kind of stuff, we forget that, yeah, we're still the crown of God's creation. He loves us with an unconditional love, and he's empowered us with his holy spirit, and he's given us all the things so we can go invest them. I mean, if Jesus gave you half a million dollars today and said, hey, this is for you, I just want you to use it to build my church, would you feel a sense of responsibility for it?

He gave you the Holy Spirit. There's no price tag on the Holy Spirit. He's entrusting his work to get done through you in the certain way that he created you, so, so that he can see his church come alive through you, through your quality work that you give him. Are you giving him your best? Are you aligned with him?

John 15 seven says, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this, my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. What does God want? He wants you to be fruitful. He wants you to bring your quality work.

He wants you to align everything with him. Are you doing that? I mean, I think about the scripture in one Peter 3:15, but in your heart set apart, Christ is Lord. Always be ready to give an answer for the defense you have, for the hope that you have within you. It means that every moment, at every time in your life, you're living in such a way that if somebody tapped you on the shoulder and said, hey, why are you so hopeful in parentheses, assuming that you're living hopeful, why are you so hopeful you're able to tell them at any given time?

I can tell you in 25 years. There's so many times I wish I could push a rewind switch and go back where I took a play off, where I had an opportunity to share Christ, an opportunity to live it out, and I failed at it. I mean, myriads, so many that the devil would whisper in my ear and say, you'll never get this thing right. You'll never do it. I'm just here to tell you, if you failed, the great news about the gospel is you can start right now, because some people hear this message.

I wish I would have heard this when I was 14. No, you would have felt the same way you do right now. It's not how much time you have left. It's what you do with the time that you have. God's a forgiving God.

He's a merciful God. Start right where you are. Can I just tell you this? I don't know when Jesus is coming back. I don't know.

I mean, predictions are made all the time. They're all wrong all the time. So I don't really listen to them. But let me just tell you this. I don't know when he's coming back, but I know that he is coming back.

But whether he came back today or tomorrow or five years from now or 500 years from now, it doesn't matter to me. Can I just tell you this? If he came back today, there's nothing in my life I'd be looking to change. Now. By that, what I don't mean is that I'm perfected and there's nothing to work on.

Just go talk to my wife or my kids, and they tell you how he's got a lot to work on. I mean, that's fine. I'm just telling you in terms of alignment with where I'm going, I'm ready. There's nothing in my life that says, if I met Jesus today, I said, I knew you were calling me to do this or live this way, but I wanted to live. There's none of that in my life anymore.

But there was a time, and it was a time when I was 23 years old and I was reading the scripture. I'm like, yeah, I know you're calling me this way, but I'm going to live this way, and it's a miserable place to live. And God's still gracious in it. Even if you're the person today that says, amen, I'm out of here. He'll still work on your art, but there's no greater joy than aligning your life with him.

It's the conviction Paul wants the church in Corinth to have. What would happen if everybody lived their life like that? If everybody said, you know what? I don't know that I'm getting it, all right? But to the best of my ability, I'm trying to align everything I have with the Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

I mean, what's gold, what's silver, what's precious stones? It's sound doctrine. It's teaching other people how to walk with Christ. It's the filling of the spirit. It's seeing other people flourish in their gifting because of what Jesus has done for them.

It's a conviction of giving God our best effort. Are you giving God your best

effort? Because if you are, then you'll understand this fourth conviction, it's an important one, this conviction. Number four is this. That if you're going to have lasting ministry service, conviction number four is that rewards result from a thorough investigation or inspection of the quality of your work.

Rewards result from a thorough inspection of the quality of your work. I mean, your rewards are coming after following a very thorough, very thorough testing of your work. Any of your parents ever told your kids to go clean their room? When you tell them that, do you say, and they come back and say, it's clean, do you just believe them or do you maybe go check on it sometime? Maybe your definition of clean is different than what their definition of clean is.

Maybe they're. Maybe your definition of making the bed is different than their definition of making the bed is. See, it doesn't matter what people say to you in this world. There's a lot of things that people can pat you on the back for and say, hey, you're doing okay. But only you and Jesus know if you're bringing them your best effort.

He's the only one that knows. I mean, in Matthew, chapter seven, verse 21, it's some of the most damning verses to those who have a lot of activity with no fruitfulness. Because Jesus will say on that day, many will come to him and say, but Lord, Lord, do we not prophesy in your name? Do we not cast out demons? Do we not heal people?

Seemingly, God worked even through people that weren't walking with him. And he will say, what? Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, for I never. What I don't know you. We don't have a relationship.

I mean, you did a lot of activity, but there was no fruitfulness because you were never connected to me. You diligently study the scriptures because they testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I mean, let me tell you what God is not grading in the future. Your success, your numbers. How pragmatic your ministry was, how fun it was, your self promotion.

He's not grading any of that stuff. Harvest could grow to 20,000 people. That means nothing if it's not built on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, right?

What's he gonna grade? Our consistent laboring for the gospel, our faithfulness, that we endured suffering, that we were humble, that we remained a servant.

That's what he's looking for, right? God's looking for that. Notice what? He says your quality of work's going to be tested by fire. Verse 14.

If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If your work remains, why? Because gold, precious stones and silver. I mean, when that fire comes, it's going to prune out all the impurities, and you're going to have this beautiful crown. And what do we do with these rewards that we get?

We get to present them to the Lord. Lord, look what you did through me. And as people cheer like Jesus, look what you did through Jeff. Look at what you did through Levi. Look what you did through Kim.

That's what God's saying. I mean, we get to present those, right? What happens

if we use wood, hay, or straw? If any man's work is burned up, which is what happens with wood, hay, or straw. It means when you give Jesus the leftovers of your life, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved yet so as through fire.

Let those words sift in your mind for a second. Now, I want to tell you Romans eight one, because many of you are going to Romans eight one, which says, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So let me be clear on that, crystal clear on that. There is no condemnation for you. If you've trusted in Christ, your Christ, he's going to be glad to see you when you come, no matter what.

But let me tell you how terrible it's going to be for you on that day. If you have nothing to present to him. It says this. It's going to be. Yeah, you'll be saved, but by the hair of your chinny chin chin, by the skin of your teeth, you're going to be dusting off, like smoke off your backside when you come into the kingdom, like, glad to be here.

And you might not think that's a big deal, but I'm telling you, when there's a number of people who have been martyred and suffered for the gospel and have been

praying for other people and doing different things, and you come in, like, waving that smoke off, saying, lisa, I'm here. It's not going to be that fun for you because you knew what you should have done and you didn't do it right. I'll tell you a story. When I was in college, I got invited to one of those pre wedding, what do they call it? Showers, something like that.

This was like a honeydew party for my friend. And we were told, I mean, we were in college, we didn't have any money. We didn't have anything. We were told just to bring some sort of gift to give to the groom to get their life set up so they could have some tools or outdoor equipment or whatever. So, I mean, it was last minute.

My friend and I were driving in his old beat up Honda. We pulled into a hardware store in downtown Chicago and we bought a hammer. Between the two of us, we pulled our money together, we bought a hammer. We didn't have time to wrap it, so we put it in a paper bag from the hardware store, and off we went to the Gold coast of Chicago, which is one of the wealthiest areas in Chicago. We didn't know where we were going.

We pull into one of the most spectacular mansions that we've ever seen. Everybody's wearing a suit and tie or a really nice dress, and we're dressed in, like, street clothes and t shirts, carrying a paper bag with a hammer. And I remember walking into that house and everybody was so gracious to us and so kind, and they were like, hey, you know, if you have a gift, go ahead and put it on the grand piano. Or if it's too big, you can just set it over here. And I walk into this grand ballroom and there's these beautiful packages all over the piano, and there's all these other presents laid out.

Like, I'm talking, like, full, like, huge metal toolboxes and all this outdoor equipment and weed eaters. We're like hiding our hammer behind our back and we're like squeezing over there and we're like, binky, you know? To add insult to injury, when everybody got together, they said, now we're going to give the gifts to the groom and we're going to announce what the gift is and how he can use it. And we're going to say, who brought the gift? And I remember, like, oh, great, you know, I mean, we're sinking down and I can tell you, my friend was so gracious to us.

You know, it was almost like, hey, we can take this hammer and put it in one of the seven toolboxes we just got, you know, I mean, it was totally great. Oh, this has a

really good feel to it. I felt so embarrassed because I wasn't ready for what was coming. That's what the scripture is trying to do to the Corinthians and do to us. It's not that God is not going to love you.

He's going to love you no matter what. But you don't want to arrive with nothing to bring. The one that you say is the lord of your life, that you say is the king. And every service counts. Praying faithfully for somebody counts.

Loving people that are unlovable counts. Every good deed that you do counts. It's all quality work that counts. God sees everything you do counts. I mean, I just think when I'm teaching this message that I know that the Holy Spirit's working in your heart, because I know that he's working in mine as I'm preparing this thing, and I know he's been working in mine over the years to say, hey, Jeff, now make sure you align this.

And what I'm not saying to you is I'm doing it right and I'm just going to coast. Now, I find that as I continue to walk with Jesus, he continues to make weeks to make sure I'm even more aligned and more aligned and more aligned as I get there. And that's what he's doing in your heart, too. And I know there's specific people in here that

he's talking to today. I think it would be wrong to end this message and just say, hey, got it.

Let's go. Isn't God good? Because I know there's people in here that God's calling to vocational ministry that are wrestling with that call. I know there's people in here that have resources and means that are wrestling with letting go of some of those. I know there's people in here that God has been calling to serve or get involved in a small group that need to let that go and say, God, whatever it looks like in my life.

I don't know what it is for you, but I know God's speaking to a lot of you. When I preached this message last night, I know, God was speaking to a lot of people. We had a lot of people do this, too. But I think it'd be right for me, just as your pastor, to pray for you. I don't need to know what it is.

But if God's been speaking to your heart about something today through this message that says, you know what, there's just something in my heart. You may not even want to do it yet. You may be like I was back in 1993 where it's like, I know you're speaking to me, God, but we'll get away. Even if that's you. Would you just

stand to your feet right now?

I just want to pray over you. God's been working in your heart today saying, you know what? There's something in my life, God, show me. Would you stand? I know there's several of you.

And you know the specific thing he's putting on your heart. You know what it is. You know what it looks like. Let's just ask God to be gracious to you. His holy spirit is so good.

It's so good. So, Lord, we just come before your throne right now, Lord, for all who are standing, and probably even some who are sitting, they're like, I'm not even standing. I'm so upset right now. But, Lord, the thing that you're working in their heart, Lord, would you just, with your grace, just pour your love through? Would you align the hearts of these men and women and boys and girls with the very thing that you're doing in their life, Lord, because they're standing.

Because they're saying, Jesus, when I meet you, I just want to make sure I bring my best and that I honor you with all that I have and that you have the quality of all my work. And so, Lord, I want my life to be congruent with you. So, Lord, hear the prayers of your people. And, Lord, answer those prayers and glorify your name through us. For, Lord, we love you and we praise you and we bless you in Jesus name.

Amen. And amen.