

Paul the Apostle - a Vibrant Life (Part 4)

by Denny Kenaston

The Christian life is a life of challenge and growth, and trusting in God in the midst of suffering is essential for experiencing the power of God.

Duration: 1:08:07

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7, 2 Corinthians 12:19

Topics: "Paul The Apostle"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission, which is the final commandment given to man. He suggests that there are hidden blessings for those who obey this commandment. The speaker also discusses how God often brings believers to a breaking point in order to mold and shape them. He encourages listeners to respond to these pressures in a way that leads to growth and a deeper understanding of God's goodness and power.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the free will offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. Yes, Father, we bless you.

We quiet our hearts before you. Yes, we joy to sing to you. We also joy to quiet our hearts before you and be still and know that you are God and there is none beside thee.

Lord, we don't understand all how you work and why you work. We do not understand why we're here today. And many are not here, why we know and others do not know.

God, I can't understand that, but I pray that you will help us again today to understand some of those reasons and some of those purposes for why we are here. Lord, open the eyes of our heart that we may see your heart today. Fill us with the Holy Ghost, Lord.

All of us, all of us, we know it's your will for every one of us to be filled. Do that, Lord, according to your promise. We trust you for that and we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated. I wonder how many of you have found yourself, last couple days now here, you've found yourself exercising yourself in a new way to have a conscience that's void of offense with God and man.

Let me see your hands. Praise God. That's not the only reason why you're here, but that is one of the reasons why you are here.

So that by the end of the week, you will full well know how sweet it can be when you just keep on responding to whatever God says to you and you tune your ear to hear that still small voice at the slightest veering to the left or the right. You tune your ear to hear that voice and respond to it and find that heaven stays open over you. Welcome to the Christian life.

This is what it is. And I'm glad that we are all learning that this week, exercising ourselves, and I trust that when we go home we will also do the same because it is the heart of God and the will of God and the desire of God that every one of us learn to walk with Him. As I ponder the last point of the message yesterday, that being the point of suffering, I began to look over all the different aspects of Paul's ministry, both the ones that we've covered already and the ones that are yet to come.

And as I looked down over my list, I began to realize that this word suffering is written all across almost every one of those points. So it's a little hard for me to leave suffering behind when you find it written on almost every aspect of the Apostle Paul's life and his ministry. And maybe we could say that suffering and ministry are synonymous.

I think we can. I see two words written over Paul's life, two beautiful words. One is the word Christ and the other is the word suffering.

And maybe we could also say that those two words are synonymous. Christ and suffering. I wonder if we realize how much these two words come together for those who are seeking for that true reality that we heard about last evening.

Christ and suffering go together. We spoke about persecution and evangelism yesterday and how the Chinese church is being persecuted because of their desire to evangelize. I don't believe they'd have any problems at all if they would just keep their mouths shut.

But the fact is that they are not willing to keep their mouths shut and because they are not willing, they do have problems. And because of that, suffering comes into their life. I thought this morning, there's only one other type of person whose life comes close to that of the persecuted Christians.

And that is the life of a village evangelist, a village missionary. You know, just like that persecuted Christian, he has made a choice, a conscious choice. He knows, if I open my mouth, then trouble is going to come on my life and suffering will be my lot.

So also, with a village missionary who makes the choice on his own to leave things behind in the land where he lives and go to another land that he does not understand and he does not know and go to a people that he does not understand their language and go to a culture that he cannot figure out and subject himself to circumstances of depriving and circumstances of sickness and all kinds of problems and

poverty and they choose to do that on their own. And suffering is their lot. But you know, there's something else that comes along with that suffering and we looked at some of that yesterday, didn't we? And it happens that way.

I've watched it many, many times. I've seen these youth teams go off to Africa for six weeks and they're only gone six weeks, but when they come back, there's something different about them. And that something that's different about them has to do with God's work and it has to do with evangelism and it has to do with the strain that comes into their life because of that and it has to do with suffering.

And they all come back lit up and bright and excited and full of zeal and that's kind of how it is. Do you want to be like Paul? This beautiful Christian life, this beautiful Christ-like life, it has a price tag on it. Do you want to be like Paul? This morning we want to move on and look at the subject, the troubles of Paul's ministry.

And you can turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 1. That's where we'll be reading, after these words of introduction, 2 Corinthians 1, the troubles of Paul's ministry. And we could take this portion of Scripture and put it under the title of suffering and it is underneath that category, but I would like to use it in a different way that I believe will relate to all of us. This word trouble, it means pressure.

It means to be crowded in on every side. It means to be squeezed in. That's what the word trouble means.

So yes, we can surely say that to be put under pressure is surely suffering, but I would like to separate them here this morning. Because while not too many of us, and probably none of us, have gotten any stripes on our back for our Christian life, we can all relate to those pressures that do come upon us as we walk in this world and endeavor to live a life for the Lord Jesus Christ. We can all relate to those pressures, that squeezing that takes place, that crowdedness that circumstances bring upon us.

Paul went through these troubles. He went through pressures. He subjected himself to distresses and oppressive circumstances.

He submitted himself to the experiences of being crowded to a point of undoneness. I don't know if you ever heard of the book before, but L.A. Maxwell wrote a book many years ago, and it's out of print now, but it's called Crowded to Christ. That's a nice title.

That's what pressures can do to us. They can crowd us to Christ. And that's a good place to go.

Let's look at this text here in 1 Corinthians 1. We'll start in verse 8. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble, Paul says. And that's that word, pressure. Which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us, ye also helping together by prayer. Paul says we were pressed out of measure by the troubles that surrounded us. I want you to notice what he says here.

First of all, pressed out of measure. That word pressed there means a heavy weight was put upon us. And now Paul is not talking about a big rock.

He's talking about pressures. These aren't physical pressures. These are pressures upon his mind.

They're pressures upon his heart. They're pressures upon his soul and his spirit. That's the kind of pressures that Paul is talking about here.

And he says our circumstances brought a great pressure upon us to the point where we were pressed out of measure. And that word out of measure means we were pressed beyond our limits. Have you ever been in that place? Pressed beyond our limits.

Pressed to the breaking point. Pressed to the place where I do not know what to do next. Paul said it here, above strength.

In other words, pressure's coming and I can handle it, and pressure's coming and I can handle it, and pressure's coming and I can handle it, and all of a sudden pressure is so much that I cannot handle it. Have you ever been there? I believe that probably every one of you in this room have been there. If there's any sincerity at all about you and your Christian life, you know what that experience is about.

Pressed to the point where you don't have strength anymore. That's what Paul is speaking about here as we look at the troubles in his ministry. I have it written in the margin of my Bible, life on the edge.

Life on the edge. That means living in a place where you do not know what to do, and you're there continually. And the next day it's the same.

And the next day you find it the same. Living life on the edge. You know, it's like you're standing right on the edge of a cliff, and there it is all the way down there, and you realize that you could fall at any moment, but yet there you are walking on the edge of that cliff, and every day you walk there right on the edge of that cliff, and you realize that with the pressures that are upon you, you could go over any moment, but yet you find yourself being able to walk there.

That's where Paul found himself. But I think sometimes we find ourselves in that place where we're pressed out of measure, but because of our wrong responses to those pressures, we fall off the cliff. Paul said we had the sentence of death within us.

And I'm not sure at all what he means by that, but it seemed to me like he found himself in that place where many times he thought, okay, this is it. This is the end of my life, which, by the way, is a good place to live. It's not a very comfortable place, but it's a good place to live.

I talked to a brother not long ago who had had some real problems, physical problems, and he almost died in the hospital, and it was three months later and he was still alive, and he said, Brother Denny, I'm living one day at a time. Every day is a gift from God. I said, So, brother, how do you find it? He said, It's very good.

It's very good. And you know, brethren, it's the same for every one of us. Every day is a gift from God.

But with that man, he actually did not know if he would be living the next day. Now, that is a beautiful place to live. And that's what Paul is talking about.

Life on the edge. The troubles of his ministry pressed beyond measure. I don't know if I can keep on going.

This thing is out of my control. I feel like I'm at the breaking point. You ever been there? Sure you have.

God is in it. He's really in it. We'll see as we move down through here.

At this breaking point, at this place of despair, and it's a real place of despair. At this place of deep feelings of undone-ness, beautiful things begin to happen if you don't give up. But at this breaking point, at this place of despair, and it is despair, many give up right there.

Now, I don't mean they give up the faith. I mean, instead of responding to God the way they should, they just give up. I can't do it.

It's too much for me. And who knows what happens. Sometimes they blow up and get angry.

Sometimes they give up and get discouraged and have the mulligrubs for two or three days before they come back up out of the clouds of what they were in. But the point I'm getting at is they find themselves in that place where they're pressed out of measure. They're brought to the breaking point.

And instead of breaking, they give up. Brother Dean mentioned the other evening, you know, running to the Internet at that point, or running to the refrigerator at that point, or running to something else at that point. I mean, we could fill it in with many, many things.

But the point is that God, it's God who brings us to those places. And God has something in mind. And it's something beautiful, even though when we look at it we feel like we are pressed out of measure by the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Paul was there. It is life on the edge. You want a challenge, brethren? Take the Christian life real serious.

And you will find the challenge of your life. You will find God allowing you to live on that edge. And if you will live on that edge, you will prove the grace of God in ways that you never knew before.

That's what will happen. You see that persecuted Christian or that village missionary, both of them, they chose to live in the midst of those pressures. They chose to subject themselves to an atmosphere that would squeeze them beyond their limits again and again and again.

But guess what happens when you choose to live there? You begin to taste that the Lord is good and blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. You begin to prove the grace of God. You begin to see that God is a living God.

You begin to see a God who is the God of miracles, who can do anything. You begin to realize that God is a God who can do the impossible. But you will never ever know that if you can't walk through some of those pressures and respond the way that God wants you to.

At this place of despair, at this place, this breaking point, you can get bitter or you can get better. You can get bitter or you can get broken. You have the choice.

I have the choice. Sometimes I've responded the right way and found beautiful things happening. But other times, I've just despaired in my heart.

God has a better way. Paul realized that God was keeping him on the edge for a purpose. Did you see the words there? In the second part of verse 9, he said, we had the sentence of death in ourselves.

And then he gives the reason that we should not trust in ourselves. Now there it is right there. God knows man very well.

And God knows what is in man. And God knows what the tendency of man is. And our tendency is to trust in ourselves.

I can handle it. I'll do it. I'll make it.

We'll get through this. This is no problem. Whatever else.

But God, knowing man, brings us into situations where we all of a sudden realize, I can't do this. And the reason is that He might teach us how to not trust in ourselves, but instead to trust in the living God. At that time, at that breaking point, at that time of despair, it is time to trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding.

It's time in all thy ways to acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path. That's what Paul was doing. And his testimony was, did you see it? Who delivered us? Look at that.

Looking back in his past, he gave this testimony. God delivered us. And he was so confident, he had learned his lesson so well, that he could also say that He is present tense delivering us.

And if that's not enough confidence, he was also able to say, and He will yet deliver us. It sounds to me like a man who has learned how to live on the edge and trust God and prove God and see that God is well able to deliver us from whatever comes our way. This is the troubles of Paul's ministry.

Now, I don't know how you have been looking at your own troubles. Maybe you see them as flesh and blood. Maybe you see them as circumstances around you.

Maybe you even see them as the devil, you know, is making trouble for you. And maybe the devil is making trouble for you, but I'm just wanting you to take another look at those pressing circumstances which come into our lives at times and bring us to the point where we don't know what to do. That's actually a very good place to be.

Know what to do. Beautiful. Beautiful.

As long as you look up when you say those words. As long as you look up when you say those words. Those are beautiful words.

But if you say instead, I don't know what to do. Or, I can't do this. And then because of that, you do nothing.

That's not good. That's not good. Many a man keeps his mouth quiet because he says, I can't do that.

And that's not the will of God. Amen? It's not the will of God. That moves us on to the next point.

The one flows very well to the next one. The power of Paul's ministry. In 1 Thessalonians 1 and verse 5, we find Paul giving this testimony of how it was when he went to Thessalonica.

He says, For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. I want you to notice these words. He speaks about how the gospel came to the Thessalonians.

It came not only in word. It did come in word, but it didn't come only in word. It came in power.

God manifested His power through His Word. It not only came in power, but it also came in word and in power, and also in the Holy Ghost. God manifested His presence through His Word.

And not only did the gospel come with all of those things, but it also came with much assurance. And what Paul is meaning by that is, you saw how we lived. And here we are back to the way that Paul lived.

There was assurance as they saw, as they heard the Word, and they sensed the Spirit of God, and they saw the power of God working itself out in real ways. They also saw a man and how he lived. And all of that together witnessed to their heart that what is being said is the truth.

And they opened their hearts up to the gospel, and they were born again. Hallelujah. That's the way it was.

In 1 Corinthians 2 and verse 4 and 5, we have again Paul giving a testimony, and he says, My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Those are two different words there. In demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

And then Paul goes on to say, Why? That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. God is a powerful God. And Paul's ministry was attended with power.

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 12. That's where we'll build on this point. We have here in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, a lesson about the power of God that modern American Christianity does not want to hear.

Power comes through weakness. Power comes through brokenness. Power comes through living on the edge.

Power comes through suffering. American Christianity does not want to hear that. In fact, there are whole church denominations who claim to believe in the power of the Holy Ghost, but they very rarely ever mention any of these kind of verses, because they look at verses like this and consider it to be unbelief.

That a man would believe that trouble would come into his life is not in their theology. That a man would expect that hard times would come into their life is not in their theology. That a man would believe that poverty would come into his life as a blessing from God is not in their theology.

Oh, they want to talk about power. Yeah, they're real excited about power. But my question is, what kind of power is that? Is it the power of the Holy Ghost? Is it the power that the Holy Ghost gives? That's a question we have to look at.

Paul was filled with the Holy Ghost. Remember, we read it there in his testimony when he was born again by the Spirit of God. And Ananias gave him those very words.

Come, Paul, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can see that that's exactly what happened to him, because as soon as he got his eyes opened up and got a little food in his stomach and a little water in his body, he immediately went to the synagogue and started preaching the gospel, which, by the way, is one of the greatest fruits of the power of God. Paul was filled with the Holy Ghost.

But he did not stop there, did he? He didn't just look back and say, back there I was filled with the Holy Spirit. No, that wasn't Paul's theology. Paul's theology was be being continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

And brethren, that's New Testament theology. Be being continually filled with the Holy Spirit. But how do you be continually filled with the Holy Spirit? How does this power rest upon us continually? It seems from the lessons that God taught the Apostle Paul that it's not just a simple little thing, you know.

Let's read some of these words. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, and we'll start in verse 7. Paul, again giving his testimony, he says, And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. And did you note that those words are used twice? Once at the beginning of the verse and a second time at the end of the verse.

Lest I should be exalted above measure. Now, someone asked me a couple of days ago, Brother Denny, what was Paul's thorn in the flesh? I don't know. And neither do you.

You might have an opinion. You might have some speculation. And I've got some opinions and I've got some speculation.

But I don't know because the Bible doesn't say. And I believe the Bible doesn't say on purpose so that you can take that verse and I can take that verse and every one of us can take that verse and find our heart right in there. Troubles and difficulties and trials and things that we can't handle and things we wish we could get away from and get them out of our lives and change the way it is, but they don't seem to go away.

You read these verses that we're looking at here today and your heart is comforted and encouraged as you realize here's one of the most powerful men that walked on the earth with God and God gave him something that troubled him continually. We don't know what it is. Some say, well, he was almost blind.

I've heard people say, oh, he had epilepsy. One writer said Paul's thorn in the flesh was whoever the leader of those Judaizers was. And everywhere where Paul went, he was right behind him.

You know, that was Paul's thorn in the flesh. I don't know. What's your thorn in the flesh? And how are you responding to your thorn in the flesh? To the difficulties that are in your life? To the cross that God is laying upon you? Paul had a thorn in the flesh.

And he was a human just like you and I. And he wanted to get rid of it just like you and I do. And he knew God very intimately. Again, we can see that here in these verses.

He gives this testimony in verse 8. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. Three times he came to the Lord and said, Lord, God, I know who You are. I watch what You do.

I see how You change people's lives. I saw that man receive his strength in his legs and get up and walk. I watched that demon-possessed lady be totally delivered.

I saw that earthquake in that jail when I was there in the middle of the night. I know who You are. I know experientially what kind of a God You are.

Now, God, take care of this thing and get rid of it out of my life. And he didn't get an answer. So he came the second time and beseeched the Lord again.

Now, Lord, I know who You are. And You know who I am. And You know all the work that I have to get done.

And You know what a trouble this thing is to me. And how it slows me down. And it makes problems for me.

And I don't appreciate it. And Lord, if You just get rid of it, I can do more for You. And God didn't get rid of it.

And I believe finally on the third time, as he went back to the Lord again, and gave the whole thing all over again, and then the Lord spoke to him. And he said unto me, now just go there with me. Go there.

This is the third time. Paul is in despair. He's crying to God.

Now God, in His sweet, loving kindness, that still, small voice of God, settles down around Paul and begins to speak to him about that thorn in the flat. Now, Paul's going to get an education. Paul's going to get a rhema.

God's going to take His Word and speak it to Paul's heart about a specific situation in Paul's life. And it's going to change Paul's view of suffering forever. He said unto me, Paul, my grace is sufficient for thee.

For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Now that was the revelation that Paul got. Paul, I am a powerful God.

I did shake the earth back there at Philippi. I did deliver that demon-possessed woman. I did do that.

And by the way, Paul, my grace is sufficient to carry you through this which is tormenting you and troubling you, and this which you would like to just shake off and get rid of. My grace is sufficient for you, Paul. Because you see, Paul, you don't understand what is happening here.

My strength is made perfect in weakness, Paul. Oh, oh, okay. Now that's a different way to look at it.

I mean, I think of power. I think power. You know, wielding this and this happening and this happening.

No, Paul, no. My strength is made perfect in weakness, Paul. Maybe you've got a bit of a Gentile view of power, Paul.

Let's get a sanctified view of power. My strength is made perfect in weakness. You find yourself on the edge and you don't want to live there, that's where my grace is made perfect in your life.

You want me to help you as you preach the Gospel? This is how you will be helped when you preach the Gospel, Paul. Now we can see his response. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities.

Now he's totally changed his view. He's no longer complaining to God about his infirmities. Get rid of this thing, Lord.

It is hindering me. It's hindering the work of God. No, it isn't, Paul.

You're not viewing it right. Let's take another look at it. Oh, yes! Most rather would I, therefore, glory in it then.

Now that I see what is happening. Now that I see its transferring power. Now that I see how your power is worked out in my life on an ongoing basis.

Now I'm going to change my view of these troubling, riddling, pressuring things that are coming into my life. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. We're looking at the power of Paul's ministry.

The power of his ministry. Paul gave us this command in Ephesians 5, verse 18. He said, Be filled with the Spirit.

And that be filled with the Spirit is a present continuous word in the Greek. Be being continually filled with the Spirit. This is one of the ways that that continual filling of the Spirit comes, by the way.

It's not the only way. There are many means of grace, but this is one of the means of grace by which God deepens the anointing upon our lives. Are you ready for that? I mean, most people are willing.

I mean, they'll take a couple of days, and you know, they'll stay up all night and cry to God if they can get the power. And somehow, in our own minds, we think, now I've got the power, and I'm ready to go for the rest of my life. That's not how God does it.

Yes, you may need to meet with God in the middle of the night, and have a crisis experience where God deals deeply with you and fills you with the Spirit of God after He cleans you up by the blood of His dear Son. You may need to do that, and you may look back on that and say, God touched my life back there. I've no problem with that.

I believe in that. But if that's all you can do is say, somewhere back there, that's not sufficient. Be being continually filled with the Spirit, God says.

This was Paul's theology. And this is one of the ways that he worked out that filling of the Spirit of God. I mean, I can imagine that at first, he probably thought, this thorn in the flesh is hindering me.

If I get rid of this thing, I'd have more grace and more power in my life. It just seems to frustrate me all the time. No, Paul, you just were not looking at it right.

Sound familiar? It does to me. I think it does to you too. So Paul gives a conclusion in verse 10 and says, therefore, I take pleasure... well, that sure changed his view, didn't it? I take pleasure in infirmities.

I take pleasure in reproaches. I take pleasure in necessities. I take pleasure in persecutions.

And I take pleasure in distresses. For Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong. Haven't you found it to be that way? Let me see your hands.

When I am weak, then am I strong. But yet all the while, while we raise our hands, and we can all bear testimony to knowing that and experiencing it, when it comes right down to everyday life, we kick and fuss, and we don't like it, and we grumble, and we try to wiggle around it and find a way to get out of it. I mean, we become very, very smart to try to wiggle our way around that which God is trying to use to bring us to places of continual brokenness.

For therein does the power of God rest upon a believer. Blessed are the poor in spirit, brethren. And we all know that, don't we? Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy.

I dwell in the high and holy place. And I dwell also with Him that is of a broken and a contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the spirit of the contrite one. God delights in reviving the

hearts of His people when they come to Him in brokenness.

Brokenness is a language that God hears. Brokenness is a language which God will not turn away His heart from. It's almost like God is obligated to run to our side as soon as He sees that heart of ours breaking up in two.

And I'm sure that you've experienced it also. Ten minutes of brokenness in the presence of God will do more than three hours without it. Don't you have your Bible open and you're praying all the prayers? Ten minutes! When that old heart is just shattered, it's just broken up, it's just standing there living on the edge of a tear every moment.

Someone came to me already this week, and I don't remember who it is, and that's good. I'm glad. But someone came to me and said, Brother Denny, God is working me over this week.

Tears running down His face. He said, I don't know what's happening to me. I don't know what's going on.

And He's crying. And I said, God bless you, brother. You're in the best place you could ever be.

God has gifted you with a broken heart. It was all broken up over His needs. God has gifted you by letting you see your needs.

Treasure it. That leads us on to the next point, which was the last one for this day. What is this power for? Is it for me to enjoy? Is it for me to display to others? Is it for me to hold on to for myself? No.

It is to be a witness for God. Acts 1 and verse 8 says, And ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Ye shall receive power.

Why? To be witnesses unto me. And I can't figure all of this out, but it seems to me that this whole matter of the power of God and the witness of God that God wants us to be, these two are reciprocating. You get the power of God, and that makes you want to witness.

And as you witness, God gives you more of His power. And as God gives you more of His power, you feel more that you should witness. And as you witness more, then God gives you more of His power.

And as you witness, God brings persecution. And that persecution brings purifying. And that purifying brings power.

And that power makes you witness more. And that witnessing brings more persecution. And that persecution brings more power.

And the whole thing redounds to the glory of God Again, and again, and again, for all those that are willing to yield themselves. It's reciprocating. God does not give His presence to His people so we can sit down here on planet earth and enjoy things.

Bless God, if that's what He had in mind, He would have taken us to glory the moment we were born again. Wouldn't that confuse the world around us? What happened to John? I don't know. Nobody knows what happened to him.

But oh, how much more powerful for John to show up the next day at work and look into the eyes of his fellow workers and say, God saved my soul last night, and I can't curse anymore. No, thank you, I will not take a cigarette today. What? What happened to him? Ah, he got religion, that's all.

He'll get over it. You see, God left us in this world because God so loved the world. That's why we're in this world still, brethren, because God so loved the world.

I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let's go to the text. The ministry of reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation. From day one of Paul's Christian life, he was busy with this ministry of reconciliation. It seems like he heard the voice of God saying unto him as he was there on the road to Damascus, or maybe as he was sitting there in that house on the street called Straight for three days with an empty belly and no water and blinded eyes, it seems he heard the voice of God saying, Who will go for us? And whom shall I send? Because as soon as he could put some energy into his body and had eyes that he could see again, he went a straight way and started preaching about Jesus Christ.

All his days were consumed with this one thing. And this was not a have-to thing with the Apostle Paul. It was a pure, sweet get-to.

I believe that he saw it as the greatest privilege that God could give him. In fact, you see him testifying of that over and over and over again in his epistles. How grateful he was to God that God allowed him to be his servant.

In 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17, we find this beautiful word that we've read already, Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God.

Or all those things that become new are of God. Or they come from God. And they are there because man has been reconciled to God.

The old things pass away, behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. Amen? We sit here today, we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

We are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, the Atonement. We are reconciled to God because the blood has been shed. And today as we sit here, there's holy blood on the mercy seat in heaven.

And that's the only reason why any of us are here today. And don't you forget it. I don't care how holy you are.

I don't care how righteous you are. I don't care how sincere you are. You're going to need blood on the mercy seat no matter how perfect you get.

We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Hallelujah. We are eternally indebted to God.

And that's beautiful and that's wonderful, but Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, And God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. You know, the ministry of reconciliation.

God takes a sinner, like we heard last night, a skinhead and his wife, and He transforms them by the power of His grace through the blood and sacrifice of His Son. But as He does that, and He begins to work

in them, and He gets a hold of them, and He puts His life in them, you'll find the next thing coming out of them is to go and tell somebody else. That's God's heart.

And that's a responsibility of every child of God. Do you believe that? Let me see. Do you believe that? Let me see your hand.

Oh, really? How many souls have you told about Christ lately? How many souls have you led to Christ? Have you led even one to Christ? Do you know in South Korea, in the days of revival in South Korea, you couldn't join the church until you had at least led one soul to Christ. How about that standard, brethren? We're not sure if you are a communing member. Why? You've never led a soul to Jesus Christ.

We question your salvation. I'm not sure the right or wrong of that, but the point's real good, isn't it? This was a privilege to the Apostle Paul. God hath given us.

Look at that. He hath given us the privilege of the ministry of reconciliation. I've got to move on here.

I've run out of time. Look at verse 19. He says, To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, became the sacrifice, the atonement for mankind. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

And He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now He has given to us. You can look at this a lot of different ways.

You can say, we have an obligation. The Great Commission is in the Bible. We have an obligation.

We need to do it. You can look at it that way if you want. Or you can say, God has deposited to me the word of reconciliation.

The word which absolutely transforms a life. God has given that to me. He's committed the word of reconciliation to me.

Then Paul goes on to say, Now then, because of all that we just read, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. See, first, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Now Paul says, God is inside of me beseeching you.

And brethren, now, today, it's 2006, and God is inside of you. Isn't He? God is inside of you. And what does God want to do inside of you? Oh, be a nice little wife here on the earth.

Get you a little farm. You know, putz around out there. Plow your field.

Enjoy life. It's great. You know, heaven on earth and all that.

Is that why God is inside of us? It's not why God is inside of us. God is inside of us beseeching the world. In a sense, God has tied His hands so that He may use us.

Like the song says, He didn't give it to angels. He gave it to us. We understand, don't we? We can stand there, a converted skinhead or a converted drug addict or a long-haired hippie, we can stand there looking at another one like that and say, Oh, that's no problem.

I'm not worried about that funny-looking fellow who looks like something that came out of Mars. That doesn't bother me one bit. God can change that person from the guttermost to the uttermost.

I know He can. He can do it. Amen.

He's done it. This is the ministry of reconciliation. Some time ago, I was flying, and I do that a lot, so I get all kinds of opportunities.

But some time ago, I was flying in the wintertime. Lots of things get changed when you fly in the wintertime. I got stuck somewhere in a hotel room all night to wait for another flight the next morning.

And I walked into the restaurant in that hotel to get a bite to eat in the evening, and there were four people sitting around the table. And they were on the same plane that I was on, and we had sat on the plane for several hours already, so they knew my face, and I knew their face. And I walked into the restaurant, and they called me over and said, Oh, come on over! Are you Amish? I thought, oh boy, here we go.

See, doesn't that bother you that they ask you if you're Amish? No, that doesn't bother me at all. They saw that movie *Witness*, and they think anybody that looks different is Amish, by the way. So you may as well get used to some of that.

But they asked me that. Called me over to the table and said, Are you Amish? And I said, well, no. And they said, well, sit down, sit down.

And I sat down. Okay, I'll sit down. And we commenced to tell them how we are not Amish and give them our testimony.

And it got pretty quiet around the table after about five minutes. They thought, oh, this is an Amishman. We can talk about pies and horses and what it's like to live without electricity.

They thought, oh boy, we've got an Amishman here with us. We're going to have a nice little conversation. The conversation lasted five minutes.

That's called the word of reconciliation. God wants us to do it, brothers and sisters. Not sisters.

Well, you two girls on the other side of the wall over there. God wants us to do it. God is inside of us, moving us that way.

You know, I thought about it this morning. Maybe that's why there's a lot of turmoil and ups and downs in your life. Because God is inside of you and it's His desire to reconcile the world through you and to beseech the world to be reconciled to God through you.

Because you won't give Him and let Him have His way up and down in troubles and tossed this way and that way. And all the while, all God wants to do is use you to tell others about Jesus. All right, I ran out of time way too soon.

But listen to this real quickly. I want to give you ten what-ifs in closing. Pulled out an old sermon, but listen to this.

Ten what-ifs. What if the Great Commission is the greatest and final commandment given to man? What if the Great Commission is the greatest and final commandment given to man? What if there are multiplied

blessings hidden for those who obey it? What if there are multiplied curses and troubles for those who will not obey it? What if, number four, the great omission of the Great Commission is the cause of a cold, anemic, Laodicean American Christianity? And we can pray for revival for the next fifty years and not have it if the omission of the Great Commission is the reason for the Laodicean heart in God's people and not just them out there. What if, number five, God gave America a chance to win the world and we blew it because we love our prosperity and our nice homes and our fineries of life.

And by the way, if that's true, God will find someone else to do it, you can be sure. Number six, what if the power of the Holy Ghost was given to fulfill the Great Commission and not for our own blessings and enjoyment? Number seven, what if the clearest expression of the body of Christ on earth is evangelism? Then what good is our body? Number eight, what if the Great Commission is the salvation of the next generation? And by that let me explain. That which will sanctify and save the next generation.

See, we've got a generation growing up and we give them nothing to do and they are finding something to do. And we're not happy with what they are finding to do. What if the Great Commission is the salvation of the next generation and the only way to keep the fire burning in the next generation of Christians? Number nine, what if the Great Commission is the only reason why we are here? And lastly, number ten, what if the Great Commission is the only reason why God gave us children? Now those are some probing what ifs.

But you know, someday we are all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and we will have to answer for what we did while we were here on this earth. What if half of these are right? How will we answer? Paul's life was consumed with the ministry of reconciliation. That's why he lived.

May God open our eyes to why we are here. Let's pray. Let's just bow our heads for a moment here.

Father, this morning again we ask you to go deep in our lives. You went deep already this morning. Now you are going deep again.

But we thank you, Lord. You've been working on our hearts. You've been giving us pliable hearts.

You've been cleaning up our hearts. You've been teaching us to open our hearts. Oh God, we do thank you this morning that you are going deep now into our hearts.

Down into the deep recesses, Lord. Down there in between the joints and the marrow and revealing the thoughts and the intents and the motivations of our hearts and why we are and why we live and why we do what we do or why we don't do what we should do. God, we pray you in your goodness to us.

You will deal with us about all these things we've heard this morning's hour. We trust you to do this. We thank you for hearing us.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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