

Are You Willing to Serve

by Skip Heitzig

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a support structure, persevering in serving the Lord, and the role of prayer in spiritual health.

Duration: 57:48

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Colossians 4:7, Colossians 4:9-11

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging that Greg, the usual preacher, is on vacation in Hawaii. The speaker then leads the congregation in a prayer, asking for God's blessing on the sermon. The sermon focuses on four individuals mentioned in the Bible who serve as examples for believers. The first three individuals are praised for their dedication to serving the Lord, while the fourth, Demas, is seen as a warning. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having a strong support structure as a Christian and concludes by highlighting the need for perseverance in the face of challenges.

Transcript

This is tape number 0371. If you don't know, by now you do, Greg announced it last week, Greg is in Hawaii again. Hey listen, it's a tough job and somebody's got to do it.

But Greg really has been on a busy schedule and so it's really good for him that he's over there enjoying his wife and his children and relaxing. So we bless him for that. Let's enter into a word of prayer before we start.

Father, we ask that you bless your word. We pray that we'd open up our ears and our hearts to receive what your Holy Spirit might speak to us. Lord, we want to give you full attention.

And Lord, we ask that fruit might come out of this evening's meeting, fruit in our lives to your glory. We pray that we might become strong. In Jesus' name.

I've had you turn to Colossians chapter 4. And I'm going to start around verse 7. And so far as you look at some of the verses, you see nothing but greetings and names of people that are tough to pronounce. And I am often drawn to texts like this because they're usually skipped over by most people. When was the last time you heard a message on Tychicus? When was the last time you spoke about Epaphras or Onesimus over coffee with someone? You don't do that.

And as we read this, though, they were important people to Paul the Apostle. They were a group of friends of comrades who shared in the ministry. And we won't be able to describe them all, just a few of them.

But I bet you'll be able to think in your mind some friends who are like the people that we read about. In verse 7, it says, Tychicus, who is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all of the news about me. I'm sending him to you for this very purpose, that he might know your circumstances and comfort your hearts.

With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you, they will make known to you all things which are happening here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you with Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him.

And Jesus, who is called Justice. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision. They have proved to be a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you always laboring fervently for you in prayers that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he is a great zeal for you and those who are in Laodicea and those in Heropolis. Luke, the beloved physician, in Demas, greets you.

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and Nymphos and the church that is in his house. Now when you read through that list and you see that that's our text, you might think, well, who cares about all of these people? The answer is Paul did. These were Paul's buddies.

These were the backstage hands for Paul the Apostle. Wherever he went, that was his network of friends who kept him going. You know, whenever you see somebody who is successful and highly visible, know that they are not alone.

For them to be able to do what they are doing, they must have a network of people behind them. It is often those people, those hidden people, that are so important that we really don't know anything about. How many of you know who Charles Lindbergh's mechanic was? Nobody thinks of that.

Or who blocked for O.J. Simpson when he won the Heisman Trophy? What about the hidden saints, the backstage crew that nobody sees like Tychicus and Epaphras and some of these others that are mentioned? We've all heard of Billy Graham, but not all of us have heard of T.W. Wilson, his right-hand man who holds his arms up in the ministry, so to speak, so that he can be out there. One thing that this shows us is the importance of having ourselves a strong support structure as Christians, because we can't make it alone. There is a book in the first chapter of one book that I have on my shelf.

The chapter is called, Who is Holding Your Trampoline? And it pictures the average person bouncing up and down in life. And unless somebody's down there holding that trampoline, you're toast. You won't make it.

You need somebody supporting you as you're going up and down through life, as Paul the Apostle had this group of people with him. A Stanford professor once said, I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of me from you and us from them.

It has been shown to be a central agent in the ideology of depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder, and a wide variety of disease states. You know, I found out that in World War II, when the enemy wanted to find out information from their enemies, they wanted to find the most effective way to draw the information out. Guess what it was? Solitary confinement.

Isolate them away from their friends for long enough and you can get almost any information you'd like from them. And that's why we fellowship together. Because unless we are together sufficiently with our support structure, we are vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy.

We can lose the values that we hold so dear. And so, the church is provided for us. This is our family, whether you like us or not.

We're your brothers and sisters. And God has intended that in an atmosphere of love and support, we all grow together to be like Jesus Christ. Now, that doesn't mean the family is perfect.

Far from it. I venture to say that when you grew up, the worst fights you had were in your own family. With your own brothers and sisters.

Those who grew up with you. That's where the friction was. And so it often is in the church.

We're not perfect. But we're God's kids. That one poem that says, to dwell above with those we love will certainly be glory, but to dwell below with those we know, well, that's another story.

And Paul's friends were far from being perfect. But behind the names that we read tonight are lives that these men and women lived. And their lives had results.

And some of them were radically changed. Some of them changed for good, and some of them, unfortunately, in the end, changed for the worse. But you know, the effect of the Christian life is always change.

When a person comes in contact with Jesus, they can't stay the same. They must revolutionize. And it's not their own work, it's the work that God does in their lives.

But change is the inevitable result of coming in contact with Jesus Christ. And all of these people here had a testimony like you have a testimony. And the testimony is, this is the way I was, but God grabbed a hold of my life, and I'm completely different from how I used to be.

Just a couple weeks ago, I read a story of how the American Red Cross was opening up their arms to receive supplies for the Africa Relief Fund. They were taking money, supplies, food, clothing, anything they could take over to Africa. And one day they got a box.

Huge wooden crate, had cloth in it, and a letter was on top, that said, recently we have been converted, and because we have been converted, we want to try to help. We will never need these anymore. Could you possibly use them? And inside were sheets from the Ku Klux Klan, cut up into strips to be used for bandages to bandage the wounds of black people in Africa.

That's change. And we could go through this list, had we the time, and look at, say, verse 9, Onesimus, who was a slave who ran away, but eventually, after he came to know Christ, went back to reconcile with his Master. I want to zero in, however, on four different names, four different people, friends of Paul the Apostle that he ministered with.

Three of them we can copy, we should emulate. One of them is a warning for us. And I'd like to describe them for you in terms of positions.

One who ran, one who stooped, one who fell, and so forth. As we go through this list, you'll be able to relate at least to one of them, if not all of them. You might be tempted to think of somebody else who needs to hear this, or maybe somebody sitting next to you, and you'd be tempted to nudge them at a strategic point.

Refrain from doing that. This is a self-examination tonight. You're before the Lord.

And we need to ask ourselves, what position am I in tonight before God? Am I growing? Am I running to finish the race? What position am I in? First of all, I want you to look at verse 10 as we look at one who ran to the finish line. In verse 10 it says, Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you. But I want to look at the next one.

With Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you received instructions, if he comes to you, welcome him. Now, Mark was related to Barnabas. It says he was his cousin.

Some translations say that Barnabas was the uncle of Mark. And it was Mark who joined Barnabas and Saul on their first evangelistic crusade. He was their assistant, it says in the book of Acts.

He probably made arrangements for them. He made the path clear so that they could go and minister. But something strange happened in the middle of their missionary journey when they sailed from Cyprus to Perga for some unknown reason, Mark split and went back to Jerusalem.

He'd had enough. Now, scholars have tried to figure out exactly why this happened and they've come up with a few solutions. Number one, they say that he got homesick.

And that's a possibility. He's been away from Jerusalem. His mother lived in Jerusalem.

We know that from the scripture. Perhaps he had a girlfriend in Jerusalem. He missed her.

He didn't think he'd be gone as long as he was. And so he thought, you know what? This is crazy. I miss Mom.

I miss Diana, my girlfriend. I want to get back to Jerusalem real bad. And he split.

Scholars have come up with a second solution and that is he got not homesick but seasick. Traveling in those days wasn't by airplane. You know, I was able to get on an airplane this afternoon and shoot right over here.

It was quick. Two hours. But in those days, being on the Mediterranean Sea and having to dodge those waves up and down got pretty hairy.

And perhaps he didn't know what it was going to be like and it was too rough traveling and he went home. But the third explanation is one that I tend to agree with and that is there was a changing of the guard that Mark saw with Barnabas and Paul. You see, Barnabas was his uncle.

And Barnabas was the most prominent figure in the church at Antioch. Everybody looked up to Barnabas. He was the one who brought Paul out of obscurity.

Nobody had heard of Paul. Everyone heard of Barnabas. And as you read the book of Acts, you read about Barnabas and Paul, Barnabas and Paul, Barnabas and Paul.

And then there's a change. All of a sudden you read about Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas.

And Paul is the prominent one. It could be that Mark saw this and he didn't like Uncle Barney taking second place. And so he went back to Jerusalem.

He had quit. He was throwing in the towel until we read a few chapters later how Paul said, You know what, Barnabas? We had a fruitful missionary journey. Let's go back to all the churches we established and let's strengthen them.

And the Bible says that Barnabas and Paul got into such an argument and dispute that they had to split company. You could picture the scene. Paul says, Barnabas, I want to go back and minister again to all those churches.

Hey, Paul, that would be great. Let's take John Mark again. No.

We took him the first time. Do you remember what he did? He split right in the middle of it. I'm not going to use him again.

Oh, come on. Give him a second chance. He's just a kid.

I think he learned his lesson. Let's let him go for it. No way, man.

I am not running Holy Land tours. I'm winning souls for Christ. I gave him a chance.

One strike, he's out. I don't have time for him, Barnabas. Well, hey, if that's the way you feel, if you're not going to take him, then I'm not going either.

Fine. Suit yourself. I'm going then with Silas.

And they split company. The contention was so hard between them. The ministry is tough.

And perhaps Mark didn't know it would be that hard. He got into it not knowing what to expect. And you can't blame Paul for being as cautious as he was and not letting him come the second time.

He really was serious about winning souls for Christ. Charles Spurgeon, last century, speaking to his congregation, said, a lot of you look at the ministry and think it's glamorous, but I go through fits of such depression, I hope none of you ever enter into them. I've even heard Chuck Smith years ago say that when young men come to him to enter into the ministry, he feels it's his God-given duty to discourage them.

He says, if I can discourage them by my words right off the bat, they don't belong in the ministry. Because the discouragements of the battles in the ministry will be great enough that if I can discourage them with a few words, they don't belong there. It's good wisdom.

Perhaps Mark went into this venture not knowing what to expect. He just said, hey, I quit. I don't like what's happening to Barnabas, and I don't like how hard it is, and I'm throwing in the towel.

Now what happened to him? How did he respond to Paul not allowing him to go? Well, the best way to answer that is look at Mark 15 years later. Fifteen years after that incident, he didn't quit. He's still thriving.

He's still running. He's still serving the Lord. Tradition says that Mark went to Alexandria and started the church.

We don't know for sure, but we do know that Mark and Paul were eventually reconciled. In fact, at the end of Paul's ministry, he pens these words. He says, get Mark and bring him with you because he is profitable to me for the ministry.

So whatever happened with Mark, he didn't give up after he failed the first time. He kept running all the way to the finish line. Now I brought this guy up because if there's anyone that should be an encouragement to us if we've ever failed at serving the Lord, it's Mark.

Instead of sulking like we can do from time to time and saying, Lord, I tried once. I was out there giving it my best. They didn't recognize me.

It didn't work. I didn't see fruit. I'm going to quit.

Mark didn't do that. He kept on running all the way. In fact, the best way to learn sometimes is to fail.

Give yourself the freedom to fail. You know, God doesn't expect you to always be perfect. In fact, when you fail, it doesn't surprise Him in the least.

Did you know that? I bet you have higher expectations of yourself than God does. The Bible says, God knows your frame that you're but dust. I quote that often to the Lord.

After I fail from time to time, God says right here, you know my frame that I'm but dust. Listen, if you're a parent and your child fails, do you kick them? You say, I can't believe you made a mistake. You're my kid.

No, you probably wrap him in your arms and say, it's alright. Let me dust you off. Go for it again.

You'll make it. And then do you charge him for it? Do you say, now listen, I did you a favor. I expect a favor in return.

No, you understand that your kid is still under construction. You're God's kids, and God knows you're under construction. And just because you fail, there's no reason for you to stay in that position but to respond like Mark as we see him at the end of his ministry, following, being used by Paul, being sent out by Paul.

And Paul said, he's useful now and profitable for my ministry. I love that. Don't quit.

In the excavations of Pompeii, the city that was destroyed by a volcano, completely submerged by volcanic ash. In the excavations, they found people in different positions, like we're reading tonight. Some running away from the volcano, clutching a few of their precious belongings from their home.

Some grabbing their babies. And they were caught by the volcanic ash in mid-flight. The excavations revealed that.

But they found a guard at the gate of the city of Pompeii standing erect, holding his spear. And as the volcanic ash came crashing through the town at the soldier, he didn't move. He held his post.

He stood firm until the end, holding his spear. He wouldn't give up. Mark was like that.

Now I want you to look over at verse 12. We saw one who ran to the finish. Let's look at one who knelt down to pray.

Epaphras. It says, Who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Now, Epaphras was a local boy.

That's what it means when it says he was one of you. He started the church at Colossae. If you were to look over at chapter 1, the Colossians learned about the Gospel from Epaphras to begin with.

So he was a local boy. They knew who he was. Now, that can work for you or against you.

You know how it is when you grow up and you become a Christian after being with your peers for a number of years and they look at you very skeptically? Because, hey, we grew up with you, man. We heard the words that came out of your mouth. We saw how you treated your parents.

We know what kind of a person you really are. And now you're preaching to me? You expect me to buy into that? Jesus said, A prophet is not without honor except in his own country. And when Jesus went to Nazareth, his hometown, that's where he received the heaviest rejection.

This is Joseph's son. We played marvels with him. He says he's the Messiah? Give me a break.

Now, Epaphras was a local boy. But he was raised up by God on Paul's missionary team and he sends his greetings and Paul makes mention of him. But his notable character, as we read here, is that he was a prayer warrior.

It wasn't his theology. It was his knee-ology. It says he's kneeling so that you can be standing.

I love that. He's praying for your stability. Here's a person who's praying that you might stand firm in all of the will of God and make it all the way to the end.

I think it's safe to say that our prayer lives, our inner, hidden lives before the Lord, it's the true indicator of our spiritual life, isn't it? I found out that an iceberg, when you look at it, you're only seeing a small portion of what's really there. One-tenth of an iceberg is visible on top. Nine-tenths are hidden.

The stability that you see is because of all of that mass underneath. Same with the tree. When you see a tree with all of its leaves bearing fruit, it's because there's this huge root system underneath that you don't see that's causing that tree to stand.

So it is in the spiritual life. Epaphras, one who knelt to pray. Now you might be able to relate to a person like this, or you might think of someone in your mind who's a prayer warrior that you know.

What a great person to have on your team, praying for you that you stand in the will of God. And that's where spiritual health begins, is in a relationship with God one-on-one on a daily basis. Hey, if you want strength, it first comes in just that quiet time before the Lord.

That's really where it's at. Now I heard that when the Gospel first went over to Africa, and some of the people in the villages were being saved, that they would all meet together in the morning and have a convocation, and then shortly after they would walk out into the jungle, each to an isolated spot that only

the individuals knew about. And so you can see what happened.

They'd get up in the morning, and they'd walk out to their place, and because of the grass that grew in Africa, they'd wear pads down into the grass. You could see little trails going out. And you could always tell when somebody was neglecting their quiet time.

The weeds in the grass started growing back. And so they had a little phrase for somebody who wasn't maintaining a close relationship with the Lord. The elder would gather the people together, and he'd find the person and he'd say, Brother, there is grass growing on your path.

Which means, hey, you haven't been walking with God very close, man. You haven't been out there with the Lord on a daily basis. We see that there's grass growing in your path.

You're not making it with God. Well, Epaphras had the strength that was an inward strength. He knelt so that others might stand.

But I want you to notice a couple things about his prayer life that makes him unique. It says he prayed fervently. It's an interesting word.

It actually means to boil over. It means to be red hot. It could also be translated to agonize.

It speaks of an athlete who is working out for the Olympics. In fact, one translation of this verse says Epaphras is wrestling for you in prayer. That's what the word fervently really means.

Now, when we pray, it is possible to put our minds on hold and our mouths on automatic. You know what I mean? I mean, you just start mouthing things. Oh Lord, bless, lead, guide, and direct in Jesus' name.

And we're not even thinking about it. It's just, you know, you turn on the hose and let it run. Instead of praying fervently, boldly, before God's throne.

Like you really know Him and you really expect Him to answer your prayers. That's the idea here. And that's what James meant when he said it's the fervent, effective prayer of a righteous man that gets the job done.

It's what Paul meant when he said be fervent in spirit, boiling over, red hot, and serving the Lord. Now, if prayer is the thermometer of the heart, what's your temperature? What's it like? What's your prayer life? Your inward, hidden life like? Is there grass growing in your path? Or is that path worn clean because you're out there every day? Charles Spurgeon once wrote, Prayer pulls the rope down below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly, and others give only an occasional jerk at the rope.

But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continually with all of his might. So he prayed red hot. But notice this.

Secondly, in verse 12, he prayed fervently for others. Notice the emphasis. Laboring fervently for you.

And notice verse 13. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you and for all who are in Laodicea and those in Heropolis. We define this as intercession.

When you pray for other people, when you pray on behalf of somebody other than yourself, that's intercession. And that's where sacrifice comes in. In fact, that's where prayer becomes work.

That's why he said, laboring for you in prayer. Now, when we worship, that's not work. I dig it.

I'm into it. It's easy. When the praise band comes out and the music rolls, it is easy to enter into that.

My spirit gets uplifted. I don't consider that work. Oh man, I've got to labor.

Here goes God. I'm going to praise Your name. That's easy.

It's wonderful. When I pray for myself and have personal petition, that's not labor. It's easy.

I'm in touch with what I need. It's easy for me to say, I need this, I need that, I want this, I want that. But when I pray for somebody else that I don't know especially, that's when it's tough.

I find it much harder to pray for others than for myself. That's where labor comes in. I heard of a young lady who said in her quiet time, I said, Lord, this morning, I am not going to pray for myself, but only others.

And she went through the prayer list and then at the end she said, and by the way, Lord, I pray that You'd bless my mother with a handsome son-in-law in Jesus' name. It's tough to just pray for others. It's work.

But Epaphras was one who would do it. In verse 14, we look at a third character. We've seen one who ran to the finish.

One who knelt to pray. Now look at one who stooped to serve. Verse 14.

Luke, the beloved physician. Now, I'm not going to turn to all of the texts in the New Testament, but I'm going to give you a little biography about Luke. Luke is obviously on Paul's team.

Luke was a Gentile. He wasn't a Jew. In fact, he's the only Gentile author in the New Testament.

But he was also a doctor. And Luke is a great example of somebody who was highly educated, very professional, but would just serve in any capacity. To see that the kingdom of God was furthered, he would stoop down to serve in any way he could.

Being a doctor, he was held in high regard because the Greeks had perfected medicine to such a degree that doctors were looked upon with high esteem. Luke was also, being a doctor, a very thoughtful person. A researcher.

He was a medical man. And as you read the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, you see when he especially writes about healings, he writes in medical terminology. Very detailed kind of doctor-scientific lingo.

And he wrote very orderly. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke, he begins by saying, it seemed good to me, having had perfect understanding of all these things from the very beginning, to write to you an orderly account. So that's the kind of a person he was.

This scientific professional, but there wasn't a job that was too low for him. Luke didn't say, well, you know, Paul, I've got a real good practice going on here. It's very lucrative, and listen, I'll pray for you.

No, he joined with Paul in Troas. Went to Jerusalem with him. Went to Rome with him.

And was a personal attendant to Paul. Probably a personal doctor. But he was willing to do anything.

When a Christian becomes a servant, and I say when, because there are believers, but then there are believers who really see themselves as being owned by God. You know, when a Christian comes to a place where he says, God, I don't own myself anymore. You're the boss.

And I've been a believer, but I've been doing my own thing in my own way for a long time. But now I'm just turning every single part of my life over to You. Whatever it is, I'll do it.

When a Christian becomes a servant, he stoops, and he doesn't care about position, prestige. He doesn't care about professionalism. He cares about people.

He cares about their souls. And he wants the kingdom work established. Like Jesus who would wash feet.

You know, Leonard Bernstein, the great composer and conductor, was asked one time, what is the hardest instrument for you to get somebody to play in your orchestra? Without hesitating, he said, second fiddle. He said, I can find plenty of first violinists and first anything, but second fiddle, second anything. Nobody volunteers.

It was Dwight L. Moody who said, the measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves. Even as Jesus, we just mentioned at the Last Supper, got a basin and He washed the dirty feet of His disciples. Did you ever think about that? He could have said, now, it's important that you know who I am.

I am the Messiah. Do you know what that means? You know what He did? He bent down and He washed their feet. And He says, I'm doing this as an example for you so that as I've stooped to serve, I want you to do that to your brothers and sisters.

Oh, we need people like that in the box. Stooping to serve in any capacity. In the days of the stagecoach, they used to sell three tickets.

One was first class, one was second class, one was third class. They had three different prices. And a man was going to the stagecoach one day, and he looked inside and he noticed that all the seats were the same.

None was more plush than the other. So he thought, well, I'll save a few bucks, I'll buy third class, and I'll sit in the same coach as first class. So he did.

And he thought it was great until they came to a hill. And they stopped, and the coachman yelled back to the people, and he said, those in first class, keep your seats. Those in second class, get out and walk.

Those in third class, get out and push. You know what? We need lots of believers who are willing to get out and push. Instead of saying, I want first class accommodations, God.

Being willing to stoop and serve in any capacity. Well, that's Luke. Now there's a fourth one, and we're going to end with this guy.

And this is not one that we should look at as an example. Now the first three are, and tonight if you evaluate your life, or as you think of yourself in the company of your peers and your friends, perhaps you can identify in your mind somebody who's running to the race. He's always going for it.

Nothing wears him down. He's still serving the Lord. You can think of somebody who's a prayer warrior.

You can think of someone who's just willing to serve in any capacity, but there's a fourth one I want to draw your attention to, who's not one we had a copy. It's a warning to us. And that's also in verse 14.

His name is Demas. Now here it says, Demas greets you. He's only mentioned three times in the New Testament.

Twice he's mentioned as one of Paul's companions. Here and in Philemon. He was just one of the gang serving Paul the Apostle.

He was obviously with Paul during his first imprisonment, but something happened to Demas. It's a tragic story. I want you to keep, well you don't have to keep your finger here, turn over to 2 Timothy.

Take a right, go a few pages. As you're turning to 2 Timothy, let me just give you the background. 2 Timothy is the last letter ever written by Paul the Apostle.

He knows that he's about to die. He can see the curtain closing in his life. He's been in prison once, he was let go.

Now Caesar Nero got a hold of him and imprisoned him a second time. He knows that he's about to die and first of all, he looks backward over his life and in verse 7 he says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. And then he looks forward. 2 Timothy chapter 4. What did I say? I didn't say.

That's why. That's why it happened. 2 Timothy 4 verse 7. I fought the good fight.

I finished the race. I've kept the faith. In verse 8 he looks ahead.

Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that day and not only to me but all who love his appearance. And then he looks around. He looked ahead.

He looked backwards. And now he looks around at the friends of people, the company of people who are with him. And notice what it says.

Be diligent, verse 9, to come to me quickly for Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world. And he has departed for Thessalonica, Crescans for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Mark left Paul once but as we already saw he was reconciled and restored and he went for the finish line.

Demas left not only Paul but his calling in the Lord. He has forsaken me. He loved this present world.

This world was such a strong magnet for him that it pulled him back down. John said, Love not the world nor the things that are in the world for all that is of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life, it's not of the Father but it's of the world and the world is passing away but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Now when he says the world, he doesn't mean the earth, the trees, don't love

everything out there.

It means the world system that's opposed to God. It is possible to have a veneer of Christianity. To carry one of these items.

Carry it alongside of you to underline things in it. Yet to be living for the world. And eventually you come to that point where like Demas you have to make a choice.

And Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world. There are two ways for us to live. We can grab onto this earthly existence in one of two ways.

Really tightly or with loose hands. We can have a light touch with it. There's a great sign as you go into Zion National Park.

It says, Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints. Good motto for our lives. As you're traveling through this life and I'm traveling through this life, hey we're just passing through.

Be transient, have a light touch. Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but pictures. But Demas was holding on so tightly that the world dragged him back down.

He thought he could serve two masters. But he came to a point where he had to choose one. Did you ever see Indiana Jones in The Last Crusade? You're wondering, what kind of a theologian is this? But, there's a classic scene in that when they're looking for the cup, the grail, and they come to the cave.

And they go inside and Indiana Jones is there and there's that old English knight who's protecting the grail. He's been there for like 800 years, 1,000 years, I don't know. And the bad guys come in and they're looking for the cup and he didn't know which one to choose.

But the old knight said, you better make the right choice. You better choose carefully. And the guy grabs the wrong cup, drinks it and he melts.

And the response of the knight was classic. He said, he chose poorly. That's the understatement of the year.

Of Demas, we could say the same thing. He chose poorly. He came to a point where he thought, the world or Christ? The world or Christ? I've been trying to walk this double standard for too long.

Which will it be? And he finally said, unfortunately the world. Instead of Christ. What a horrible thing to say.

Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world. Now, unfortunately, many have followed in his footsteps. You probably can think of some tonight.

Some of your contemporaries. Some who used to come to church with you. Some who used to be faithful to the Lord.

And you mention Jesus to them now, they go, oh, not now. I can think back on my early Christian walk. Some of my contemporaries that I went to church with, that I served the Lord with.

It's not the same anymore. I think of one who was a young minister actually and played quite an influential role in my early Christian life. And I saw as he turned away from the Lord.

He's not serving the Lord like he used to. He's a used car salesman now. Not that that's bad.

But it's not God's highest for him. He loved the world and went away from Christ. I remember two guys in high school who used to stand up on the lunch benches every noon hour and preach the gospel.

One of them is selling drugs. The other is selling insurance. You know, a couple years ago, I had a guy call our church and say, Skip, I have a Bible I'd like to give to somebody.

I'm quitting being a Christian. I'd never heard that. I said, what? How do you quit being a Christian? You might give up on God, but He won't give up on you.

Oh, but I quit. I'm laying it down. I'm not going to use it anymore.

I had expectations. God didn't fulfill them, so maybe somebody can use my Bible. Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.

That was the epitaph of Demas. Be faithful to the Lord. Why was it that Demas left? We don't know, but could it be that as he saw Paul put in prison the second time, as he saw Caesar Nero about to kill Paul, he thought, my neck is next.

I could be in prison next. Hey, this is not what I expected. No way, man.

I had a good time in the world. I didn't know that serving Christ would bring these kind of trials. I'm laying it down.

I quit. See you later, God. Could it be? There's a true story from about 300 A.D. when the Roman Empire was being converted in mass and soldiers were coming to know Christ, that an edict came from Caesar himself that said, tomorrow, everybody in the company of soldiers in the Roman Empire must stand before a statue and burn incense to Caesar and say, Caesar is Lord.

The company of the 12th Roman Legion was assembled and the leader said, tomorrow is our day, gentlemen. You've been courageous in battle. I want you to step forth and be courageous and give honor to the emperor tomorrow.

And that night, two soldiers came forward and said, we want to tell you something. Forty within our company are Christians. And there's no way that we're going to bow to Caesar tomorrow morning.

The man said, well. The commander said, if you do, you'll be promoted and you'll get a raise. If you don't, you'll be killed.

You make the choice. In the morning, they refused. They were taken to a lake.

It was in the middle of the winter. They were bound with ropes and when the sun went down, their clothes were stripped off and they were made to stand in the middle of a shallow lake, almost frozen, until they died. But they lifted up their hands and their voices and they sang praises to God.

Until about midnight, their voices started fading because they were starting to freeze to death. There was a warm bathhouse kept off to the side of the lake for defectors, to tempt them. Hey, anytime you want to quit and worship the Caesar, run out this way, we'll warm you up.

Around midnight, one of the soldiers who was in the lake was heard splashing through the water and running to the shore, to the bathhouse. He said, hey, I'll do anything you want. I'll forsake Christ.

I'll worship whoever. I'm cold. The sentry who was watching them was so taken by the 40, the 39 who were left out in the lake that he took his armor off and his clothes and he said to the defector, hey, you can have my clothes.

You can have my armor. I'll take your place. He was so taken by this kind of faith that these would hang in there.

That even though there was a demis among them who defected, he was taken in by the faith of the rest. Perhaps your life is like that. Perhaps there's people around you who are starting to fall.

They've been around, but now they're starting to back off a little bit. But they see you standing up for the Lord. And that's enough for them to go on.

You say, but it's hard. It's hard serving the Lord. You know, I think we ought to tell Christians that at the very beginning.

I think we ought to call people to discipleship and say, hey, you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and He'll wash you from your sins. He'll give you a brand new start. It'll be a radically peaceful existence and you'll have peace with God and abundant life.

But, the battle begins when Jesus becomes your Lord. All the forces of hell, when you ask Jesus to be your Savior, aren't going to applaud you. You're going to be their target.

And you all know that. You all know the magnetic pull that this world has toward us who believe. But you also know the strength that Jesus Christ gives you when you stand, don't you? And you know what? It is hard.

Hey, I'll be the first to admit it. It's not that easy. But you just wait until you get to hear Jesus say, well done, good and faithful servant.

And you think, it's all worth it. It's all worth it. What profit a man if he gained the whole world and lose his own soul? A missionary came home from Africa.

He was retired. He decided, hey, I'm 65, I'm retiring. On the same boat that was carrying him back to the United States was President Roosevelt.

Who just got done being in Africa two weeks on a big hunt. And the press was there in New York to meet him and they took pictures and they had a band playing. And the two missionaries who gave their lives in Africa walked off the boat unnoticed.

Went to a dingy hotel room in New York City. And that night this elderly gentleman scowled on the edge of his bed. Slammed his fist down and said, it's not fair.

We've been slaving all of our lives for God in an unknown country. And the President shoots an elephant for two weeks and the people applaud him. He gets all the reward.

We didn't get anything. We come home and nobody says anything. And the wife turned to him and smiled and said, we're not home yet.

Hey, brother and sister, you're not home yet. One day you'll be home. And no matter what you're going through now, no matter what is pulling you down, you hang in there.

Which position are you? Are you running to the finish? Are you stooping to serve? Are you kneeling to pray? If you say no to those three, you probably are saying yes to the fourth one. You're probably like demons. But if you are stooping to serve, you're kneeling to pray, you're running to the finish, you can't be falling to compromise.

But to close this whole evening off, I want to give a word of encouragement because perhaps some of us tonight are like demons. We have not been following the Lord. We have been pulled away and we have been compromising lately.

The scriptural word is backsliding. You know that you have a heavenly dad who just like a father that wouldn't kick his son when he fails, your heavenly dad wants to pick you up and restore you this evening? If you've fallen away from Jesus Christ, if you've left your first love, don't you know that God is willing to restore you? I would like to close this evening with a story written by a father about his kids. I want you to listen carefully.

He begins by saying, being a parent is better than a theology course. Two ten-year-old boys walked up to my five-year-old daughter on the bus yesterday, scowled at her, and demanded that she scoot over. When I came home from work, she told me about it.

She said, I wanted to cry, but I didn't. I just sat there afraid. My immediate impulse was to find out the names of those boys and punch their dads right in the nose.

But I didn't. I did what was more important. I pulled my little girl up into my lap and I let her get lost inside my arms and I told her not to worry about those old bullies because her daddy was here.

And I'd make sure if those thugs ever got close to my princess, they'd be taking their lives in their own hands, yes sir. And that was enough for her. She bounded down and ran outside.

She came back a few minutes later, however, crying. Her elbow was scraped. I picked her up and carried her into the bathroom for first aid.

She tried to tell me what happened. I was turning in circles, like a helicopter, and I fell down. She wailed.

It's going to be okay, I said, as I sat her on the bathroom counter. Can I have a Band-Aid? Of course, I said. A big one? The biggest.

Really? I stretched the adhesive bandage over the scrape and held her arm in the mirror so that she could see her badge of courage. Wow, can I show Mommy? Sure. And that was enough for her.

Moments of comfort from a parent. As a father, I can tell you they're the sweetest moments of my day. They come naturally, they come willingly, and they come joyfully.

Now, if all that is true, if I know that one of the privileges of fatherhood is to comfort a child, why am I so reluctant to let my Heavenly Father comfort me? Why do I think He wouldn't want to hear about my

problems? Why do I think, well, they're so puny compared to people starving in India? Why do I think He's too busy for me? He's got the whole universe to worry about. Why do I think He's tired of hearing the same old stuff? Why do I think He groans when He sees me coming? And why do I think He consults His list when I ask for forgiveness and He says, don't you think you're going to the well too many times on this one? Why do I think I have to speak some holy, lofty language around Him that I don't speak with anyone else? And why do I think He won't do in a heartbeat to the father of lies what I thought He would do to the father of those bullies on the bus? Do I think He was just being poetic when He asked me if the birds of the air and the grass of the field don't have a worry? No, sir. And if they don't, why do I think I will? Why do I not take Him seriously when He questions, if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him? Why don't I let my Father do for me what I am more than willing to do for my children? I am learning, though, for being a parent is far better than a course on theology.

Being a father is teaching me that when I'm criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I'm better, help me until I can live without the hurt, and who won't go to sleep when I'm afraid of waking up and seeing the dark, ever. And that's enough for me.

You have a dad. You have a relationship built in anytime you fail. And if you are not a believer tonight, do you know what you're missing out on? The comfort of a Father who would take you in His arms and say, no matter what you've done, I'll forgive you completely? Why do we think that God is so far away from us and what we've done is so wicked that He won't forgive us? Not true.

I encourage you tonight, if you are a backslidden believer, if you're a demis who's fallen compromised to the world, that you come back to Dad. Heavenly Father, who will forgive you in your backslidden state, who will restore you, who will put a band-aid on that scrape, who will say, it's okay, I'll teach you how to walk, but don't let go of my hand. And if you don't know Jesus tonight, you've been invited by friends, you're curious, you're thinking, what kind of people come Monday nights to a church? And you ended up here.

God is calling you tonight. God is calling you to be, first of all, His kid, His child. He wants to care for you, He wants to forgive you.

Perhaps you're religious. Hey, I go to church. It's good enough.

And you know in your heart tonight it's not good enough. That relationship isn't established. What's your relationship with God like tonight? As you've evaluated yourself in light of all of these four people.

Great theologian, George Truitt, went over to a man's house in Texas who was a millionaire. Millionaire was proud of what he owned. Millionaire took him to the top of his roof and he pointed out at the bean field that stretched to the horizon.

He said, I own everything in that direction. George Truitt said, wow, that's great. Then he pointed backwards and he said, as far as you can see in that direction, I own it all.

And I own everything in that direction, I own everything in that direction. And Truitt said, how much do you own in that direction? Tonight, evaluate your life in the light of God. Eternity.

What's it like in that direction? If you find yourself bankrupt, you have a heavenly Father who will pick you up. Let's pray. Lord, it's great that we can come before you and call you Father, Dad.

We can come before your throne boldly to receive grace to help in time of need. And we admit, Lord, that that's pretty often. But nevertheless, we come boldly to you tonight, Lord.

And if we have fallen, we ask that you pick us up, restore us, forgive us. May we know the joy of your salvation once again. I pray, Lord, that we would not quit, but we'd keep running.

We'd keep stooping to serve one another. And Father, I pray that if there are those who have backslidden tonight, have fallen away from you, or have never made once a commitment to Jesus, that they would come home tonight to a loving heavenly Father like that prodigal son that your word said. During this time of prayer, I'm going to ask that everyone stays seated, remains in this attitude of reverence before the Lord.

As your head is bowed and as you're contemplating your life, if you're a believer, I want you to pray for people who need to come home to Jesus tonight. But I'm speaking to those now who perhaps have fallen away from the Lord, who never made a commitment to Jesus. If that describes your heart, and you feel the tug of the Holy Spirit in your heart tonight, I want you to respond, because the Bible says now is the appointed time.

Today is the day of salvation. If you want to know the love of Jesus Christ and His peace, which passes all human understanding, as the worship team sings this song, I want you to get up out of your seat, and I want you to walk down the aisle and stand right here in front of this platform, and we're going to lead you in a word of prayer. If you brought a friend and he's a little bit antsy about it, you might want to help him up and bring him down.

So as we sing, we want you to come and just stand right here, and we'll lead you in a word of prayer. Begin to come now. I need you.

I need you. Oh Lord, have mercy now on me. Forgive me.

Oh Lord, forgive me. And I will be free. Look upon my need.

I need you. I need you. Oh Lord, have mercy now on me.

Forgive me. Oh Lord, forgive me. And I will be free.

Oh Lord, you are familiar with my ways. There is nothing here from you. Oh Lord, you know the number of my days.

I want to live my life for you. I forgot to announce, but if you're watching on television in the fellowship hall, you might want to get up and just come across the walkway and come right into the church here and take a stand with these who have come already. Praise the Lord.

All right. Thank you, Lord. Everyone that has made a stand here tonight, you've made a bold step.

But it's the best, most important step of your life. It's a step into birth, into new life. But the Scripture says, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Everything is passed away and everything becomes new. As you come to Jesus and as you give Him your life tonight, every sin you've ever committed will be washed completely away. You'll be white as snow.

And you'll be God's kid. You have a relationship with Him not as human and God, but child and Father. I'd like to lead you in a word of prayer.

Everyone who's come forward, if you're listening by radio, if you're in your car, you're at home, I want you to say this prayer after me if God has touched your heart and you want to give your life to Jesus tonight. This prayer is between you and God. But I'd like you to repeat it out loud after me.

Heavenly Father, I give You my life. Everything I have is now Yours. Cleanse me from my sins.

I make Jesus the Lord of my life. Take control, Lord. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit.

Write my name in Your Book of Life and help me now to do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/5/SID5441.mp3>

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