

Giving Our Best

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[0 : 00] If you ever watched a hard-fought athletic contest where the players just went all out, did all they could, put forth their best efforts, and after the game, one of them said, we left it all on the field, or we left it all on the court.

That was their way of describing how they held nothing back. They gave everything they had to win the game.

They gave it their best effort. Well, that is how the Apostle Paul lived his life and in different words summed it up as he approached death.

Paul basically said, we're going to read the passage, but he basically said, I left it all on the field of life. I put forth my very best effort to be faithful to God and fulfill his purpose for my life.

Look at how he actually said it in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 6 through 8. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

[1 : 25] I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

New Testament scholars spend a lot of time doing things like reading Paul's letters, reading what Luke says about him in the book of Acts, and trying to figure out a timeline of his life.

And most of them really believe that Paul wrote 2 Timothy, this second letter to Timothy, his son in the ministry, that this was his last letter, and that he was waiting in a Roman prison cell to be executed.

Now some of you are familiar with the life of Paul and how he at one point was under house arrest in Rome. The book of Acts ends with him.

He's under house arrest in Rome. He's chained to a Roman soldier at all times, but he has a lot of freedom, and friends and other people can come and talk with him.

[2 : 50] He got to teach. And it was during that imprisonment, with all that freedom, that he wrote the New Testament letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Now this is not in the Bible, but tradition says that Paul was released after he appealed to Caesar that day, or at that first imprisonment, and that he did go to Spain.

He's talked about that at the end of his letter to the Romans. He wanted to go to Spain and preach. He wanted to take the gospel to the western part of the Roman world because he'd always been working in the eastern part.

Well, tradition tells us that he went to Spain and he came back, and in Rome this time, under a time of great persecution, he was put in a real prison, dungeon-lock prison.

And it's from this prison that he dictated his last letter, his letter to Timothy, and he made this statement. It sounds like a final summary of his life, doesn't it?

[4 : 00] He knows it's coming to an end. I want you to note in that first verse six, he describes his approaching death as something that has already begun.

Look at it. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering. Paul's really talking about how he has poured out his life. His energy, like wine, was poured out in certain Old Testament ceremonies. In some of those ceremonies, when the wine was poured out, the entire container was emptied. Nothing was left. That's how Paul's thinking.

He's thinking about how his life has been poured out in service to God and to thousands of people. And it's about to be emptied.

He's going to die. That's his way of saying, he left nothing on the field. He put forth his very best effort to serve God and fulfill the mission that God gave him.

[5 : 08] Two weeks ago, Alan McQuiet was here and he preached a message that challenged us to be totally committed. He gave some examples of men and women who just sold out to the Lord, poured out their lives, spent their life.

And the challenge to us was, we need to be totally committed. We don't have to be missionaries.

We don't have to leave pickings. We don't have to change jobs.

But total commitment is what God calls all of us to. Last week, I followed up that message with this.

Don't waste your life. Don't just fritter away life.

Just go in with the flow. Just whatever happens, happens. Today, I want to challenge everyone, beginning with me, to live our lives in such a way that when we face death, we can truthfully say, I left it all on the field of life.

I held nothing back when it came to putting forth my best effort to serve the Lord, to develop Christian character, to truly live the life that God called me to live.

[6 : 27] By God's grace, we need to be able to say, when all is said and done, I put forth my best effort to honor the Lord and do His will.

I want us to look at this passage you see on the screen and look at that as an example of what it takes to be able to say that. Look first. Giving our best to the Lord requires discipline.

Discipline is a word that a lot of people don't like. Discipline is a word that a lot of people avoid. But I want you to look at how Paul described his life in service to God in verse 7. I have fought the good fight.

Note two things about Paul's service. The value he placed on it. He said it was the good fight. The word good could be translated excellent or even noble.

Paul considered his service to God to be something of great value. He considered giving his life and doing God's will to be a great, noble cause.

[7 : 37] He didn't think he was wasting his life. Paul spent a lot of time being opposed, being mistreated. He spent several years in prison.

Paul lived the kind of life that no one would choose. No one in their right mind would want to live the kind of life and be subject to all the mistreatment that he endured.

But he considered that his calling. That was just the price that it took for him to be faithful. He didn't think he was wasting his life.

It was something of value. It was good. It was a noble pursuit. Now look at the next thing. The effort he put forth. He says he fought.

I fought. This refers to great effort, a struggle, a fight. Living a faithful Christian life is not easy. I want you to understand that.

[8 : 43] If anybody ever tells you just give your life to the Lord, put your trust in Jesus, and all will be well, either they're just misinformed or they're lying to you. Nowhere in Scripture do you find it said that living the life that would please God will be simple, will be easy.

It's a fight. It is a struggle. It's a struggle spiritually at times. It's a struggle emotionally at times. It is a struggle physically sometimes.

That's why Paul liked to use, and other writers, like the writers of the Hebrews, they like to use images of athletes. Paul liked to talk about runners.

The writer of the Hebrews did. Paul, at the end of chapter 9 of Romans, talks about boxers even, wrestlers, everyone in Paul's day and in ours.

We understand that Olympic-type athletes make all kinds of sacrifices to make the Olympic team, to go to the games, to run for the medal, I mean, think about it.

[9 : 56] They train for hours every day, eat only healthy food, and avoid anything that would be a hindrance or distraction to their efforts, listen to this, to win a medal.

But we know in our day, you win a medal, you win enough of them, you win fame, you win fortune, you win a lot. Well, Paul said what he said to encourage us, make sacrifices, whatever sacrifices are necessary, to be victorious in faithful Christian living.

Now what I'm talking about here is we need to put forth the effort to discipline ourselves, to be faithful, to develop Christian character, to treat people the way that we should in our homes.

And that's the hardest place to do it, to really love one another, demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, love and joy and peace and patience and kindness, self-control.

But also at work, do you discipline yourself, do you put forth the effort to really be the man or woman or young person of God that you profess to be?

[11 : 23] Now if you're here, you're a church member, you've professed faith, you claim to be a Christian, are you putting forth the effort to actually live that way in front of the people that are in your home and family, that you actually work with, interact with, some of them you're around more than your family.

Are you doing that with your classmates even though some of them are not Christians? Some of them may make fun of you, may leave you out.

Are you putting forth the effort to be victorious in Christian service? I'm talking about actually using the gifts that God's given you in some aspect of the life of our church.

You know, Paul challenged Timothy like this in his first letter to him. He said, train yourself, which can also be translated, discipline yourself to be godly.

You've got to work at the Spirit of God's working in you, but you've got to cooperate. You've got to work at developing godly character.

[12 : 37] It's not going to just happen. Life is such that we're going to be ungodly. Life is such that we're just going to be selfish. Some of us, by temperament, are going to be mean.

We're going to be sarcastic. We're not going to serve anyone. We're going to try to just be served ourselves. We've got to fight the good fight of faith.

That's what he told him as well. Now, don't misunderstand any of this as teaching that salvation is something that we must work for. We can't. We don't deserve it.

We cannot earn it. Salvation is truly a gift of God's grace that we can only receive by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus did earn our salvation. Salvation is costly. Jesus gave his life when he died on the cross as our substitute to take the punishment that we really deserve, the wrath of God.

[13 : 43] He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins if you're a Christian. He lived a perfect, righteous life, fulfilled the law of God and God credits that to you if you are a true believer.

So Jesus earned our salvation. We didn't. We receive it as a gift of God's grace. But then some people have the idea, well, yeah, you're saved by trusting in Jesus.

But from that point on, you've got to work. Maybe some people think to keep it. Or you've got to work to develop as a Christian. Here's how we need to think.

God graciously works in our lives to save us and God graciously works in our lives to enable us to continue to trust in Jesus and to become more like Him.

And here's how God does it by giving us those kind of desires and then enabling us to put forth the effort to discipline ourselves and develop godly character.

[15 : 00] The best statement of that in the Bible that I'm aware of, and I put it on the screen from time to time, and if I could find a way to put it up there every week, I would. This is vitally important.

Look at this. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation.

Develop it. Grow with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will, He gives you the will, the desire, and to work to do it, to discipline yourself for His good pleasure.

God does that through His Holy Spirit who lives within us. Now, let's think about how we are doing these things.

How would you describe your effort when it comes to living, I'm talking about really living like a Christian, every day from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night.

[16 : 08] Now, none of us have arrived and just truly walk with the Lord from the time we get up until we go to bed. But let's think about some specifics.

Are you training yourself to be godly by spending time with the Lord every day in His Word and prayer?

That takes discipline. our lives are busy. Some of you get up at 5 or 5.30.

You have to get up that early to get ready to eat breakfast, to be at work at the time you've got to be there. Some of you work long hours, 8, 10, 12 hours a day.

You come home, you are tired. You've got to rest. You've got to unwind before you can actually go to bed. It is vitally important that we find a way to spend time with the Lord some kind of time in His Word listening to Him and in prayer talking to Him as well as listening to Him.

[17 : 28] I want to encourage you. Discipline yourself. Find a way, a time, a place to spend time with the Lord because that is something that every single Christian must do and continue to do being with the Lord in order to stay close to Him, in order to learn how to please Him, in order to be

able to overcome sinful habits in our lives.

We need that. Are you training yourself to be godly by spending time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer every day or at least on a very regular basis which I can't say I couldn't be every day. Ask God to show you a way and it's going to take discipline. It won't be easy. Number two, are you fighting the good fight to be morally clean and pure in your thought life, in the things you talk about and in what you do?

You know, we live in a culture today, we are bombarded everywhere with all kinds of impure, lust-provoking images, aren't we?

I mean, in print, on TV, all over the internet. Everything is marketed in a sexually suggestive way. [19 : 13] If you read much of what's going on in the world, people today just talk filthy from our president on down.

That is not acceptable from anyone. But when we hear it all the time, when it's just the common lingo, it is very easy to pick it up, to use it, and to think it's okay.

God calls us to live morally pure lives, to be clean. He wants us to be that way in the way that we think, in our conversations, as well as in the way we live.

That's not easy to do today. It's not easy for me. It's not easy for you. If you're a real human being, we've got to fight to guard our minds, our words, and our actions.

Discipline your mind. Number three, are you putting forth the effort to intentionally do your job or schoolwork as if you're doing it for the Lord?

[20 : 49] Paul talked about that in Colossians. It hasn't been long since we looked at that in detail. We're supposed to do what we do as if we were doing it for the Lord.

And that, what I want to say is, that doesn't mean something real spiritual. We're supposed to do our, as Christians, we should be the best at our jobs that we can possibly be.

that helps us to have sort of a platform from which to talk about the things of God and be a witness. Don't be like the young man that I worked with many years ago.

We worked in a plant. There's a lot of machinery. Those, every one of those machines needed to be oiled on a regular basis. This young fellow, 20 years old, committed Christian, loved the Lord, and wanted to witness all the time.

But it was his job to oil those machines to go around this. It wasn't, maybe about this size. It was a little bit bigger than this. The section he had and a lot of different machines, grinding parts.

[21 : 57] You know what he did? He floated around that room, witnessing to everybody. All day, talking about the things of God and not oiling the machines.

He lost all credibility. Most people despised him because he was preventing their machines from running at full capacity.

Some of them sometimes would stop and they would come and cuss him out over his witnessing and drag him back to oil their machines.

I say all that to say, at school, at work, the first way you are a witness is by the quality of your work. The attitude you demonstrate in your work. If you're not good at what you do, you are a bad witness. I want you to know that. If you're a sloppy employee, don't put forth much effort.

[23 : 03] They know you don't really care. Don't tell anybody you're a Christian, okay? Don't tell them you're a member of our church because you're a poor, poor witness.

We, if we're serious about living the kind of life Paul did, Paul was a tent maker. And he supported himself a lot of the time. And I guarantee you the tents that Paul made would have been of high quality because he did everything to the glory of God.

He was serious about living his faith, not just sharing it. Are you putting forth the best effort intentionally to be a good witness by the way you work, the quality of your work, your school work, as if you're doing it for the Lord?

Number four, are you disciplining yourself to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence in your life so that you'll be able to discern and obey his leading?

Here's what I'm saying. If you're a Christian, the Spirit of God lives within you. And what we need to do is learn to be sensitive to his presence as he prompts us.

[24 : 22] Don't look at this. Don't dwell on this. Don't listen to this. Get off that website. Don't engage in that kind of conversation.

As he prompts us, you ought to try to develop that relationship with that person so that you can share the gospel with him.

So when he prompts us, you need to share the gospel. You need to ask that person about their relationship with the Lord. We need to be sensitive to his presence. He'll always guide us in a way that's consistent with what he says in the word.

Never contrary. If we don't cultivate being aware of his presence, we won't hear him. We'll grieve him as the scripture talks about. I want to encourage you.

Cultivate. Discipline yourself to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence so you can be led by him. To do certain things, to not do other things.

[25 : 27] We're talking about living a Christian life. Now I want you to think, can you describe your service to God as fighting the good fight? Let me ask you a question.

Might make some people uncomfortable. Are you serving God right now? Or are you just showing up at church every now and then? If you're not serving the Lord right now, I want to encourage you. He's given you gifts and talents and abilities that he expects you to use for his glory and other people's good. He expects you, if you're a member of this church, to use those gifts and talents and your time.

If you're serving him, how do you value what you're doing? If you're already serving him, how much do you value what you're doing?

Do you think about it in terms of, I'm doing a good work. I'm seeking to please God. I'm seeking to truly help other people. We need to be involved in serving the Lord, part of fighting the good fight, and that includes everyone.

[26 : 57] Just think about it this way. Aren't there some things that you do for people just because you love them? Aren't there things you do for your spouse, your children, your parents, a friend?

Aren't there things that you do that you don't really like to do, you don't really want to do, but you do it because you love them? And because you love them, you do it with a good attitude.

You want to meet that need. Well, that's what Paul did. Paul went to places to preach that he knew he was going to be opposed, maybe run out of town, and he was a lot of times, maybe imprisoned or even killed, but he knew, Paul knew, God has graciously saved me, forgiven me, made me his child.

He has called me to this ministry of taking the gospel where it's never been before, and that's just going to cost me a lot. He also knew if he didn't go and preach, maybe thousands, of people would never hear the gospel, never be saved, spend eternity in hell.

And that was another motivating factor in his life. He fought a good fight because of his love for God and his love and concern for people. That's the key to putting forth the effort to serve the Lord in any kind of ministry.

[28 : 32] I want to ask you, do you love Jesus? I'm not asking, do you believe in him? I'm asking you, do you truly love him? How do you demonstrate it?

He wants us to serve him. He wants us to have a relationship with him. He wants us to be like him, but he wants us to serve him. He wants us to be intentional about doing it.

I encourage you to do that. Living this kind of life requires discipline every day. Look at this. Giving our best to the Lord also requires perseverance. We've got to continue to do it.

We've got to hang in there. Look at the second thing. I have finished the race. Now, don't worry. We're not going to get to the third part this morning. Paul's talking about how he's been faithful to the end.

He's persevered. He is hung in there. That didn't just happen. Paul had a plan. When God saved him and called him, he planned to do whatever it took to be faithful to the very end.

[29 : 43] I want you to look at this statement he made in Acts chapter 20. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me. If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.

The task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. God's goal throughout his ministry was to be faithful. Complete the task the Lord Jesus had given to him no matter what.

What about you? Are you planning to finish the race of Christian living? Sad truth is a lot of people aren't.

A part of the finishing the race of Christian living for you where you are right now if you're married God wants you to be the best husband or wife you can be and live together in what Genesis calls a true one flesh relationship until death separates you.

God wants you to disciple your children. Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. There's certain things that's just a part of our lives as Christians that we need to be determined we're going to be faithful.

[31 : 05] We're not going to give up. We're going to hang in there. Are you? Do you have that determination?

You know I don't think about it every day but when Lisa and I got married you know we made that same commitment everybody else makes on the wedding day but divorce has never entered my mind.

I'm sure divorce has never entered Lisa's mind. Murder yes. Maiming injuring yes. She can come closer to killing me than divorcing me I truly believe.

You see what I'm talking about. We've got to be committed. The sad truth when it comes to Christian living in general everybody doesn't finish the race.

There were people in Paul's day professing Christians who just quit. Paul talks about one later on in this letter in verse 10 one of his co-workers Demas look at it for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

[32 : 19] That happens in the church today. You can think of professing Christians who used to attend this church but they don't anymore. Some of them just sort of quit being active and just show up every now and then.

Some quit altogether. They certainly wouldn't say they abandoned the faith but they don't show much. And then some people appear to have just quit the faith.

Some people who at once professed to be Christian just turned their back on the Lord and in no way do they show any kind of evidence of being Christian. When you think of people who've quit just walked away from a real commitment to the Lord dropped out of the race let it be a warning to you.

Saving faith is continuing faith. When God starts something in us He brings it to completion. I want you to look at three verses that strongly emphasizes continuing faith.

And it says in Colossians 1 and you who once were alienated hostile in mind and doing evil deeds He is now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.

[33 : 41] Look at this. If indeed you continue in the faith He's not going to present us before the Father holy and blameless and above reproach if we don't continue because if we don't continue we never were.

He says if indeed you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul became a minister.

I know you're sitting in this room right now you're here but are you really continuing in the faith of trusting loving and following Jesus?

That's the only sign of a real Christian. Saving faith is continuing faith saving faith is also fruitful faith. There's good works. Look at Ephesians 2.10 for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The first two verses before that says I forgot the verse now. For by grace you are saved through faith it's not of yourself it's the gift of God it's not of works that no one should boast.

[35 : 00] And then he says to those who are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus look at it. For we are his workmanship some people some translations say his masterpiece created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand.

Are you doing those good works? God has prepared you and he prepared you by gifting you enabling you giving you the whatwithal to do it.

Are you doing those good works? And here's a simple way to know name them. What are you doing? Sitting around looking pretty is not one of them.

Warming a seat week after week is not one of them. What good works are you doing in and through the ministry of this church and where you work and where you go to school wherever what good works are you doing that shows the reality of your faith.

You know all of us struggle to be faithful. It's hard to fight the good fight every day. We may even be tempted to quit at times.

[36 : 15] That's why Paul wrote so many warnings and encouragements in his letters like this. Look at this. Let's not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

we can remain faithful to the end. We can persevere because God will enable us. Look at this real quickly. God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. God's always working in us causing us to will and to act according to his good purpose. We've already looked at that. God will always provide a way of escape when temptation comes.

If you give in to temptation if I give in to temptation it's because I want to, because you wanted to. Yes. Because look at what the scripture says. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.

And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. That's why I say when I sin it's because deep down that's what I wanted to do.

[37 : 19] I refused to take the way of escape. God is never will God be faithful to the very end with us.

It's always will we be faithful to the very end. God will do what he promises to do. but he also requires that we be committed, that we be disciplined, that we hang in there and not give up, that we persevere.

I want to ask you right now. If your life, you find out it's going to come to an end within the next few weeks or months, are you ready to say with Paul, I have fought the good fight, I finished the race, I kept the faith, I left nothing on the playing field of life.

If you can't say that, talk to God about it now. Make the kind of commitments you need to make. If you're not truly a Christian, admit that to God, even if you are a church member.

Turn from your sin, put your trust in him, in Jesus Christ and him alone. Surrender your life to him now. Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to see right now how we need to respond so that we can have the testimony at the end of our lives whenever that may be.

[38 : 59] We left it all on the field. We held nothing back. We gave our all to cooperating with you in developing Christ-like character.

We gave our all in serving you with our time, talents, and treasures. I encourage everybody in this room to listen to the Lord about what you need to do.

Then respond to him in obedience. Take this time to do that. As we bow together, instruments playing, we're just going to talk to and listen to God.