

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 25 Faithfulness

By

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1

Turn to [1 Corinthians 4:1–5](#). The apostle Paul declares by the Spirit of God—

1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.
3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.
4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.
5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. ([1 Corinthians 4:1–5](#) NKJV)

Let's pray,

Thank You, Lord, for Your Word, the privilege of being able to study it, and the privilege of being able to obey it. We pray that You would freshly fill us with Your Holy Spirit and we pray that You would commune with us by Your Spirit over Your Word. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the interesting studies that a person can do in the New Testament is to study the autobiographical statements of the apostle Paul, as they are found in his epistles. We read the book of Acts and we get the narrative of the cities that he went to, the events that were associated with the cities, and the establishing of that first-century church. But in Paul's epistles, the Holy Spirit occasionally gives us a glimpse at some of the things that went on in his heart and his mind while he established those churches on those missionary journeys. We get a glimpse at what made this great man of God tick—what went on in his heart and in his mind to keep him faithful through indescribable hardship.

What is it that causes a man to sing praises? It is one thing for it to be just words on a page, but it is another for it to really happen in human history—through real human lives just like ours. What is it that causes a man to sing praises after being unjustly arrested and then savagely beaten and then chained in the bowels of a first-century Roman jail? And what causes a man to rise to his feet after being stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead? What causes him to rise up from that condition, dust himself off, and rather than head into the opposite direction, he makes his way straight back into the city in which he was stoned, as Paul did in Lystra?

Many of us saw the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and there are some powerful scenes in that movie. If you watched the scourging that occurred, which our Lord bore as was portrayed in the movie, the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin winced and turned away, because they had been instrumental in causing this to occur on a purely physical realm. Then we read, as Paul writes in his epistles, this was also his portion five times in the course of his ministry and his faithfulness to God.

During Paul's second missionary journey, he came to a Greek city by the name of Corinth. He established a church there. It was not an easy thing for him to do. Corinth was a difficult city. It was a tough nut to crack, but the Lord cracked that city and the church was established there in Corinth. The apostle Paul would spend more time in the establishing of the church at Corinth than he did in any other church, except for Ephesus. He spent eighteen months of his very precious

post-conversion life, directed by the Holy Spirit, in establishing that church. The Bible declares that Paul labored day and night at enormous expense to himself, so this group of people might know and experience all that God intended for them as Christians.

Although Paul had birthed the church in Corinth, and he had served them so sacrificially; overall, the apostle Paul was largely under appreciated. Indeed he was completely unappreciated, at least by the believers there as a whole. And though there were many people in the church who loved him, there were many others who were just a constant source of grief to him. As Paul writes his letters to the people of Corinth, there is none of the openness, none of the vulnerability of the letter that he wrote to the church at Philippi. Those who ought to have been unspeakably grateful to Paul for what he had done for them, who ought to have been a tremendous source of encouragement to him and a comfort to him, they displayed none of those things to him. In fact, from the beginning of the first epistle to the end of the second epistle, he is forced to defend himself constantly to them. From the opening line of the first epistle and then very near the end of the second epistle, in what is one of the saddest verses in all of the Bible, Paul declares to this church that he had served in this way:

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls, though
the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.
([2 Corinthians 12:15](#) NKJV)

It seems as if they never appreciated his gifting. They never appreciated his service to them.

Now today it is hard for us to believe that the great apostle Paul could be unappreciated by a body of believers, but it happened in Corinth. And it was not true only of Corinth. I mean amazingly, apart from his Savior, at the end of his life he stood virtually alone in the world. He declared as he wrote to Timothy in that second epistle:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all [men] forsook
me: [I pray God] that it may not be laid to their charge.
Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.
([2 Timothy 4:16–17](#) KJV)

While Paul was at Corinth, he was serving the Lord in a situation in which he was unappreciated. That is what I want to talk about—serving the Lord in situations in which that service is unappreciated, and serving the Lord in thankless environments.

You notice in [1 Corinthians 4:3](#) that in Corinth, rather than appreciating Paul, they constantly judged him. And he speaks of their judgment of him. As he speaks of being judged by them, the word there means “to examine” or it means “to scrutinize.” It was not for the purpose of finding good in him; rather, they examined and they scrutinized him for the purpose of finding fault in him. They looked for a reason to condemn the apostle Paul. They were critical of him.

The idea is not that they watched his life and they listened to his teaching and then, having fairly observed his life and having fairly listened to his teaching and then having tested it, they came to a judgment concerning him. That is fair and necessary of people; but instead, their constant attitude toward Paul was a judgmental one. Instead of seeing all of the good things he was doing, they were constantly putting him on trial. In their own hearts they were looking for some fault in him.

There is of course, the discussion about following the Sunday morning service and how often those that have been a part of it can go home for lunch and have “roast preacher.” And they talk about, “Well, he fumbled there a little bit.” Or they may say, “He messed that up” or “Boy, he had a rough day.” This kind of thing is discussed, as all of the faults are brought forth.

And there were many in Corinth, who just did not like Paul because they did not want to like him. And Paul gave some of the reasons that they did not like him there when he spoke about it in his two epistles to them. Some of them did not like his teaching. It was too simple. It lacked great displays of intellectual wisdom and human wisdom that they were accustomed to there in Corinth. And so, they put him down for it. And you remember how Paul came to Corinth, as he declares it in chapter two:

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with
excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the
testimony of God.
2 For I determined not to know anything among you except
Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.
4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive
words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and
of power,
5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the
power of God. ([1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#) NKJV)

Some at Corinth did not like the fact that his style was non-flashy. He lacked all of the oratory skills that were so highly esteemed by the population there in Corinth. So Paul wrote in his second epistle what he was being accused of by some:

“For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his
bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.”
([2 Corinthians 10:10](#) NKJV)

And what they did not realize until later was that Paul possessed a crushing intellect. And he was a man of tremendous personal charisma. But he refused to use either of those things in Corinth so that their faith might be based upon the wisdom of God’s Word and on the power of God.

Some did not like the fact that he would not let them grow comfortable in their sin and in their carnality. Paul was a pusher and he pushed people along. If you sat under his teaching, you were going to continue to grow.

There is a famous illustration which I doubt is true—hardly any of them are. But there is a famous illustration of a man whose church had been canvassing for a new pastor. They found the one that they liked and he came in and that first Sunday he taught this tremendous message. And everybody is clicking their heels saying, “How wonderful it is. We have the find of the century here in the pastor that we have got.” The following Sunday he got up and he preached the same message a second time. And the deacons thought, “Well, you know, it is good enough to hear twice. It really was that good.” And so they were willing to live with that. And then the third Sunday he got up and he preached the same sermon the third time. And it greatly disturbed them, as you might imagine. So the deacons came up to him and they said, “Listen, you know, one sermon? Do you have another sermon? And if you do have another sermon this would probably

be a good time to use that.” And the young preacher said, “I will go on to a new sermon when this one is obeyed.”

There is a little bit of the apostle Paul in that illustration. The repetition of the apostle Paul in his teaching was intentional.

Others did not like Paul. No matter what he said, no matter what he did, they just were not going to like him. They did not want to like him. They wanted somebody else other than Paul. They wanted some kind of a dynamic speaker like Apollos or some great exhorter like the apostle Peter, a man that they had heard about. Instead, they got this methodical teacher who reasoned with them from the Scriptures and would not allow them to think that they were spiritual solely on the basis of what they knew, rather than what they knew and what they were practicing in their lives.

I would like us to notice seven things in our text that helped the apostle Paul maintain perspective and remain faithful in that thankless setting of Corinth.

First, notice in verse three that he considered it a very small thing that he should be judged by others. Literally, he said, “I consider it the very smallest thing” (cf. [1 Corinthians 4:3](#)). Paul is declaring that their personal opinion of him amounts to nothing. He is not being arrogant here in what he is saying, he is merely stating the truth. No personal opinion of him mattered at all in comparison to God’s opinion of him. And he did not let those with a judgmental, critical spirit get him down. He did not give undue importance to it or let it dominate him. And what people with critical spirits think should be kept a small thing in our hearts and in our minds. The apostle Paul did not give their assessment undue weight.

One must not let the unjust criticisms of others drive us out of where God has called us to serve Him. Someone has noted through some kind of study of the church, that the average pastor leaves his pastorate because of seven people. Now how tragic is that? In a church of fifty, forty-three people lose because of seven. In a church of one hundred, ninety-three people lose because of seven. In a church of 300, 500, 1,000 whatever it might be, but it is a great illustration of the kind of undue weight that we can be prone to give to this kind of voice. Seven people can seem like 700, depending on the seven.

The apostle Paul knew it. God had called him to Corinth. God had told him to stay there because He had many people there in Corinth. And that is what he had to do no matter what other people’s opinion of him might be. “As long as I know that I am pleasing Him—the One that sent me,” Paul would say, “then I am not greatly concerned if I displease you.”

And so Paul, first of all, did not give the judgmental opinions of him undue weight. But notice secondly, in [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](#) that he refused even to judge himself. And that is as dangerous as the first behavior. There is a certain kind of personality among us, as God calls us into the pastorate, where the greatest danger to our longevity will be what other people think of us or the tendency to give that undue weight. But there is another kind of personality in this room where the greatest danger toward our longevity will be our own critical attitude toward ourselves. We are our own worst enemy. And we can be prone to give undue weight to what we think about ourselves, or God’s choice of us to do what it is that He has called us to do.

We are called to examine ourselves concerning sin and holiness. Paul declared, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” ([1 Corinthians 11:31](#), NKJV). What he is talking about here is not about that. Here he is talking about our own ability to come to an accurate opinion

about the effectiveness of our own ministries and our own service. Paul was saying that even he does not have the ability to properly evaluate his own effectiveness.

So we cannot say, as we leave the pulpit on Sunday morning or the midweek service or any type of ministry situation and say, “That was a great teaching.” Because I do not know that it was great—maybe it was. We cannot leave the pulpit and say, “That was a lousy teaching.” There are some sermons where you feel like you are in *Chariots of Fire*. I mean, you are running and it is effortless. How do you bottle this? And it is hard to stop. And you just know that God has taken the whole thing over. And then there are other times, from the opening line, your heart sinks. You immediately know you are in four feet of mud. One message is light. It pops. It moves. And during the other one, you struggle. And what happens? His strength gets seen in our weakness. And we never know what He is coupling with our ministry by the power of His Holy Spirit, or what people are hearing and receiving. And the second one can be the greater message so often. It can be just right for the moment, but we completely misjudge it and do not know how many lives have been changed that heard the message.

One pastor can go to one city and great effort is expended in that city, and it bears little fruit. Another man can go into another city and comparatively much less effort is given to establish a church, and it becomes very, very fruitful. And this great church is established in the eyes of everyone. And we are prone to judge it, but both have been equally faithful in what God has called them to do. Who can figure it out?

And Paul declares that he cannot figure it out. So here he gives as little weight to his own natural opinions and criticisms of himself, as he did to the natural and fleshly opinions made by others. He is not being arrogant. He is not being unteachable, but he recognized that he was as incapable of judging himself as fully as others were incapable of judging his effectiveness. We have to be careful because we can condemn ourselves right out of the ministry.

Now notice point three in [1 Corinthians 4:4–5](#). Paul entrusted all judgment to the Lord, because only the Lord knows the whole subject. Only the Lord knows everything that is going on in all given issues—the heart issues. The motives of why we do what we do will all be brought out one day. All the dark things will be brought out. All of the envy and the jealousy and the pride and the carnality of those who were critical of Paul will be brought out. One day all of that will be exposed as being the real reasons for the criticisms of Paul.

Nobody comes up and says, “Listen, I am a pathetically shallow and selfish person and so I am going to do everything I can to undermine you.” It is always couched in noble themes such as: “I am looking out for the greater good of the people.” And this and that, and it always sounds good. We are all crafty enough to do that and experienced enough to do that. But one day it will all be brought out into the open—what the real motivations were. We have to leave that with the Lord.

I remember hearing, in the early years of my service to the Lord, that somebody said, “If the devil can peg us as a person who has to run out and put out every single fire that the devil starts concerning us, that is all we will do for the entire duration of our ministry. And they will put that on our tombstone—‘The man who spent seventy years putting out fires that the devil started.’” No, the ministry has to be entrusted to the Lord. And Paul did that.

Again in the early years of my ministry of serving the Lord, I remember hearing Greg Laurie speak at a conference and he said, “You take care of your character and God will take care of your reputation” —and He will. And Paul understood that and he trusted the Lord to do that.

Point four is that Paul reminded himself that he was a servant and in 1 Corinthians 4:1, he says that he needed to be a servant where the Lord had placed him. Now the word “servant” that is used there is not *doulos*, or “the bond servant.” It is a word that means “an under rower.” On those ancient Roman ships, the larger ships would have a group of men who would be on the upper deck of the ship, on each side of the upper deck. And they would have the oars and they would row the ship into battle at ramming speed. And so they would be chained into their place.

Now if the ship was large enough, there was a lower deck down below that deck and there was another set of rowers. If you have ever seen Ben Hur, Charlton Heston is sitting there on that upper deck. And he is looking fit and tan like a commercial for a spa or something. You can get a wrong idea about what it was like to be a rower. But that was a hard, dangerous kind of thing that he was doing. It was back breaking, with blisters and that kind of thing. But as hard as it was to be a rower on the upper deck, as miserable as that was, there was another place that it was even more miserable, because coupled with all of the hard work and all of the sweat and all of the blisters, was an environment that was absolutely miserable. There was no ventilation and there was the stench of the bodies. No sunshine. All of this on top of all of the exhaustion of the rowing, it was a miserable environment for an under rower. And Paul said in [1 Corinthians 4:1](#), “I am an under rower.” And to take the position of the under rower in Paul’s day, it was the lowest position that a person could take.

Self-pity can be a great danger to God’s call upon our lives. Paul looked at the position that God had called him to there in Corinth and he did not entertain thoughts like: “I do not have to put up with this. I do not need this. I do not need the aggravation. I think I have saved enough to get out and do some other kind of thing.”

I have always appreciated the strength of what the Lord said in Luke 17. Let me read it to you. He said,

7 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and sit down to eat”?

8 But will he not rather say to him, “Prepare something for my supper and gird yourself and serve me ‘til I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink”?

9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.” ([Luke 17:7–10](#) NKJV)

When you read that for the first time you may say, “Wow! That is pretty hard.” But He is protecting us from self-pity.

Paul realized when God called him that he was already wasting his life. Every one of us would be thoroughly wasting our lives tonight, if not for God. When God calls us, He is free to use our lives any way He sees fit. But He will never waste a life. He would not even waste the remains or the leftovers after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousands with the fish and the loaves. One would think you could waste that. You would say, “Listen, throw that away. We will just do this again tomorrow.” But He is not going to reinforce that type of thinking in His disciples. The leftovers were to be gathered. If He will not waste something as easy for Him to produce as that, He is not going to waste a servant of His.

Point number five is that Paul also considered himself in verse one to be a steward of the mysteries of God. And as a steward, he was committed to being faithful to where God had placed him as a steward. Now a steward was a servant or a slave who managed another man's money or resources. So, when a man would develop or gain enough wealth that it was too much for him to keep track of personally, out of an empire, he would have a steward. He would give that steward instruction on how and what he wanted done with his wealth. He would make decisions and say, "I want you to do this and I want you to invest over here and do all of these things." And he expected that what he told the steward to do with that wealth, the steward would do. And of course the wealth that Paul had was the gospel, the great New Covenant in Christ's blood that he spoke of.

But the steward was not free to have this incredible wealth delivered to him and then just go and say, "Well, I think I know more than my master and I will invest the entire portfolio in tech stocks." And then lose the entire thing. What was most important in a steward was faithfulness. That he would just hear what God (the Master) told him to do, and then he would obey what God told him to do, with that wealth. He did not need to be super-talented. He did not need to be wise. He did not need to be eloquent. The one thing that was critical in a steward was faithfulness. And Paul stayed in that difficult place out of faithfulness to God. God had called him there for eternal purposes and, to his credit, Paul stayed there.

Sooner or later it all comes down to that. We are in the service of the Lord. God calls us as pastors and there can be a lot of motivations in there, can't there? All of them are high and lofty. There can be a lot of carnal motivation in that. The Lord has a way of putting us through the different things that He puts us through, and the ups and downs, until you finally reach a place where you say, "I would not do this for anyone else. And I would not even do it for myself, but Lord, I will do it for You, to stay faithful to You." And ultimately everybody comes to that place. And if you are there now, you are right on schedule. It is perfectly normal.

I have a little saying and I do not think it is going to make me either rich or famous. But it goes something like this: "If I can't quit, you can't quit." And this could be the making of country western song.

I had a friend that served with me at the church in Modesto, and he was beginning quite an endeavor. He was starting a pretty big ministry and heading into it. And of course, we are all confronted with our sense of inadequacy in the face of what it is that we were starting. So I was talking with him and he said, "But I am afraid." I said, "Well, join the crowd." I said, "By the way, if you take that to God and He accepts that excuse, would you let me know? Because the last time I tried that out on Him, He was not really accepting that from me."

You know during the building project that we went through some time ago, there were times when things were kind of overwhelming. And during that time I had a reoccurring dream. My reoccurring dream was that I worked at Target. And it is a funny thing; I was not in management or at a cash register. I did not want anything with that much responsibility. I was at Target and my only responsibility was to collect those red carts all day long every day. And I got off and I was done and I went home. And you know, I would be miserable in another forty-eight hours. It is a ridiculous kind of dream, but it is just the Lord working. I was in that place where I just said, "No. I am a steward here. And if this is where the Lord wants me to spend my life and to be faithful, then that is what I am going to do." And that is what the apostle Paul did. He viewed himself as a steward at that place.

Point six, in [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), is that he stayed conscious of the Lord's return. Paul said, "Until the Lord comes." Here is Paul, doubtless the greatest missionary in the history of the church, next to the Lord Jesus Himself. But it is interesting as we read through his epistles over and over again, there is this almost constant reference to heaven, to eternity. And one of the things that this tells me is that the eternal perspective was one of the keys to his effectiveness and his longevity in the ministry that God had called him to. That realization that one day, all of this ends up in a very real heaven, which is more real than the chairs you are sitting on. It is more real than the floor that is under your feet. And one day, at the end of our three score and ten, or one day when we hear that trumpet and the Lord draws us in through the Rapture, one day we are going to stand on that glassy sea and we are going to sing His praises forever and ever. And we must realize that this could happen today.

Paul said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (cf. [Romans 8:18](#)). This world is not my home. I am just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door. And I cannot feel at home in this world anymore. And it gets stranger and stranger by the day. We wait for that last gentile, don't we? That is when the fullness of the gentiles has come. And then one day we will be face to face with the Lord.

Several years ago, I heard Warren Wiersbie teach that for the Christian, heaven is not just a destination, but it is also a motivation. That was true of the apostle Paul. The coming joy of heaven was a strong motivation for the apostle Paul. I mean, he almost smacks his lips as he writes about it. He wrote to Timothy,

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand.
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
8 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 to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.
([2 Timothy 4:5-8](#) NKJV)

And finally in 2 Timothy 4:8, the apostle Paul reveals part of what drove him through all of those difficult years. It was that heaven is on the other side of all this and it is a very real heaven.

C. S. Lewis declared,

If you read history you will find that Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of that other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

So we live for eternity, and eternity is a very, very long time. Think about eternity and how long it is going to be.

There is a guy by the name of Hendrik Van Loon, who, just his name captures one's imagination. But he declared in a way that I can understand concerning eternity and I have always appreciated it. He wrote this:

High up in the North in the land of Svithjod, [he said] there stands a rock. It is a hundred miles high and a hundred miles wide. Once every thousand years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak. When that rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by.

All right! It is worth living for, and it is worth being faithful for.

Finally, in [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), number seven is that Paul was confident that at the end of such a life was the greatest reward that one could ever have. And that is to one day hear the praise of the Lord Himself—to hear Him, with eyes looking into ours, and from His very lips, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (cf. [Matthew 25:23](#)). And Paul wanted to live every day of his life here so that one day he would hear that from the Lord Jesus who had done so much for him and had been so much to him. We have been so well taught through the years that no person who does not hear that from the lips of Jesus can ever be considered successful. And yet for Paul, to hear those words from the Lord meant that a long period of his life would need to be spent in one of the most difficult circumstances a person can find himself in. Perhaps this was every bit as hard on the inside of his heart, as stoning was on the outside of the body. There are times when God calls us to be faithful to Him in an environment that is devoid of any appreciation.

Perhaps the Lord has called you, like Paul, and entrusted such an experience to you. It may be that the circumstance that God has you in, in your service to Him, is completely one sided. You do all of the giving and everyone else does all of the taking. This is true not only of the ministry, but it can be true of a marriage. It can be true in a family. It can be true in many arenas.

Remember the seven things that helped the apostle Paul maintain his perspective and remain faithful in just such a setting:

- 1) Do not let the unjust criticism of others get you down. Do not give it undue weight. Consider it a very small thing compared to what God thinks of you and what you are doing.
- 2) Do not judge yourself. You know as little as they do.
- 3) Entrust all judgment to the Lord.
- 4) Remain a servant where God has called you. You are an under rower. You are not too good for where God has placed you and what He has you doing. Be careful of self-pity.
- 5) Stay faithful in that situation.
- 6) There is a praise coming your way one day that will make you forget all about its long absence in this life.
- 7) Remember that the Praise Giver may come tonight, so let us be found faithful.

So, Lord, we pray that You would bless this section of Your eternal Word, and plant it in our hearts tonight. We pray that You would use it for the remainder of our pilgrimage and service to You. Protect us from all of these things that You protected Paul from, and I pray that we might be found faithful, Lord, to You at Your coming. Bless my brothers, Lord. Protect each one, I pray. And I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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