



EXTRAORDINARY

FAITH





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## INTRO

# Should My Faith Be Extraordinary?

The Apostle Paul stands out in scripture for his undeniably extraordinary life and faith. Almost one quarter of the New Testament Scriptures are written by Paul, making up 13 of the 27 books. He certainly was an exceptional man, so in what way should our faith look like his?

Before Paul even begins his life as a Christian, he's a remarkable Jewish leader. The Book of Acts records that Paul "sits at the feet of Gamliel" (he's a disciple of a renowned rabbi). He persecutes the Christian Church with zeal and is overseeing Stephen's execution (the first martyr).

Even the story of Paul's conversion has been given a name (The Damascus Road Experience) due to his incredible and life changing encounter with Jesus.

However, it isn't just Paul's circumstances that make him extraordinary, rather it's how he handles his circumstances.

Surprisingly, Paul will invite us over and over again (at least five times) to imitate him as he imitates Jesus. It would seem that Paul believes his extraordinary faith is available to us all.

Two conditions had to be met for these topics that we've included. The first was that Paul had to indicate that it was a personal experience. Therefore, while it might be extraordinary for Paul to instruct us to "pray without ceasing" we limited our focus to areas in which Paul revealed personal ownership or experience.

The other condition was that it needed to be something that came to the forefront on more than one occasion. Therefore, while it is extraordinary that Paul says, "I speak in tongues more than any of you", this only occurs once in his writings and is not as prevalent as other facets of Paul's faith.

So what made the cut? What made Paul's faith extraordinary and how can we imitate, not his circumstances, but his character and heart with which he faced those circumstances?

In this, we found 5 main characteristics of Paul's Extraordinary Faith:

- 1. Extraordinary Life Change**
- 2. Extraordinary Gospel**
- 3. Extraordinary Endurance**
- 4. Extraordinary Evangelism**
- 5. Extraordinary Reward**

Join us in reflecting on these passages of Scripture throughout the week as we let the word of God shape, challenge, inspire, and lead us. You'll need to have your Bible with you as you work through each day.

Week 1 Monday | July 25

Galatians 1:13-24

# Extraordinary Life Change

*<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*

As Paul considers his former life, he recognizes that he had established patterns (his previous way of life), and he had deeply rooted practices (persecuting the church), and lastly a reputation among his people (zealous for the traditions of my fathers).

All three: “patterns”, “practices”, and “people” would have to take a backseat to truth. It would’ve been so easy for Paul to find his identity in his patterns, practices, and people. Yet, Paul’s intent is to live for the truth, no matter the cost. Even if that means giving up the direction his life was headed in.

C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

“Progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turn, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.” (Mere Christianity)

Week 1 Tuesday | July 26

Acts 9:1-30

# Extraordinary Life Change

*9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*

Two principles immediately come to the surface during this account.

The first: No one is ever too far from God. Someone may appear far from God and their actions may be completely against what God desires yet their full surrender to Jesus may be just around the corner. God has not given up on them and they may be more receptive than they appear.

The second: Your past can be used to glorify God. When the believers heard that the very person who persecuted them was now championing their faith, it must have been an incredible encouragement to them.

Similarly, your past, whatever it is, can be used to give God glory by letting others see His work in your life. What a beautiful thing that even our rebellion, disobedience, and sin can be redeemed by allowing God to glorify himself through it.



Week 1 Wednesday | July 27

Acts 22

# Extraordinary Life Change

*22The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"*

Those words had to cut deep. Imagine for a moment, hearing a crowd of "your people" shouting that at you. Especially in a culture of honor/shame where reputation was seemingly everything. Imagine the shame that would have brought on Paul's mother and Paul's father.

Paul is speaking to his fellow Jews and Scripture says that he has their full attention. That is, until Paul says that Jesus told him: "Go: I will send you far away to the Gentiles." This is problematic for the Jewish people, after all, they were special among the nations, why would the Messiah send someone like Paul to the Gentiles?

How lonely it must've felt in that moment as Paul's people (who once were so excited to see him excel in Judaism) to wish that he was dead. Why? Among other things, they were mad that God's plan for Paul's life wasn't their plan for Paul's life.

Paul's newfound faith meant living for an audience of one and finding purpose and value in God and not in the world. Such surrender also meant boldness, power, and freedom.

Week 1 Thursday | July 28

Philippians 3:2-11

# Extraordinary Life Change

*<sup>7</sup>But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.*

Jesus, may we love you so much that whatever we give up for you would be considered garbage to us.

Is there something in my life that I desire more than you?  
It's garbage.

Is there something in my life that gets in my way of following you?  
It's garbage.

Is there a good deed in my life that makes me feel like I'm earning my salvation?  
It's garbage.

Is there a skill or ability in my life that makes me feel like I don't need you?  
It's garbage.

Paul's ability to experience extraordinary life change not only comes from his pursuit of truth but more importantly comes from his desire for the person of Jesus. May we love Jesus so much that we're freed to live the life He has for us. A life of grace, a life of spirit, and not a life of flesh.

Week 1 Friday | July 29

1 Corinthians 15:8-10, 1 Timothy 1:13-16

# Extraordinary Life Change

*<sup>15</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.*

Paul is certainly a saint (as in, believer) and he's surely surrendered, obedient, working out his salvation with fear and trembling, and being sanctified. He speaks often about fighting the good fight, running the race, and disciplining his body to do what it should so that he won't be disqualified.

Yet he also says that he's the worst of sinners. He doesn't even say, "I was the worst." Rather, he says, "I am the worst." In context though, he's not talking about his present behaviors but rather his past sins (before He met Jesus).

This humility is important: no matter how much I follow Jesus, no matter how obedient I am, no matter how much I reap a harvest for the kingdom, no matter what work I do, no matter how much I sacrifice, can I remember that none of it was owed me? Can I remember that anything good that I do is simply the result of God's unmerited goodness at work in me? He could've left me as I was. I don't deserve what I've been given, who I am, what I've become... any good that's in me isn't something I take credit for. It's all God's grace. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's the only reason I'm here.





Week 2 Monday | August 1

Galatians 1:6-10

# Extraordinary Gospel

*<sup>8</sup>But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! <sup>9</sup>As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

Wow. Paul isn't pulling any punches.

The gospel is sacred. The gospel is central. The gospel is of utmost importance. The gospel is not to be manipulated, miscommunicated, misconstrued, or misrepresented.

So much so that Paul would wish someone to be separated from God for distorting the gospel. Why? Salvation depends upon it. Souls are at stake. Judgement is coming.

Do we know what the gospel is? Can you articulate it?

In it's simplest form: Jesus saves you from your sin. You don't save you. Your works don't save you. Your church membership doesn't save you. Your political affiliation doesn't save you. Jesus saves you from your sin.

Lord, cultivate in us an extraordinary love for the purity of the gospel so we can truly know it's goodness.

Week 2 Tuesday | August 2

Galatians 2:11-14

# Extraordinary Gospel

*11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.*

Who is this Cephas character? It's Peter! Seen by many as the leader of the apostles, the "pope" of the early church.

Paul is an absolute bulldog when it comes to protecting the gospel. He sees Peter, giving into a group of believers who demand circumcision and as a result Peter is not eating with the Gentiles.

Why is this a gospel issue? Because circumcision doesn't save. Circumcision can't make anyone righteous. Circumcision doesn't decide whether or not you're part of the Body of Christ.

Paul sees hypocrisy but he also sees that the gospel is at stake and this he won't allow. He rebukes Peter to his face and then he writes about it in a letter to the Galatians and allows it to circulate among the churches. This is so important to Paul that he'll use Peter's failures as an example to protect and to emphasize the importance of the integrity of the gospel.

Week 2 Wednesday | August 3

2 Corinthians 11:4

# Extraordinary Gospel

*4For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*

Why would the Corinthians “put up” with a different Jesus or a different gospel? Here’s three common reasons...

They’re People Pleasing:

It can be difficult to tell someone that their belief system is wrong. It’s much easier to “put up” with them than it is to offend them.

They’re Being Tempted:

Sometimes a different gospel can be attractive. We like to be in control, and we like to earn what we’ve been given. If someone preaches a gospel that says that my works save me, there’s a temptation to want to believe that.

They’re Being Misled:

Sometimes people are cunning, their arguments seem strong, their self-confidence is persuasive, and their intentions seem good.

If we’re going to have an extraordinary faith, we need to tenaciously protect our understanding of the gospel.

Week 2 Thursday | August 4

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

# Extraordinary Gospel

*<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Churches spend about five weeks (Advent & Christmas) celebrating Christ's birth. Easter gets a major Sunday and the crucifixion gets less attention because it falls on a Friday. Yet, this is Paul's primary message: "we preach Christ crucified."

Central to our faith is the crucified Christ. It's not a popular message today and it wasn't back then. The Jewish people found the concept to be a "stumbling block" (they struggled with a concept of savior that wasn't a victorious political figure) and the Gentiles didn't have a framework for it, so they found it to be "foolishness."

No one was looking for this message and to this day that's still the case. Yet the gospel is powerful and God uses it by inexplicably calling people, both Jews and Gentiles, to Himself. May we, like Paul, not rely on eloquence or persuasive arguments but instead, trust in the power of God and of the gospel to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ.



Week 2 Friday | August 5

1 Corinthians 9:16

# Extraordinary Gospel

*16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

The gospel has so captivated Paul and grabbed a hold of him that he can do nothing but preach the gospel. This isn't something that he can boast in because he simply feels compelled to do it. He has no other choice.

Undergirding this experience of Paul must be a deep, powerful, and moving understanding of God's forgiveness through the work of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This, Paul understands, is grace. Paul doesn't deserve it but God has given it anyway. If we, like Paul, want to be "compelled" to share the gospel, it must come from a deep knowledge and love of the sweetness of the gospel.

We've all had the experience of being an "evangelist" for a certain product or restaurant or experience that we've enjoyed and that we want others to enjoy. All of those things that we've felt compelled to share pale in comparison to the offer of eternal life, forgiveness, a right relationship with God, and the power of the Spirit at work in our lives. May we understand the incomparable sweetness of the Gospel.



Week 3 Monday | August 8

1 Corinthians 4:9-16

# Extraordinary Endurance

*<sup>12</sup>We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; <sup>13</sup>when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.*

Paul is not talking about the average Christian; he's talking about apostles. Here's the kicker though, he ends his thought by saying: "Therefore I urge you to imitate me."

There comes a point in our walk with God when we're so grateful, so enamored, so joy-filled, so free, and so surrendered that eventually we say: Glorify yourself in my life, however you want to. For some, God will glorify himself by allowing others to see how his people suffer with joy, courage, and undying perseverance. There, in the Spirit, is an unshakable grit to follow Jesus to wherever He leads and through whatever comes our way.

This extraordinary endurance, for Paul, comes from a desire to glorify God. He sees that the apostles are "on display at the end of the procession..." He sees the apostles are, "a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings." People are watching our lives, let's make sure that what they see magnifies God.

Week 3 Tuesday | August 9

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

# Extraordinary Endurance

*<sup>9</sup>Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*

Paul shares that he and those with him thought they had received a death sentence. They “despaired of life itself” and faced great pressure, “far beyond our ability to endure.” Why? So, they could rely on God’s power who raises the dead and delivers us from situations in which there seems to be no answer.

I’m often reminded of the psalm, “I lift my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD...”

Maybe we’re looking far off, wondering where our help will come from. Maybe we have a situation in our lives that doesn’t seem solvable by human effort. Maybe there’s a pressing, surmounting circumstance that seems out of control. Good. We serve a God who specializes in moving mountains, in making a way where there is no way, in parting waters, stilling storms, and raising the dead.

When we’ve entered the end of “our way” we’ve found ourselves in God’s territory. His ways are greater still. Where we see crisis, may we also see opportunity for God’s glory.



Week 3 Wednesday | August 10

2 Corinthians 4:7-17

# Extraordinary Endurance

*<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

Paul calls his troubles, “light and momentary.” That’s pretty shocking language compared to his description of those troubles in yesterday’s reading.

Two truths are coming together to reframe Paul’s perspective on the sufferings he’s enduring.

The first, is from v.15. For Paul, all that he endures will bring thanksgiving and glory to God.

The second, is from v.17. Paul is able to call his troubles “light” and “momentary” only in light of eternal glory. That is, as he compares his temporary struggles to his eternal rewards, he’s able to say, “this is a small price to pay.”

Lord, help me to live for your glory and to live in light of an eternity with you – that I may have extraordinary endurance, like Paul.

Week 3 Thursday | August 11

2 Corinthians 11:22-30

## Extraordinary Endurance

*<sup>23</sup>Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.*

Paul's summary here is not something he's entirely comfortable with. His opponents seem to be valuing and measuring by earthly standards. He knows he can go toe to toe with those earthly standards and proves that if anyone has reason to boast in their accomplishments and zeal and willingness to serve, it's surely him. He then says, "I am out of my mind to talk like this." Why? Because such boasting seems foreign and antithetical to humility, gratitude, and faith in Jesus.

Yet we also see through this exchange, a powerful fact of life and ministry: Circumstances do not reflect God's favor or His will. How many times does God call us to something and we judge His will by our circumstances? What would have happened to Paul if, when he faced opposition or hardship he said, "God's closing this door" or "God must not want me to do this" or "If it was God's will, it'd be easy"? We must be open to the idea that God calls us to hard things.

Week 3 Friday | August 12

2 Corinthians 6:3-10, 2 Timothy 3:10-12

# Extraordinary Endurance

*<sup>12</sup>In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

There has never been a culture or a society that didn't, in some form or fashion, come to odds with Christianity. In other words, Christianity offends something in every culture. Some would find our sexual ethic too restrictive while other cultures might find it too liberal. Some would find our emphasis on vulnerability and self-sacrifice to be too weak. Others would find our emphasis on social justice to be too meddlesome.

The fact of the matter is, if we make it our primary goal to please people or to build bridges, or to increase our following and our influence and our audience – then chances are we'll try our best not to offend anyone.

This though, is not the calling of godliness. If I want to live a godly life – it will mean that at some point my faith will be offensive. I don't want to offend, I don't need to try to offend, and I shouldn't embrace a contrary way of life. That being said, everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted. For Paul, it's unavoidable.

Knowing this is the case, frees me to live for an audience of one (God) and enables me to endure.



Week 4 Monday | August 15

Romans 9:1-5

# Extraordinary Evangelism

*<sup>2</sup>I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,*

Paul's statement is incredible: "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people."

Paul's heart burns so passionately and his burden is so heavy for his people that he would almost rather go to hell than for his people to not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

What more could be said about that?

Lord, give us the heart of Paul. Give us a heart for those who don't know you. Break our hearts and grant us the grace to weep for those who don't know your salvation. Burden us with a deep sense of urgency and weightiness when it comes to those who don't know Jesus. Wake us up to the reality of the spiritual condition of those who are far from you.

Week 4 Tuesday | August 16

Romans 10:14-15

# Extraordinary Evangelism

*<sup>14</sup>How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

It's a popular phrase among some Christians, often misattributed to St. Francis of Assisi that goes, "Preach the gospel often; use words if necessary." The emphasis and principle behind it often becomes this: live a life that causes people to ask you about Christianity. The difficulty with this teaching and with the concept of "relational evangelism" (which teaches that I need to have a relationship in order to earn the right to share the gospel) is that they're both unbiblical.

According to Paul, preaching the gospel with words is always necessary. No one can hear unless someone speaks. No one can believe unless they hear. No one can call on someone that they do not believe in. Words then, are crucial to sharing the gospel.

In the same way, this gospel is for anyone who would hear it and shouldn't be limited to those in our close circle nor withheld from strangers or acquaintances. Quite oppositely, we see the early church seeking to tell anyone who will listen.

Week 4 Wednesday | August 17

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

# Extraordinary Evangelism

*<sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.*

Paul is not encouraging us to become a social chameleon in order to fit in with those around us. Quite oppositely, Paul most likely stood out from those he was encountering.

Paul isn't talking about compromising his integrity or somehow being twofaced or living a double life. Instead, Paul is constantly trying to identify customs and practices and social expectations that will help his listeners be more receptive to the gospel.

What things can I leave aside or what can I adopt in my own life that would help certain people hear the gospel from me better? One famous evangelist rides around boardwalks with a tiny dog that wears sunglasses and sits in the basket on the handlebars of his bicycle. Why? It makes him more approachable and sets people at ease.

Lord, show me anything in my life that I can add or subtract that would make your gospel easier to hear while still being true and faithful to you. Give me a love for my neighbor that would compel me to do so.

Week 4 Thursday | August 18

1 Corinthians 1:17-21

# Extraordinary Evangelism

*17For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

Charles Spurgeon, a highly influential and effective preacher and evangelist of the 1800's has been called "The Prince of Preachers." His voice has been described as "musical", "Marvelously expressive", and a "silver bell." It's said that he was "perfect in oratory" and a "master actor."

George Whitefield, similarly, was named "America's Spiritual Founding Father" and Benjamin Franklin records that he once preached at an event with over 30,000 people present. So impressive were the crowds that the Music and Audio Research Laboratory at New York University has begun to study Whitefield's preaching in light of the science of sound.

We may be tempted to wish that we were eloquent, melodic, musical, marvelous, and powerful when we shared the gospel. Paul cautions that this is not where the power of the gospel really comes from. Its power isn't in its delivery but in its source. Instead, we should value our weakness and lack of expertise because that's where God's power shines through the most.



Week 4 Friday | August 19

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

# Extraordinary Evangelism

*<sup>2</sup>For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.*

It's easy for us to think that Paul shared the gospel because that was his personality or that was his gifting.

In reality, many people who share the gospel or have a heart for evangelism don't necessarily feel particularly gifted in it. One ministry leader I know, who shares the gospel more than anyone I've met swears that he's not an evangelist. This person knows many people who bear much more fruit and are much more effective at sharing the gospel than he is. In the same way, he doesn't refuse to pray for someone's healing simply because he isn't gifted in healing.

Instead we find out that Paul preached the gospel "with great fear and trembling" and that his preaching and message were not "with wise and persuasive words."

Instead, Paul rests, not in the power of human wisdom or human demonstration, but in God's power. We might feel shy, timid, unpowerful, but it's this vessel that God chooses to use to communicate His gospel. Why? So that faith doesn't depend on human effort but on God's effort.



Week 5 Monday | August 22

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

# Extraordinary Reward

*<sup>19</sup>For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup>Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

Jesus will talk about the importance of storing up treasures in heaven and he encourages people to make choices in order to work towards and for heavenly reward. Jesus is not offended by our need for positive reinforcement, nor does he criticize our doing things for some sort of reward. Instead, Jesus uses human nature to motivate us towards gospel centered living.

What reward could possibly await us in heaven? What does a heavenly reward look like? Some people picture a bigger personal mansion than their neighbor next door. Paul had a different idea – his crown would be the people in heaven that are there because of his ministry.

It begs the question: who will my crown be? Will there be people in heaven because of my life and ministry? Can I name other Christians who are my “glory” and “joy”?

Paul invites us to live for this extraordinary reward.

Week 5 Tuesday | August 23

1 Thessalonians 3:5-10

## Extraordinary Reward

*<sup>8</sup>For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*

It seems strange but Paul is encouraged in his distress and persecution by the faith of these believers. It's almost as if, Paul's so invested in his churches that all of his hardship is "worth it" if only the people hold onto their faith.

We might shy away from getting our sense of "joy" from the faith of others. In fact, we might be tempted to say the opposite: "Don't look to what others are doing to find your encouragement." Yet Paul is so heavily invested in his ministry and in the faith of those that he is caring for that he wants to know how he can thank God enough for them in return for all the joy that they've given to Paul.

You can't help but wonder: do I have this kind of heart for the people that God has placed in my care? Am I taking responsibility for caring for and praying for the faith of other people like Paul does? It's passages like this where we need to remind ourselves that Paul really does tell us to follow him as he follows Jesus.

Week 5 Wednesday | August 24

Philippians 4:1

# Extraordinary Reward

*4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

Lord, help me to “love” and “long for” people in my church, my small group, and my ministries the way that Paul loved and longed for people in his church and his ministries.

Lord, place people into my care who are “my joy” and “crown” – allow me to care for the spiritual lives of others to such a degree that their lasting faith would be a reward to me.

Who, in my life, are you calling me to God? Who is in my life that I can pray for and lift up – that they might endure in the faith and persevere to the end? Who in my life needs help standing firm? How can I come alongside them to encourage and strengthen them today?

Lord, help me to value and care for my brother and sister in Christ. Cain once asked you, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” And the Church responds with a resounding, “Yes!”

Week 5 Thursday | August 25

Philippians 2:14-18

## Extraordinary Reward

*<sup>16</sup>as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup>But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.*

What does Paul boast in? The lasting faith of those that he cares for. He can't wait to get to heaven and see the harvest, the work of his life and ministry.

In the same way, Paul says that even if he's being poured out like a drink offering and emptying himself in service and sacrifice – he's glad to do it if it benefits their faith. We see over and over again just how much Paul values and believes in this extraordinary reward.

One day, we'll be greeted in heaven by those that our earthly lives have impacted. You may have heard of Billy Graham but you may not have heard of Rev. Mordecai Ham, who once preached at a revival meeting in North Carolina that teenager Billy Graham happened to be at. It was this moment that Billy Graham credits for his conversion.

We may not even realize what our harvest is until we reach heaven and find out the far-reaching impact of our ministry. In the meantime, let's develop a heart that truly desires this extraordinary reward.

Week 5 Friday | August 26

1 Corinthians 3:5-15

## Extraordinary Reward

*<sup>12</sup>If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

Lord, what am I building on the foundation that Paul says is Jesus Christ? Is it worthy? Will it stand? Will its quality prove true?

One day our work “will be shown for what it is” and the “Day will bring it to light.”

Paul doesn't say how to build this way but he offers us a hint in verses 18-20 and that is: we shouldn't trust in our own power or in the wisdom of this world. To borrow from Jesus, flesh gives birth to flesh but Spirit gives birth to Spirit. If I want to bear spiritual, lasting fruit then my work has to be a spiritual work. Do I labor in prayer or do I trust in my own power? Ministry without prayer is the highest form of arrogance because when we do that, we're trying to accomplish God's work without God.





What Next?

# Extraordinary Faith Takes Time

The Christian Life is often a matter of training, not trying. In other words, you don't run a marathon by simply waking up one day and deciding to give it a try; you train for it. Paul recognized as much when he said:

*"<sup>25</sup>All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. <sup>26</sup>So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. <sup>27</sup>I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:25-27).*

That's not extraordinary. It's downright ordinary. We might prefer a quick fix, shortcut, supernatural transformation of our souls (and sometimes that happens) but more often than not, extraordinary faith is built in the day to day.

As you think about these five marks of Paul's faith...

1. Extraordinary Life Change
2. Extraordinary Gospel
3. Extraordinary Endurance
4. Extraordinary Evangelism
5. Extraordinary Reward

Which one is God leading you to work on in this season of life? When it comes to growth, it's often easier to think in terms of: "What are the next steps that God has for me?"

To that end, prayerfully identify one area that God might be calling you to focus on and train in.

As humans, we oftentimes we need four essential ingredients to create lasting life change in us. Here's an easy acronym to use:

**Practice Affections Community Knowledge**

First, write down some Crawl, Walk, Run steps for this particular area of faith that you want to grow in. That's the practice part.

How do we cultivate affections though? We're used to thinking about improving our knowledge... improving our affections (desires) is a little more tricky. This is all about habits (particularly religious or worshipful habits) and reward/celebration. Make a list of small habits that you can do to deepen an appreciation for the area you're trying to grow in and make sure you celebrate or reward yourself along the way!

Then, think back to our first week (before this devotional) when we kicked off our series with a message on "Extraordinary imitation." Can you think of someone in your life that exemplifies that area that you've chosen to focus on? Consider reaching out to them, taking them out for coffee, and asking them to share how they've grown in that way. That's the community part.

Lastly, how can you study and understand this area better? That's the knowledge part.

That's your PACK and as you implement those, you'll be well on your way for growing in this extraordinary faith.







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