

Text: [2 Corinthians 11:16-30](#)

Date: November 4, 2018 – All Saints' Sunday

Title: "Life FOR God" – With: Reimagining How We Relate to God – Wk 3

Theme: We can't do great things, only small things with great love.

Intro

Remember, we're in this series that is talking about different approaches to God – we've discussed life OVER God and life UNDER God – headed ultimately to life WITH God

It's a special Sunday today, but I think this week's installment of this series fits well into it.

We're talking today about life FOR God.

Prayer

Sermon

1

You know this already about me: I like to get things done, cross things off my to-do list

And I know many of you feel the same way

A day without some sort of progress, some sort of achievement feels...empty

Having some downtime this summer started to chip away at that

But honestly, this is a challenge to me every single day

It's a spiritual challenge to remember that my value is not based in what I have done or what I will do

But rather in God's love for me, through Jesus Christ

Maybe this analogy helps.

Have you ever had a friend who, you couldn't help wondering – was only your friend because of what they thought you could do for them?

Maybe when you in high school, maybe you had a friend that you suspected just hung out with you because you had a car

Maybe there's someone who comes around now because they think you can help them in business, or whatever

Sometimes, if I'm really honest
I worry that I've often been guilty of portraying God in that way
God WANTS you to do this
God NEEDS you to do that
Have YOU done anything to make the world better today?

This is what it means to talk about a life FOR God
And like all the other postures, there's some truth to it
We don't want to tell you to give up on changing the world
We don't want to tell you not follow through on those ways God calls you to
live

2

You know the story of the prodigal son?
The church loves to talk about the prodigal, the younger son
But in reality – the church NEEDS the older son
That person who is willing to put in the work
To put in the time
If all we had were prodigals, we'd be in trouble!

The life FOR God approach is NOT the approach of the casual Christian
It's often the approach of the truly committed – and that's why it's so
dangerous
It can feel righteous and holy
But when we begin to believe that our Creator values us, that Jesus only
values us, for what we can do for him –
we've lost the essential message of our faith – the love that saves the
prodigal

Like I said, this is the approach of the truly committed
Now I spend a lot of time talking with, coaching, praying with pastors – just
as I know many of you likewise mentor people at your work
Good people. Gifted people. Committed people.
Many are frustrated – at least some of the time.
Because they want to increase the impact of their ministry.
They want to reach more people. Grow the body of Christ. Have a
thousand people download their sermon each week.

But it's hard. And when things aren't progressing like they imagined, they begin to feel beaten down – like they're sacrificing a lot, with not a whole lot to show for it.

I can't help thinking about the spiritual toll of that
Whether you begin to wonder if this God is like that friend you had in high school who valued you for your car.
Whether you're worth less somehow because you're not doing something great for God.
That's a spiritual challenge.
To imagine that God only loves you because of what you can do.

And it can feed on itself.
Work harder. Ignore the people in your life more.
Get more unhappy. See fewer results.
Wash, rinse, repeat.

Again, life FOR God is the approach of many of our most committed Christians.
Real deal Christians who take their faith very seriously.
They are ready to follow. Ready to roll up their sleeves and do.

Here's another challenge: what does it mean when we can't DO any more?
Because of physical, spiritual, emotional challenges
This is where life FOR God can really begin to go off the rails
If I think God only loves me for what I can do, then I'm lost

3

Do you know the Apostle Paul spent the last years of his life in prison?
Here's Paul, often cited as – after Jesus – the single MOST IMPORTANT figure in the Christian faith
He began as a persecutor of the church, a stalwart opponent of the faith, and ended up as perhaps the greatest missionary of all time
He preached all around the eastern Mediterranean, from Jerusalem through Asia Minor, Greece and all the way to Rome

And in the piece of the scripture we read today from 2 Corinthians, he's
trying to settle an argument with them by proving his devotion
5 times he received 39 lashes at the hands of Jewish opponents
3 times he received beatings with rods at the hands of the Romans
Once he was nearly stoned to death
3 times he was shipwrecked
He goes on and on and on
All of this he did, all this he endured to spread the gospel of Jesus

You want to talk about someone who lived a life FOR God?

It was Paul. No doubt.

And yet, at the end of his life, he had to wrestle with the fact that much of
his ministry was pretty much about writing letters to the churches he
founded

He really couldn't DO any more at all

I wonder what that meant for someone whose entire ministry was about
motion – constantly on the move

What was it like when suddenly his sphere of influence got very small?

I wonder: how did it change him?

4

This week, I did a graveside service for someone I didn't know

I learned from the funeral director that the person really didn't want a
service

I understand the family struggled with that a bit

So they just decided to do something at the graveside, no big deal

Expected maybe a few people would come

When I got to the cemetery, it was packed with cars.

I thought at first maybe they had scheduled two services at once.

But then I saw the line of people streaming toward the grave.

I had to shout to be heard as I did the service.

Her granddaughter, probably about 10 years old, very eloquently summed
up how much she loved her grandma.

All she had taught her, how much she had enjoyed being with her.

5

Mother Teresa said, "We can do no great things. Only small things with great love."

Too often, we're guilty of believing that real faith is defined by our willingness to attempt great things.

So we think the faith of pastors matters, and the faith of teachers does not. That the faith of missionaries matters, but the faith of accountants does not. That the faith of bishops matters, but the faith of fathers and mothers does not.

We're wrong.

Small things with great love. That's what matters.

Today is All Saints' Day.

It's a day we set aside to remember the saints in our lives.

People who taught and modeled the faith for us.

People who loved us when we were unlovable.

People who took time for us when it seemed like no one else wanted to.

A life lived FOR God doesn't necessarily mean we do great things

We might not end up with a Wikipedia page or have a street named after us

None of that is the point anyway

God doesn't love us because of what we can do

God loves us just because

God just wants to be WITH us

And if we can show God's love to the few people who are closest to us – simply by being WITH them -

So that when our journey here ends, they show up at the graveside even when we told them not to

Well, then I'd say we've lived a pretty good life

We can't do great things

We can only do small things with great love

Remember that

Amen.

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