

## **Eager to Serve**

2Corinthians 9:1-5

When I was eight years old one of things I really wanted to do was cut the grass.

Some people might hear that and think, “Wow Pastor Mike was a super responsible and hardworking young man to want to cut the grass for his parents!”

I can assure you that was not the case. More often than not the work I did around the house was forced labour instead of voluntary service.

I wasn't thinking about helping out around the house and I wasn't really thinking about cutting the grass. Those things were just a byproducts of what I really wanted.

What I really wanted to do was drive the lawnmower.

If it was a push mower there is not chance I would have ever even asked to cut the grass, but since my parents had a fairly big yard my dad had purchased a riding lawnmower for the task and I wanted to drive it.

It was a silver craftsman lawn mower.

I can't remember the horsepower but I'm pretty sure it had five gears and to me it seemed like a chance to drive a racecar.

I asked my dad if I could cut the grass and he said, “No!”

When I first asked he felt it was too dangerous, a factor that I cared nothing about.

Not to be discouraged I asked again and again the answer was no.

I have no idea how many times I asked, but it was more than enough for my dad to know that I really wanted to drive the lawnmower.

I'm not sure how long I persisted at it, but I very clearly remember what I said to change my dad's mind.

I said, “Please dad, let me cut the grass! If you let me cut the grass then I will cut it every single time from now on!”

Do you know that look people get on their face when they have been made an offer they can't refuse? My dad got that look on his face.

“You are going to cut the grass every time from now on?” He asked, no doubt giving me a chance to reconsider what I was agreeing to.

I had no thought of reconsidering and said, “Yes, every time!”

He said, “O.k. then.” He gave me the run down on how to use the lawnmower, told me the course I was supposed to drive, told me he would watch me to make sure I could do it, and off I went.

I jumped on started up that glorious four wheeled machine, started the blades, put it in gear, and just like that I was driving the lawn mower as happy as I could possibly be.

You can probably guess what happened after a while.

The excitement wore off. My eagerness to cut the grass quickly faded and when my dad said, “Mike, go cut the grass” I replied with, “Do I have to?”

That is when he reminded me of the deal I had made and so with a few exceptions I was the one who cut the grass for as long as I lived at home.

Has something like that ever happened to you?

Have you ever been eager to do something, get to do it, and then have your eagerness fade away over time?

That happens to us at times.

It can happen at home, at school, at work, and it can even happen in the church.

[It is possible to be really excited as a Christian to do something you believe is in service to Jesus and to have that excitement fade over time. I’ve experienced that in my own life and I’ve seen it in the lives of others over the years. That is the concern of the portion of God’s word we are going to look at this morning **2Corinthians 9:1-5**. We are told here about the Corinthian’s eagerness to serve the LORD and also see the concerns that the apostle Paul raises about whether or not their eagerness has faded. From these few verses we learn some important lessons about having a passion to serve God. We learn about the blessing of this kind of eagerness, the responsibility of it, and how eagerness is proved to be true. First let’s look together at one of the blessings that comes out of people being eager to serve the LORD. We can see in the first two verses that...]

### **Point #1 – Being eager to serve God can inspire others. (Verses 1-2)**

When believers are fired up about doing things for the LORD it is often contagious.

Verse 1 reminds us of the specific area of ministry/service to God that the apostle is talking about.

The apostle recognizes here that he has taken a considerable amount of this letter to speak to the Corinthians about the gift to the saints in Jerusalem.

By the time his readers make it this far it is very possible some people might be saying to themselves, “We know already, there is no need to go on about it.”

The ESV translation here uses the word “superfluous” to describe what he is writing.

It’s a good translation of the original. Paul is saying, I know that what I am writing seems over the top and maybe even unnecessary.

[Have you ever asked somebody to do something more than once or been on the receiving end of being asked to do something more than once? Someone says, “You said you were going to take out the garbage, do the dishes, fix the sink, or whatever.” What is the response? Yes, I

know you don't have to remind me. That is likely true because when we are on the receiving end of those sorts of requests we do know those things need to happen.]

That is the point here. The Corinthians know and Paul knows that the Corinthians know.

He explains further in **Verse 2**.

Thinking back about a year Paul remembers how ready and eager the Corinthians were to serve the LORD by caring for His people in Jerusalem.

They were excited to help.

Their enthusiasm is a strong encouragement to the apostle.

[Just imagine working at a job that is too big for one person. I'm sure many of you know what that feels like. There you are working away thinking to yourself I'm never going to make it and someone shows up and starts helping. That is a real boast to how you are feeling about the job right?]

Here is this huge task and there is no way Paul can meet the need by himself and the Corinthians believers say "We are here to help and we are excited to work."

If that is an accurate picture of the situation it makes sense that the apostle would "boast" about these believers in other Churches.

We have seen that word "boast" before in 2 Corinthians and it is used in other parts of the Bible as well.

Considering how the word is used it likely means more than telling people about how great the Christians over in Corinth are.

It likely is a boasting about the work that God is doing among the believers at Corinth.

That is a good kind of boasting right?

It is like he is saying, "Hey you have to hear about how the Holy Spirit is moving in the hearts of people."

When he tells the Macedonians about the zeal of the Corinthians it stirs up in them a desire to serve in this ministry as well.

Eagerness for the Lord can have that effect.

[I think of people like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Jim Elliot, George Whitfield, Bruce Olsen, Brother Andrew, and countless others who's passion for Jesus led them to the mission field. That passion has reached far beyond their own mission work as thousands of others have been inspired by their zeal to go to the mission field as well.]

God can use that in all kinds of areas in the Christian life.

Someone becomes a Christian and they decide to obey the LORD in baptism, which can inspire someone in the pew to say to themselves, “That is something I need to do.”

One believer sees another stop to help someone out and they think to themselves, “I need to do more of that.”

We see a Sunday School child memorize the books of the Bible and we think I can do that too.

If we read this and think that Paul is just using this as a way to get people to give more money we are missing the point.

This idea applies to the whole Christian life.

If God by His grace has ignited a passion for Jesus in your heart, He can and often does use that to inspire others in the same direction.

[That can happen in the heart of every believer and it can happen in every circumstance of life. Every one of us can desire to love Jesus more than anything else. When we do others will see it and it will have an effect on those around us. Now when that happens, when we display a passion for the Lord, it comes with a responsibility. That is the second lesson from these verses, that...]

## **Point #2 – Being eager to serve God creates expectations. (Verses 3-4)**

It is only reasonable for people to believe that someone who seems enthusiastic about doing something for the LORD will follow through and actually do what they have said.

Paul had witnessed the enthusiasm of the Corinthians first hand and I believe the context of this book as a whole shows that he truly believed their zeal was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit.

He believed it so much that he told other believers about it.

The only good reason he would do that is if he had real expectations concerning their zeal.

We also know that the relationship between the apostle and the Corinthians had gone through a bit of a bumpy patch.

While we learn in chapter seven that the situation between them has improved, it has raised some concern that the Corinthians may have lost their enthusiasm for the ministry Paul and his companions were doing.

So he writes this in **verse 3**.

It would seem that the eagerness of the Corinthians lead to Paul talking them up quite a bit.

After all the time that has past and all the things that have happen, he is a bit concerned that reality may not measure up to his boasting.

That is one of the reason he is sending Titus and two other brothers to this church, so that they would be reminded of there earlier zeal and commitment.

That is very important to see here. This is not a new ask, it is not asking them for more, it is simply asking them to live up to strong commitment they had made in the past.

He wants to remind them of their earlier passion so that his boasting “may not prove empty.”

That is hollow, vain, or without power.

He then explains what will happen if they don’t follow through on their commitment (**Verse 4**).

*It would be easy to read this verse and say something like, “Paul was being foolish for putting so much stock in these Corinthians.”*

We could think that maybe he should have had more realistic expectations or maybe he should have been more pessimistic about the work of the Spirit among these believers.

If we are thinking along those lines we should ask why that is? I suspect it is because we don’t like humiliation to the point where we don’t want to risk it.

I think it is pretty clear Paul isn’t excited about the possibility of being humiliated either, but he is not so afraid of it that he is unwilling to take any chances and refuse to act in way that requires him to trust in God and not himself.

When we believe we see the Spirit at work it should fill us with joyful expectation.

Yes that is a risky thing to embrace because we are fallible and sometimes we think the Spirit is at work and we turn out to be wrong.

That said, we will miss out if we never take the risk of believing that the LORD is doing something in the hearts of people.

[We know that is true in other areas of life. Have you ever had someone tell you about how amazing a restaurant is? A friend of mine took me to a burger place in Windsor once saying, “It would be the best burger I have ever had.” “It is so good it will change your life.” He said. I was really looking forward to it. I was two bites in and he says to me, “What do you think?” I said, “It’s ok, but I wouldn’t call it life changing.” Does that mean I will never look forward to trying a restaurant that someone suggests? No, because if I did I would miss out.]

Paul doesn’t want to be humiliated, but he also is unwilling to give up on his expectations for these believers.

He saw their eagerness to serve and is expecting the results.

We should have the same perspective.

When people show a passion for the LORD let's not be a wet blanket on the work of the Spirit let's expect to see people continue on in their faith.

Let us also be willing to remind each other of what we are committed to.

If we have come to Christ by faith, confessed our sins, if we have been forgiven, and made into a new creation by the power of God it is going to make a difference in our lives.

We should have expectations of generosity, love, faithfulness, kindness, a love for the truth of God's word, humility, forgiveness, letting go of bitterness, resentment, and anger.

[Jesus tells us brothers and sisters to count the cost of following Him. Yes it is true that the price of being saved from our rebellion against God is paid for by God and not by us. Being right with God costs God His Son dying on the cross and we pay nothing for it. That said, it costs us everything because in believing the good news of Jesus Christ we are saying that we now belong to God to serve and glorify Him with our entire lives. If we say we believe, if we say we want to serve the LORD that immediately produces expectations. That brings us to one more lesson from this text. Here is the lesson...]

### **Point #3 – Genuine eagerness to serve God is proved over time. (Verse 5)**

Being excited to do something for the LORD is good, but it is only truly good if it results in a lasting commitment.

Having admitted that failing to do what they have promised will lead to humiliation for both Paul and the Corinthians, he writes this in verse 5.

It would seem that Paul's desire here is to help in the best way possible.

He wants the reality of the Corinthian's eager desire to help the saints to be lived out in front of the Macedonians.

He has no desire to argue or fight with them.

He would rather not have to rebuke them in front of their fellow believers for backing out of what they agreed to.

He wants them to keep their promise, he wants them to be people of integrity, and he wants them to show that their commitment to Jesus and His service is real.

This is as straight forward as it gets.

If the desire to serve is real it gets lived out and if it isn't then it doesn't.

While the amount of time may vary depending on the circumstance, the moment

of proving the reality of our desire to serve Christ always comes.

[Jesus taught this lesson in a parable about seed being sowed in four different types of soil. Some seed, he said, fell on the path and immediately gets eaten by birds, some falls on rocky soil it springs up but doesn't have a root is scorched by the sun and dies, some seed falls among the weeds and lasts longer but eventually gets choked out and dies, and some seed falls on good soil grows up and produces fruit. He explains that the seed is the word of God. The seed on the hard path that gets eaten by birds represents people who hear the word fail to believe and Satan comes and takes the word from their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil are those who believe for a time but fall away in a time of testing. The seed among the weeds lasts even longer but the cares of the world outweigh their trust in the word of God. Finally the seed on the good soil are those that continue on in their faith and grow in the things that God loves. In each example we see a different length of time, but in each case the reality of the condition of the soil is eventually revealed.]

*It is a very good thing to be full of zeal, we need more of it in the church today no doubt, but eagerness that is short lived is not of God.*

Zeal combined with perseverance and patience is surely the work of the Spirit and will always be proved true.

This is why the Bible warns against making recent converts leaders in the church, because often a new convert will be full of passion but his passion does not run deep in his heart.

Genuine eagerness to serve the LORD is concerned primarily with faithfulness.

Faithfulness to commitments made, faithfulness in little things, everyday things, things that only God sees.

Time and time again doing what is right for the glory of God and the good of His people.

*That is the kind of eagerness we need brothers and sisters.*

That is the kind of eagerness that God can use to bring revival in our land.

That is the kind of eagerness that will lead us to expect great things in the church.

The kind of eagerness that is proved true over time.

May God in His mercy fill up our hearts with this kind of eagerness to serve Christ in our homes, in our work, and in the church.

Let's pray towards that end.