

Daring to be Committed (to What Matters Most)

Series: Daring Faith
Brad Bailey – September 30, 2018

Faith is that which allows us to enter a larger reality of life...one of profound and powerful value... that matters more than anything known only in this world.

What made Jesus so powerful and profound... was that his life was rooted outside this one... that he lived for and into an eternal identity and destination... something that mattered more.

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." - John 17:4

The faith-full life is one who both knows and lives to complete what matters most.

How can I give my best to what matters most?

"Endure hardship with us like a GOOD soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. And the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Think about these three illustrations, and the Lord will help you to understand how they apply to you." 2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NIV/LB)

Live like a dedicated soldier...

"There is a cause worth hardship and dying for...so I will avoid _____."

Jesus [said] to all of them, "Any of you who want to be my follower must stop thinking about yourself and what you want. You must be willing to carry the cross that is given to you every day for following me. ²⁴ Any of you who try to save the life you have will lose it. But you who give up your life for me will save it. ²⁵ It is worth nothing for you to have the whole world if you yourself are destroyed or lost. - Luke 9:23-25 (ERV)

Live like a successful athlete

"There is a win worth running for...so I will embrace _____."

"In a race everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize. So run your race to win. TO WIN the contest YOU MUST deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a ribbon or medal that won't last, but we do it for an eternal reward that will last forever! So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I discipline myself, making sacrifices and training my body to do what it should, not what it wants to do. Otherwise I fear I might be disqualified from the race." - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (LB/NCV)

Live like a productive farmer

"There is a harvest to come....so I will _____ for the future."

2 Corinthians 9:6-13 (NLT)

"Honor God with everything you own; give him the first and the BEST part of everything. If you do this, your barns will fill with grain and your barrels will overflow with wine." - Proverbs 3:9-10

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Intro

Let me begin with **two questions** that may **help us hear God's call** to us today:

Do you understand that some things matter more than others?

Do you understand that your earthly life is that which can be given to the source and center of eternal life?

These are the questions which God wants us to engage today. And if we are honest...I think many of us would pause and sense that such an understanding is perhaps only so deep. Some of us want to understand. Some of us understand these conceptually... but are not fully living in such an understanding. God wants to speak to us.

We have begun a **Fall focus** entitled **Daring Faith**.

And as **noted in previous weeks...faith can be described** as the connection between the finite and infinite. ...how we live in relationship with the infinite.

This is all about knowing the WHY of life. One of the aspects of our current culture... is that we are notably focused on the WHAT and avoid the WHY. We have become increasingly intense about what we do and how much we can do...but avoid the WHY of it all.

Whatever aspiration we begin with, as the years go by... they often elude us... we may accomplish some things....but a sense of deeper purpose seems to elude us.

Our culture is learning to master pace more than purpose. Everything is focused on what we can do and how we can do more...but never on why. We have proudly defined our American Lifestyle as 'life in the fast lane.' We are driven to get devices that will allow everything to work faster... I can get on the fast track...to get my fast food... while I instant message my network all about it. [1]

Pace has replaced a sense of purpose...

Max Lucado wrote:..

"Complacent to purpose. How in the world can a person be born, be educated, fall in or out of love, have a job, be married, give birth, raise kids, see death, retire, and die without ever, ever asking why? Never asking, "Why am I here?" - Max Lucado [2]

That is the reality which Jesus brings to us.

Into a world of futility... he pulls back the curtain... and reveals the source of true and everlasting life.

It's the **larger reality of the infinite** that **enters the finite**...and the finite enter it by faith...by trust.

Faith is that which allows us to enter a larger reality of life...one of profound and powerful value... that matters more than anything known only in this world.

In fact... when people try to identify... what was so powerful about Jesus... they will often think of his **moral teaching**... or how he **changed the world**, But...

What made Jesus so powerful and profound... was that his life was rooted outside this one... that he lived for and into an eternal identity and destination... something that mattered more.

Jesus didn't live for himself...not for the audience around him...including religious popularity. **He lived for the heart and home of heaven.**

I have shared a few times how struck I have been by one of his final prayer before his death and resurrection. His closest disciple John records his prayer to the Father in heaven...and he says...

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."
John 17:4 (NIV)

Those are **quite profound words**. At the age of **just 33 earthly years**... he **spoke of completion**.

I never feel I have finished anything. I can feel like life is a "to do" list that never seems done... add a bucket list...and it seems even more unclear.

What should be **equally fascinating**...is that Jesus knew such completion amidst a world that was still **filled with needs not yet fully met**.

What does his life reflect?

Jesus lived out a life defined by priority. (...an ability to know and commit and fulfill what mattered most.)

He lived into a priority.

The key to a "faithful" life is priority... knowing and choosing what matters most.

When we say that someone is **faithful**... **we often miss what it really means**.

We often think of **someone who just follows what is expected by others**... and not necessarily any particular others.

We might think of a faithful guy as **passive**.

"He's a **faithful worker**." ...implying he **just does his job**...whatever he is told.

"He's a **faithful husband**." ...implying he **never cheats**...he never looks for anything more.

What we need to understand is that **the Bible understands** a very **different dynamic** when it speaks of being “faithful.”

The faith-full one is one who lives **not with passivity**...but with a **profound and powerful grasp of priority**.

The faith-full life is one who both knows and lives to complete what matters most.

The faith-full life is defined by priority... an ability to know and commit and fulfill what matters most.

Jesus comes calling us to stop wasting our lives on what doesn't matter... not to settle for what's temporal.

How do we not waste our lives? How do we live for what matters most?

How can I give my best to what matters most?

He reveals that there is something more to live for... a race worth winning...a prize worth receiving... a gain worth gaining.

The Bible has a **great description** of what we need to grasp....the **Apostle Paul** is writing to his younger apprentice Timothy who is serving as a pastor to those in Ephesus. Here he describes what we must embrace to be faithful. He uses **three roles to embrace in a spiritual manner**.

“Endure hardship with us like a GOOD soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. And the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Think about these three illustrations, and the Lord will help you to understand how they apply to you.” 2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NIV/LB)

This is a call not to waste our lives. It is a call to learn how life really works. It says **we can learn from these three examples of roles that exist here**.

A dedicated soldier...a successful athlete...and a productive farmer

What do they all have in common? Dedication to a priority.

None of them just go along letting life just passively shape what they do.

There is dedication.

Faith calls us into a life in which we give our best to what matters most.

All of these reflect understanding that there is something that matters most...and is therefore worth whatever is involved with living according.

The first role which God says we can learn from is the dedicated soldier.

Live like a dedicated soldier...

“Endure hardship with us like a GOOD soldier of Christ Jesus.”

The Bible starts off by saying **look at the military**. You can learn a lot about faith and about being the best you can be in the military.

I know that we are **not in as active an era of war as known before...nor** in very **military active city**...but I would like to ask if any here have served in the military. If so...would like to **ask you to stand**. I believe it is a fitting opportunity to honor you. If you served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Reserves, I want you to just stand up first now and let us thank you for your sacrificial service to our country.

He clearly wasn't speaking of simply a new military force to join. He was **speaking of the dedication** to a cause... that **embraces the cost** of the cause.

Those who serve as soldiers... are **rooted in the understanding** that there is **something worth dying for**.

Until you know what you're willing to die for you're not ready to live. You're not ready to live until you know what you'd die for. And you're not ready to love until you know *who* you'd die for.

If you've never clarified what's worth dying for you really are not fully alive.

A dedicated soldier has to **stop and assess life**...and **make a choice**: it's a choice that is inherent to the role of being in the military...and it is this... I will choose to risk my life above others...because there is something worth dying for. There is something good that must be protected against something not good. There are some things more valuable even than my own life and they understand that.

When someone enters the military... **they enter the terms that come with such a role**. **Paul says... we need to grasp the same terms**.

Jesus understood the term by which he came... and he shared them to all who follow.

Jesus said:

Luke 9:23-25 (ERV)

Jesus [said] to all of them, *“Any of you who want to be my follower must stop thinking about yourself and what you want. You must be willing to carry the cross that is given to you every day for following me. ²⁴ Any of you who try to save the life you have will lose it. But you who give up your life for me will save it. ²⁵ It is worth nothing for you to have the whole world if you yourself are destroyed or lost.*

Those are the terms of true faith. And with it...we learn to **endure hardship**.

I must sacrifice my comfort. Of course soldiers do this all the time. Think of all the comforts soldiers give up in order to serve others.

They give up comfort. They go out and serve in the heat and they serve in the cold. They give up their free schedule. They're not free to do anything they want to do. The commanding officer says “I want you to do this... I want you to do that.” They give up their freedom in order to preserve the freedom of other people.

When a soldier accepts that this is what this is...**it is worth dying for**... then they enter into military life...**as opposed to civilian life**.

“Endure hardship with us like a GOOD soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer. - 2 Timothy 2:3

Civilian affairs refers all the way some **simply engage the affairs of this world**. A soldier accepts that they have a special responsibility...and there dedication to that includes living with some distinction.

“There is a cause worth hardship and dying for...so I will avoid distractions.”

Now **the two do indeed overlap**...but inwardly they are living with a different set of terms. **What is expected of a civilian and an enlisted are different.**

The enlisted therefore have **boundaries to keep**...boundaries **to keep them free to fulfill their higher cause they have entered**.

What does that look like? It doesn't mean that the military don't have families they visit or nights out. We can all see that outwardly...a soldier may still be engaged in some normal activities...and Jesus was still involved in some common aspects of life. So this is not a call to complete separation from engaging and enjoying life. But they are always part of the military...and they maintain a priority based on their responsibility.

It's a call to be set apart.

So while it doesn't mean we have **complete cutting off...contempt** for the other life... most of us lose any sense of what it means to be set apart. The truth is that we can become **so given to trying to not be different... so vague about what it means** to truly accept a higher calling ... that we become deceived... that there is **no real difference**.

We need to be honest with ourselves: Do we really understand the terms of service?
DO we really have a cause that we have given ourselves to...with all the distinction and dedication that comes with it?

C.S Lewis described how he reflected a lot on what happens when secondary things become primary....when caring for a dog...enjoying alcohol... the power of a romantic relationship.

In a letter to Dom Bede Griffiths in 1951, Lewis stated this principle succinctly:

“Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose *both* first and second things.” – C.S. Lewis [3]

If there's one thing a soldier must have is he must have the freedom to respond, the flexibility when his commanding officer says Go. No soldier says, “Sorry, I'm busy right now. I'm watching *The Bachelor... or Game of Thrones...re-runs of Friends*.

No. A soldier is ALWAYS aware that they have given themselves to something that defines their priority. There is no conflict.

The Bible has a lot to say about doing without **things that really don't matter**. How much of your time is invested in things that aren't going to matter five years from today, much less in eternity? How much of your energy is invested in things that aren't going to matter five years from today much less for eternity? How much of your money are you investing in things that aren't going to matter five years from today, much less for eternity?

If you want to be great, if you want to be the best, you must start spending more of your time, more of your money and more of your energy on things that are going to last forever and less on things that don't really matter.

Do you really need to know how many times a Hollywood celebrity has been married? It's a waste of time. It's a waste of brain space.

What could you give up? I want to challenge you to think about this this week. What could you give up? An hour of tv a week? What could you give up in order to make more time for the things that matter in life? To love. To serve. To know God. To worship.

If we give our lives in faith to a true and everlasting life that transcends this world... how do we enjoy this world without becoming entangled... without it becoming a higher priority...a first thing?

So what constitutes “becoming entangled in civilian affairs?”

That is a really significant question. And a sensitive one. I believe most of us have some pretty strong attachments... comforts... elements that likely are distractions. [4]

Is there a distinction from this world which God sees in our hearts? Paul says, we will want to please the commanding officer. We will want to give our best...be dedicated.

The second role which God says we can learn from is the successful athlete.

Live like a successful athlete

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 2:5 (NIV/LB)

The second most used analogy for the Christian life in the Bible is an athlete. The Bible compares your life to a race. You are running a race in life.

“In a race everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize. So run your race to win. TO WIN the contest YOU MUST deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a ribbon or medal that won't last, but we do it for an eternal reward that will last forever! So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I discipline myself, making sacrifices and training my body to do what it should, not what it wants to do. Otherwise I fear I might be disqualified from the race.” - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (LB/NCV)

Run to win...

The Bible says, there in verse 24 “*In a race everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize. So run your race to win!*” Circle that. Run your race to win.

Now I think it is obvious that the emphasis is not about beating others...it's about the approach to the race.

The first thing we learn from the athlete is this – I must intend to win. If I'm going to win in life it's got to be intentional. It's not going to happen by accident. It's not going to happen without effort. It's not going to happen unless I have a goal. **You will not become great by accident.** You will not become the best woman you could possibly be or the best man you could possibly be just casually. It only happens if you intend to be the best you can be, if you intend to have a great soul, intend to have a goal.

This is the **difference in being** a casual commitment to Christ...and a serious one.

Only one is really committed at all. They're playing to win. And they get stressed out about it if they don't win.

Paul... I am intent on the prize... **not just playing around.**

The problem with a lot of people today, they're just shadow boxing. They're air guitaring the life Jesus has come to bring. They're pretending. They're just playing around. They're just hitting the air. They're not serious. And he says, run straight to the goal. You need to stay focused on the finish line.

You should be living your life in a way that you're running to win. **God wants you to win.** God doesn't want you to be a loser. **God wants you to be a winner.** He wants you to run the race to win and you've got to do this intentionally.

Some of us may need to ask: Am I even intending to become great? To win?

What will this involve? Discipline.

We all know stories of what Olympian athletes give up in order to win a gold medal. They pretty much put their life on hold. They put their social life on hold. They have a rigid schedule of when I get up in the morning, when I go to bed at night. They have a rigid schedule at the training table – what they eat and what they won't eat, what they do, what they don't do. They make enormous sacrifices to win gold or silver or bronze.

Live like a successful athlete

"There is a win worth running for...so I will embrace discipline."

God says nobody's even going to remember those awards and they gave their whole life. They gave their whole life for something that's just going to vanish. It's not going to last. But he says it is a wise move to do that for something that's going to last forever in eternity and to make your life count.

So what are some things I can do without so I can spend more time with God, so I can give more to God, so I can serve more, so I can be more of what God wants me to be.

I again ask you this question: What am I willing to do without in order to be the best? Am I willing to do without popularity? Am I willing to do without wealth? Am I willing to do without comfort?

I saw a poster that said...

“The pain of regret is always greater than the pain of discipline.” That’s a pretty profound statement. The pain of regret is always greater than the pain of discipline.

How would your life be better if you’d been just a little more disciplined early on in your life? What are some things you could be enjoying today if you had been more disciplined early in life? The pain of regret goes on and on and on. I never learned that language; I wanted to but I didn’t. I never did this. I never did that. It is discipline.

What is something I can build into my life to define and develop a life that wants to win an eternal prize?

Then finally ...the third role which God says we can learn from is the productive farmer.

Live like a productive farmer

“There is a harvest to come....so I will sow for the future.”

2 Timothy 2:6 (CEV)

And farmers who work hard are the first to eat what grows in their field.

The farmer who sowswill be the one who gets to share in the harvest. Not just any farmer...**but the one who works hard...** who really invests in the process of sowing... of the investment of energy and thought and time and seed. [6]

“Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. - 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NLT)

The productive farmer says,

“There is a harvest to come....so I will sow for the future.”

Sowing for the future is a way of life that can be most contrary to our cultural ways...and the most defining work of faith.

Our culture says... “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die”... there is nothing more so consume everything now.

Our culture says...”Sowing is for suckers.” Consume everything... before someone else does.

But just as that proves tragic even in temporal life...and we see the farmer who sowed hard be the one blessed by it... Paul is saying,, learn that it goes beyond this temporal time and space.

This is what Jesus declared...

Jesus said... “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” - Matthew 6:20-21 (ESV)

The person who tries to store up a treasure in this world is going to find it never lasts. NEVER. The finite world is finite...everything is wears out...or is taken before that. EVERYTHING. SO Jesus says... store up a treasure where it will last... in the realm that is not finite...that will never end.

How? How do we sow like a productive farmer who will be able to RECEIVE and ENJOY what they sow...

You commit to what lasts. You dedicate your time.. your talent...your treasure to it. Anytime you sow your time... treasure... and talent into something of eternal potential,, rather than just your temporal comfort...you are sowing into an eternal harvest.

Closing:

And **Jesus sums it all up** when he calls us to face what is always true: what you give to is where your heart will be...and where your heart is...you will give.

It is **all about commitment**. Each of these roles was rooted in a commitment.

They **didn’t talk** about a commitment. **They had made it.**

That’s what it means to be **“all in.”** It means you stop living the sidelines... stop mumbling “we’ll see.”

When you are all in... you are **no longer “holding back.”**

When you are “all in”... you are **not divided... not focused on a backup plan.**

Closing story... some of you may be familiar with...

It was the year **1519** and Hernán Cortés, with some 600 Spaniards, 16 or so horses and 11 boats, had landed on a vast inland plateau called, Mexico.

The **Spanish conquistador** and his men were about to embark on a conquest of an empire that hoarded some of the world's greatest treasure. Gold, silver and precious Aztec jewels were just some of what this treasure had to offer anyone who succeeded in their quest to obtain it. There may be little in their motives and morals...but there was something unique that unfolded in their process.

So outnumbered and weak in force. – conquering an empire so extensive in its territories could only be undertaken by a man with a death wish.

This daring undertaking was made even more insurmountable by the fact that **for more than 600 years**, conquerors with **far more resources** at their disposal who attempted to colonize the Yucatan Peninsula, **never succeeded**. Hernán Cortés was well-aware of this fact. And it was for this reason, that he took a different approach when he landed on the land of the Mayans.

Instead of charging through cities and forcing his men into immediate battle, Hernán Cortés stayed on the beach and awoke the souls of his men with melodious cadences – in the form of emblazoned speeches.

But, ironically, it would only **just be 3 words** which Cortés' murmured, that would change the history of the New World. As they marched inland to face their enemies, Cortés ordered, **“Burn the boats.”**

You can imagine what those lives must have thought...if you burn the boats... if we are getting defeated...there won't be any way to turn and run. They would be all in... and the result: they were the first in 600 years to successfully conquer Mexico. [7]

I wonder if some of us find that fear is controlling us more than faith.. because we have never really committed... been running life like a “maybe”... holding back with back up plans. Some of us need to “burn the boats.” We need to cross that point of no return.

Closing Prayer

Resources: This message is part of a church wide series based on the Saddleback Church Daring Faith campaign / series. We have adapted that set of messages by Rick Warren to fit our thoughts and way of approaching these topics, while maintaining most of the broad themes and some specific points. This message draws upon Rick Warren's message Daring to Give God My Best (April 18-19, 2015)

Notes:

1. Journalist Peg Zaemisch - "America. The land of the rushed," "We have proudly defined our American Lifestyle as 'life in the fast lane.' Even our sentences are peppered with such words as time crunch, fast food, rush hour, frequent flyer, expressway, overnight delivery, and rapid transit. The products and services we use further attest to our hurry: We send packages by Federal Express, use a long distance company called Sprint, manage our personal finances on

Quicken, schedule our appointments on a Day Runner, diet with SlimFast, and swim in trunks made by Speedo.

2. Max Lucado, "On the Anvil" 1985

3. From: *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Vol. III, Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper, HarperSanFrancisco, 2007, p. 111

In an essay first published in 1942, C.S. Lewis discussed a principle concerning first and second things. An excerpt follows: Until quite modern times — I think, until the time of the Romantics — nobody ever suggested that literature and the arts were an end in themselves. They “belonged to the ornamental part of life”, they provided “innocent diversion”; or else they “refined our manners” or “incited us to virtue” or glorified the gods. The great music had been written for Masses, the great pictures painted to fill up a space on the wall of a noble patron’s dining-room or to kindle devotion in a church; the great tragedies were produced either by religious poets in honour of Dionysus or by commercial poets to entertain Londoners on half-holidays.

It was only in the nineteenth century that we became aware of the full dignity of art. We began to “take it seriously”... But the result seems to have been a dislocation of the aesthetic life in which little is left for us but high-minded works which fewer and fewer people want to read or hear or see, and “popular” works of which both those who make them and those who enjoy them are half ashamed... by valuing too highly a real, but subordinate good, we have come near to losing that good itself.

The longer I looked into it the more I came to suspect that I was perceiving a universal law...

The woman who makes a dog the centre of her life loses, in the end, not only her human usefulness and dignity but even the proper pleasure of dog-keeping. The man who makes alcohol his chief good loses not only his job but his palate and all power of enjoying the earlier (and only pleasurable) levels of intoxication. It is a glorious thing to feel for a moment or two that the whole meaning of the universe is summed up in one woman — glorious so long as other duties and pleasures keep tearing you away from her. But clear the decks and so arrange your life (it is sometimes feasible) that you will have nothing to do but contemplate her, and what happens? Of course this law has been discovered before, but it will stand re-discovery. It may be stated as follows: every preference of a small good to a great, or partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice is made.

Apparently the world is made that way... You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first. — From C.S. Lewis, “First and Second Things,” *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 278-280

4. Three questions that can help identify what has become a primary distraction are:

What do you count on... or look to ... for validation?

What captures your attention? (Where does your mind go when it wanders?)

What role or activity in life do you find most challenging to disentangle from... to do without?

5. Also Mark 4:26-29 (NIV)

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

6. He is drawing upon what was so deeply a part of their culture...and this is what Jesus had described about the nature of how God's kingdom was coming forth.

Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field." - Matthew 13:24 (NLT)

Many versions of this and other "burning of boats" can be found. This one, which appears more credible than others is from [About BurningBoats.com](http://AboutBurningBoats.com)