

Made for More

5. Sustained

March 21, 2021

Text: Ephesians 5:8-17

[Video shown to start the service.]

It's inspiring for me to watch Steve live as an everyday missionary. He's using his spiritual gifts and his unique position in his company to make an impact in an area he has passion. The result is that people are served, and God is glorified. This series is all about learning how to fulfill our purpose and our calling. And our purpose is not always obvious.

We're all used to seeing yellow and black school buses in our neighborhoods. But until this week, I never thought about why they look like they do. Of course, the yellow color makes the bus very visible. [Picture shown on the big screens.] It helps us instantly recognize the vehicle as a school bus so that we're prepared to slow down and watch for kids. And most yellow school buses have a series of black stripes along the length. I heard a bus driver explain in a video that those stripes are not just there for looks. It turns out they have a couple of purposes. For one, these black panels add structure to the side of the bus, so that they add some protection to the side of the bus in case it's hit. These black lines can help first responders in an emergency. One of the lines marks the floor of the bus. The line above that one marks the bottom of the seats. And the top line shows the top of the seats. If the bus is in an accident, those black lines actually give firefighters an idea of where to cut. And some school buses up north also have black hoods and grille covers. The black hoods, said the driver in one video, reduce glare, while the grille covers keep the diesel engine warm in winter in areas with more extreme temperatures. That sounds ingenious!

Whether or not those black lines on a bus have a purpose, you have been created by God for a purpose and a calling. That's what the book of Ephesians tells us. **Ephesians 1** tells us that when we trust Christ, we are adopted into the family of God as his children. That is our identity, and our purpose is to do life WITH God every day. Then **Ephesians 2:10** says God prepared good works in advance for us to do. And that is our calling -- to do those works. Each person's calling is unique because we each have different gifts, passions, and life stories that influence our calling. And chapter 3 tells us how important it is that we do those in love. Chapter 5 starts out summarizing this. **Ephesians 5:1-2** *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children -- there's our purpose: to live as his children -- ²and walk in the way of love -- the good works we do in love are our calling -- just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Just as Jesus was sent into the world to express God's love, so are we. Each of us who follow Christ are called to be everyday missionaries where we live, work, play, and learn. But today, the world we are sent to is hurting. The people we live, work, and play with have been rocked over the last year by COVID and political hostility and division. They have been emotionally battered by anxiety, uncertainty, and loss. Their marriages and friendships have been strained and broken. Students miss out on school

activities and wonder about their future. And the truth is, you and I are not above those realities. We live in this world, too. Many of us have been depleted emotionally. We have suffered loss and strained friendships and maybe marriages. We have our own concerns and worries. So, how do we live out our calling to be everyday missionaries when we're feeling battered ourselves? How do we live out our purpose and calling when we've been rattled or even wounded? How do we minister to others when we're feeling like it's all we can do to get through the day ourselves?

The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to be a missionary when he was hurting. After all, Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians from jail. It wasn't a fun time. And listen to what he tells the Corinthians. **2 Corinthians 1:8-10** *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.*

Things were so hard for Paul that he didn't want to keep living. You might think that as an apostle, God would make everything smooth for Paul. But not so. Yet, Paul kept preaching the Gospel and training believers to live for Christ. So, if this last year has left you feeling like throwing in the towel, remember God is still with you. Don't give up; don't give in to despair. Reach out for help if you need it. If you don't know who to contact, contact us here at the church. The difficult times we're going through don't mean that God has abandoned us. They don't disqualify us from fulfilling our ministry. *They are not signs we are to give up. They are signs we are to look up for God's help.*

1 Corinthians 1:10 says, *but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* When we don't have anything left in us, that's when we learn to rely on God the most. The process of working through fatigue, pressure, anxiety, or depression is going to develop us and shape us deeply to be used by God. The hard times will be part of our testimony, our story that God will use to encourage others in the future. Years from now, you will have stories to tell about how God got you through the pandemic of COVID-19.

Our calling doesn't go away just because we're in a pandemic. God still calls you even in the midst of the storm -- *especially* in the midst of the storm -- because that's when you are most needed. This pandemic is going to end in the near future, but people's needs will remain. The Lord wants to prepare us, his people, to live out our calling so we can help heal hearts and lives. So, let's take a practical look at how to stay in the game as an everyday missionary even when we're feeling beaten up ourselves. I'll share four points. As I do, ask yourself which one of these is a first step for you.

1. Recharge your spirit. Plug in to the Lord's love. Even when life is hard, God is still good. Even when you don't feel him, God is close to you. **Ephesians 5:8-10** says *Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.* Live as children of the light. Don't wander. Don't hide. But stay under his light. Remember, our purpose in life is to do life WITH God, every moment of every day. And part of that means meeting with him alone.

I remember years ago, our church was going through a multimillion-dollar building project that went sideways. The contractors got into a dispute with one another, and it looked like the building might not be finished. I was feeling the stress of that very heavily. My stomach was in knots all the time, and the stress was getting to me. One day, I went into my room and got on my face on the floor and starting laying things out to God. I read the Bible. I talked to him about the situation. I stayed in his presence – and he met me there. When I got up, my stomach was relaxed, and I felt about 100 pounds lighter. I didn't get any specific answer. I just sensed the presence of God, and that was all I needed.

No matter what's happening, make yourself available to God. Stay under his spiritual faucet. [Picture of a glass filling up with water shown on the big screens.] When life is challenging, we need to experience God's love. We need the refreshment of his presence. So, keep putting yourself in a place where he can find you and you can encounter him. That means soak up his love in worship. You're taking a step right now by being in worship, whether online or in person. Worship is essential to growing our relationship with the Lord. After all, it's what we'll do in eternity. Keep worshipping at home. You can worship along to music on your phone. Take time daily to listen to his voice through the Bible.

Most of us hear the voice of the TV, or Instagram, or Twitter, Facebook, or our favorite music. What we need to hear right now is the voice of God. And that can come to us through the pages of the scripture. Read a chapter per day. It will only take you about four to five minutes most days. If you're just starting out, try the book of Luke, which is a biography of Jesus. It tells about what Jesus did and what he said. We listen to other sources every day. To live out our calling, we need to hear from God every day.

2. Practice self-care. A couple years ago, I bought a lawn mower that needed oil added. I wasn't used to that type. I added oil to the line the first time I used it, but I didn't the next times. The third time I used the mower, the engine seized up and smoke came out. I knew that wasn't good. The mower never worked right after that. Not smart. Just a little maintenance would have kept that mower in service. Many of us override our body's limits and neglect caring for the creation God gave us. That's unwise. If we're going to stay in the game as everyday missionaries, we need to invest in caring for ourselves. Some of us might feel selfish doing this. But there's a difference between self-focus and self-care. So, let's do the checklist.

Rest – are you getting 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night? We are designed to unplug every day. If you run a machine constantly, it will wear out. How much more our own bodies? One day, Jesus and the disciples were busy ministering to people. **Mark 6:31** *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* The Lord might be saying to some people here today -- get to a quiet place and get some rest. Get quiet. Take a break from news. Much of it is designed to outrage you so you keep tuning in. Let it go for a while. Rest. I used to think that sleep was a waste of time. I used to wish I could get by on a lot less than I did. But **Psalms 127:2** says *In vain, you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat -- for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

Eat healthy. I heard someone say that the 19 in COVID-19 represents the amount of weight the average person gained during the pandemic from stress eating. To go the distance, choose to eat well. Make meals a relaxed time with people you like. Jesus was often eating with other people. I can't wait until our Life Group can eat together again. Something good happens when we eat together.

Confront addictions. When under stress, it is tempting to try to escape into addictive behavior. **Ephesians 5:18** *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* If you have been struggling with alcohol, drugs, pornography, shopping, or any other addiction, reach out for help. There are 12-step groups that meet at Crossroads. And by the way, if you're interested in helping to restart a Christ-centered 12-step group, please let us know. We can't help others if we break down ourselves. We can't fool our bodies in the long haul. They keep score. How are you doing with self-care?

3. Speak positively. The way we speak influences the way we think. If we criticize someone, we then tend to pull away from them. If we complain about our job, our attitude and effort go downhill. We can choose what we feed our mind! **Ephesians 4:29** *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* Be the gatekeeper of your words. Speak truth! **Ephesians 5:19-20** *speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Let's do that right now. Let's declare some of the truth in Psalms by reading it aloud together.

Psalms 23:1-4 *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.* When you are worried about not having enough money, enough time, enough friends, enough whatever -- speak aloud the truth of his promise. *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.* When you are feeling tired -- *²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he refreshes my soul.* Do you not know what to do? Not sure what the future will hold? *He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[a] I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

4. Meet someone's need. It might seem counterintuitive to reach out to someone else when we're tired and stressed. But the Lord has created us in such a way that when we minister to others, it refreshes us. There have been many times I have felt tired and come across someone in need. As I listen and pray with them and enter into what God wants to do in their lives, it re-energizes me. When you live out your calling, it will energize you, too. Yes, we have limits. But the point is, don't wait until you have it all together to reach out. Because it's in our reaching out that we'll be healed. **Ephesians 5:16** *making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.* God will give us opportunities to meet someone's need this week. Let's make the most of them. Look for opportunities this week to show Jesus' love. Each morning you can pray, "Lord, let me express your love to someone who needs it today."

Those are a few ways you can stay in the game as an everyday missionary even when weighed down yourself. Which one of these is a first step for you? **¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:17** *Therefore do not be foolish,*

but understand what the Lord's will is. To [be ready to] meet the moment as society opens up again.