

INSIDE OUT
Serving God
1 Corinthians 15:58

I know what it is like to be worn out and discouraged while in the middle of a task that seems futile or endless. I also know what it is like to be REVIVED in that task when I get my second wind and REMEMBER WHY I was doing it in the first place. Today, I want to spend one more message sharing WHAT we do as a church, and WHY we do it. I am doing this because I know that many of you have been faithfully serving the Lord in good times and in bad at CHC, and that you are tired. The work of the ministry can get overwhelming and discouraging. I also know that it is the greatest investment of resources that any of us could ever give! We are here to be the HANDS and FEET of Christ. **Our mission is to bring hope to the world by helping people to FIND and FOLLOW Jesus Christ.** One of the greatest ways that we can accomplish this is by allowing the power of God to flow through our PRACTICAL ACTS of SERVICE, both inside and outside the walls of the church. Serving opens HEARTS and DOORS that God can walk through, but it will COST us. Along with many of you, I have learned this, and I have gladly chosen to make God the greatest INVESTMENT of my life. **The truth is that each of us must make a CHOICE about how we will INVEST our LIVES. So, if you examine how YOU are spending your time, talents, and treasures, do you find GOD in the center of it all?** I hope so, not just for your sake, but for the sake of all of the people around us that do not know Christ. Today, I want us to look at a passage of Scripture that describes the WHY and the WAY that we ought to serve our Lord Jesus. Paul wrote these words to challenge some believers in Corinth (Greece, not Mississippi) who were in danger of losing their focus and passion for ministry. Some of you may need the very same kind of encouragement! We shall see. **1 Corinthians 15:58 AMP**

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord [always doing your best and doing more than is needed], being continually aware that your labor [even to the point of exhaustion] in the Lord is not futile nor wasted [it is never without purpose].

I want to encourage you with these words. Paul says that we must EXCEL (or ABOUND) in the work of the Lord. This is a great word. It means, "to go beyond what is required, to give MORE than enough!" This verse challenges us to give the FIRST and BEST of ourselves to God for his use and purposes. It is so sad to me when we put him LAST on our list of priorities. I believe that God DESERVES our first and our very best. When we do this, it demonstrates to everyone watching that God is our highest treasure and our greatest passion! **Of course, God is watching too, and he PROMISES that he will not allow a single aspect of any work that we do for him to go to waste. I love that promise.** Sometimes I wonder if what I am doing is making a difference. I grow discouraged when I do not see the fruits of ministry blooming all around me, but during those times I simply recall the truth that God has

promised that NOTHING that I do for him will be IN VAIN. This has two distinct meanings. **First, it means that God will NOT WASTE anything that we do for him on this earth.** Sometimes you get to SEE how a life is changed or a person is helped by what you do in God's name for them. Yet, very often you may not find out HOW God used your work or WHAT it accomplished until you get to heaven, but he will show you that it was not wasted. This is the promise of God. That is very helpful when you are neck deep in "labor to the point of exhaustion" for the Lord. By the way, have you EVER been EXHAUSTED from doing the Lord's work? I'm just saying!

Not only does God USE every work that we do for him; he also REWARDS every deed that is done IN and FOR his name. He promises to give us an ETERNAL reward for our spiritual work. This is not a promise that you will go to heaven IF you serve God. No! Heaven is ALREADY yours if you have given your life to Christ. Instead, it means that in heaven he will LAVISH rewards on you for every thing that you do for him in this life. He rewards you for every chair that you stack, every child you teach, every meal you serve, and every witness you give. **Jesus said that even if you simply give a child a cup of cold water in his name, you would receive a reward!** And his rewards will be more than you could ever imagine. He does not just give STUFF; he will give you opportunities and experiences in eternity future that will be just for you because you were faithful to him. Servants become LEADERS in heaven! Your depth of service on earth determines your height in RANK in heaven!

This reminder that nothing that we do for the Lord will be in vain is given to challenge us to be FIXED in our resolve to spend our entire LIVES serving God as a lifestyle. The words "steadfast" and "immovable" mean, "to remain firmly set on course and to refuse to drift away." This is the essence of what it means to be firmly COMMITTED to something in your life. You will not budge. We used to sing a song in church titled, "I shall not be moved." I used to jokingly say that it was the anthem of those who refused to give up their favorite pew in church or to CHANGE! But in truth, it was written to encourage believers to STAY ON COURSE in serving God. **Too many Christians today simply "dip their toes" in ministry rather than making a wholehearted commitment to it. They serve for a short time, and then drift away. Drifting away from our purpose is easy to do without a firm commitment to serve.** There are so many things that can distract us, and we must fight drift in our spiritual service. Drift is imperceptible and deadly at the same time because it allows you to slip quietly out of service without being noticed as your spiritual life withers away. Look at where you are today. Have you drifted away from serving God with the same passion and diligence that you used to have? I challenge you to REAFFIRM your commitment to ministry. Don't slip away! If you need to rest for a short season, then do so. But do not fade away in your faithfulness.

So, just what does it look like for us to ALWAYS EXCEL in the work of the Lord? I'm so glad you asked! Paul wrote these words to a local church, so I want us to look at the next several verses in this passage to see just how we can excel in the work of the Lord at CHC. The first thing that he brings up is the reminder that excellence in the work of the Lord INVOLVES GIVING. **1 Corinthians 16:1-2 NIV**

1 Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Paul reminds the church to set aside money each week for the ministry needs that they can help to meet. This is an act of spiritual and practical service. I have been reminding you lately of the fact that giving is worship. It is also spiritual WORK. In this passage, Paul is affirming the giving of a tithe (a percentage of your income) when you come together in worship on Sunday (the first day of the week). He is encouraging them to excel in this work of giving as a church. **Let me take this opportunity to say something important to the members of CHC. Some of you have asked me about why we have decided to pass an OFFERING PLATE in church again after not having done this for so long.** I LOVE the way that you have asked me about this. You have affirmed the VALUE that we embraced so long ago that we do not want our guests to feel pressured to give, and you are afraid that we are somehow moving away from that value as a church. I want to reassure you that nothing could be further from the truth. It is essential to me that we set our guests at ease during our offering time by letting them know that we do not ask them to give anything! We want them to know that this service is a GIFT TO them. **But the Lord put it on my heart some time ago that I needed to bring GIVING back into our services in a practical way for a time to re-establish the biblical connection between giving and worship.** This is a REMINDER for seasoned believers and TRAINING for our new believers. I actually let you know this early last year, but I deliberately waited several months before putting it into motion. I move slowly. I do ask you to trust me as we do this. This decision was not driven by fear or by some feeling that we were losing ground financially. Remember, we PAID OFF the loan in Hernando last year! That was an amazing picture of your faithfulness, and I am not worried. I am just following the Lord's lead in doing this for a season until he leads me to do something different. We WILL continue to make sure that our guests KNOW our intentions during our offering time. They will understand. **Of course, you can still give your offerings in the boxes or online if you want, but during this time of offering make it a point to DEDICATE your offering to God. I don't want you to give just as a matter of duty or ritual; it is a sacrifice of PRAISE! Celebrate it!**

Do you realize that when you GIVE to the work of the Lord through the local church or through a ministry that serves in his name, even your TIME AT WORK becomes an ACT of WORSHIP? That is such a cool thought! You are not just making widgets for the world or money for the Man; you are working for the Kingdom of God. I love that. The next time you are at work and you are just frustrated out of your mind over something that is going wrong, just remind yourself that you are doing this FOR THE LORD. **Colossians 3:23-24 NLT**

23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

I believe that remembering this principle will help you to retain your joy at work. You are not just serving your BOSS; you are serving your LORD. This will even help you to be the hardest worker at your place of employment, since you have the best Boss! You are doing the work of the Lord. Do it well.

You can also excel in the work of the Lord by STAYING PUT. Paul stressed the importance of being “steadfast and immovable, ALWAYS abounding in the work of the Lord” in the first verse that we read. He illustrates this in his own life in the next few verses. **1 Corinthians 16:5-9 NLT**

5 I am coming to visit you after I have been to Macedonia, for I am planning to travel through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay awhile with you, possibly all winter, and then you can send me on my way to my next destination. 7 This time I don't want to make just a short visit and then go right on. I want to come and stay awhile, if the Lord will let me. 8 In the meantime, I will be staying here at Ephesus until the Festival of Pentecost. 9 There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me.

Paul is saying that he wants to STAY where he is for a while before he comes to spend a good amount of time with them. There are two clear reasons for this. **First, Paul knew that every ministry has SEASONS, and you have to stay long enough in a place to be able to DEVELOP relationships and leadership structures.** God's work is a miracle, but it does not always happen quickly. This is why it is important for each of us to find a ministry that we can COMMIT to for a season. This is how long-lasting works are created. **Secondly, Paul said that he wanted to stay in Ephesus awhile longer because God had opened a HUGE but temporary DOOR for ministry at that time in that place.** Even though he desperately wanted to go and see the people of Corinth, Paul would have been a fool to leave before taking full advantage of that doorway. **You have to stay in a place (or in a ministry) long enough to be able to SEE and then SEIZE the opportunities that may come up at any given time. Some of us never stay put long enough to see or step through any wide-open doors!** But notice that Paul also says that he was also facing significant OPPOSITION from some people in the middle of that God-sized work. We should stay alert to the same thing. Some of us do not recognize that it is the ENEMY who is fighting us when we are serving God, and we give up and quit because it is getting hard. Don't quit! **Stay put and keep on serving!** Nothing you are doing is in vain.

The third thing that we can do to excel in the work of the Lord is to SUPPORT one another as we work side by side. The one thing that the enemy loves to do is to destroy our UNITY. Please don't let him do this, and please don't be an agent of the enemy by the way that you treat the other servants around you. Paul gave some very practical counsel about this in his letter: **1 Corinthians 16:10, 11, 13,14 NLT**

10 When Timothy comes, don't intimidate him. He is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. 11 Don't let anyone treat him with contempt. Send him on his way with your blessing when he returns to me. I expect him to come with the other believers. 13 Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. 14 And do everything with love.

It may sound funny that he tells them not to intimidate Timothy, but to bless him! Timothy was the kind of guy that was easy to intimidate. Paul loved him, but he had to constantly encourage him to overcome his fears. He had to take special meds for his upset stomach, and he had to be reminded that "God has not given us a spirit of fear." He was a passionate servant, but he could be easily discouraged. We ought to be aware that some of the servants around us may be somewhat tender at times. Don't tear one another down. Serve each other with respect and LOVE (Vs. 14).

Now, serving can be extremely difficult, but it can also be downright ADDICTING! One could literally begin to feel almost a compulsive need to serve in ministry to others. You don't believe me? Well, from the earliest days of the church, there were people who became so blessed by the experience of serving God's people in the church that they almost could not help themselves. **1 Corinthians 16:15 KJV**

15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)

We have many people at CHC that I could describe in this way. They are so in love with Jesus that they cannot stop serving him. They are changing the world for Christ! They INSPIRE me! Now, if you are here today and you are not a follower of Christ, then I invite you to respond to the challenge of my message today as well. I know that it will encourage you as you learn to serve others in practical ways around you, and I think that it may even open your eyes to the bigger picture of who God is and why he would ask us to do this in the first place. But be WARNED, serving is DANGEROUS. It could become an addiction that might just change YOUR life!

There is one last truth that I want us to see in this passage about serving. **Great servants are the kind of people that I want to FOLLOW.** This is another aspect of what Paul wants us to learn. **If our work in the Lord is to abound, then we will also need to show support through SUBMISSION.** Paul points out that there are some servants in Corinth that simply stood out because of the way that they served God in the church and in the community, and that we need to follow them.

1 Corinthians 16:15-18 NIV

15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, 16 to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. 17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and

Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

We have many people just like that at CHC. They are fantastic servants of God, and we need to support them first through submission to their servant-leadership. They have EARNED the right to lead us. They can make each of us better servants, but only if we will follow them as we follow their lead. This means that we must get involved in the work of the ministry with them! Don't just watch them. I am so grateful for these great leaders. They regularly refresh my spirit, and I know that they have done the same for you. I hope that you are paying attention, and that you are doing your best to support them by serving with them and by celebrating the ministries that they lead. I love it when I hear that you have filled up our Food Pantry, or filled up the Difference Maker's bus with clothes and supplies that go to help needy people all over the world! Some of your shirts are going to Haiti in just a few days! These are great days to be serving at CHC with the great leaders that God has given us. We can pray for them, and we can stand with them as we all fulfill our high calling together in Christ. Let's truly EXCEL in the awesome work that God has called us to do! Not one bit of it will be in vain.

Let's pray.

Do you know what the letters ROI stand for? Every businessman and woman on this planet succeeds or fails based on his ability to get a great ROI. Anyone who has ever put money or time or energy into a project or a person prays that his or her ROI will be fantastically enormous. ROI stands for RETURN ON INVESTMENT. It is what you GET for what you GIVE. In the business world, you want to always get MORE back than you give out. That is just good business. But it is NEVER guaranteed. Never. Well, almost never. There is ONE exception. Today, I have news for you about this one particular ROI that should stop the presses. You see, there is ONE investment that will ALWAYS reap a world of fantastic RETURNS.

Notice that the first word in verse 58 is THEREFORE. You know what to do when you see the word therefore in Scripture? You look to see what it is there for! It is a reference to the previous verses. The first promise of reward for our service to God is given even before we do a single thing for him. That is the kind of God that we serve. His first promise is that our greatest fear, DEATH, will no longer have any kind of hold on us. He has removed the sting of death from us because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our resurrection is guaranteed. It is a DONE DEAL! This is not a theory or a nice theological thought; it is PRACTICAL. If you are a true follower of Christ, then you can be SURE that death will not be an end for you. It is simply the DOORWAY to your eternal reward in Christ. Because of this, you can be FEARLESS in your service of God. You can take RISKS and spend your life freely, because God promises to turn your death into something glorious. This entire section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is an explanation of the facts about our resurrection and its implications for our daily life. Paul used his own life as an example: **1 Corinthians 15:30-32 NLT**

30 And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? 31 For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. 32 And what value was there in fighting wild beasts--those people of Ephesus--if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, "Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

Some people have bought into the lie that this life is all that there is, and therefore they only invest in things that promise a reward for the here and now. Some of you here today may take that as your ultimate reality. You believe that you had better get all you can now, because it is too late once you are six feet under. I can understand your thinking. If you are right then all Christians are just IDIOTS. But if you are wrong, then you need to understand something else. If you are apart from Christ, then it is not all over once you die. God's Word teaches the fact that "it is appointed to all men once to die, and AFTER THIS the judgment!" Please don't fail to understand this!

But there are many believers who are living their life as if they believe that this life is all there is. That is a tragedy! Some of you are spending the lion's share of your

time, talents, and treasures on things that are NOT eternal. This life is your primary focus. Paul is pleading with us in this passage to change our thinking. He wants us to reexamine the NATURE of our service to God. Believers, since we know that death is a beginning and not an end, then we ought to be giving ourselves away to God and others every day by faith. Are you doing this? I have been striving to keep before us our MISSION as a church of bringing hope to the world by helping people to FIND and FOLLOW Jesus Christ. We have been looking at how we do this by “attracting outsiders in, building insiders up, and serving: inside and out.” This is our vision. Today, our focus is on what it means to SERVE. There are so many ways to serve. Have you been thinking about what ministry looks like in YOUR life right now? I don’t necessarily mean that you have to be in charge of some great work of God, but I do mean that every one of us ought to be DEEPLY INVOLVED in some aspect of ministry in our lives. This is our CALLING! Listen again to some of the words that Paul used to describe what our commitment to ministry ought to look like: **1 Corinthians 15:58 AMP**

This past weekend at D-Now the students from our Southaven Campus went out and served people in our surrounding communities. Over 80 teenagers distributed clothes and served meals and cleaned the yards and houses of people that they had never met before because of love. It was a different kind of love. It was a groovy kind of love. It was a GODLY kind of love. It was the kind of love that does for ALL OTHERS because of love for JUST ONE. Jesus reminded us that everything that we do on this earth should be driven by parallel commands that were given to us in Scripture. **Love GOD with all of your heart, soul, and strength, and love your NEIGHBOR as yourself.** Jesus said that the entire law is summed up in those two commands, and if we obey them we will GLORIFY God in every ultimate way. Such is our HIGH CALLING. It is the ultimate picture of a God-inspired, purpose driven life, and it will SPEND YOU until you are completely spent for his will.

Sometimes we grow weary in ministry (“the WORK of the Lord”) because it is so COSTLY. It is a heavy investment. Any of you who have ever served in some capacity for an extended period knows this. Ministry can be exhausting. But God has promised us an amazing RETURN on our investment that exceeds anything that we could imagine.

It has to be motivated by LOVE.

This is because true love is not just an emotion; it is an action. Love . . . SERVES.

*Sometimes we feel like we just cannot go on in our labor; we feel like we are going to DIE. **I have news for you: You ARE going to die!** It is EVIDENT:

- Our bodies are wasting away.
- Our energies are being depleted.
- Our opportunities for success are gradually decreasing.
- Most of us are working so hard to excel in our OCCUPATION before we die that it is about to KILL US, but is this the wisest investment of our selves that we can make? I think not. There is a better ROI for those who invest God's way!

**Have you ever worked yourself to this point in your service of God?
Why or why not?**

READ 1 Corinthians 15:58 AMP

The challenge to serve: Therefore, my BELOVED BRETHERN. (Vs. 58)

*My beloved brethren – This is a call for Christian servant hood. A LABOR OF LOVE!

*Are you willing to die as one who is found FAITHFUL in the work of the Lord?

Serving = Doing the WORK of the LORD. [Serving: Inside and Out]

-What is the work of the Lord?

*The LORD'S WORK – Seeking the lost; shepherding the saints.

*This is work that serves the purposes of God; serving God.

*We are called to be faithful unto death!

*YET, our imminent death is NOT our ULTIMATE REALITY.

-Death is simply a DOORWAY to the realization of our eternal hope.

*Jesus told us that DEATH is necessary for RESURRECTION.

-Dying is NOT the DEFINING FACTOR of our effectiveness or fruitfulness.

*See **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

*Do you REALLY live according to this reality, or is it just a THEORY to you?

*Jesus gives us VICTORY over death; not EXCLUSION FROM it!

-This victory is actually the FUEL that keeps us going in our exhausting tasks.

The challenge to serve: Therefore, my BELOVED BRETHERN. (Vs. 58)

*My beloved brethren – This is a call for Christian servant hood. A LABOR OF LOVE!

*Be steadfast – “Keep on BECOMING steadfast.”

-Steadfast=settled, firm, firmly decided, SEDENTARY

-Becoming - This is a progressive matter of GROWTH in faithful service.

*It is not perfection, but PERSISTENCE!

*Immovable – Do NOT be MOVED from your place! See **Colossians 1:23**

-Refers to one who is firmly persistent, who does not DRIFT AWAY.

-Drifting happens slowly and imperceptibly.

-Drifting is how we are able to move out w/o being noticed in our absence.

*Always (immovable) – Evermore

- Is associated with the phrase, "IN/AT EVERY SEASON")
- You have a variety of seasons in your life.
 - *You do not have to do the SAME thing in every season.
 - *Find your sweet spot in every season of life.

- *ABOUNDING – This refers to that which could be viewed as excessive!
 - Abounding=To exceed a fixed number or measure; to overflow in abundance
 - To be AT HAND in abundance; to do MORE THAN ENOUGH.
 - *Refer to the LEFTOVERS from the FEEDING OF THE 5,000.
 - Do you EVER give MORE than is expected in your service of God?
 - *It is amazing to me how TIRELESS we can be in pursuing OTHER interests:
 - My experience in DEER HUNTING! 17,000 steps!
- *Am I willing to give more than enough for the sake of giving others a chance to rest!
 - Do you like to give more so that others can REST for a bit?
 - *Refer to **1 Corinthians 16:15-18 AMP**
 - This kind of labor gives other workers a refreshing respite from labor!
[Think of all those who serve week after week in set-up, children's areas, etc.]
 - Paul tells us to SUBMIT to these kinds of people and to KNOW, HONOR, and APPRECIATE those who are OBVIOUSLY addicted to ministry.

- *KNOWING that your exhausting labor is NEVER IN VAIN. (See Amp version)
 - Let this be an ever-increasing awareness of the richness of service.
 - This is NOT a DENIAL of the DIFFICULTY of the work.**

- *Is NOT IN VAIN.
 - First, this means that our labor is NEVER without some kind of fruit!
 - *Every act of service to God will bear some fruit:
 - Fruit in our OWN life [growth, maturity, etc.]
 - Fruit in the life of other believers [encouragement, challenge]
 - Fruit in our RELATIONSHIP with other believers
 - *Fruit in the lives of unbelievers [Awareness, Salvation, Seed-sowing]
 - This is fruit of INFLUENCE through PROXIMITY.
 - Serving others removes BLINDERS and BARRIERS to the faith.
 - *Fruit in the ETERNAL rewards that WILL come to faithful servants.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 AMP**
 - We will be JUDGED according to the way that we faithfully serve!
 - *Are you living in the light of this JUDGMENT that God will render over you?
 - See **2 Corinthians 5:9-11**
 - Your very APPEARANCE in heaven will reveal your faithfulness!
 - Not surprisingly, your appearance NOW reveals the same thing!
 - *Do you look tired? Why not? 😊

