

Finish What You Started

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finishing what we have started, drawing insights from 2 Corinthians 8. It highlights the need to follow through on commitments, address hindrances like discouragement, laziness, and lack of practical implementation, and ultimately rely on the grace of God to abound in every good work.

Scripture: Matthew 14:29, Luke 14:28, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Galatians 6:9, Acts 26:19, 2 Corinthians 9:8

Topics: "Commitment", "Grace in Action"

Description

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Transcript

2 Corinthians 8 I was studying this passage for another reason Friday night, and something stood out to me that I thought, you know what? This is what the Lord's giving me, so I'm going to share this with the saints today. 2 Corinthians 8 What I want to look at here, there's a simple principle in the midst of what's happening with Paul about finishing what you've started. Finishing what you have started.

Following through on what we give our word for and to do. And before we read the passage, an interesting... This morning, I came in after I printed my notes, and my daughter this morning was working on formatting a chapter in one of the audio books, and I went to check her work, and it turns out the file did not save. So she lost all her work on the one chapter.

That's not a big deal, right? One chapter? But you had that happen before? You worked on something and it didn't save? That's why I like Google Docs, right? Google Docs, whether it's for good or bad, I'm just saving every millisecond basically. But when she shared that, it reminded me of something, that I thought, you know what? This goes with this sermon. And so I thought, I'm going to read this.

How many know William Carey, the missionary? Not know him, he's dead. Do you know him? Different person. But listen to this.

William Carey, I'm going to read what someone wrote. Dedicated his life to spreading the Gospel in India, serving as a missionary from 1793 until his death in 1834. He had hoped to translate Scriptures into as

many Indian languages and dialects as possible.

Carey supervised the creation of India's first printing press. He established a large print shop in the city of Serampore where he did his Bible translation. The building was 200 by 50 feet.

So it's 200 feet by 50 feet. It's a big building. Twenty translators worked there in addition to typesetters, compositors, pressmen, binders, and other writers.

On March 11, 1812, Carey was teaching in Calcutta. While he was gone, a fire started in the printing room. Despite many hours of exhaustive efforts to fight the fire, the building burned to the ground.

Just five pieces of equipment were saved. Carey's entire library, his complete Sanskrit dictionary that he made, part of his Bengal dictionary, two grammar books, and ten translations of the Bible. This isn't one chapter in an audio book.

You see? It's not. Ten translations of the Bible were lost. Gone also were the typesets.

I don't know a lot about making a typeset, but making a typeset in Bengali does not sound like an easy job at all. Gone also were the typesets for printing fourteen different languages. So he's making the grammars for these languages.

He's making the typesets for these languages. It's all gone. Vast quantities of English paper, priceless dictionaries, deeds, and account books were all gone.

When Carey returned to Serampore and surveyed the scene, he wept and said, so this is what I want to look at, his response to the great significant loss on something he started. In one short evening, the labors of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the ways of God.

I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection of which they seemed capable. In the translations. And I contemplated the missionary establishment with perhaps too much self-congratulations.

The Lord has laid me low that I may look more simply to Him. And was he heartbroken? He was. But he didn't take a lot of time to mourn.

Some recorded the very next day he was already started again on his translation work. He said the loss is heavy, but as traveling a road the second time is usually done with greater ease than the first time, so I trust the work will lose nothing of real value. We are not discouraged.

Indeed, the work is already begun again in every language. We are cast down, but we are not in despair. And so Cary resolved, despite the significant loss to trust God from the embers, would come a better printing press.

And that happened, brethren. And not only did that happen, it was recorded the fire would bring him and his work to the attention of people all over Europe and America. They had so much money coming in that they had to ask people to stop giving for the printing press and everything in that regard.

So brethren, what would you have done if you were William Cary in India laboring all these years and you had such a significant loss and it was all burned to the ground? What would you do? Would you finish what you started? That's what he did. He finished what he started. So 2 Corinthians 8. And what we find

here in 2 Corinthians 8, over a year ago, the church at Corinth committed to set aside money to help Christians who are in need.

And as time has elapsed, the financial obligation has come due, and Paul recognizes that this church, they're not prepared to meet this commitment that they have given. So 2 Corinthians 8, verse 1, we want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God. So in the midst of this, notice some things about how He's going to encourage them to finish what they started.

Right? That's important. And what we find Him starting with here is one of those things. He's given an example to imitate.

Among the churches of Macedonia, verse 2, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy, their extreme poverty have overflowed and a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means as I can testify and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. So He's telling this church about how zealous these other people are to want to help.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urge Titus that as he had started, so when Titus is there, they got started in some giving or commitment. Verse 6, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

So you started something, complete it. Verse 7, but as you excel in everything, in faith, speech, and knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also. Notice verse 7. They're earnest in all these other areas, but he's saying be earnest in this area of this commitment you make.

Verse 8, I say this not as a command, so he doesn't want to manipulate them. He wants them to do what they really wanted to do just to finish it. But to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is also genuine.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. So now he brings in the example of Christ, which that's a great, compelling place to appeal, to motivate someone, right? It's Christ. That though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.

And in this matter, I give my judgment. This benefits you who a year ago started not only to do this work, but also you desired to do it. Verse 11, so now finish doing it as well.

You see, they started something. Paul's saying finish it. Finish what you started.

Finish doing it as well, so that your readiness and desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. So the readiness you had when you started this, let's match that with the same desire and get the job done. Verse 12, for if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he doesn't have.

For I do not mean that others should be eased. And he goes on in the chapter. But let's stop right there.

Honestly, we could read all the way through chapter 9 to verse 15. That was my plan, but let's stop there. So you notice right here in these verses, 8-6, we urge Titus that as he had started, he should complete.

So a year ago, they started something. It's not been complete. It's getting near that time for this gift to be given.

And Paul is doing something to help this church keep their word and finish what they started. Verse 10 and verse 11, who a year ago started. So now finish it as well.

And then verse 11, your readiness be matched by your completing it. So that's what I would consider, brethren. There's a real exhortation here from Paul to finish what we've started.

And there's wisdom from Paul on how to help someone finish what they've started as well that I hope we will glean from this. And we're going to think too right at the end about what were possibly some things at Corinth that were happening that actually were preventing them from getting this gift done in time where Paul had to send a team over there to exhort them and get the job done. So let's pray and then we'll consider this.

Father, Lord, I pray You'd use this text, Lord, even as You use it in my own life as I study this. Lord, there's so many reminders here on a practical level as a Christian. And I pray You'd just use this for Your saints here.

Lord, we want to be people like Terry who though we face significant obstacles to getting a job done. Great setbacks. Lord, we persevere.

And we trust Your providence in the midst of that. Lord, we don't want to be a lazy people. We don't want to be a people who are known as procrastinators.

Lord, we don't want to be a people who are known for giving our word, but not keeping it. We want to be people who give our word and swear to it even if it hurts us. And so, Lord, I pray You'd help mold us in these specific ways even in this hour.

And Lord, help us to be a people who have the discernment and the wisdom on how to properly encourage others who might be dragging their feet in some way. Lord, we don't want to crush them. We want to encourage them.

And so, Lord, would You equip us even in that way that we could help others in this same area. So Father, I just ask for Your help right now in Christ's name, Amen. Amen.

Amen. So, I don't know about you, does something come to your mind when you think about something you started that you didn't finish? And maybe you didn't finish it because it wasn't worth finishing. Or maybe it was something that absolutely was worth sticking it out.

But something came up. Something happened in the job and never got done. And notice again what Paul says right there about their readiness.

Verse 11. It's an interesting thought. So now finish doing it as well so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

Don't you find that at times? Jeff's brought this up. I need to be careful. This wasn't in my notes and I don't want to cause problems by bringing it up.

But Jeff would mention in his theology study, people want a theology study. They're ready for it. And then you start the theology study and what happens? Was their readiness for it matched by their continuation in it? No, and there might have been a good reason.

You might have partook in it and you started to realize it's too over my head or you might have realized I already know this. You just didn't have time. There's valid reason.

But you get what I'm saying? There's things like that in our lives. We get excited about it. We're ready to do it.

But often the desire in the midst of it, it's not the same. The readiness was all full of excitement, full of joy, but now as you're going through it, it's kind of like, man, this is exhausting. I'm out of this.

You quit halfway. I mean, this church. This is a church who had a readiness and a desire to give financially to believers in need.

And they're ready to do it. They're excited about it. And yet, the time's come to get the collection and the readiness hasn't been carried over into action.

Something's happened. Something's happened. Can any of you guys relate to this? This problem in life and the life of a Christian? I thought about it.

Many young children unaware of the challenge and the duration of the board game of risk are ready. I mean, new board game. It looks fancy.

It's got soldiers in it. It must be an exciting board game, right? Well, the readiness to play it is not matched by a desire to get the game done. I can't remember the last time I finished a game of risk or even played.

I don't even embark on playing it because I'm so intimidated by the length of it. I know my limits for games. So you get the picture? They had a desire a year ago to give.

Paul makes it clear. They weren't pressured. This isn't a people who is pressured and manipulated into something.

They had a genuine desire to do it. Paul makes that clear. They made a commitment, but they've not completed it.

And we're going to consider possibilities of why. And notice again in v. 6, chapter 8, v. 6, how it all started. Thus we urge Titus that just as he had previously begun this work, so Titus was there on Paul's missionary team.

He's laboring among them. And it looks like he was a factor in them even starting to have this idea to take a sum of money and give it to believers in need, which is a good thing, right? We need people to encourage us to do that which is honoring to the Lord. We need people among us who exhort us to do something like giving to this need.

So Titus was among them. And think about it. This issue of them not completing this gift was a big enough deal for Paul that he's writing about it and taking almost two chapters to talk about this issue.

This isn't a minor thing in Paul's mind. And part of what ups the significance for Paul, look at chapter 9, verse 2. He says, I know your readiness of which I boasted about you to the people of Macedonia. So he's saying I realize how excited and ready you guys were at the business meeting at the beginning of the year to say let's give this money to that, right? There's that readiness.

And he goes, Paul is boasting about it to others. And he says your zeal has stirred up most of them, but I'm sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove to be empty in this matter so that you may be ready as I said you would be. You see, people gave their word.

It looks like they're not going to follow through on their word. And so Paul's actually getting involved to help them follow through on their commitment to keep their word about this commitment that he boasted about their zeal. And look, Paul's invested in this personally.

Look at v. 4, chapter 9. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me, they will find that you're not ready and we would be humiliated. And then look what he says next. We would be humiliated.

We being who? Paul, Titus, the missionary team. We'd be humiliated to say nothing of you. Meaning, how much more you guys who gave your word would be absolutely humiliated at not having this gift ready for these people.

And some of these people even come in order to collect it and it's not there to be found. You didn't finish what you started. You didn't keep your word.

And so Paul here, he's got a personal interest in this whole situation of helping them finish what they started. He doesn't want to be humiliated. And I think more than that, he doesn't want them to be humiliated as well.

You know what this makes me ask? Was Paul's confidence misplaced in this church? I mean, you're there. Titus is there. He encourages them to give a certain amount.

They commit to it and then they don't do it. Did they miss it in expecting this church to follow through on what they did? You see what I'm saying? I think it actually indicates things can interject in our lives. We're going to look at some of those that actually prevent us from getting done what we intended to do.

And there's reasons behind that. Do you think the devil wants us to be a church of people who give our word, give our commitments, and follow through exactly as we said? Do you think that Satan is just okay with that being a reality? Not at all. The devil wants to absolutely oppose us from that happening.

There's things you and I can have initial excitement about and it just kind of wane off later on. And that's the enemy getting that to happen in our lives. And we've got to fight against that and press through and get the job done.

It also made me ask, is Paul having pride here and wanting to avoid being humiliated? It even says to them, we don't want to be humiliated. I don't think that's coming again from Paul's pride. I think it's greater concern here is for them and even more than that, for this other church who has needs that he's wanting to help support and they've said they're going to support in that way.

So they're going to do it. They're going to make it happen. So Paul is encouraging them in these chapters to get the job done.

He's got his own interest involved, but obviously he's very interested in these other believers and he's interested in the reputation of this church. You see, by not getting the job done or doing what we're saying, does that affect your reputation? Does that affect my reputation? You better believe it does. We could have a reputation as a church as those who are irresponsible, those who are not people who follow through.

May the Lord save us from that at all being the case. And he makes it clear, as I already said, look at v. 11 and chapter 8. They were ready. V. 10 at the end, he says, you also had a desire to do it.

And then the well-known verse in chapter 9, he says in v. 7, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Right? Paul is not manipulating this church to give financially. He's coming in there to encourage them to finish what they started.

He wants them to get the job done. Paul is earnest for them. Titus is earnest for them.

Look at v. 16 of chapter 8. Thanks be to God who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. Paul's over there earnest. Titus is earnest.

They're all wanting to help a church. Don't you appreciate that? When people are genuinely earnest for you, to help you, and these people are doing something about it. Right? They're not standing on the sidelines.

They're really earnest to help this church. It just makes me think again, churches that we've planted as a church, missionaries that we've sent out, all those people on the board, our readiness to support them at a business meeting or to send them initially, is that being matched by our readiness today to continue to be there spiritually to support them in prayer? To support them financially? It's not just going to randomly be the same desire today as it was then. Thanes died down and we've got to fight to keep our affections hot and warm towards these different commitments we make as a church and as individuals.

Now Titus is not currently there. Look at verse 17. But being himself very earnest, he's going to you of his own accord.

Right? The guy who's involved in his starting, he hears about the situation, I mean, he gets in his car, he gets in his plane, he gets in his boat, wherever he was, he's going to these people because he's concerned that they will keep their word, that they all won't be humiliated, that the name of Christ won't be blasphemed among the nations because of their inability to follow through and keep their word. And a team is assembled here to help complete what they started. So look at this team.

You could actually call this a super team. We didn't read this. I should have read this part, so we'll read it right now.

Look at chapter 8. So Titus is gone. We just looked at that verse 17. Look at verse 18.

This is the verse I was looking at that kind of led me to all of this. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. Who is that brother? Who's in verse 18? The point is you don't know.

You can't know. There's a lot of possibilities. That's neither here nor now.

That's number one. We're sending the brother who's famous among all the churches for his spreading of the gospel. Verse 19, and not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry this act of grace that is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself and to show our good will.

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us. What does Paul mean blame us? People are criticizing Paul. People don't trust Paul that he's not going to steal some of the money.

That's part of why he's even... Paul went through that. They slandered his reputation in that type of way. You obviously know that even from other things he said in this letter.

He was up against that. So he's sending these certain people to protect himself from these false accusations. And then he says in verse 22, we're sending with them, that's Titus and this other guy he's not known, we're sending our brother whom we've often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.

So verse 22 is talking about a third guy. You see, he's got Titus, and he's got two guys whose names aren't even mentioned. Kind of like the writer of Hebrews.

Who's the writer of Hebrews? It might spark your curiosity, but that's not the purpose right now. So, these three people, so first one observation right here, how do you help people get done? When they're not getting started, you can send a team to help them. And you're very specific about those individuals you're going to go help get the job done.

Every parent, you've had a little kid who's struggling to clean the room, and you might send in the older sibling to help him out. You're not sending the sibling in to do the job for them because then they don't learn. But the older sibling is kind of an encouragement.

That task that seems so daunting for the little kid, their massive big brother who's ten comes in and they're only four, and that brother's helping them get the job done. That's what Paul's seeking to do right here with this team. And so Titus, who was involved in starting it, comes.

Now here in Applications, before I forget, Titus helped them start it, and he is so zealous that they get it done that he's taken a one-way trip to get there. What does that tell you? What's an application that you and I should take to heart? Ask yourself this question. Is there anyone here in this church or any ministry or anything where you encourage someone into something? Have you been there not just to encourage them at the beginning, but to see it through? You see what I'm saying? Titus had that desire.

I mean, ask yourself, if you encourage someone to go preach at Haven for Hope, if you encourage someone to do the women's study, if you encourage someone to become an elder, if you encourage someone to go to the nursing home, if you encourage someone to fill in the blank, Titus looks at that. I was involved in these people being encouraged to go and give this money. And it's not happening.

So he feels the personal responsibility to go and be involved in getting that done. We should have the exact same thing towards all of those missionaries on the board over there. We should have that desire, that zeal of concern for them.

Titus has that. We should have that. So ask yourself, maybe there's someone that you really affirm them and encourage them early on as they partook in something, but you haven't been there along the road.

You thought it was a great idea initially. You were really ready to say go for it, but that's it. No encouragement.

Well, Titus looks at that as his responsibility to help him get the job done. So that's one application right now on this. Follow up with earlier efforts of people and encourage them.

So that's Titus. Then we've got the second person, the brother who's famous. We'll look at him in a second.

And then we've got the third person in v. 22. They're sending someone earnest in many matters. What matters? What matters is this guy earnest? He has a description of being zealous in many matters.

Not just one matter, but multiple things. Isn't that an interesting description? You're a brother who's zealous in many matters? And we've often tested him and found him earnest in many matters. So this isn't just some random observation.

Time has proven this to be true. And then it says in v. 22, he is now more zealous than ever because of what? What does it say? He has great confidence in you. Isn't that interesting? They're sending someone who's really zealous, who's often proved that he's zealous in many ways, and they're not sending him to go and beat him on the head.

They're sending him and what's his perspective? He has what in the church at Corinth? He has confidence in them. Notice that. That's huge.

Paul's team that he's assembling to help these individuals, it really is they are seeking to do everything they can in their power to encourage this church. To be an encouragement to this church. Not to tear it down.

Not to be critical of them. But to encourage them. And this guy's all the more earnest now when he hears about this situation.

But you've got to love that. His great confidence in you. You could easily look and say, well, why do you see full confidence? These people gave their word and they're not following through.

Go rebuke them severely. Right? No. You really see 1 Corinthians 13 shining in this interaction.

There's love. There's believing the best about what's led this church to this situation where they've not completed their follow-through and their word on what they were going to do. Now, I'd also ask this, if he's confident in them that they're going to get the job done, why is he even going? Well, God uses means, right? You can have a confidence for someone, but you still need to be the means in their life to encourage them.

Alright, so by following through on what we've stated, look at v. 24. We're actually giving proof of our love for these Christians. Look at v. 24, chapter 8. So we give proof before the churches of your love and are boasting about you to these men.

I mean, that's an obvious thing, I guess. If you don't follow through on the financial commitment for these believers in need, and they find out you didn't send what you said you were going to send, does that communicate love to those needy Christians? Do they all of a sudden feel their love when the gift doesn't show up? No, they don't feel the love, right? So our following through on our commitments is an expression of love to the people by which we've given those commitments to. And so it shouldn't shock us that if someone's love lessens for us because we've not followed through on our word.

Right? If we don't keep our word and someone's affections are growing less for us, it's not an amazing thing on why that's happening. Okay. You know what? Paul felt this love.

Look at Philippians 4. Just turn to the right a little bit. Philippians 4 is often not emphasized enough. The incredible love.

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians 4. Look at Paul's love for this church at Philippi. Verse 15, You Philippians yourselves know in the beginning of the Gospel when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. But look at his description there. He's saying no one else, no church partnered with him in giving and receiving except them only.

And they did it to the extent, even when he was in Thessalonica, you sent me help. You heard about my needs and you sent my help. Paul is overflowing with love for this church.

If you go read chapter 1, that's exactly what's happening in his heart. They kept expressing their love to him by holding the rope financially with their commitment that they gave to him. That's the same thing that's not going to happen here with the Corinthians if they don't give to this need and they don't follow through.

So, kind of like Paul, brethren, with Philippians 4, thank God there are people that we support who can look at us and say in the beginning of my work, in the beginning of being sent to this place, I had no other church support me in the Gospel from the first day until now except you only. And we can thank God that we can look and say, you know what, every single check that we sent to them to support them, every commitment we made, it was being kept. I mean, that is something to praise God about.

That is an expression of our love. One way to express it in keeping our commitment financially. What about our commitment though at times to send people to encourage them? Right? We made certain commitments to Nicaragua a while back.

Honestly, we didn't keep those as we could have kept them. We were going to send more of our elders down on a regular basis. I look back, we didn't do that as we had said we were going to do.

So it doesn't shock me if Bess and Javier would look and say, you know what, I felt a lack of love on you all prioritizing sending an elder down there for our encouragement and building up. I get it. If that's how they felt, I totally understand.

Regardless of what reasons we face here and what trials that might keep us here and not able to go, you understand why they would feel a lack of love if you're not following through on something you indicated you would do. So, this isn't at all a church business meeting message, but obviously there's application

here with our business meeting that is coming up. So, Paul sends a team.

Titus and two unnamed people to encourage this church to finish what they started, to get the job done. Titus is going on his own though. He's really concerned about this.

He was involved in the beginning of it and he's really concerned. But the third guy, maybe we should think about him for a moment. He sends the other brother, verse 18, famous among all the churches for his preaching.

I find this very interesting. I think the NET conveys more specifically what's being said here. Listen to how the NET renders it.

We're sending along him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his work in spreading the Gospel. That was a phrase I was looking at. Maybe it was a sermon.

A man was known for spreading the Gospel. There's a lot of things you can be known for spreading. You can be known for spreading gossip, slander, false doctrine, your personal convictions.

This man was famous among all these churches in a day without the Internet for one thing. His spreading of the Gospel. It doesn't indicate, does that mean all these people got saved under his ministry? It might not mean that.

It might mean his teaching to people who were already saved. We don't know specifically who this is or what aspect of this Gospel being spread. If it was through conversion or if it was through truth of the Gospel that's being conveyed to Christians and he had a specific gift in that way.

But Paul's taking this guy and he's sending him to this church. There's leverage in this individual who has fame even, which that is interesting to me. But in Acts 13, the Word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

May God give our church more people who are known for spreading the Gospel. It's like they're known for that thing. They just spread the Gospel.

They're sowing so much seed. They're spreading so much seed. And the Word of the Lord is spreading throughout the whole region.

May God raise up more to be in that exact way as this individual. I also find it remarkable, Paul doesn't even mention his name. I don't know why.

You could assume a lot of things about that. But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter who he was. Alright, so why this man, Paul? Verse 20, so that no one should blame us.

Blame Paul. People are criticizing Paul's motives. He had to defend his integrity.

So, you know what? Here this guy is. He's well known. He's famous.

He's got to be on this team. They trust him. It's going to keep me from having accusations.

Paul has to think about that much specifically. That shows something negative about the church at Corinth. It shows something negative about people if they're going to be that critical of Paul here.

But that is what it is. And Paul realizes you can't change reality. You've got to work with it.

And so you know what? I'm going to send this guy who's famous with them so that I will avoid having any sort of blame. So, I'm not using this collection to profit for myself. I want to prove by sending this individual that there's no ulterior motives here.

So here are these three men, Titus and two others, being sent in one accord to be an encouragement to this church to finish what they started in the area of this financial gift. But brethren, this whole issue of having a readiness and an initial excitement about something, it goes far beyond finances. Finances is one aspect of this.

But it goes beyond that. It goes far beyond that. So we want to think in that way.

Brethren, is there anything in your life that you've started that you should complete that Paul would write and say you should complete this? And maybe like 8-7. Very interesting. You excel in everything in faith and speech and knowledge and all earnestness.

He's saying that to the people who aren't getting it done. In all earnestness and in our love for you, see that you also excel in this act. Isn't that interesting? They're zealous for a lot of things.

They're earnest for a lot of things, yet they're not getting this one thing done. Right? So this isn't some church that's just lazy and dropping the ball. It's like they're not putting the value on this commitment that they should.

And he says, verse 11, now finish doing it. Finish it. Get it done.

So again, apply this in a broader way. So, let's kind of move on to another section in the sermon as we're thinking about this passage. What can make it hard to finish what you've started? What tends to cause you to procrastinate? And obviously, the first thing I'd want to consider, is there anything I could pull out of 1 and 2 Corinthians that would help me understand possibly what might have affected the church at Corinth? Right? Before you just bring out whatever ideas that might be right and true and have biblical integrity.

Is there anything at the church at Corinth? Look at 1 Corinthians 16. Connect this dot. 1 Corinthians 16.

Remember all the issues happening at Corinth. Look at 1 Corinthians 16. They've already written Paul a letter.

Paul is now writing to church and look at the end of this letter. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. Do you know what this seems to clearly indicate? Their desire as a church to commit this money to this need, to the relief of the saints, they already had that before Paul responded in his first letter in 1 Corinthians. Now you understand why that is very relevant.

They already had this desire. And he says right here, this is something he started a year ago. So there's every reason to believe.

They already had this desire to give in this specific way. And Paul's responding in 1 Corinthians as he does. Why does that matter? Think about what could be some of the things that were preventing them from getting this gift done.

No doubt, issues that he addressed in his letter to them in 1 Corinthians. So let's just think about some of these issues. What were brethren doing to one another in 1 Corinthians? Did you hit my car in the parking lot? I'm going to sue you.

There's lawsuits going on. Okay, it's such a big deal. Paul has to address not taking one another to court.

And it wasn't for hitting a car. It doesn't specifically say being defrauded in different ways. Paul had to say that in the first letter.

In the same letter, he's talking about them collecting money for this collection to Jerusalem. Now, if I'm busy using my money to sue someone for hitting my car in the parking lot, do you think I'm putting aside a sum of money in order to give it to a need of a commitment I've made? No, that's not going to happen. If you're busy suing someone in the church, you're not even thinking about how you can give to this need you committed to.

There are things that derail a church from a mission and completing that which they have committed to do. Immorality was in the church at Corinth, right? What does leaven do? Corrupts. Some of these people, they're being corrupted by this leaven.

1 Corinthians 11, people were getting drunk at the Lord's table. People were abusing their liberties. You think a person who's abusing their liberties and getting drunk on Sunday is thinking about the money they're going to put aside for Paul when he comes later so he can take it to the needs for the people in Jerusalem.

You think as they're intoxicated there at the fellowship mill, they're thinking about, oh yeah, did I put that money I said I would give aside? Not happening, right? What else in 1 Corinthians? They had people teaching what error? There's no resurrection at all. And it's interesting, right, Paul? He says it right there in that chapter. Teaching there's no resurrection, it gives the perspective that, you know what, let's just eat, drink, and die.

I mean, let's eat and drink and be married for tomorrow we die. If there's no resurrection, all this is in vain. So you know what? You know that money I thought about giving to them that Paul's going to come and we committed to it and he's going to take it to the people in need of Jerusalem? Well, since there's no resurrection, why give? You see, error.

Error can enter in and keep you from doing what you said you were going to do. Tons of knowledge, right? That was a problem in 1 Corinthians. Do you think you're thinking about giving to needy Christians from all of your wealth at Corinth? If you're debating over all manner of stuff and having thick heads full of knowledge? Do you think that's going to help your love abound more and more? No.

No, it's not. You guys see what I'm saying? The church at Corinth, apparently had already made this commitment to give to this need, this collection they are not ready to give for. So Paul is sending a team of men to help them keep what they're... to get it done.

And I'm just simply pointing out, we can then, it seems, pull out from the first letter of Corinthians that since these things were happening in the church, that these were some of the things derailing some of them from following through on their word and keeping the commitment they said they were going to give. You see what I'm saying? And so these things have to be dealt with in order to get the right thing done that the Lord wants us to get done. And one more.

1 Corinthians 1. One of the very things he starts the letter with. Some in the church said, I follow Paul. Others said, I follow Apollos.

Others said, I follow Cephas. So they had cliques among them. Certain cliques had a common person that they were all about.

And the church had yet to split into four churches individually. But they could have done it. You could have had Apollos' church and Cephas' church and so on.

Brethren, do you think that helps a church be unified in giving to something financially and following through on what they said they're going to do? If you've got people within the church who are saying they're following this person and you're following that person and you have that division. Division never promotes unity to express love as a body in specific ways. Ray Stedman, he says, the same viewpoints are still dividing people.

There are those who are emotionally attached to some great Christian leader who has helped them and they will only listen to him. They read only his books, listen only to his tapes, and there are others who are drawn to some speaking style that has attracted them. They love to listen to someone because he turns them on emotionally.

You see, that could happen to us. There might be something God's wanting you to do in your life. But because you're falling into one of these errors or even this error in 1 Corinthians 1, it's not happening.

You're not getting it done. You're not doing the will of God as you should because something is derailing you. That's something you can't recognize in your own heart even.

So these attitudes, we're not helping those at Corinth meet the needs of others. It's causing problems. I mean, all those issues.

Suing one another. Immorality. Being drunk at the fellowship meal.

All of them are rooted in selfishness, right? It's all selfish. Selfishness will not encourage you in sending to those in need. Selfishness will not help us keep our word this week.

We need the love of Christ compelling us. So, what's sidetracking you from getting done what you should get done? Another thing. So that was the first thing.

What possibly was keeping them from following through on their word? A second thing. What can make it hard to finish what you've started? The lack of practically applying and implementing certain things into your life. Where do I get that from? Did you hear what he said in 1 Corinthians 16? It was really practical.

What did he say? What did he say right there? 1 Corinthians 16. First day of the week. Oh, man, I've got to have a calendar and a schedule.

Put something aside and you store it up as he may prosper. Well, can't I just wait until the last minute and all the money's just going to happen to be there? This is real practical advice from Paul. He's giving practical counsel to them.

If they would have kept the practical counsel in 1 Corinthians 2, 1 Corinthians 16-2, they wouldn't have needed Paul to say what he said in 2 Corinthians 8. It wouldn't have been an issue. And so, brethren, we don't want to dismiss the practical. It doesn't matter how motivated you feel or I feel, we will bear no fruit if practical implementations don't happen.

Don't just buy the spreadsheets or the scheduling and all of that. There can be so much benefit. I realize different people have different ways.

My point is, are you able to put things before you, commit to it, and make it happen? A third thing. You know what leads you to not finish what you started? Discouragement, right? I mean, that's just universally. We all know that.

Discouragement. You think something is a real good idea. You think it's the Lord's will.

You're excited. Right? Kind of like Israel going into the promised land, but you're met with great difficulties. Great difficulties.

Not only are there big giants, but some of your own team who goes into the land, what do they say? They're discouraging. This is impossible, guys. We're grasshoppers.

We're going to get killed if we go in there. Discouragement. Discouragement.

For us believers, those giants, like for those spies, can be people within our own nation, within our own church. Brethren, you and I can be a discouragement to one another in this body and actually strip away from someone a God-given motivation to do something that the Lord really gave them a desire to do. You might have even encouraged them in doing whatever it might be.

And then you can come along and rather than keep encouraging them in that task, you can actually throw wet blankets on the fire, so to speak, and be a means of discouraging them. It can be like the ten spies where it's like, no, stop doing this. This is too hard.

This is too difficult. If you look at your life, I imagine there is a time in your life where you're seeking to do something you believe is the will of God. And you face criticism and it just made you want to throw in the towel and give up.

But you know what? We all have the ability to encourage one another in various tasks that we partake in. And again, I'm amazed even at this famous person that Paul is sending. He's going with great confidence in them.

I mean, I love that, brethren. He realizes there's something off here. They should have followed the commitment.

But he comes in already expecting these people are really going to get done what they said they were going to do. There's that sort of confidence in these Christians. That's huge, brethren.

If he would have come in with a different attitude than that, everything would have been absolutely different. But discouragement can come in many ways and can be a big factor. Brethren, you might be discouraged because you just fell into sin this week.

You feel condemned. You feel self-pity. I'd remind you of the Lord Jesus' words to Peter who denied Him three times.

Peter, I prayed for you that your faith not fail. When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. Go be an encouragement to them.

What can discourage you and me? We don't see any results. And I shared that quote months back. I mean, I am amazed how many missionary biographies I have read where they saw absolutely no converts for how many years? Seven years.

There's like ten missionaries. And people at their home church were not given the money in some cases. Tell them to come off the field.

They labored for seven years. Over ten of them in the history of missions and they saw zero conversions for seven years. You want to talk about discouragement? You want to talk about losing heart? Giving up? We have an expectation something's going to happen real fast.

This is going to work itself out in this way and it doesn't. Don't lose heart, right? We can lose heart in prayer. We don't see answers.

Luke 18, you told them a parable to the effect they ought always to pray and don't lose heart. What's another way to encourage someone so they don't get discouraged? Well, how does Paul? I kind of mentioned it, but think about it again. He doesn't just send them the three amigos, these three guys, but he gives them an example, right? Look at the start of 2 Corinthians 8 again.

He gives them an example to imitate. Chapter 8, verses 1 and 2. He's talking about, we want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. So he's giving an example to stir them up.

We should do that, right? Examples and imitation can be powerful and very convicting. And the ultimate example he gives, don't miss it, it's right there in v. 9, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, right? That is the greatest example. It's Christ.

And he mentions in 9, v. 15, thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. And that gift is the Lord Jesus Christ. Did they need to have a calendar and give us something they said they did? You better believe it.

But back behind all of that, whatever it is you and I need to get done that we've committed to do, the fuel has got to be Christ. It's got to be what Christ has done. He humbled Himself for us and He went to the cross and He died to remove the wrath of God from abiding over our head.

That's got to be the motivating factor. Christ has got to be the reason. Paul's the one who said in the first letter, I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The good you're seeking to do for Christ is motivated by the great good Christ has done for you. May the Lord help our hearts be right in that regard. Well, I'd also mention, brethren, don't be afraid to abandon that which is a waste of time.

There are certain things we start and are pulling back. It's not because of a lack of desire to finish it, but we recognize it's not a worthy endeavor. We shouldn't be afraid of that.

You only get one life to live. You only get 24 hours a day. We want to make it count.

We want to use it for Christ in whatever way we can. There's a difference between being pressured into something, manipulated, and feeling the pressure while in the midst of something. Some pull back because of the pressure, thinking they were pressured, and it's really the Lord wanting them to get it done.

It's not a manipulation. It's not a wrong pressure. We'll hear a fourth matter that can help us finishing what we started.

Finishing what we started. We'll skip that. Laziness.

We can be lazy. That's obviously a problem. But brethren, God gave us courage.

Who do you think of in the Bible who finished something they started and it took a long time? Noah, right? And if you look at the verses there and do the math, it looks like for 55 to 75 years, he built an ark. What great support community did he have? Did he have the famous preacher coming to encourage him from another city? Brethren, he didn't have anyone almost. It was him.

And a world mocking him. And he kept on. That is absolutely astonishing.

He didn't have the community of Christians supporting him. He had a world mocking him. And boy, you know what? It was not in vain.

When you're on that ark and the whole world is condemned under the wrath of God through a physical flood, you're not regretting your perseverance. And brethren, you and I won't regret the same thing. As you remain morally pure with a clear conscience, and you seek to love as Christ is loved, and you seek to persevere in the midst of trials, you're not going to get to the end when the flood of the wrath of God comes and have any regrets.

You will only regret what's on Ravenhill's tombstone are the things you're living for worth Christ dying for. That will be our regret. There's things we live for, we poured our energy into, and it wasn't worth the death of Christ.

It should have been cast to the side. Galatians 6, let us not grow weary. Brethren, don't grow weary of doing good.

For in due season we will reap if we do not give up. And brethren, you think about starting a job and finishing it, again, Christ. I mean, the words on the cross, it is finished.

You know what that means? Until that point, it wasn't finished. And did He have just an easy job floating through the world to go to the cross? Who tried to prevent Him from finishing the mission? Peter! Peter, Lord, don't do this. Don't do this.

Get behind me, Satan. You're setting your mind on things of this earth. It's absolutely incredible.

Christ, He went and He finished the job. Look real fast at Luke 14 here as we finish up. Luke 14.

As I was studying this, I thought, yeah, this is the same idea. This is for professing Christians. Luke 14, in a way, it's for the lost.

Those who do not profess to know the Lord, but it's also for the Christian. Luke 14, 28. He's giving all these costs of discipleship.

Verse 27, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Verse 28, for which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish..." So he's not able to finish. "...all who see it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish." What's Christ talking about there? He's talking about people who are confronted with the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And He's not just talking about people who hear it and it has no compelling reality to them. He's talking about people who start the race. But they didn't count the cost.

They didn't recognize what they were really in for in following the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe they thought they could have their idols and they could have this Christ, and they're going along living in sin thinking everything's okay because Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so.

It doesn't matter that I live in sin. They don't know Romans 6. That you can't continue in sin. That grace might abound.

And they abandon halfway. They don't finish the race. They're not able to finish it.

And it says the people who do that, the people who make a profession and they drop it halfway through, they're going to be mocked. Because that is a shameful thing. It's better to have never said I'm a Christian and go to hell in that state than to go to hell having had a profession at any point in my life.

Jesus says them who knew the Master's will and refused to do it will receive a more severe beating. People don't think about that significant reality of judgment that we will have for the knowledge that we have. Brethren, us persevering and fighting the good fight is a matter of life and death.

Luke 8, the same thing. The ones on the rock are those who when they hear the Word, they receive it with joy, but they have no root. They believe for a while.

But at the time of testing, they fall away. God help that not be us. Paul, he says, I fought the good fight.

I finished the race. I kept. I fought.

I finished. I kept the faith. So brethren, let's finish the race.

And in the midst of finishing the race, one aspect is let's keep our Word. Let's grow in this area of following through on what we said we're going to do. Let's be people who not just have a readiness and excitement to start something, but a willingness to finish it.

And also people who recognize certain things we have to abandon in order to manage our time better, in order to be better stewards of our time. And the last thing here, what is it? 2 Corinthians 9. I didn't point this verse out, but again, another encouragement. The fuel for all of this is not from gritting your teeth in New Year's resolutions and self-motivation and all that stuff.

No, not at all. 2 Corinthians 9a, God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. You know what's going to help you and me abound in every good work? It's the grace of God.

The undeserved power of the Spirit of God at work in our lives. Even as I mentioned last week, through the work of regeneration, Him giving us new hearts and new desires, where there's certain things we want to get done. God's given us a desire to get it done.

Go in faith. Even if there's giants standing in the way. Even if there's all manner of discouragement, brethren, we've got to encourage one another, encourage our hearts, that we not lose heart and give up.

May the Lord help us. Bakhshin was a missionary in India. He planted many churches.

I shared this years ago. But I think over 100,000 people came to his funeral that showed the impact that he had. And there's a picture of his funeral, and there his wooden homemade casket is.

And on the side of the casket is a verse. I remember seeing that verse, just weeping over what it implied. On the verse, I think it was Acts 26-19, it's a specific reference.

But it said on that casket, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. It hit me. We want to live in such a way that when we die, whatever the heavenly vision, the specific design and plan for God for your life is, you can get to the end and say, I wasn't disobedient to it.

And who knows what it might be, brethren. It might not have anything what you think it's going to be. Recently, I was editing sermons Paul Washer gave in Sedalia when my wife and father-in-law were there.

He did a series on faith. And in it, he mentioned in his own life, he had to leave the mission field. And that was one of the most tumbling things for him.

Because he had this false idea that missionaries were more radical Christians. Right? And there's so many things we can have in our own mind. These wrong expectations of what true spirituality is.

Brethren, just giving your word to your kid this week and keeping it, that is as radical as a missionary martyr. You tell your kid something, you go follow through with that with your kid. Whatever it might be.

And if you're a parent, you see the negative effect. You say something to your kid and you don't keep your word right there, not only do they question your character, but they will question the character of the God whom you say you believe. And the God that I say that I believe.

That is radical. Let's pray. Father, I pray You would help us.

And Lord, I know in my own life, I need Your help in this area. Lord, there's so many areas. We can just be discouraged.

Lord, help us to press through. Help us to press on, Lord. By faith.

Lord, we think about William Carey and just miraculous. All that he's suffered the loss of. And you just want to... Lord, the devil wants to throw in the towel.

Just get out of India. And he didn't. He stuck through.

Lord, give us that. And I pray You give that to our missionaries. Lord, would You help us to be a church? Father, I am thankful as a church that we have kept our financial commitments and we have not lacked towards those people on that field.

But Lord, I pray You'd help us in a greater way in this coming year. Serve them in far greater ways than just finances, but Lord, to be a support to them, to help them. Lord, to be sending more people there for their own encouragement.

Lord, help us to do that, Father. Help us to see the significance of that. And Lord, I pray You'd rightly convict us in our lives in areas that we need right now in view of these truths.

Lord, help us to finish what we started. In Christ's name, Amen.

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