

BEYOND THE WEEKEND

For the sermon on February 23-24, 2013
"Paul's Résumé"



Welcome to *Beyond the Weekend!* The experiences below are designed to connect with the weekend message and fit a variety of learning styles. They provide additional readings from other sections of Scripture such as the Old Testament, Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles (letters). Take 20-30 minutes each day and enjoy your pursuit of God!



Prefer e-mail? ***Beyond the Weekend*** is also available via daily e-mails, which include links to the Scripture (both written and audio), the sermon video, and a weekly blog post. To sign up for the daily e-mails, go to adabible.org/btw.

Day 1 2 Corinthians 11.23-29 | What Would You Endure?

What would you endure for the Gospel? As we heard this weekend, the Apostle Paul endured countless obstacles, excruciating pain, and traumatic loss. Why? Because he had come to know Jesus and serving him was more important than anything in the world. (You can read how this happened in Acts 9.)

None of us, today, are apostles the way Paul was, and we are not working to start the Church like he did. So, we are unlikely to face what he experienced. However, those who have given their lives to Christ in faith are also his disciples. We are also sent to serve him and promote the very same Gospel—that Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promise of redemption, inaugurated a new kind of Kingdom, died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and was exalted as King of the universe.

What would you endure for that message? Has the love and authority of Christ gripped your heart so much that you would do *anything* to know and obey him? Many long-time followers of Christ would likely admit Jesus isn't nearly that all-consuming—so *Paul's example challenges us*. Today, look at your life. What are you enduring in order to know Jesus more? What have you given up to obey him?

Day 2 Mark 15.16-41 | Theology of the Cross

Jesus promised to give his followers an "abundant" or "rich and satisfying" life (John 10.10 ESV, NLT), but very little of Paul's life looks rich **or** satisfying. In fact, by our standards we would assume God had abandoned Paul, sent him to the wolves to be devoured. We hear the words "abundant" or "rich and satisfying," and we assume Jesus promises to give us a wonderful, happy life.

Martin Luther, the leader of the Reformation, called that a "theology of glory"—a view of God that only sees things from a human perspective. The trouble, as Luther taught, is that God revealed himself most clearly, not through glory, but through the cross. So, we need a *theology of the cross*—a view of God shaped most by that event: Where was God as Jesus suffered and died for us? From a human perspective, God seemed nowhere to be found. But in that very moment—when God seemed most **absent**—he was in fact most **active**. He was saving the world.

The same is true in our lives. The most rich and satisfying life we can have is to know and walk with God, even when our circumstances are painful. A theology of the cross helps us pursue this life because it looks for God where we wouldn't normally expect to find him. When life goes badly, rather than grow bitter, we look for God in the pain and seek to be refined by it (1 Peter 1.6-9). Today, read the story of the cross in Mark 15.16-41, remembering that God was in fact in the center of these events. Then, look at your life and circumstances. Where have you felt abandoned by God? Look for him there with fresh eyes. Ask him to refine and strengthen you in it.

Day 3 Luke 9.23-25 | The Cost of Discipleship

Each morning Paul made a decision to give up his life on behalf of Christ (1 Corinthians 15.31). For him, being a disciple was extremely costly, which has been true for every Jesus follower since—except maybe those of us where Christianity is widespread. For us, becoming a Christian often brings praise. In West Michigan, going to church can actually be good for business!

However, if we are serious about following Jesus, we will eventually experience loss. Our discipleship will become costly as we seek to become more like him. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “[Grace] is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live” (*Discipleship*, p. 45). Today, prayerfully listen to the song “I Surrender” by Jesus Culture (search youtube.com). Make the lyrics your heart’s prayer.

Day 4 Jeremiah 9.23-24 | What Are You Proud Of?

In 2 Corinthians 11.24-29, when Paul described his suffering as an apostle, he was actually making a case for his authority. He didn’t boast about miracles he performed or sinful behavior he conquered. He wrote, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (v. 30). Similarly, in Philippians 3.4-11, Paul declares that his strengths are worthless compared to knowing Christ. His words echo the prophet Jeremiah in today’s reading.

If you were to boast about your spiritual journey, what would you point to—your upbringing, morality, or character (e.g., “I’m a good person”)? Would you describe how Jesus has made you a more effective leader, business owner, or parent? Paul’s example shows a shift in focus. On the left side of a piece of paper, list what you are proud of spiritually. On the right side, list where you are weak and in need of God’s help. Then, meditate on Jeremiah 9.23-24. What perspective does it add?

Day 5 Daniel 3 | Real Contemporary Global Persecution

True, serious discipleship is costly for everyone, but no one in modern America (much less West Michigan) experiences the kind of persecution Paul endured (2 Corinthians 11.24-29). You never hear of someone being physically beaten, arrested, or murdered for their faith in Jesus. However, this persecution still occurs today. It is a daily reality for many Christians around the world.

Today, set aside 15 to 20 minutes and prayerfully explore the ways Christians are being persecuted. Go to persecution.com, and click on “Restricted Nations.” Pick a few nations, such as India and Iran, and read an article or two under each. Ask God to show you how to pray. Then, ask him to search your heart and show you how you might respond if you were in those situations. Would you be able to stand up to persecution like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do in today’s reading (see Daniel 3.16-18)?

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BTW Blog

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This week we hear from Julie Benson, Mentor and Care Coordinator.

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