

Make your life count

Message for Sunday, November 15, 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Acts 28:30-31

Children's Message:

1 Corinthians 10:31, New International Version:
So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."
The Bible teaches that is our aim in life: to bring glory to God. Not glory to me. My aim in life is not to impress people with how wonderful I am, but rather how wonderful God is. That's what it means, "for the glory of God" — our aim is to make God look good.

I'd like to do an experiment. I have a balloon here. Would one of you like to blow it up? *Accept a volunteer.* Fill it right up with air; not too much so that it bursts, but full up. Hang on to it, so the air stays inside.

In a moment, I'm going to ask you to let go of it. But before you do that, let's guess: where will it land? *Listen to the guesses, and then see what happens!*

Wow! That balloon went up, down, sideways, all over the place, and eventually landed over here. Let's use the tape measure to see how far it went. *Ask a helper to hold the tape.*

Let's try that again. But this time we'll do something different. This balloon has a straw taped to it. And the straw is riding on a string that goes across the room. When we let the air out, what do you think is going to happen? *Listen to answers.*

Well, let's see! *Let it go.*

Let's use the tape measure to see how far this one went.

Both balloons used a lot of energy. But the first one didn't have any aim, so the energy was used up in going all over the place. The second one was aimed one way, and it used all its energy going in that direction. The result: it went a lot further!

Message: "What is your life counting for?"

We've come to the end of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Of the 28 chapters, 17 of them describe the ministry of the apostle Paul. Here is a summary of what we know about Paul, gleaned from Acts and from other parts of the New Testament.

- He was born in Tarsus, a city on the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea:

Acts 22:3, Today's English Version

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel. I received strict instruction in the Law of our ancestors."

- He was born to Roman parents, and thus had the privileges of Roman citizenship:

Acts 22:27-28, New International Version:

The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

- But that doesn't mean he wasn't Jewish! Not at all!

Philippians 3:5-6, Today's English Version:

"I was circumcised when I was a week old. I am an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin, a pure-blooded Hebrew. As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee, and I was so zealous that I persecuted the church."

This is the great passage where Paul goes on, saying that all these things that were so important to me, I now consider them worthless. That's because he found what is truly valuable: knowing Jesus. Jesus made all the difference in his life.

- He became a Christian as a result of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus [Acts 9:3-19].

- God appointed him to preach the gospel:

Acts 9:15, New International Version:

But the Lord said [to Ananias], "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message

to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.”

- His trade was tentmaking:

Acts 18:3, New Living Translation:

“... he earned his living by making tents.”

- He had a health problem which no one has ever figured out:

2 Corinthians 12:7, New Living Translation:

“To keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud.”

- He was accused of criminal activity, went through a lengthy process of trial and appeal, finally ending up in Rome, where he awaited trial for at least two years [Acts 21-28].

What I find especially interesting about this is what’s not there: what happened to Paul after that? Instead of focussing on the cloud of doubt over Paul’s future, the book of Acts ends with hope and faith shining through:

Acts 28:30-31, Today’s English Version:

For two years Paul lived in a place he rented for himself, and there he welcomed all who came to see him. He preached about the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking with all boldness and freedom.

Still, people wonder. Was he found guilty, and executed? Was he found innocent and released? Did he remain a prisoner for the rest of his life? Did he live to a ripe old age, or did he die as a martyr because of his faith in Jesus Christ? We don’t know the answers to any of these questions. Oh, lots of people have written volumes giving their conclusions, but they are all speculation.

In any case, I’m just as glad the end of Paul’s life is not recorded there. The purpose of Acts was not to glorify Paul, but to glorify Jesus.

By way of contrast, let’s look at another famous person. Elvis Presley died on the 16th of August, 1977 at the age of 42. At his funeral two days later, more than 150,000 fans lined the 6.5 kilometres long route from his Graceland mansion to Forest

Hill cemetery. They came from as far away as England, Japan and Australia. That same day, Elvis’ last album, *Moody Blue*, sold 250,000 copies.

Since then, the Elvis phenomenon has continued to mount. More than one billion of his singles and albums have sold, more than any other entertainer in history. His home has become a shrine, with over 600,000 people coming to see it and touch it every year. Every year on the anniversary of his death tens of thousands of people gather at his home for a candlelight vigil. You can even get an Elvis credit card (I’m not kidding! Phone 1-800-821-5184).

If Paul had become some sort of cult hero because of his martyrdom, that to him would be worse than the worst kind of torture. His life’s purpose was to glorify Jesus, not himself:

Acts 20:24, New Living Translation:

“My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the Good News about God’s wonderful kindness and love.”

You see, the book of Acts is not about the acts of Paul. It’s not about any of the acts of the other apostles who are mentioned: John, Peter, Philip and James. Through this book, over and over again, we’ve read that it’s really about the Acts of the Holy Spirit, working through them:

Acts 1:8, New Living Translation:

Jesus said, “But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Where does Jesus fit in your life’s plans? Is he at the centre of your life, or off in some box, where you can take him out when it’s convenient?

This is not just a rhetorical question to make you squirm, and make you feel guilty because you’re not “religious” enough. It’s an honest question, that I really want you to ask yourself: “Where does Jesus fit in my life’s plans?”

What is my life’s purpose? What are my goals? Is Jesus at the centre?

Having a goal in life gives you tremendous power, to accomplish great things. If your goal is to become rich, and you focus all your energies on that goal, you'll likely achieve it. You might lose everything else you count dear in the process, but you'll win your goal.

What would happen if your heart's desire was to be a servant of Jesus Christ, and in his name to love the people around you?

Let me give you an illustration of the power of goals.

Action Gadgets is a company that has an annual banquet for all its employees. It's a way of saying "Thank-you" and of getting people geared up for the coming year.

One year, Stall Hall, the president, had a brick wall built on the floor of the auditorium and ordered in a large crane with a giant wrecking ball used to demolish buildings. You can imagine that people were curious what was up!

As the crowd calmed, Stall began his presentation. He told the audience that by the end of his talk, using only his hands to push the ball, he would destroy the wall.

The crowd began to murmur and giggle. Most didn't believe he could get the ball to even move, let alone move it with enough force to knock down the wall.

Stall began by talking about the company's recent accomplishments, and how they would pave the way to the future. As Stall stated that Action Gadgets had their finest year ever, the crowd began to cheer. Stall then reached up and touched the ball. The crowd quickly calmed and began to murmur. The ball didn't move at all. People chuckled.

Stall continued talking. Every once in awhile he'd reach up and touch the giant ball. He went on to say how he didn't want any of the staff to rest on their laurels. How the only way they got to where they were was because of consistency and persistence. Throughout the talk Stall continued to reach up and push on the giant steel ball.

The audience was mentally captured by the words of Stall and nobody noticed that the ball was beginning to slowly move. Stall went on to tell them what he thought the potential was for the company and prospective growth rate. The crowd began to murmur again, but this time these weren't any giggles.

There was a feeling of excitement and amazement in the crowd as Stall again seemingly gently touched the ball, it began to move faster and farther. Stall was nearing the end of his talk and he closed by getting everyone to focus on the large ball now swiftly moving back and forth coming within inches of the wall. Stall stated how easy it was to push the ball now, and commented on how hard it would be to stop it! Stall then stepped back and gave it several strong pushes. The ball tapped the wall once. Then, on the next swing, the ball sent cement and bricks flying, as the wall tumbled down.

At this point the crowd was cheering and fired up, Stall closed by simply saying:

- Getting the ball moving takes time, energy, and persistence.
- Keeping it moving takes perseverance.
- Keep the ball moving and there's no barrier you can't break through!

That's a powerful motivational speech. If that's what people can accomplish by their own efforts, dare to imagine what is possible when our work is multiplied by God working in us and through us. That's the kind of power we have when the Holy Spirit fills us, and we make serving Jesus Christ the goal in our life.

Next Steps:

Ponder and pray:

- What do I want to accomplish in the remainder of 2015?
- What do I want to accomplish in 2016?
- What is my life goal?

Note: Make God your partner in achieving these goals. Ask for God's wisdom in choosing your goals, and God's power in achieving those goals.