

“That I Might Save Some” // 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 // *Cutting Through the Noise # 8*

(Offering: December Declaration (VAMP through announcements))

Great to see everyone this weekend across all of our locations. You know we say around here that EVERYTHING we do in our services is supposed to be an act of worship--not just the singing--that is worship, of course, but how we listen to the Word and how we give are also acts of worship. And that latter thing we are going to do right now.

Last month, I explained that as an act of worship we should give to God our first and our best, not the seconds and the rest, and I challenged you to think about what that would look like for you this coming year, and to commit to doing that for the next 12 months. We also said that we were going to call December our “December Declaration” month, where we give to God in a way that declares that he is first in our hearts. And this is the first Sunday of that, so right now, I want you to consider: What would declare to God that he is first in your heart and that his kingdom is the first priority of our life.

As always, you can give in 1 of 3 ways: [online, or you can text the word ‘GIVE’ to 33933, or you can hop on our app](#) and give that way. We used to pass the old Covid buckets, but we’ve paused that

temporarily. My family and I are doing this; I hope you will as well--you can do it right now.

(Christmas Stuff: Services + SW Song)

One more quick thing for you before we hop into 1 Cor 9: Our Christmas services are right around the corner! Our Christmas services are some of the easiest services of the year for you to invite people to with the highest likelihood of them saying yes. Right now, think of someone who is not really in church that you could invite to come with you--in fact, let’s do this: bow your heads, and invite the Holy Spirit to put one name in your mind that you could invite (Now, you think, “Would they even come if I invited them?” Listen: take a chance. Give the Holy Spirit a little space to work. How terrible if this person never got to experience the gospel simply because you or I never took a chance at inviting them! Right now, resolve to take that chance. Pray for them!)

Prayer

Services are on Sat/Sun, Dec. 18 + 19, at several of our campuses--we don’t do them at all our campuses; we combine them to have a few bigger services. You’ll need to RSVP for a service for you and your guests--that helps us make sure everyone gets a seat. And, we’ll have childcare up to preschool age, which you’ll need to register for also. All of that information is on summitchurch.com/christmas. And, btw, that song we just sang at all of our campuses—*Sovereign Strong*—that’s an incredible new song our SW team wrote: I love it because it’s not just a sentimental Christmas song--it captures the power and worship of what took place at Christmas. You can get it everywhere

you stream music, so look it up. In fact, if you enjoyed that song, could we put our hands together and let our worship team know? SW, we love you and are grateful to you.

OK, 1 Corinthians 9, **if you haven't opened your Bibles there already.**¹

When I served as a student pastor, one of my favorite group games was this one where you'd create a small, indoor obstacle course, and then you'd divide everyone into two teams, each team would choose a student, blindfold them and have them try to work their way through a small obstacle course. The blindfolded person got to choose one person from their team to stand at the end and call out instructions for them: "OK, turn left, now, duck and take 2 steps forward, step over the tire, walk carefully over the broken glass," etc. The trick was that everyone on the other team also got to stand around the side shouting out counter-instructions. It's actually a lot harder than it sounds--you'd think you'd be able to pick the voice of your friend out of the crowd--but it was incredibly difficult to cut through all the noise and focus on the guidance you needed. (I'm pretty sure a few of the kids ended up in the emergency room because of this game, but thankfully most people were less litigious back then, which is why I made it out of student ministry to being your pastor!)

¹ Works Consulted: Charlie Dates, "The Most Segregated Hour in America," Talk Given at MLK50, Memphis, TN, April 3-4, 2018; David Platt, "All in Good Conscience: Your Conscience and People Without Christ," sermon preached

The title of our series through 1 Corinthians is "Cutting Through the Noise" because that's what Paul is attempting to do in this letter. He sets up the gospel as the voice that cuts through the noise to guide them to safety.

- **In the first four chapters**, we saw **how the gospel** heals the divisions in the church that came from pride.
- **In the second section, chapters 5–7**, Paul shows them how the gospel gives them clarity in the moral and sexual confusion of their society.
- **Today** we're crossing over into the 3rd section of this letter, where Paul explains how the gospel can unite them even when they are culturally and politically divided.

I've mentioned this before, but this church in Corinth was pretty diverse. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles; young and old; rich and poor; people who had been religious for years and those with no religious background. And that brought conflict into the church. It always does. (A lot of you have a rosy picture of multi-ethnic unity; but bringing together people of diverse backgrounds always creates conflict and tension. And what that does is create an opportunity for the unique beauty and power of the gospel to shine. The world longs to see this kind of unity--they idealize it in movies and in the classrooms, but very few seem able to accomplish it. Critical Race Theory can't accomplish it. What the world tries to accomplish through things like CRT, the gospel accomplishes through the death and resurrection.

at McLean Bible Church, posted on Jun 2, 2021; D.A. Carson, talk on 1 Cor 9 at the Gospel Coalition, 2009; Bryan Loritts, "Multiculturalism," talk at Centered and Sent Conference, 2016; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

Let's jump right to Paul's conclusion on this: **19 For though I am free from all, (for the sake of the gospel) I have made myself a servant to all** (the word for "servant" there is actually *slave*, btw. A slave is totally owned by someone else, and while a terrible, terrible institution, it's an analogy that Paul's audience would have been familiar with. Paul says, "I've given up control of every preference and perspective to the gospel. I claim no rights to any of them. All I think about now is how...") **that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.** Now, that is a really interesting statement--How could Paul "become as a Jew to the Jews"? I mean ethnically, Paul WAS a Jew! How could someone who was ethnically a Jew *become* a Jew. What that meant was that, for Paul, even his Jewishness--his ethnicity, his culture, he could play up or play down depending on what the needs of the gospel were at the moment.

To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) what he means is, "I was willing to live culturally like those who keep the law. What I DON'T mean is that I put myself back under the law as a means of earning salvation, like I used to believe when I was a Pharisee. And I did that..." **that I might win those under the law.**

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ)--meaning, "I mean I was willing to live culturally like those who weren't under Jewish law, but I don't mean that I cast off all morality and started to live like a reprobate; I'm still bound of course by the moral law of Christ. And I did that..." **that I might win those outside the law. 22 To**

the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (or, better, "have teh chance to point them to salvation") And here's your key phrase: **23 I do it all** (everything I do now, I do) **for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.**

And then vs. **24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.** Here's Paul's second analogy for how he thinks about his life. (The first was 'slave to the gospel'). The second is "professional athlete." A professional athlete gets rid of everything that keeps them from winning. A professional swimmer, for example, takes off literally everything that might slow them down. Wearing a speedo, shaving my legs and chest and wearing a little rubber cappy is not my preferred style, but if I was a competitive swimmer, that's what I would probably choose to wear to the meet (**and you're welcome for that mental image**). I may have the right to show up in board shorts and a tank top, but that's not a right I'll exercise if I want to win. Paul says I have the right to a lot of things in the Christian life that I lay aside to help me win people to Jesus.

Specifically, in chapter 9 Paul mentions 3 rights that he's given up to help him win people to Jesus:

- **Vs. 4 Don't we have the right to eat and drink?** This was a reference to a controversy in the early church over whether one could eat meat that had been offered to idols--you can read about it in chapter 8. Basically, almost all of the meat sold in the markets had been presented to an idol for blessing, and **many of the new Christians, particularly the Jewish ones, felt like that meant the**

meat was permanently tainted and that in eating that meat you were (a) condoning the idol worship and (b) bringing the power of that idol into your life. **Plus, a lot of the meat was pork, which was forbidden under the Jewish law. But other Christians in the church were like, “No--idols are not really gods, they are just statues. God’s power is stronger than any idol’s curse, and Jesus’ death has cleansed all things for us, so, go ahead, please pass the Ba’al-blessed-bacon, I’m hungry.** Now, in chapter 8, Paul explained, “the meat eaters are right. The blood of Jesus has indeed cleansed all these things, and God’s power is stronger than any idol’s power, so we are free to eat whatever we want.” Paul was on team meat-eater. But,” Paul says, “if eating that meat will keep someone else from hearing the gospel, then I won’t eat,” because I will eliminate anything in my life that hinders me in my race to bring people to Jesus. Y’all, **listen: giving up bacon would be a pretty serious sacrifice for me.** But Paul says, “I’ve subjected even that to the gospel.” (Shew. This is making me hungry, let’s move on to the next point).

- **Vs. 5 Don’t we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife?** Remember in chapter 7 Paul explained that he remained single because it was more helpful for the mission at this time. Here he’s like, “Look, I’d like to be married. And I have that ‘right.’ But at this time that’s not what is best for the mission so I’ve given that right up.”
- **Vs. 12 If others have a right to receive (financial) benefits from you, don’t we even more? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working?** Paul and Barnabas had chosen not to take a salary for their ministry, even though other Christian

leaders did--and that was in part because there were a lot of people out there saying that the Apostles were making up these stories of the resurrection in order to get rich and powerful. And Paul said, “The Holy Spirit has shown me that my testimony will be even more compelling if I don’t take any money for it, to show that I’m not telling these stories to get rich and powerful. 1900 years from now a man named Bart Ehrman is going to come along and say I did this to get rich and powerful, and if I don’t take a salary, that takes away a lot of that slander.). I have a right to be financially supported in my work like anybody else, but I’ve given up that right for the sake of the gospel.”

15 For my part I have used none of these rights... 18 What then is my reward? To preach the gospel and offer it free of charge and not make full use of my rights in the gospel. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, “that I might save some.”

Again, vs **25 Athletes who compete exercise extreme self-control self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.** It’s like I’m running a race for the souls of the lost and I’m willing to strip away anything that doesn’t move me closer to my goal.

- I remember reading about the training program of Michael Phelps.² Michael Phelps, of course, the most decorated Olympic athlete of all time. He won a total of 28 medals, which means by himself he has won more medals than 70% of the countries that compete in the Olympics have won in their histories. To win those medals came at a cost, though. During his peak training seasons

² Most recently, via David Platt’s sermon, “All in Good Conscience.”

he would swim about 12 miles per day. Every day. He did this for 1800 consecutive days, without missing a single day. He ate 12,000 calories a day--he would eat literally a pound of pasta every day for lunch and then another pound of pasta for dinner. (Who says you can't out-exercise a bad diet? You swim 12 miles a day, and you can eat whatever you want.) And he did all this for a bunch of records that will one day be broken and a bunch of medals that will end up in a dusty museum somewhere. Someday, you realize, our grandkids, probably our kids, will hear the name Michael Phelps and ask us, "Who was *that*, Dad?" They'll have absolutely no knowledge of him. Most of today's students going into Cameron Indoor have no idea who 2/3 of the names of the jerseys hanging in the rafters even are.

- Paul says if athletes train like they do for crowns that perish and names in rafters that fade into oblivion, how much more should we be willing to discipline our lives for the souls of people that last forever? The crown we are striving for is not having our name in the rafters. It's the soul of your neighbor, or your coworker, or your grandkids.

That's the principle "cutting through the noise" 1 Cor 8–9. I want to apply that to us in 2 ways:

- First, as a church, I want to explain how this impacts how we think about and organize ourselves
- Second, I want to challenge you personally to think about how you are ordering your life.

(I. For the church)

First, I have 3 things for the church:

1. We must sacrifice preference to reach the lost

- This January, we will celebrate our 20th year as TSC, and it's led me to a lot of reflection. Particularly, because in the last year three of that original group that started with me 2002 when I first became pastor have gone on to be with Jesus: I'm thinking about Carl Scott, Doug Martelon, and David Baber. All 3 championed this value. It is best illustrated by a story involving **David Baber**, which I've told you, but I'll repeat since we're coming up on 20 years.
 - When I 1st got to the church in 2002, I started a basketball ministry in our gym. Group of local guys from the neighborhood came to play each Monday night. They all had nicknames for each other--money, streak, air, no don't shoot...
- **We are where we are, Summit, because of a group of saints** that were willing to make themselves uncomfortable for the sake of reaching others. **They did it for the sake of the gospel "that they might save some."**
 - *Sadly, the countryside of America is dotted with churches who won't do that. They sit on furniture designed in the 1940's, listen to music from the 1950's and listen to a pastor dressed like he got stuck in the 1960's. I heard one guy say, "If the 1950's ever come back, a lot of our churches are going to be ready!" But they don't want to change because change is uncomfortable.*
 - *Some of you grew up in churches like these, and you know how hard it is to get them to change anything. The organ. The handbells. And Lord help us if somebody tries to bring in a drum set; that's tantamount to setting up an altar to Satan.*
 - *The sad truth is that many of these churches prioritize maintaining their traditions over reaching their grandchildren.*

- **And I don't share that so you can feel smug about how advanced we are.** Do you realize how easy it is for that spirit to creep back in? How willing are you to put up with things *you don't like in church* for the sake of reaching others? To put up with music, styles, or topics that may not be your favorite but help us reach someone else?
- **How committed are you to this church reaching the Triangle?** Let me make this real for a minute. Paul's illustration for how he applied 1 Cor 9 was having Timothy, his travel companion, circumcised. For Jews, being circumcised was the thing you did not only to obey the law, but also to show you respect your heritage. Timothy had a Jewish mom, but because his dad was a Gentile, he had never been circumcised, and that became a huge problem for a lot of Jews they were trying to reach--they thought Timothy was disrespecting his Jewish heritage and trying to distance himself from it. And Paul argued, "Listen, according to the gospel, he doesn't need to be circumcised. And, you demanding that is unreasonable!" But, Acts 16:3, in order to remove any obstacle to the gospel, Paul had Timothy, a grown man, circumcised.³ *Now, that gives a whole new meaning to "have some skin in the game." Right?*
- **Keep that in the back of your mind** (I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that) **as the standard for being uncomfortable.** (I feel like Timothy would say to a lot of us, "Please don't BELLYACHE that the MUSIC is not exactly to your liking." My becoming all things to all people cost me a lot more than you putting up with some new music.)

- We're always asking how we can best set up this church to reach more people. That's the primary reason we chose to pursue multi-site. Just to be clear, multi-site is a headache for everybody. But we figured that it was easier to reach more people in the Triangle if lost people had a facility they could come to within a 15 min drive of them. Like I say, we're flattered you would drive... So rather than build one big, gargantuan "6 Flags over Jesus" kind of building, we said, let's build slightly smaller outposts all over the Triangle. **We do it all for the sake of the gospel, "that we might save some."**
- I hope you, and I, will always feel a little bit uncomfortable here. The moment we stop feeling uncomfortable and think this church is our dream church is the moment we can be assured we're no longer focused on the lost but meeting our needs. The mission is not to build the kind of church we always wanted to be a part of, that caters to our needs and preferences, but one stripped down for maximum effectiveness in reaching our community.

Which leads me to...

2. We must care not only about depth, but width also

A lot of Christians, when they talk about their church, seem to think the only measure God cares about is whether they are doctrinally faithful. They'll say things like, "We don't worry about the width of our ministry, we just worry about the depth." And, listen, I get it: we can't control how many people will receive and believe the gospel. We have to preach the truth as we understand it and leave the results to God.

³ Acts 16:3

But I at least want you to see that Paul was not satisfied with merely being “in the right.” He was like, “I’ll do whatever it takes, become whatever I need to become, that I might by all means save some.”

Charles Spurgeon, who was not known as a theological lightweight, a big-time Calvinist, one of the church’s most important theologians in its history--said it this way: “If my hearers are not converted, I feel like I have wasted my time; I have lost the exercise of brain and heart. I feel as if I lost my hope and lost my life, unless I find for my Lord some of his blood-bought ones... I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpack all the mysteries of the divine Word, for conversion is the thing we are to live for.”

That’s how I feel. So yes, we want to get our doctrine right and grow deep. But we’re not content to simply preach the truth accurately; we want by all means to “save some.”

Now, time out: Some are like, “Look, I’m just not comfortable with all this talk of “saving somebody.” It feels so smug and imperialistic, like we’re better than everybody and we’ve got to run out with some Messiah complex to save everyone.” Well, let’s be clear--we’re not capable of “saving” anybody, and we’re not out preaching ourselves. You’re not going to find any hope in us. But, the gospel message is that God sent a Savior, and all people are lost without him, but he offers forgiveness, healing and restoration to new life for all who will come to him. We can no more deny that than I could deny Jesus himself. And, if in your heart you don’t yearn to see other people come to Jesus, or if you feel like it’s wrong to try and persuade someone else to come to Jesus (and of course I mean you do it

respectfully), I question whether or not you actually believe the gospel. How could you?

The gospel is that there’s only one hope for all people everywhere, only one way to escape God’s judgment and be reconciled to God: Jesus. How could you believe that, and not be doing everything you could to try and get that to someone else.

3rd thing for our church...

3. We must seek to reach *all* people in the Triangle, not just one kind

It’s clear from what Paul says here in 1 Cor 9 that he was focused on reaching different kinds of people in Corinth, not just one kind. You had Jews and people under the law; you had Gentiles and those outside the law. He was trying to reach them all. And that was HARD.

- **Do you know how much easier it would have been for Paul to just focus on one kind of person?** To go to one side of the city and plant a church focused only on reaching Jews, and then go to the other side and plant one that reached Gentiles? 1st Bapt Jew, and 1st Bapt Gentile, and we’ll cooperate in a joint community-service project. That would have been way easier and would have led to so much less conflict. They all would have already thought the same about meat questions and political questions. But Paul didn’t do that. Instead, he challenged the church to put some of their cultural preferences aside to reach someone else because he knew that **what Jesus wanted**--what would glorify him--is a united community, not a segregated one.
- **To the Jews, he said, I became like a Jew:** Which means, I did Jewish things. I ate Jewish food. I listened to Jewish music. I

entered into Jewish struggles. I wore Jewish clothes. I made Timothy get circumcised.

- **To the weak I became weak**--Paul says, "Even though I knew, theologically, I was free to eat the bacon, I refused to do anything that put a stumbling block between me and someone else."

He made all of these *cultural* adaptations to reach people. And that was hard.

Summit Church: the gap between us and many of OUR neighbors is often a cultural one. We know that Jesus didn't die only for Republicans, or political conservatives, or white people, or middle-class families with kids. He died for all peoples at all stages of life from all economic strata. And to reach them, we all have to be willing to turn down certain things and lean hard into other ones, and, I'm going to tell you, **that's hard**.

- **Listen: It's so easy to nod our heads at that in affirmation.** But it's hard when the rubber hits the road. Let me show you what I mean. (Now, fair warning, this story is going to be hard for many of you. Candidly, it was hard for me the first time I heard it.)
 - One of our members of color, who attended a Black church for most of his life, told me that growing up, in times like these, the church was the one place he could go for refuge, confident that everyone there felt his pain, shared his anxieties, and just understood. In the church was the one place he could just be. The trauma of slavery and Jim Crow laws created a solidarity in the Black community that served as a refuge in times of trial. So, he said, when something tragic happened in the Black community, he could expect it to be discussed at church that week because that shared pain and fear was on everyone's

mind. In choosing to come to a multiethnic church, especially one where the majority of the membership was white, he said, he had given up that comfort because not every person in the church understands his worries. Some, in fact, seem primarily concerned to show that his worry or his pain is not legitimate. **He's chosen to be a part of our community here because he believes in the vision of this church. But it's hard.**

- **And here's the truth: He shouldn't have to be the only one who has to adapt.** For those of us in the white community, we too have to enter, as much as we can, into the culture of others. To take on their burdens. To listen to them. It doesn't mean we say that their perspective is infallible and ours is wholly flawed. But it means we lay aside cultural preferences and perspectives and try to enter in with each other and remove as many barriers as possible--to lay aside whatever we can for the gospel. **We do it all for the sake of the gospel, "that we might save some."**
- **It also means all of us are muted on some of our perspectives to keep from causing unnecessary division in the body.** In 1 Cor 8-9 Paul was willing to be quiet, or muted, on secondary convictions he was fully convinced were right, because he thought the unity of the church and its evangelistic mission were more important than maintaining a uniformity of perspective in all things
 - We have people leave this church all the time because we don't say exactly what they want on some political or social issue. We say too much about some issue. We don't say enough. I'm not saying all perspectives are equally valid, and I'm certainly not saying we are ever muted or unclear about injustice or wrong--the sanctity of life; the evils of racism, equality under the law--I'm saying there are times that my

particular perspective on the best way to set up society, or my opinion about the best people to lead us there, or my interpretations of some event--there are times I will dial that back because it's more important that people hear and experience the gospel than it is everyone see every situation the way that I see it. It's not that these other things are not important, it's that the gospel of Jesus Christ **is that much more important. And I don't want people to get confused** into associating a particular cultural or political slant on secondary matters with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have a RIGHT to say what I believe about these things, but I turn down that right a little that I might by all means save some.

- **We see a great example of this philosophy at work in the early church.** It's such an important example, but so overlooked by so many when they read Acts. In Acts 15, Jewish and Gentile believers were so divided over a cultural issue that they could no longer worship together! Seriously. Churches led by Gentiles were experiencing a "Jewish flight" and *vice versa*. So the church leaders came together to try to work something out. Their solution, however, at first, seems rather confusing. They basically said, Acts 15:29, that Gentiles should (a) avoid sexual immorality and (b) avoid eating things that had died by strangulation (both of which were regularly practiced by Gentiles) (Acts 15:29). The reason for the prohibition on sexual immorality seems clear--stop going to prostitutes! But the prohibition on eating something strangled? Of the entire Hebrew law, *that* is the regulation they thought was essential to enforce?

⁴ The ESV Study Bible summarizes James' ruling this way: James concludes his appeal by noting the widespread (in every city) teaching and affirmation of the Mosaic law, thus suggesting that there is no need to give unnecessary offense

- No! That's not why they included it. James explains the reasoning for these two regulations: "*For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him ...*" (Acts 15:21). In other words, in every city there were a lot of Jews; lost Jews--who needed to be reached for Jesus. And when Gentiles were in the parking lot barbecuing things that had been strangled, that would produce a major stumbling block for the Jews. The Apostles knew that if these unsaved Jews came into the church and Gentiles were in the back choking the gophers and throwing them on the grill, the Jews would not be able to stomach it (no pun intended). And then they wouldn't get a chance to hear the gospel and be saved.⁴ And the Apostles said, "Yes, you Gentiles have a right to eat choked gophers if you want, gross as it is, but we are asking you to forgo that right so that more unsaved Jews in your community can hear the gospel."
- And then James, leader of the Jerusalem church, wraps it up by uttering one of the most important phrases in the whole New Testament (yet so routinely overlooked) for a church's mission philosophy: "... we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles [or Jews] who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19 NIV).
- Oh, Summit family, I've told you that I wish I could plaster James' phrase on every single one of our hearts, and make it the headline for each of our Facebook pages. *Do all you can not to make it hard for Gentiles who are turning to God.* Don't make it hard for our Black friends to find God. Don't make it hard for Democrats. Don't make it hard for Republicans.

either to Jewish believers or to unbelieving Jews who might otherwise consider becoming Christians in the future.

Don't make it hard for Asian seekers, or white seekers, brown seekers, or anybody. Don't make it hard for public school teachers or policemen. We have a gospel too precious and a mission too urgent to let anything stand in its way.

- Some of you are passionate about politics and which solutions are best for society--and I want to be clear: that's a good thing. We should care deeply about these things and I pray that many of you get inspired by this church to get more involved in the political process, not less. And we have to speak out about injustice and oppression and suffering around them--But in the church let's not let a secondary, culturally-shaped perspective on the best strategies or candidates or particular interpretation of an event (that's probably more shaped by my background than anything else), let's not let any of those become synonymous with the identity of the gospel, because what's when the gospel suffers and people stay lost.
- **We do all this for the sake of the gospel, "that we might save some!"**

So, that's what it means for our church. Let's take a quick minute and think about what it means...

(II. For You Personally)

If you think of reaching people like a race you are trying to win, how will that impact how you live your life? *Stop thinking of evangelism as a duty you perform and think of it as a race you are trying to win.*

- **Have you thought about how your career might contribute to the GC?**

- Some of you have been given jobs that carry you into places that are hard to reach with the gospel. Places I can't get to. Are you taking Jesus there with you? As you've heard, "You are the only Bible some people will ever read?"
- **Some of you have jobs you can transfer to a less-reached place.** We often say around here that following Jesus means doing what you do well to the glory of God, but also doing it somewhere strategic for the mission of God. Every year we send out people who uproot their lives from Raleigh-Durham to go with one of our church planting teams to live out their career in a place where they can be a part of a new church plant. I'm thinking of...
 - **People like Brian**, who got his degree in patent law from Duke and instead of opening a practice here, opened one in the UAE to be a part of one of our teams there
 - Or the Parker's, who run a Crossfit gym in N Africa
 - Or Craig, head of engineering firm in South Asia
 - Or Rachel, counselor who works with abuse victims in a red light district in India
 - **We've also had about 700 of our members go to domestic cities like Denver, Charleston, Greenville, and Miami.** Together these people have planted 482 churches
 - Most don't that this because it's convenient, or they have wanderlust; **they do it all for the sake of the gospel, "that they might be all means save some!"**
- **Are you spending your money in ways that befits the urgency of the gospel?** (Listen, I know that God doesn't need our money and that we don't bear the weight of funding the Great Commission, but are we giving like we really believe that heaven and hell are real and the mission is urgent? If Jesus came back tonight and it

was all over, would you feel good about how you'd invested your money in his Kingdom?) Related to that...

- **What lifestyle changes could you make to free up some bandwidth for giving?**
- **Have you prayed about fostering or adopting? Would you?**
- **Here's a big one: Can you critique your own culture?** Like Paul was doing: When Paul says "I've become a Jew to the Jews," he's showing that he was removed enough from his own culture enough that he could critique it when necessary. His commitment to Christ outweighed his commitment to Judaism. Lesslie Newbigin says that the true test of Christian maturity is the ability to allow the gospel to challenge my culture. Yes, I love America and I love my culture but I love the gospel more, and where my culture falls short of the gospel I want to be the first to point that out.⁵
- **Is there an opinion that you need to dial back so as not to be a distraction to the gospel?**
- **What preferences do you need to forgo to create environments better able to reach others?** Are you really willing to be part of a church where you feel uncomfortable sometimes, for the sake of reaching others? Have you gotten comfortable with being uncomfortable?
- **Will you set aside one night a month to invite over a non-churched person from your neighborhood, job, or sports team?** This could be a great practical place to begin. For some of you, this is uncomfortable. It's easier for all of us just to come home, eat dinner, and chill every night, or hang out with people we're

already familiar with. Are you willing to try something uncomfortable in an attempt to reach someone?

- **How can you begin to include someone not like you in your social rhythms?** Reaching out to and including people in your social circles that are not from your cultural background. It's like Pastor Bryan says, ("Diverse churches start with diverse dinner tables.")
- **Whom could you invite to start reading the Word with you? Or to come to church with you?** (Start with Christmas services this year!) That's for you.

VAMP

SUMMIT: **24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run** (they all fulfill their duty), **but only one receives the prize** (they all run, they all finish, but there is only one winner. **So be that winner**)? ~~So run that you may obtain it.~~ **25 Athletes who compete exercise extreme self-control self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.**

- Think with me for a minute about being in eternity. You've been there 10000 years (so, we're just getting started.) And during that time you get to know some other saint that is there. Imagine after 10000 years how much you'll love them. And then, you find out that they are there because of a sacrifice you made that enabled them to hear the gospel. So, now you are talking about someone whom you love, dearly--you never knew them on earth, who is there because of some sacrifice you made, some accommodation

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

for the gospel. Don't you think you'll say a billion times over that it was worth it?

25 Athletes who compete exercise extreme self-control self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.

You've probably never heard of Mary Clarke, but Mary Clarke grew up in one of the most privileged, desirable neighborhoods in the world: Beverly Hills, CA. But she grew burdened over the brokenness and hopelessness felt by many in prison there. As she began to get involved in ministering to them, she found that a huge obstacle was when she left everyday to drive back to her comfortable home in Beverly Hills. So she did something totally unorthodox: she asked for a cell, and they gave her one, and that's where she chose to spend decades of her life: in a little 10x10 cell. The inmates were so baffled by and drawn to her, they called her, "The Prison Angel". She was so revered she once walked into a prison riot where bullets and tear gas permeated the air, but when they saw Mary the riot stopped. Because she had become one of them, she could reach them.

Now, I'm not saying that's our new prison strategy. I don't even think the prison system would allow that. I'm saying that history has been changed by people willing to do whatever it takes, for the sake of the gospel, so that they by all means might save some.

Are we willing to do that for the take of the lost in our generation?
Are YOU willing to do that for the sake of the lost in your life?