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2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-13

2 Corinthians Series

I have a real passion for young people and I pray for the young people at our church. I pray for them because our young people are under tremendous pressures today. The temptations that exist today for our young people to get them derailed, sidetracked, or really get in trouble and mess up their lives are great. There's a lot of bad stuff out there today for young people. I know that there's a way through all of that path if they would commit themselves to Jesus Christ fully. If they would become servants of Christ, it would make that path much more easy to navigate. So I just pray that God will do a work in our young people's lives. Not just so they'd learn more facts about the Bible, but that they would learn something that would resonate in their hearts and it would affect who they are and how it impacts the way they live. So I just ask you to pray with me for our young people. It's just a strategic time.

I also pray for families here at Calvary. I ask that God would do a powerful work in the homes here. Because the family is designed to be this place of ministry, reaching out to other people. But if the family's all cut up with tension and you have to focus inside and deal with the stuff inside, you don't have a lot of energy left to reach out. So my prayer is that God would strengthen marriages, that God would give parents and young people and children the ability to interact effectively in life so that they can take on this mission of reaching out beyond themselves.

I also pray that God would empower our church to be the kind of church that supports people. Families certainly. But the church is called a family. So single people and married people and old people and young people are all part of this big family that God has designed. I just have a passion for our church that it would be that kind of church that's reaching out, caring, and loving each other.

The whole thing that makes it all work is that we're servants of God. Today as we look at God's word, we're going to see more of what it means to be a servant of God. I was just touched by this passage because I know that within this message, the message of being a servant of God and knowing what that means, is something that can drive us all forward in a way that we can't do otherwise. Whether we're young people or we're parents or we're couples or we're singles, it doesn't make a difference. Being a servant of God is where we need to be.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] So Lord, we ask that you would work in our hearts today and you would equip us to follow you, to love you with all our hearts, to desire you more than the desires that are around us.

Scott Turansky - Calvary Chapel Living Hope

We ask that you would show us what that means in really practical terms today. We want to open our hearts to you now as we open your word, and we ask you to speak to us, to teach us, not just in our heads. Please inspire us to live differently this week, focused on you and who you are for us. In Jesus' name, amen.

I'd like you to stand and we'll read this passage together. Standing in honor of God's word. You can open your Bibles, if you'd like, to 2 Corinthians 6. 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 is the passage I'm going to read to you now.

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way (now we have a list of twenty-eight things, twenty-eight points in this sermon. Just hold on here): in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. Well that's quite a list.

What I'd like to do today is go behind Facebook. In Facebook you know everybody puts on their best face, right? You don't see everybody putting up "oh I'm depressed today," usually. What you see is all the great things that are going on and the fun things. So we're going to pull back the veneer of Paul's life today and we're going to learn a little bit more of what it means to serve God. I'm not talking about professional ministry, that is someone who gets paid for doing what they're doing. I'm talking about the fact that we're all servants of God. That we all have this calling on our hearts to serve the Lord. I want to talk about what that's going to look like in very practical terms for us so that we can get a glimpse of that.

I want to start, before we do, by looking at this first passage, the first couple verses where it says – *We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.*

Think about what Paul's saying there for just a moment. Because he's saying we don't want a stumbling block to be in the way. We don't want to be a cause for stumbling. What Paul is saying is different than what the world says. So Christians think differently about their actions and decisions than someone who's not a Christian. See, Christians ask different questions because they're on a mission. Okay?

He says *our ministry will not be discredited.* Now if you want to know what he means by *ministry*, then you read the previous chapter. Remember he was talking about how we have been given this ministry of reconciliation. The idea of reconciliation is to bring people to God. Because that is when they're experiencing wholeness in their lives. That's our job. We have this ministry of reconciliation that we carry around with us. And Paul knows that. So he's talking about that and he's saying I'm going to live my life in a way that doesn't allow a stumbling block to hinder someone's progress toward the gospel.

There are a lot of reasons today why people don't become Christians. People find all kinds of excuses because becoming a Christian means you have to change a lot of things. Change the way you think, change the way you live. There are tremendous advantages to that and benefits, but some people don't see that, so they have all kinds of excuses why they don't want to make those changes.

Sometimes one of those excuses is "I don't want to be like those guys who are Christians" because sometimes their opinion of Christians is some odd thing that doesn't represent God. Because I do believe that if people really knew what it meant to be a Christian, they would be attracted to it and want that and see what it means in their lives. But sometimes we, as imperfect people who represent Christ, don't do as good of a job as we could. So we sometimes hinder people or we become a stumbling block in their way.

Christians then ask different questions about their choices. We don't say, "Oh I just do whatever I want to do." Or "I do what I want and let the chips fall where they may." Or "it's nobody's business what I'm doing. I don't care what other people think." We don't make those kinds of statements. Because according to this passage, Paul is saying I don't want my decision making, the choices I make, the words I use, my entertainment, the things that I'm doing that people are seeing to be a stumbling block. That's basically what he's saying.

So I would suggest in our lives we want to be really careful that we don't contribute to some person's disillusionment with God as much as we can. Obviously we make mistakes and one of the greatest things we can do is be humble and apologize and admit our weaknesses and how God is working through us in the midst of that because we aren't perfect and we can't be God. All we're doing is representing God in a way that has integrity, which means that we have humility in the whole process.

This idea of a stumbling block is important because we know that Paul says, "We have great *liberty in Christ*." We are the most free people there are. He talks about it in Galatians. But there are different reasons why we might choose not to exercise that liberty. We might choose not to do something. One is because we don't want to be a stumbling block to a nonbeliever who really needs to come to know Christ. And so we might choose some of our actions so that they don't mislead someone and really don't get in the way of someone coming to Christ. But we also see this idea of stumbling block used for someone who is a Christian, but not a very strong Christian. So if they saw us exercising our liberty and all of our freedom, they might be turned off or disillusioned by their own faith.

But I would say that another way that we are a stumbling block is to our own selves because Galatians tells us *do not use your liberty to exercise the desires of your flesh*. Which means that sometimes we say "no" to good things in our own lives because good things might get us moving in the wrong direction or thinking the wrong things and they get us off balance. So sometimes the enemy, the big enemy for the Christian isn't the evil that's out there. It's the good things that get in the way of the best things.

There are a number of reasons why we would choose to limit the freedom that we have in Christ, which is great. That doesn't mean we let other people determine our actions. It means that we

have this freedom, but we choose to limit it for certain reasons, and that's a big difference. We do it for a reason and that reason is we want people to know more about who God is. We want them to experience God. We want them to be reconciled to God. If that's for a nonbeliever coming to God, that's great. If it's for a Christian who just needs to be cemented more in their faith, that's really important. There's this idea of Paul is saying *we put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.*

Rather, as servants of God. I just want to underline that *servants of God* because that's where I want to focus today. What does it mean to be a servant of God? I think the list of twenty-eight things are going to give us some insight into this passage. So we're going to take them verse by verse, word by word. We're going to look at them all today to try to understand what he's saying as he describes the *servant of God* idea here. Notice there's a colon at the end of this verse. *Rather, as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way* [colon]. So now we have the list of twenty-eight things.

Now let me organize them for you a bit so that you can see this is what I think he's saying. This is the summary of the twenty-eight things in three different groups. We are servants of God because we endure pressure. That's going to be the first ten things. The next nine things we focus on integrity and then the last nine things we aren't driven by the reactions of others. So if we look now at these things (and I'm going to take you through them), I want you to see that a servant of God does experience pressure, focuses on integrity, and isn't driven by the reactions of others. I think that's what he's saying. We're going to walk away with that idea because when we go out of here, we're all recognizing we're servants of God.

So let's go into the first group. Just remember: servants of God. That's what we're talking about. Let's go to the first group of words. There are ten of them here. Let's just look at these. I don't want you to think in terms of when I serve the Lord I experience these things. I want you to think in terms of you are serving the Lord right now, in your work, or in your home, or in your private life, wherever you are. You're a servant of God right now and you're experiencing these things already. I am.

The first four: *in great endurance*. This is the word *hupomeno*, which means kind of under pressure. But there's this space that allows us to remain under. That's what the word means, to remain under. We don't have to run from the pressure. We can remain under it and, as in the previous chapter, we saw we're like clay pots, we're hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. Because we have this reserve of Christ's power inside of us that allows us to be able to remain under. So the idea of endurance, whether you're running a race or you're just hanging in there on the job, or you're living in a home where there's a lot of pressure, you remain under because you have the strength that God provides.

The second word, *in troubles*, is *thlipsis*, which has the idea of being squeezed on both sides or being squeezed on the inside. Either way. But the idea is stress, I would suggest. The common word we use in our western terminology is stress. We all experience that. It's the pressures of life.

The third word is *hardships* and has reference to emergencies or necessities. That's the idea. *In hardships*. Which then reminds me of the urgent things that have to happen in my life, and I end up taking care of these urgent things and they squeeze out sometimes the most important thing. Because every time I turn around, I've got another urgent thing going on. So those are like the hardships that we experience. That's the idea there in that word.

The word *distresses* is I don't have an answer or I don't know exactly what to do with this, so I'm distressed. If I knew what to do, I'd be fine. I could work through this. But *distress* in this word has the idea of I just don't know what to do. I don't have the answer. I don't know what the next steps are. That's *distresses*.

So four words I think describe...at least in my life I experience these things. I expect that some of you experience them as well.

The next three things seem to be specific to Paul. Because I don't experience the next three things very often – *beatings, imprisonments and riots*. Those just aren't in my repertoire of hardships that I experience. Those were a part of Paul's life. If we look at the book of Acts, we see that he experienced those things as he was being a servant of God.

But you can put your things in here. What are your unique things that challenge you? It may be a physical challenge. It may be some problem causing you to live a particular way because of your health. Or maybe you have some issues going on with finances that you're going to have to live with for a long time. Those pressures are there continually. They're not something that's going to go away tomorrow. So you're living with that. Or maybe it's a relational challenge that you're addressing. So you can put whatever you want in there.

When we're servants of God and serving Him, we're going to experience all kinds of challenges in our lives. And they're rather unique for each one of us. You have your basket of challenges and I have mine as well.

Then we have these last three words – *in hard work*. The key to this word is the word *hard*, because it's talking about work to the point of exhaustion.

Sleepless nights has the idea of running after sleep. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel that way. I want sleep to come, but I feel like I'm running after it. That's what he's talking about there. And then *hunger*. Sometimes in our lives I would suggest as we look at the challenges of our lives, it looks like this.

Now if I were a salesman trying to sell Christianity, I probably wouldn't put this list up on the board. But what I want you to see is as we pull back the Facebook page and look at Paul's real life as a servant of God, he experienced a lot of challenges. Can he still experience joy and peace in the midst of all the stuff that's going on? I think the answer is yes.

Here's what I think makes it work. I think it makes it work because of an idea I want to share with you. It has to do with this idea of satisfaction. Ask yourself, what satisfies you? I'm not just talking about food, although that could be one thing. I'm talking about at the end of your day

what do you say, “Ah, this was a good day.” What is it that happened in the course of that day that made it a good day? It’s a very important question for us to ask.

I work with young people a lot and I find that if I ask this question to young people, there are two primary answers that they give. Can you guess what they are? Playing a video game or being with friends. If I have time to play my video game or be with friends, then I have this sense of satisfaction. There’s this idea that pleasure is really important. In fact I think that some young people have this idea that their job description in life is to have fun.

Maybe we could tribute to that as children growing up when we say as they’re going out the door, “Have fun!” as if that’s their primary job in life. And when they return we say, “Did you have fun?” as if we’re evaluating their experience by having fun. I just think sometimes our young people get an idea that fun is my objective in life. That’s where I’m going to find satisfaction. All this other stuff, like schoolwork or chores or following instructions from my parents, are all things that are necessary evils that I’ve got to get over in order to have fun. It’s dangerous. It’s dangerous when you have that mentality that I really need to have fun.

I’m working with this seventeen year old boy through his parents right now. He is a real challenge with us because he’s saying to his parents, “How would you feel if your parents took everything away that you wanted to do that’s fun?” I mean his whole idea is all about fun. It’s a real problem today. Sometimes young people get so focused on fun that they miss some other things.

So I would suggest this. I would suggest you can feel the same sense of satisfaction in your life in some other ways. Some of you know this already because this is a step of maturity. You can experience the same sense of satisfaction in your life by achieving a goal that you have. I set a goal; I feel good about that. Even I would suggest that same satisfaction as you would in playing a video game or spending time with your friends. Or maybe we could have the same sense of satisfaction by accomplishing a task. Are you getting the idea of what I mean by this sense of satisfaction? That we all have this and it drives us in some very interesting ways in our lives. When we’re going for this idea of satisfaction, which I think many of us do, then we find ourselves pursuing different things.

You have to understand that Paul is making a statement here in the passage that his satisfaction comes from being a servant of Christ. Wow. Isn’t that interesting. At the end of the day I look at my life and say, “Did I serve Christ today?” whether I had a challenge or not in the midst of that. Was it a good day because there was absence of conflict? Well I don’t know if that’s necessarily a good day.

Sometimes I’m working with a family and a child will be in my office. Let’s say he’s ten years old and I send him away to work on following instructions from his mom and dad. We’re going to do this and if you have a problem, you need to take a break and settle down and change your heart and we’re going to work on that this week.

He comes back the next week and I say, “How did it go?”
He says, “It went great.”

I said, “Well why did it go so well?”

“Well I didn’t have to get corrected this week. I didn’t have to take a break.”

I’m going, “Oh that’s too bad. Because we learn through the pressures of life. Maybe we need to increase some of the pressures in your family so that you will practice doing the right thing and you’ll be able to take a break or follow instructions.”

Absence of problems is not what measures a good day, according to Paul. Paul is looking at this list of ten things and he is making that part of what it means to be a servant of Christ. We have these challenges. That’s part of the job descriptions that we experience as the servants of God. We’re servants of God when we endure the pressure. That’s what we talked about first of all. We’re looking at all the pressure that is here. But the second group of things we’re going to focus on is this idea of integrity.

I want you to see the list because I don’t know how Paul is planning this in his mind, but he comes up with ten things that are hardship things and then nine things that are things he focuses on. Look at this list because I think you’ll find it to be encouraging and helpful. As you’re going through all the challenges of life, what are you going to focus on is a very important question.

In purity. That has to do with motives and this sense of rightness inside. Then there’s *understanding*, which is really the word knowledge or God’s knowledge. Which is the ability to perceive behind the front to what else is going on or the bigger picture. Understanding is the ability to see the consequences of my current actions now. Sometimes people don’t see that. What they see is “oh I’m just having fun right now” and they don’t realize that pretty soon they’re going to be in trouble here or have a problem over here later.

You see, if pleasure is your primary goal, then where do you end up? Often you end up with some kind of an addiction, right? Because you want this pleasure. So we pursue that pleasure. It could be a substance abuse. Or it could be something like work and being addicted to accomplishing tasks. Or it could be something like anger and expressing emotion. It could be all kinds of things that we get addicted to. Because it does something satisfying for us. If we got our antenna pointed in the wrong direction, we end up in trouble in more ways than one. Sometimes that trouble doesn’t manifest itself till years later. Then it creates these problems inside that we got to work through. So focusing on understanding helps us see the future consequences of my present actions right now. Very important.

Patience, of course, always has to do with time. It’s giving more time, allowing this to work itself out or giving someone more time, listening to them, or more time for my emotions to settle so I can work on something. *Patience* has to do with time.

And kindness is compassion in action. So kindness is just thinking about other people, not just thinking about myself.

I like these words *in the Holy Spirit*. We usually talk about the Holy Spirit being in us. This is different. This is being in the Holy Spirit. So the servant of God is in the Holy Spirit. This idea that the Holy Spirit is working all around us and we’re in it. And we’re watching what God is doing and we’re a part of that. In the Holy Spirit.

Sincere love, of course, is this deepest motivation that drives us forward that we want. We want this love that's going to drive us sincerely toward the goal, especially with other people and with God, as we're talking about there.

Truthful speech, this idea of focusing on the truth. *The power of God* that equips us to do what we need to do.

And then *weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left*. Here's the idea. Offensive weapons with the right hand and defensive weapons with the left hands, like the shield or the sword or whatever. So you've got these offensive weapons and defensive weapons. What are they? Righteousness. Doing the right thing. Doing what's right has tremendous value for us.

Now these are the things that Paul is focusing on. So even though there are trials going on, the servant of God is going to experience trials, just as they're living life. It's going to happen. But it's the servant of God's focus that's very important. Here's where we're going. So they're focused on these things, all of these right things. I call them integrity because integrity is this internal strength to match the external pressures.

We've talked about this before that integrity is like a bridge. We say it has integrity. The trucks going over it don't collapse the bridge, so it has integrity. A person has the integrity when they have the internal strength to match the temptations and challenges. That's why the friends that we hang around are so important. Because sometimes the friends we hang around can get us going in the wrong direction. That is really dangerous because we may not have the internal strength to manage that. So we need to hang around with friends, people that are going to encourage us in our faith and move us in the right direction. As servants of God we focus on integrity.

We're servants of God, so there's three groups here. The first group was enduring the pressure. You saw all those ten words. Then we focused on integrity. There were nine words there.

Now we're going to find this interesting contrast, several contrasts, nine of them, that some of them are talking about the reactions of others. So as servants of God we're not driven by the reactions of others. Watch what these nine things say.

Through glory and dishonor. It would be nice if I could tell you you're not going to have any problems as a Christian. But that's not the reality of life. We all experience trials and problems. It would be nice if I could tell you even though you're going to experience problems, everything is going to be fine. Everybody's going to like you because you respond the right way. It doesn't happen that way. Even with Paul the apostle, he says sometimes *through glory* and sometimes *through dishonor*. People didn't like him. They dishonored him.

Bad reports and good reports. Sometimes you do the right thing. You've got your weapons, doing just what they need to do. Then someone else comes along and gives a bad report about you and just drags you down.

Genuine, yet regarded as impostors. I'm trying to do the right thing. I'm trying to be genuine, but someone is saying, "You're not being real." So there's this imposter kind of impression that people place on us when we're really trying to do the right thing. There's a sense of misunderstanding. I think one of the greatest pains that we have is when we're misunderstood. We're trying to be genuine, do the right thing, but we are regarded as imposters. *Known, yet regarded as unknown.*

Now we come to these other contrasts. He says here *dying, and yet we live on.* So there's this hope. He helps us understand this container of God in the midst of the pressures of life allows us to experience *dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.*

Don't you find that kind of strange? I'm thinking sometimes I'm helping someone who's depressed and I have to ask this question: Can you feel depressed and be joyful at the same time? Because I think in our lives we tend to put those at two different ends. God says that we are to *rejoice always.* Yet sometimes we're just discouraged, depressed. Can we be joyful in the midst of that? I think the answer is yes because the discouragements or the depression that might be out there for various reasons (depression comes from all kinds of different problems and issues and causes), but inside I can be experiencing this joy while I'm wrestling through that. Very important to think about that. Because he's saying *sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.* That's what he's saying. Even though we're sorrowful about some things, we have this joy that we can experience on the inside.

Poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. You see there's this perspective that we have that our job is to serve the Lord and leave the rest to Him. So when we serve the Lord and leave the rest to Him, He works out all those details. My job is just to hear that "*well done, good and faithful servant*" that comes from the parable in the Bible. "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" is what God gives to us and He wants us to rejoice in.

There's something very powerful about serving the Lord and I'm convinced that if we would view our lives every day and the challenges we face as part of serving the Lord...not just serving the Lord as in using my spiritual gift when I come to church on Sunday or going to the small group, but serving the Lord means every day when I get up I am God's servant and I'm doing this and I'm experiencing these things. My focus is on integrity. I'm not looking at the results in the sense of I'm not looking at what people's opinions are. I'm just trying to do what's right and serve the Lord and leave the rest to Him. He's in charge of the results. I would suggest we would have much more power in our lives, we would avoid so many more problems in our lives if we would view ourselves as servants of the Lord and be doing what He wants us to do. There's power in that whole understanding of God and what He's doing and who He is in our lives.

When Paul comes to the end of verses 11-13 now... So he's made this whole statement about what it means to be a servant of God, and then he comes to these last verses in our text today. In verses 11-13 he's appealing to them now. It's as if he's earned the right now to make this appeal that says, "Would you guys please think about this?"

Listen to this appeal. He says – *We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.*

See what Paul is saying is he really values the relationship with the Corinthians. He values them because they're part of this church. It's the Corinthian church that he's writing to and he's saying we need this together. There's something about having open hearts as a church that strengthens us in the midst of the struggle, that allows us to stay focused in the right direction. That's powerful. So Paul is opening his heart and saying, "Would you please open your heart with me?" Because Paul values open hearts in the church dynamic because God is working greatly in the midst of that and he needs that.

I would suggest we need that too. There's something that happens in our fellowship. The friendships that we develop in our relationship with church are often greater than those even in our own family. God calls the church this family of God that comes to this place where we find the closeness, we're spiritually connected. That comes from opening your heart up. I would encourage you to open your heart up to other people in fellowship. As you do, open your heart up and share who you are and they share with you, there's this closeness that provides encouragement as we're under the pressures of life and helps us stay focused in where we need to go.

It's a beautiful teaching that Paul is laying out for us in this passage. He ends it by saying let's keep our hearts close together. It's a great message. I don't know which of those twenty-eight words jumps out at you. It's hard to have a twenty-eight point sermon, but the point is that God has something for every one of us as we move forward to be His servants. Servanthood is what draws us forward to be the people that God has called us to be, both individually and corporately.

Would you stand with me? Let's close in prayer together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we know that you've chosen to allow your message to go forth through people. You use people, even imperfect people like us, to share the message of you and who you are and what you want with other people. So Lord, we ask that you'd allow us to do that with endurance, that we would be wise and not be stumbling blocks to other people. Lord, show us what it means to serve you as your servants in powerful ways. We all need that and you know each one of us needs it in a different way. So I ask for your Spirit to speak to each person here today right now. That in this quietness of this moment that you would reveal what it means to serve you and to give you our lives one hundred percent. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.