

Series: YOUR MISSION! February 3, 2008

**LAYING IT ALL ON THE LINE
1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 15:58**

I. INTRO

- A. I have a question for you. What do **you** think is the most dangerous object in your house? Let me give you some facts. A professor of philosophy at the University of Hawaii named Larry Laudan has written a book about risk—and he has a whole chapter on household risks.
1. Now, some of these—you'd suspect—like the fact that every year in America, 460,000 people are injured by kitchen knives—and 100,000 are injured by saws of some kind. That's not real surprising.
-But did you know that **draperies** are dangerous? Every year, 20 people are strangled to death by drapery cords—probably spying on their neighbors. And, get this, 4000 people seriously injure themselves on **pillows**. How the heck do you injure yourself on a pillow!? Imagine going into an emergency room where they ask, "So. How did you get hurt?" "I don't want to tell you!" "You have to—or we can't help!" Well—I—uhh—it happened with a pillow!"
 2. So. What I want you to do is turn to the person next to you and guess—what is **the most dangerous** object in your house? Just take a guess.
-Anyone want to know what it is? It's an **easy** chair. We don't buy these things because they're beautiful—as you can tell—but because they're **comfortable**. The top selling brand of easy chair is—guess? La-Z-Boy. Not **Risky** Boy or **Wor-Ker-Boy**. Lazy-Boy! That says something, doesn't it?
-Anyone have any idea what this can do to a human life? Let's get some slippers, comfort food, remote control. Man, I'm ready for an evening of excitement!
-Don't I look like a person who's gonna spring into action and revolutionize the world? Lay everything on the line and do something truly **great**? Maybe not.
- B. If you look at homes, cars, ads, food—just about **anything**, it's clear that we live in a world system that would tell you that **comfortable, risk-free, prosperous** living is what life is all about.
-In fact, at almost **every** decision-making crossroad we face, **comfort** is one of the options. It's appealing, isn't it? But the pain-free, stress free option has consequences, too. What's dangerous about choosing the **La-Z-Boy** option is not what you'll do while you're in the chair; it's the stuff you **won't** do. The people you'll never serve—because you've never seen them—and the exhilaration of a life that never gets invested.
-And that's the question isn't it? What will you invest your life in? We've been doing the **Mission Impossible** thing; what makes those movies fascinating is how those who have been given the mission will lay their lives on the line to get it done! There is no pay-off—or respect—for having a critically important mission—and throwing leftovers at it.
-So, what, to you, is worth **dying** for? Or, better yet, **living** for? You know—totally invest in, break a sweat for; get off the couch, out of bed, miss a meal, sell your car, go without...for?
-We've been talking about Jesus' mission to bring hope and life to this planet; transform it's people—for now—and eternity. I want to tell you why I believe His cause is worth everything. And then you'll have to decide what you believe.

II. ALIGNING THE 'gods' UNDER JESUS

- A. If you were to ask a ant what the point of his or her life was, they would tell you, "to build an underground community!" If you were to ask a worker bee, the answer would be, "to serve the Queen Bee." Some guys would give the same answer. If you were to ask a dog, it would be, "to get hoover up scraps of food, sleep...and sniff." If you were ask cats what the point of their miserable lives were, they would say, "to get the humans to serve us."

-It gets more complicated with humans. Bill Hybels tells the story of how, when he was about 18, his Dad gave him an handful of airplane tickets and told him to go see the world. I think it was in some fancy motel in Brazil where he overheard a 60-something guy say to his wife, "Well, Ethel—we've worked hard, and saved all our lives—and now we're finally here! It **doesn't get any better than this!**" When he heard that, Bill said a feeling of terror swept over him, "They've worked and saved all their lives—**this** is the pinnacle—and **I'm** here at 18!"

1. What people say is worth living for varies hugely. Most of the answers have to do with success—to excitement—to staying safe and comfortable. Your life is kinda like a car. It will tend to go where you aim it. If you aim your life at staying safe and comfortable, that's where it will go.
2. Paul, early leader in the way of Jesus, wrote that the mission He was a part of—**Jesus'** mission of reconciling all people and all things to God—was worth every sacrifice he'd ever made. After listing all the credentials he once staked his life on, He says this:

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. (Philippians 3:7-9 NLT).

-Then after talking about how he had given up all his personal rights to help reach the people Jesus laid down his life for, he says these challenging words:

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT)

- a. Sports was a **big** deal to the people of Corinth.

A 14,000 seat coliseum dominated the landscape in Corinth—in which they hosted the Isthmian Games every other year. So everyone could relate to this imagery.

- b. I only knew one Olympic athlete well. Jungle Jim Hunter—who won the Bronze in the 1972 Olympic games and competed in the 1976 Olympics.

His training was crazy—and his style of downhill skiing—fearless. Which, of course, is why he got called Jungle Jim.

-I know this. For Jim—training for the Olympics was a full-time job—from the age of 11 on. He actually had to quit school—and, from the age of 14 on, it was push, push, push. What Paul is saying is quite true; you can't do the couch potato thing—the La-Z-boy thing—and **win**.

3. Let's get clear on this. Paul is not talking about some competition God is running for salesperson of the year—or best Bible-thumper, or best argument winner, or who can give up the most—suffer the most.
 - Paul is saying, "What God is doing to restore this world and it's people to what they were created to be--one person, one kingdom at a time—is **THE most important thing going on**—in time, in history, and in eternity."
 - When we engage our love, our time, our passion and our resources in what God is doing, we **will** make an eternal difference in the lives and souls of others. It won't just change their character and the trajectory of their lives—it has the potential of changing everyone who comes into contact with them. It is a **massive** opportunity! It is the single most **profound** thing you and I can with the one and **only** life we've been given.
 - That's** why Paul says—"don't mess around with this! Don't play games! Don't throw leftover scraps of time and money and effort at it like it's some hobby! Even though you can't see it now—this...**this** is the race that's worth the best you've got! This isn't a jog through the neighborhood. This isn't a little run-and-sweat thing on the treadmill. This is the one race that counts. You will **not** want to screw this up.

B. Now, given the profound nature of this—and the chance to team up with the God of the universe, why wouldn't someone want to throw themselves right into what He's doing? Well...?

1. Some people—maybe a number of you--would honestly say, "I'm really not even sure about the God thing—or who Jesus was." That's **fair**. You need more information before you sign on. And Jesus said to do that. "Count the cost" were His words.
2. To be honest, there's another reason why people who've been hanging around the church for a long time have never fully engaged. It's a kind of dualism—or compartmentalization that goes on in their hearts. It looks like this:

GOD...CHURCH...WORLD.

God is kind of this Deity who lives in the Church—but never engages in the real world. People come to Church to visit God on weekends when they can—and do their 'God thing.' But the **rest** of their lives are water-tight compartments where God is irrelevant.

-That, friends, is the **classic** struggle God's people have had all through history. "This is my **official** God—but when it need good fortune, success, money, health, comfort—I go to the **other** gods."

3. People in our world do the very same thing—except they use different titles. In the marketplace—the god of money is who people listen to. In our relational world, people take their cues from their friends. In the sexual arena people follow the

teachings of Sex In The City god, or the Playboy god, or the Animal House god—where people get their information and values.

-If you want to live with integrity—you can't compartmentalize your life. All your worlds have to line up under **one** set of values. Under **one** God. Either Jesus is Lord...or He's not. You either **belong** to Him—because you were bought by Him—paid for on the cross with His blood—or you don't.

C. So. Jesus **is** Lord of all. What He says is true for every Christ follower, right? We know these things: He created everything. He is Sovereign over every kingdom in this world. He has the power to set leaders up—or take them down. Right now, as I speak, he is at work behind the scenes in **every** situation on this planet. **EVERY** situation—whether it's in the Kremlin or the White House; the corporate boardrooms of Wal-Mart—or a kitchen table in the Appalachian mountains of Kentucky. And if you have given your life to Him—you **belong** to Him, and He **belongs** to you.

-What that means—to just say it plainly is that the **purpose** of my life is not about me. And the purpose of your life—**is not about you**. It's about Him. All of that is very clear in what the Bible teaches. Why is it such a struggle for us?

1. Mainly because the value system of the world system we live in every day—and God's value system—are very different. Sometimes opposite to each other.
 - The world system hates weakness. God says, "When you're weak—when you realize how small you really are—**then** I can do something!"
 - The world system says, "Of **course** it's all about you!" Jesus says, "If you make your life all about yourself, you'll **lose** it!"
 - The world system says, "Love your friends and the people who deserve it most." God says, "Love your enemies."
 - The world system says, "Money and success and fame are symbols of how important you are." God says, "Money and success and fame are false gods; they promise a lot—and deliver **nothing** of eternal value."
2. Think about it for a minute. What if the people who've made the most difference in the world had put their own personal comfort, safety and success first? Imagine Jesus saying, "Okay, Father. I'll go down and help those who are lost to You. With one condition. That you don't ask me to do anything painful, uncomfortable or humiliating!"
 - Imagine Martin Luther King standing in Washington and saying, "I have a dream...! My dream is for a safe and comfortable life for my family!"
 - Imagine Mother Theresa saying, "I really do care about the poor and the dying—but I **really** don't like dirt and disease."
 - All through history people have dreamed great dreams for their lives, for the future, for their people, for the world—but the ones who actually made a difference **laid it ALL on the line**.
 - Friends, **anything** worthwhile in this world has a price tag. We just have to decide if we're going to **do** something worthwhile. And you have to remember—choosing what's safe and comfortable has a price-tag, too.

III. WHY SHOULD ANYONE DO SOMETHING SO CRAZY?

A. I'll tell you what I believe is the single biggest obstacle that keeps people—maybe you—from **laying it all on the line**. Fear. Most of us have felt it. Some of you are choking it back right now. You're thinking, "Oh, oh! God's going to make some kind of demand on me that will make my life weird and miserable!"

-Personally—I've found that, if we'll allow Him to, He'll set us **free!** He will ask you to face your fears—like, face to face. That's what I'm going to ask you to do.

1. Let me set it up like this. Anyone here run marathons? Okay, let me talk to the rest of you. How many of you could go out, right now—this afternoon—and run a marathon—if you tried really, really, **really** hard? How many of you think you might be able to run a marathon if you had an expert by your side encouraging you, teaching you, coaching you day after day after day for 3 years?

–When it comes to doing **anything** with excellence, whether it's a marathon, playing the guitar, becoming a surgeon, or a computer geek, it takes **training. Practice. Time.** I want you to look carefully at what Paul says in this passage:

So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

(1 Corinthians 9:26 NLT)

–See the words? **Purpose...not just shadow-boxing...discipline...training.** I can hear some of you groan. Ohhhhh. That sound like work—like ...*exercise!* I was hoping for something a little easier."

How many of you had some form of schooling? Why did you do that? Why not sit home, eat chips, drink beer, and watch Family Guy re-runs? You did it because—well, maybe your parents made you. But hopefully because you felt that there would be a pay-off. It's called **delayed gratification**. The other is called **instant self-gratification**.

2. Now, my assumption is that everyone here wants to make a difference. I would define that as being able to look back at the end of life, and say, "I did my best, I served well, I was generous with those in need—there are people whose lives were forever changed because my path intersected theirs."

–As I mentioned before—no one drifts into that, where one day you suddenly you have all this extra money, time and energy. That doesn't happen with anything worthwhile.

a. You first of all have to offer yourself to God. To feel the weight of Jesus' words about loving and serving others—that even He, the Son of Man did not come to be served—to consume—but to serve and give his life away for others.

–Then you will have to choose to make **space** in your life to do it. Your schedule will not just clear itself up. If it's jammed, you'll probably have to choose to **not** do something you're **now** doing, and so you can serve others. We think we can help you with your first attempts at serving—which is why we have all these booths out there—and there are **lots** of options.

–Your first time at it might be like my first day on the violin. It was awful! Cats mated, dogs howled, small children ran for their mothers. It was ugly.

It took a **long** time before my playing was presentable. And that's the way it is—especially with hard stuff. And serving is **hard**—at least at first. -But you see, in a culture with a consumer mindset like ours, serving will require some adjustment.

- b. My calling as a leader is to equip—help—**everyone** to serve. And we're prepared to do whatever it takes along that line. Please understand, as followers of Jesus, we are called—not to be **excellent consumers** of worship, teaching, and various other services of others—but to **SERVE** others in love! Jesus made that clear. He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to **be** served—but to serve and give his life." But you have to **choose** to serve.
- Time is precious. Probably the most precious commodity we have. If we're ever going to give it away, there has to be this sense that this is not The Olive Branch calling us because the organization needs more volunteers. The calling has to come from God. He gifts. He gives the opportunity. He calls. And at the end of time, He rewards. You serve because you have chosen to follow Jesus—and part of following is serving. Not when you've retired and have a bunch of time on your hand. Now. When it's awkward, messy, costly, and inconvenient.
3. Since I've already waded into it—I'm going to wade in even deeper and talk about giving—and generosity. One of the words that is **most** descriptive of God is generosity. He is **generous**. He made this earth—and gave it to us. We needed to be redeemed—He gave His Son. What we sometimes don't see is that every day—He gives, and gives, and gives, and gives. In fact, it's so regular—we think everything we have is ours. It **feels** like it's ours—because our accounts, homes, cars and titles are in **our** names.
- But the truth is—God has entrusted to us all we have. His plan is to work in our hearts, to soften them, to create generous hearts. And when our hearts get soft and generous—our hands loosen up. We stop saying the little word we learned as toddlers and have been saying ever since, **MINE! IT'S MINE!** And we realize that we have been given the privilege of having a lot in a world of need. But with that privilege comes responsibility. To whom much is given, **much** is required. Friends, more than **anyone else in the world**, we have the chance, on God's behalf, to experience the extreme blessing of giving to others. Being generous, so that what God loves and cares about in this world gets done; gets cared for.
- a. But giving won't just happen spontaneously. See, our first urge is to cling to it. So giving takes some training. Some discipline. Some pain. And it takes faith. God starts his followers out slow. He says, "Why not set aside a tenth of what you have—and give that."
- That simply act says to us and to God, "I know who owns what. You own—I manage!" And when we give—people hear truth that transforms their lives, the poor get cared for, and the beauty of God's generosity is seen through His children. it.
- The point is not that we stop there--which God's people have sometimes done. "There you go, God. You **got** your tenth—I counted it out to the penny." The point is that we would train! Learn faith, understand how,

when we have a spout on our lives, God gives us all we need. Over time we realize that what Jesus taught us is true. We don't have to worry. We are free to give our money and our stuff and our lives away.

- b. God's plan for every follower is that they feel the pinch of giving—and the incredible blessing of living a generous life. That we always have enough. We can give more. That generosity is one of the most beautiful things in the world.
-I can honestly say, I have **never...NEVER** met a person who felt cheated by giving. I **have** heard people say, "Why didn't I do this before?"
- c. But you—**you** have to take a deep breath—and just **try** giving. **Test** God! The giving muscle is like any muscle; if it hasn't been used much, it may get a little sore in the process of being exercised. Jesus calls us to—we have this chance in this life to do it--and we either decide to obey—or not.
-When you begin giving—it's like you begin to see the world the way God does. You see the potential of taking this same stuff that everyone fights over—and changing eternities with it instead of buying more stuff.
- d. So—I want to dare you! **Try it.** Start on the bunny slope--with a tenth. God owns it all—and that part belongs to him anyway. If that makes palms sweat and your mouth go dry—lick your palms! No—try starting lower. Just take one small step!
-By the way, anyone think maybe the Governing Board has sent me up here to raise extra money? If you do—then give your money somewhere else where it will make a difference.

-If you try giving a tenth over six months and wind up in real need—I'll personally refund your money. Do we have a deal?

-If you wait until you have a bunch of leftover money—you will end your life **never having had the privilege of being generous.** And that would be a tragedy for your soul—especially when we have more than 95% of the world.

4. Jesus said that His Kingdom—His leadership—his work to bring the Shalom of God to everyone—**for the sake of the world**—is like a treasure someone finds in a field—then sells **everything** off to buy it. The question is—**was Jesus telling the truth?** If so--will you invest your life? Will you lay it **all** on the line?

- B. Know what I've been talking about all along here, really? Faith. Is the Bible really true? Can God really be trusted? Does Kingdom life work in the real world? Only you can make the decision on that.
-There's a part to faith that you have to learn through study or teaching about the character and power of God. But there's a part to faith that you never, ever learn until you **act** on it. It's like little kids standing on the edge of a pool, with their Mom or Dad saying, "Jump! I'll catch you!" Some kids just go for it. Others come up to the edge, go back, come up the edge, whimper and cry, then go back—and wait until next year! But eventually, if they're going to find out that Mom or Dad is trustworthy—that have to actually **jump!**

-In fact, I'm going to see if you have faith in me. How many of you think I can make this La-Z-Boy chair disappear from this stage? How many of you think I'm full of hot air? Let's try it. Shazam! Zippity do-da! WHATEVER!!!

(lights go out. Several guys run up the aisle—carry the chair out the door. Lights come back up) See?

-There *is* a point to this. Two, actually.

1) Don't put your faith in me!

2) If you pursue comfort and safety, it will ultimately disappear. Guaranteed.

1. Put your faith in God.

And the main barrier to that would be...? Fear. Everyone feels it—no matter how brave they appear. It goes something like this: “What if I let Jesus be in charge—and I just give Him the keys to the whole thing, all the rooms, all I do, everything—and He asks me to give it all up? What if He asks me to be single? To move? To change my lifestyle? To give up golf, movies, shopping, my boyfriend, my...?”

-The only way to break through this barrier is...? Trust. To trust, you have to **know**. If a person you met last week comes up and asks to borrow \$1000, would you do it? What if it's a friend you've had for 20 years? Love, friendship changes everything. The Bible says:

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

(1 John 4:18 NIV)

-But **ultimately** you have to bridge that last little bit of uncertainty. You swallow the last bit of fear—and walk toward it.

2. And that's what the Bible calls **faith**. The Bible says that without faith it's impossible to please God. I'd say—it's impossible to do **anything** without some kind of faith. Without faith you'd never fly on a plane, drive, apply for a job, get married or have kids. The point is—to put your faith in something, **Someone** rock solid, right? Something, **Someone** who won't let you down—cheat you, break your heart, kill you.

-Where are you going to put your faith—when it comes to your life—and when it comes to eternity. You and I have one shot at this. Your life is something only **you** can invest. And you will invest it somewhere. You will. People do it every hour of every day. Some invest their lives in staying safe and comfortable. Some invest in being important and successful. According to Jesus—**wise** people invest—lay everything on the line—where it will last forever; in what **He's** up to.

3. I'm not going to make any promises about what it will be like. I do know this—if you're looking for adventure, if you're looking for something that will make your heart beat fast—that will give you the thrill of changing lives—and changing this world, one person at a time—**I'd invest in what Jesus is up to**

4. I'm a little surprised at how this passage ends. Paul says, “I practice what I preach. I give my best, train, run to win...”

Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:27 NLT)

-You’d think, “Man, Paul—you’ve got enough dedication, enough action, enough exercise stored up for a *long* time!” But Paul was wise. He knew how life is—that sometimes best athletes press hard for a long time-- and then get soft. Retire. Open donut shops. Right before his death, he said,

The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NLT).

And *then* he said this about a close co-worker,

Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. (2 Timothy 4:10 NLT)

-Remember Jungle Jim Hunter? I used to *envy* his physique! I don’t any more. He now gives lectures on training—but he weighs about 300 pounds.

I guess it’s hard to stop eating like an athlete when you stop training like an athlete!

IV. CLOSING

A. This past week, I had an astounding experience. I’m taping the Guinness Book of Records top 100 people—with *bizarre* records—longest finger nails, picking up weights with your teeth, a guy tattooed like a leopard.

-On the other channel, we’re watching Extreme Home Makeovers—a team of nameless people whose names will be in no ones book—giving themselves to build a new home for a family who’s lost everything in a flood.

-I thought about that from the perspective of eternity. God asks, “So. What did you do with your one and only life?” Well—I grew really, *really* long fingernails! I popped my eyes out! I held the world worm-eating record!” “Really? Hmmm.”

B. Remember the original Mission Impossible? The record would say, “This is your mission, should you choose to accept it. This tape will self-destruct...” The messages we get every hour of every day—urging us to go for comfort, live for ourselves are appealing. But are they true and real? Everyone has to decide who they’ll believe—people trying to sell them stuff—or Jesus. Who you believe will determine whether or not you ever fulfill the mission, the purpose of your life. It’s your choice. Choose well.