

Paul's Example

by Gary Sharp

Duration: 26:10

Transcript

2nd Corinthians, please, chapter 12, 2nd Corinthians, chapter 12, and verse 15. 2nd Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 15. I don't know if you're anything like me, but sometimes I can read through a whole chapter without knowing what it's talking about.

And often I get a little wake-up call because I read something and it just strikes me. And I have to confess that one day when I was reading this chapter, I got down to this verse that we're going to read just now, and I had to stop myself and ask, what have I just been reading? Anyway, let's read it, verse 15. And I, I will, I will very gladly, I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

Go back, please, to verse 1. 2nd Corinthians 12 and 1. So what I did, it is not expedient for me, doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knows such an one, caught up to the third heaven.

And I knew such a man, whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I will not glory. But in mine infirmities, for though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool, for I will say the truth.

But now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be. This always stops me. I don't know many men like this, who really don't want to be esteemed above what they are.

But that's what he says, says I don't want anyone to think of me above that which he seeth me to be. Verse 7. Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations. There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure for this thing.

I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me, and he said unto me, My grace, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made, or is being made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore, most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I don't know many men like this either.

Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities and reproaches and necessities and persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong. Down to verse 14.

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you. For I seek not yours, but you, for the children, not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

Trust that God will bless what we've read from his own precious Word. Are you focused? Have you got your mind centered on something? Are you determined about one thing? Have you kind of just put it before you and that's your goal? Here's a man, and everything we know about him tells us that he was focused, that he was determined, that he was driving towards one goal. Notice what he says.

I think we get his wisdom revealed in these words. He says, I will spend and be spent. And he's not talking about money.

He's talking about his life. He's talking about his skills. He's talking about his abilities.

He's talking about what he is to others. He says, I will be spent to exhaust my spending, to spend wholly, completely, to be used up. It's used of one who consumes his strength and his life and his days on behalf of others.

Are you focused? Oh, wouldn't we be? Wouldn't we be wealthier, richer in our Christian life if only we learned what it was to pour out our lives for others? I want you to notice not only his wisdom, I want you to know his way. Do you see it? Most gladly. I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, very gladly.

It's not the first time he used it. He used it in previous verses. And it was more than just the habit of his life, more the habit of his life.

It wasn't grudgingly. It wasn't reluctantly. It was with pleasure.

He says, most gladly will I spend and be spent, used up completely for you. You know, anybody like that? You know, this man, he encourages us to be like him in that he also followed Christ. And the example he gives us here is very clearly Christ-like, isn't it? That was his way, his wisdom.

He says, I'll spend it all for you. Of course, it brings back the thinking of Jim Elliott, doesn't it? He is no fool, no fool who gives up what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose. Are you going out for what you can't lose? Going in for others, for the sake of Christ, in a way that shows that this is the joy, this is the delight, this is the thing that moves you on.

I will very gladly spend and be spent for you. Notice, not just his way, but his will. Though the more abundantly, I love you.

Have you shaped your will so it reveals the love of Christ towards others? The more abundantly, I love you. Here's his will revealed. Agapeo is the, and I'm no Greek scholar, but it's the love of intelligence.

I wonder if we show that we love with intelligence, with purpose, with reason. And phileo love is a beautiful love, but this kind of love outranks phileo love of personal affection. It can find a reason in another.

In spite of there being no reason, Paul says, the more abundantly, I will love you. Who is this man anyway? What kind of a man is he? Well, obviously, he's very practical. He knows he understands that

there is a cost if you're going to go in for loving others, if you're going to show kindness and care and a shepherd's heart.

He knows it costs, and it costs big time. He says, and I will very gladly spend it all for you. Who is this man? I was thinking he was a man who was under divine control.

You remember his early prayer, Lord, what will you have me to do? Are you a man under divine control? Are you a person who's heard his voice, who understands his purpose, who is willing to get as close to him as you can, who is willing to grasp the purposes of God that he has for you, and to do it with all your heart, with a love like this, and with joy in your soul, finding in it your deepest pleasure. Oh, sometimes it's so easy to get discouraged in this business of loving others, of caring for others, of providing for others. Here's a man who's determined.

I will most gladly spend and be spent, used up for you. He was a man under divine control. If I read my Bible right, I believe that this was a man who knew a lot of communion with God.

Are you such a person? Do you enjoy communion with the Almighty, whether it's in prayer, or in the reading of the scriptures, or whether it's in following up what you know by the actions that begin to look like Christ? A man who enjoyed much communion with God, even in this chapter, reminded of a man who had a transcending experience with God. Have you had any experience like that with God? To have your view open up, to have divine understanding poured in, enjoyed communion with God. He had a look, he had a look, and that look captivated his heart.

You ever had a look at Calvary? Ever saw one hanging on a tree, and agonies and blood? One who gave his all on your behalf? One who bought you for himself at such a price? Here's a man who had a look. Oh, I tell you, we need our eyes opened. We need our hearts stirred.

If you're satisfied with just keeping rules and never really getting to the person who redeemed you, then you're missing out. Here's this man. He had a sight of a greater glory.

I tell you, we could sure use that. There's a greater glory than anything you'll find in this world. You may go after the stuff of life.

You may get a mighty big portion of it, but there'll be nothing to compare with the joys of having a look at the glory, the glory that he reveals. This man, he knew, he knew something about communion with God. Once you notice his will, he was a man who had a thorn in the flesh that said, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, verse 7. And you know, there's lots of speculation about what it was.

It may even have been a recurring temptation. I tell you, I just want to apply that for a moment, because we are surrounded with temptation. Temptation to just go on with life and forget there's another world coming.

Temptation. Oh, the vilest sorts of things are presented in the most appealing ways. We can feel the draw, the pull, sometimes even the push of others who have gone that way.

And we're encouraged to follow. Undoubtedly, this thorn was in the flesh. It hurt, and maybe he chafed about it.

You know, just like you and I, when we have challenges that we have to face, why sometimes it just goes so deep, and it hurts so much, and we just can't help talking about it. But I wonder why it was this man was so stressed about it. I believe it was because it hindered him.

It hindered him from being all that he wanted to be. He had greater goals in view. What kind of goals do you have? You know, if you don't need to be honest with me, be honest with yourself.

What's your heart set on? What are you aiming at? What is it that you're pursuing? Here's this man, and undoubtedly whatever it was had a balancing effect in his life. And this was a man who learned, verse 9, that God's grace, God's grace is sufficient. He heard the voice of God in the midst of his challenges.

And even though this man perhaps was stressed because it hindered him from doing more for his Lord, he heard the voice of his Lord saying, my grace is sufficient for you. It's enough. It's what you need.

I brought you this way so that you could learn this lesson as you could never have learned it before. God's grace, it's enough. It's enough for a servant who wants to please God.

It's enough for a man who wants to be closer to his Lord. It's enough as we seek to serve him, whether it's in gospel or teaching God's people or shepherding amongst the Lord's own. He says, my grace, it's enough.

Thank God that grace gives favor, favor that you can feel, you can sense. It gives joy and pleasure like the world can never ever provide. And it's that influence of God that kindles us to want to be more like his Son, the Lord Jesus.

And God's grace is enough. It's sufficient. I was thinking of this man, not only was he a man who had known communion and who was under divine control, a man who knew what conflict was.

As he experienced this thorn in the flesh that troubled him, he says, for which I besought the Lord thrice. It wasn't a little issue. And I don't know what you're facing today, but I know this.

If you want to please God, you'll experience certain things that will seem as though they're your life's biggest challenge. And yet in the midst of it, to know his voice speaking into your life, saying, my grace, it's enough. This man, he was committed.

He practiced what he preached. That's a good thing, of course. He practiced what he preached, and he labored.

He labored unceasingly. What kept this man going? He wrote, and he wrote a lot to encourage others. You ever think of taking up your pen and writing something to encourage someone just to lift their spirit, just to tell them you've been thinking of them? And maybe you don't know what they're passing through, but you just want them to know that they come into your prayer life.

Their faces come up in your vision and your concern for them. He labored. Yes, and he prayed.

Prayed for God's own. And he yielded himself unreservedly to the calling of his God. Where are you at with that? You know, into every life, into every life, there's a crisis that comes.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies, oh, the full range of them, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, perfectly reasonable, perfectly expected of

God. Have you come and taken the first step all to Jesus? I surrender. I surrender all.

All my beings' ransomed powers, have you ever turned it all over to him? Have you ever yielded your life for him, for what he wants, for what he's designed you for? Here's a man who was committed to what he preached. And his practice certainly gave evidence that he had yielded himself unreservedly to whatever God wanted him to do. I want you to think of one more thing in this man's case.

He was a man who had a crown waiting for him. Do you? He had a crown waiting for him. I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a righteousness.

And not to me only. You see, he had a wider view. His life was not all about him and his stuff and his things and his accomplishments.

This was a man who had a crown waiting for him. And he lived as though he was just such a one looking for the blessed hope and the appearing in glory. Ah, that glory.

Get your eye on of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you focused? Are you centered? Have you set in your mind and heart to go forward with God? And maybe someday to be able to say in a fuller way than now, most gladly, will I be spent for you. Even though the more abundantly I love you, your reward's not here.

Even though the more abundantly I love you, the less I'd be loved. You say, how could it be? You wouldn't love a man like this. Well, sadly, it's so.

Oftentimes, why their example embarrasses us. Their life for God is such a record. The feel we can never compare.

But here's this man, and he clearly says, I'm going to say it again. I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for you, though the more abundantly. Yeah, he went overboard in it.

The more abundantly I love you, the less I'd be loved. May God bless us.

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