

“Called:Be Steadfast”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Graphics: phone, world, calling

Big Truth: The grace of God was poured out into the first century church through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The early church was called by God to receive that grace and live as holy saints because of Jesus. God’s grace and a life of holiness leads the church to be steadfast when struggle comes, to be unified when division seeks to tear it apart, to be wise when the world’s wisdom seeks to confuse, to be Spirit-filled when the supernatural is dismissed, and to be ready for Jesus to move in new ways. We are called to be the Church for today and always by God’s grace given to us through Jesus and the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: God’s grace calls us to be steadfast in the midst of struggle.

1. Introduction

- A. I read a short statement someone posted on social media a few weeks ago that got me thinking. It simply said this: “If the Apostle Paul were alive today, the church in America would be getting a letter.”
- B. Paul was one of the most passionate church planters in all of Christian history. He couldn’t lead every church, personally. So, after the church got established, Paul would move on as the Spirit led him. Often, when he was away from a church or in prison or something, he’d write letters to those churches.
- C. Paul’s letters to the brand new churches in the first century were a way to help them live into the fullness of God’s plans for the Church (capital C) and churches in a particular place and time.
- D. Much of the bible’s New Testament is made up of these epistles - the letters - from Paul to first century churches and church leaders. In those letters, Paul often would start with encouragement, thanksgiving, and praise for the faithfulness of the people of those churches. But Paul also spoke truth into those churches - to re-orient them on their path - sometimes rebuking them for what he saw in their midst. His goal was always to set the churches on the path that leads to God’s hopeful future in Christ Jesus.
- E. We know that the Church today, no matter where it’s found, has much work to do to fulfill it’s mission and vision. And because the church is not the buildings, but the people, we also know that there are always challenges that we (I) bring to the mix, because of our sinful natures.
- F. Yet, despite that, I know two things for certain: (1) we are sinners saved by God’s grace, which allows us to meet the challenges we have in loving and gracious ways, and (2) we are CALLED to be more than we are now for today and for every tomorrow.
- G. This new sermon series is entitled: **Called**. Paul’s letters have one very distinctive and consistent message: “You, church (in such-and-such a place),

are CALLED to be holy and to live out that holiness in the world, so that ALL will know that Jesus Christ is Lord...and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is poured into the church for the work of making disciples of Jesus.

- H. You and I - in THIS church and every church - are CALLED.
- I. We'll spend time in the first 3 chapters of Paul's first letter to the young church in Corinth. In those first three chapters, Paul called the church in Corinth to BE steadfast, to BE unified, to BE wise, to BE Spirit-filled, and BE ready.
- J. We, as a church, have been, are having, and will have some of the same struggles the early church had. I would dare to say that, in addition, in this season, we have some unique challenges that the early church maybe didn't face. Yet, at the end of the day, we can learn and grow from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. We can look in the mirror and then respond to the same invitation they had to live into God's holiness.
- K. WE TOO are called to be steadfast, unified, wise, Spirit-filled, and ready.
- L. This morning, we'll begin with God's call to **be steadfast**. In the midst of turmoil or change or whatever else might slow or stymie our missional growth in holiness, **God's grace calls us to be steadfast in the midst of struggle**. Make a note of that somewhere this morning.
- M. **Let's Pray! (Jesus you are Lord...)**
- N. In your bibles, let's turn to Paul's letter...1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 1.

2. Scripture

A. READ 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

- i. This letter has the typical opening for letters from Paul, and for letters in the first century. Unlike our modern-day letters, correspondence in the first century identified the sender of the letter up front, as a way of giving the reader some context and a heads-up.
- ii. Paul wrote that this letter was from him and from a guy names Sosthenes, of whom we know very little.
- iii. The important thing for us to understand about this opening statement is that Paul was establishing his **authority** by reminding the church that he was **CALLED to be an Apostle of Christ Jesus...by the will of God**.
 - a. Two things to understand here. The first is that being CALLED has a very specific meaning. The second is the office of apostle.
 - i) First, being CALLED was not something that one chose. Being called is an election or a calling out from others.
 - ii) Called people are believers who are set apart for God by God's grace.

- iii) Every believer is CALLED, but some believers are called for a specific purpose or task. In Paul's case, he was called to be an apostle - he was set apart, by God's undeserved favor, to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.
 - iv) An *apostle* was more than simply a title. In the early parts of the first century, an **apostle** was an *office* (for lack of a better term) held by those who had been in direct contact with the risen Jesus.
 - v) And, in this case, Paul was reminding the church that he was an apostle SO THAT what he was about to write would carry the full weight of the office to which he'd been called by God. Paul's authority came from Jesus, whose authority came from the Father.
 - vi) This opening sentence gives us a bit of a clue of what Paul was about to write in this letter. He would need to have the full weight of the office to which he was called...clueing us in that some truth needed to be spoken to the church - which we'll get into later in the letter.
- iv. Having established ALL of THAT, Paul then tells the church to whom he is writing: the church of God that in is Corinth. Then, he adds some sugar and a cherry on top: to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called (set apart for God's purpose, remember) to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...grace to you and peace from God (remember Paul is an apostle who speaks with the authority of God) and Jesus.
- a. Along with establishing his authority, Paul said that...
 - i) The Corinthians are being **sanctified** - meaning they are being transformed and made into the image of Jesus himself.
 - ii) The Corinthians are called to be **saints** - meaning that they're believers who are holy and following Jesus, claimed by God, AND,
 - iii) They are in this with everyone everywhere who are also being transformed and called to be saints. With this one sentence, Paul placed the Corinthian church into the grand scheme of God's plan for the Church universal.
 - b. "Grace and peace to you, from God and Jesus..."
- v. That's the context that will carry us through this whole series: the believers in the church are growing, changing, claimed by God to be used BY God, together with all others doing the same thing. AND, I would add, that includes US right here in Panama in 2023. Let's read on...

B. READ 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

- i. "I give thanks to God for the GRACE that has been given to you in Christ Jesus..."

- ii. GRACE is an incredible gift from God. In fact, as Wesleyan Methodists, grace is a central theme of our faith and heritage.
 - iii. Grace is the God's **undeserved favor given** to every saint because He wants to bless us. Grace is what God pours into the life of every believer and church when the Holy Spirit is present.
 - iv. Grace, as the presence of the Holy Spirit, is also what brings life-transformation into the life of a saint - a believer. It brings an increase in knowledge of God and speech to proclaim His truth. And, as the people see Jesus as work more and more, they also are strengthened in their faith.
 - v. Paul, rightfully, was thankful for that grace in the Corinthians, KNOWING that with grace came the fruit of their ministry to share their faith in Jesus.
- C. But the thing that Paul was most thankful for was that grace **strengthened** them.
- i. In verse 6, Paul said that the testimony of Christ - their witness in the world - has been **strengthened** as they waited for the return of Jesus.
 - ii. Then, in verse 8, Paul wrote that God would **strengthen** them, not only today as they wait, but to the end, on the day of the Lord.
- D. In some translations, the word translated here as strength is **steadfastness**.
- E. The Greek word that Paul uses is *bebaioo* (βεβαιόω), which means *to make firm, establish, confirm, or make sure*. In a more literal translation, it means *properly guaranteed security*. This has the sense of assurance that what is happening and will happen is secure and confirmed by God.
- F. And Paul said that the strength would be for right now, as well as *to the end*. It has the sense that what they were doing as believers in Christ - what they believed, how they were living - would allow them to make it through whatever hardships they were facing now and forever.
- G. And, it had everything to do with grace, this undeserved favor of God through Christ, calling them to be holy saints.
- H. Let me see if I can summarize this:
- i. God is full of grace and wants to bless us with his undeserved favor.
 - ii. He proved that by sending Jesus to die on the cross and be raised to life.
 - iii. When Jesus returned to heaven, he sent the presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - iv. The Holy Spirit is the vehicle for God's grace in our lives.
 - v. That grace empowers the church with spiritual gifts in order to build up the church and glorify God.

vi. When the church uses its gifts and stays on mission, God's grace allows us to not only be strengthened today, but to be steadfast until the end, when Jesus returns to set all things right.

I. Paul ended this section by simply saying, as if we forgot - God IS faithful (God will uphold His end of the relationship with us); by Him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

J. The fellowship is the church. So, every believer IN every church is called to dive into this pool of grace called THE CHURCH in order to make disciples for Jesus through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

K. God's grace calls us to be steadfast in the midst of every struggle.

3. Application

A. So what? Let's get some application today. What does it take to be steadfast?

B. Henry Ford believed in the automobile. He pursued his dream. His good friend Thomas Edison said it wasn't a good idea. Ford was steadfast, persistent in his dream. Because of that, we're driving today.

C. The Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, believed that people could fly. They were discouraged by friends, journalists, and their own father. They pursued their vision and dream because they were steadfast.

D. Now, these are human endeavors and stories of steadfastness in the lives of inventors and explorers. Being steadfast is more than simply hoping or wanting something to be the case. Being steadfast is persistently overcoming obstacles that may stand in your way.

E. When Paul called the church in Corinth to **be steadfast**, he wasn't asking them to simply make sure they had enough money, enough ministries, or staff to make them feel like they were doing a great job.

F. No, when Paul called the church to **be steadfast**, he KNEW that they would be persecuted, misunderstood, and maligned by their culture. They would also have internal struggles, failures, and sin.

G. Being steadfast in your career or family is admirable. Being steadfast against the evil forces of this world trying to undermine the church that Jesus is building is something altogether different. The former takes some fortitude and ability. The latter takes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to defeat the doubt, discouragement, and fear that so easily entangle us.

H. It takes the **grace of God** working in the **people of God** to confidently follow a Savior to a cross and an empty grave, only then to be brought to a new awakening in Christ. It's dying to self and rising to serve Jesus in all that you do.

I. You are called! You are called to be steadfast! All believers are called to serve God...to be set apart for God's purposes.

- J. But, this series isn't focusing on what you, as an individual believer is to be doing as you stay steadfast in your walk with Christ.
- K. This series is all about the church being steadfast in the midst of a culture that looks more like the first century culture than it has in the previous 1000 years.
- L. In order for the Church - this church and every church - to be steadfast in this generation, we must:
 - i. Start with a **fresh awareness of God's grace** being poured onto the church.
 - a. This comes through faithful prayer and passionate worship, as we open ourselves to the supernatural movement of God on the earth...and right here in this sanctuary.
 - b. Awareness of God's grace takes an intentional invitation for the Holy Spirit to come in powerful ways into our hearts and minds...and our worship and prayer.
 - c. Let's spend time simply welcoming the grace of God to come upon our church as the Holy Spirit brings that grace. In God's grace, we will be steadfast.
 - ii. Then, let's **come together as saints** of a holy God.
 - a. We can help each other be steadfast in our small groups and men's and women's groups...and Sunday school classes...as we learn more about this God who shows up and brings His undeserved favor to us.
 - b. Let's find ways, in 2023, to reach outside the walls of the church to serve the community **together**. Let's get outside to find mission trip opportunities where we can share the love of God with others.
 - c. The church will be making some decision about our future in the weeks to come. But, this isn't just about our disaffiliation discernment. This is also about what ministries and missions we will engage in as a church, together - how we will serve and give together, and how we will live out our CALL to BE the church in 2023 and beyond.
 - d. As we love everyone who comes to be found by Jesus, we will grow together to be more and more steadfast. As we come together as saints, let's do whatever we do together - all in! Together, we can be steadfast!
 - iii. Finally, in order to be steadfast to the end, we must **teach the next generations** how to be steadfast until the day of the Lord.
 - a. Paul was pretty clear that God's grace will give the church strength for all times and places, until Jesus returns.
 - b. We can get weary of waiting and cry out to God, "How long?" But no matter what, our faith spurs us on to patient hope for the years to come.

- c. One of our main task is to raise up the next generation of Jesus followers and faithful leaders. This includes the littlest disciples among us, of course, but also those who will seek out the church of any age.
- d. When we begin to see more and more young people learning and leading us, we will be confident and steadfast in the future.
- e. The church of Jesus Christ will never cease to be until Jesus comes back and puts everything right again. May we be steadfast until that day!

4. Conclusion

- A. I'm not sure if Paul would send a letter to the church in America today or not. More likely, he would just show us the letter he wrote to the churches in the first century and try to help us see where we look like them.
- B. The Christian Church is in the midst of the next Great Awakening. Jesus is looking for churches who are steadfast, unified, wise, Spirit-filled, and ready.
- C. God's grace CALLS us to BE STEADFAST in the midst of struggle.
- D. Next week, Paul will challenge us to also **be unified**.
- E. For today, let the Holy Spirit increase your awareness of God's grace in order to make us more steadfast for today and always.
- F. **Let's pray...**