

**WHATEVER IT TAKES**  
I Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23

Pastors are used to being the targets of jokes. It goes with the territory. A parishioner had undergone a serious operation and was still under the influence of the sedative when his pastor came, so the pastor just said a prayer and left. The next day he returned and asked the patient if he had been aware of his visit. "I vaguely remember your visit yesterday. I remember opening my eyes and thinking 'I can't be in Heaven because **here is my pastor!**'" We are accustomed to being the targets of jokes and we are accustomed to being targets of criticism. You may have seen a letter in the "Dear Abby" column several years ago. It read like this:  
Dear Abby:

One of the toughest tasks a church faces is choosing a good minister. A member of an official board undergoing this painful process finally lost patience. He'd just witnessed the pastoral relations committee reject applicant after applicant for some minor fault . . . real or imagined. It was time for a bit of soul searching on the part of the committee. So he stood up and read this letter purported to be from an applicant.

*Gentlemen: Understanding your pulpit is vacant, I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I've been a preacher with much success and also have had some successes as a writer. Some say I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader most places I've been. I'm over 50 years of age and have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have left town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing. My health is not too good, though I still accomplish a great deal. The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I've not gotten along well with religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some have threatened me, and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records. I have been known to forget whom I have baptized. However, if you can use me, I promise to do my best for you."*

The board member turned to the committee and said, "Well, what do you think? Shall we call him?"

*The good church folks were appalled! Consider a sickly, trouble making, absent-minded ex-jailbird? Was the board member crazy? Who signed the application? Who had such colossal nerve? The board member eyed them all keenly before he replied, "It's signed, The Apostle Paul."*

There is more than a little truth to that parody. St. Paul couldn't seem to please anybody. It was a common practice in Jesus' day for prominent philosophers and teachers to charge a fee

for teaching and public speaking, but when Paul was in Corinth, he refused to do so. It's not that he thought he didn't deserve it. He is very clear on the fact that preachers and teachers of the Gospel deserve to get paid for their work. But Paul was grateful to God for all that God had done in his life, and he considered his salvation payment enough. Out of his great gratitude, he would willingly spread the Gospel for free. Evidently, some of the Corinthians criticized Paul, as if he weren't a real teacher if he didn't charge for his teachings.

Paul couldn't win. If he charged for his services, he offended some people, if he didn't charge, he offended others. Any pastor who thinks he or she is exempt from criticism ought to go back and read the New Testament. Still, like most pastors, Paul felt he was one of the most fortunate people in the world. Why? Because he had the privilege of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What were the characteristics of Paul's life that caused him to have such an impact on the world? What can we learn from his life that will empower our lives?

**First of all, St. Paul took the great commission very seriously.** What is the Great Commission? You know the great commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind." (Luke 10:27) The great commission is found in Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this--that I am with you always, even to the end of the world." (TLB)

St. Paul took these words of the Master very seriously. He writes, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." That was what St. Paul's life was about: to win as many people as possible to Christ and his church. St. Paul was on a mission. People on a mission change the world.

At the end of World War II, Robert Woodruff, president of the Coca-Cola company from 1923 to 1955, had a mission. "In my generation," he declared, "it is my desire that everyone in the world have a taste of Coca-Cola." With vision and dedication rarely matched in corporate American culture, Woodruff and his colleagues spanned the globe with their soft drink.

Why is it all right for people to feel that passionate about a soft drink but not about taking Christ to the world? Are there no places of darkness left where Christ's light needs to shine? Are there no families in crisis that need Christ's love and understanding? Are there none in poverty who need the gracious charity of the Master? Are there no teenagers in hopeless webs of drugs and violence who need to be liberated? Has our age of technological advance left us no problems which need to be alleviated, no wounds which only Divine Love can heal? St. Paul felt a passion. He was on a mission. You and I are in this room today two thousand years later because St. Paul was not deterred. He took the great commission seriously.

**In the second place, St. Paul was willing to do whatever it took to win people to Christ.** Listen to what he says, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law . . . so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . so as to win those not having the law." St. Paul was willing to do whatever it took to win people to Christ and Christ's church.

A motivational speaker once said there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say "whatever" and those who say, "whatever it takes." And he's right! Some people live their lives with the motto of a petulant teenager on their lips, "Whatever." Have you ever asked a young person to do something that you think is important and have them shrug their shoulders and respond, "Whatever?" Some people are like that with regard to their faith. In fact, let's turn this into a responsive reading. I'm going to make some statements. After each statement I want you to answer with a shrug, "Whatever." Say it with a loud sigh. "**Whatever.**" O.K., Jesus said to love your neighbor. "**Whatever.**" Jesus said there is more rejoicing over one sinner who is found than the 99 that stayed within the fold. "**Whatever.**" Jesus said that when you have done it to the least of these. "**Whatever.**"

Now, let's change our response from whatever to "**Whatever it takes.**" O.K., let's try it. Jesus said to love your neighbor. "**Whatever it takes.**" Jesus said there is more rejoicing over one sinner who is found than the 99 that stayed within the safety of the fold. "**Whatever it takes.**" Jesus said that when you have done it to the least of these. "**Whatever it takes.**" Are you and I, like St. Paul, willing to do whatever it takes to win the world to Christ?

George G. Hunter in his book, *Church for the Unchurched* tells about a young man in his late twenties named Bill who experienced a deeper gift of faith and began serving as a counselor in the youth ministry of his church. He also launched efforts to revitalize the Men's Fellowship of the church by reaching out to young men in the community. But listen to what he ran into. Bill observed that most of the young men in his community like to gather in the fall to watch Monday Night Football on television, and the only places providing that setting were bars. He wondered if the Men's Fellowship could bring in a large screen TV into the church's fellowship hall on Monday nights and host unchurched men. He asked an acquaintance with long hair, a left earring, and a motorcycle if guys would be interested in watching Monday Night Football at their church. The fellow replied, "I would like to, and I could bring other guys." When Bill proposed this Monday evening agenda to the Men's Fellowship president, he heard this reply: "Sure, we could meet on Monday nights, but **we like dominos more than football**; invite them to come and play **our game.**" (Could someone give me a **whatever**, please?) Even with this revised agenda, Bill's friend visited the Men's Fellowship. His friend liked the men, most of whom were older, and was attracted by what he understood of

Christianity's message. But he felt uncomfortable, saying to Bill, "Look, with my long hair and earring, I'm out of place here. Christianity is not for people like me. After tonight, I'm out of here." Bill found himself saying, "If I get my ear pierced, will you come back?" His friend was moved, and said, "If you care enough about me to do that, sure, I will come back and I will bring my friends!" (1)

Now, I'm not suggesting that all the men in our church start wearing jewelry in their ears. But I am asking whether you and I are willing to do **whatever it takes** to win people to Christ and his church? Paul said, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (NIV)

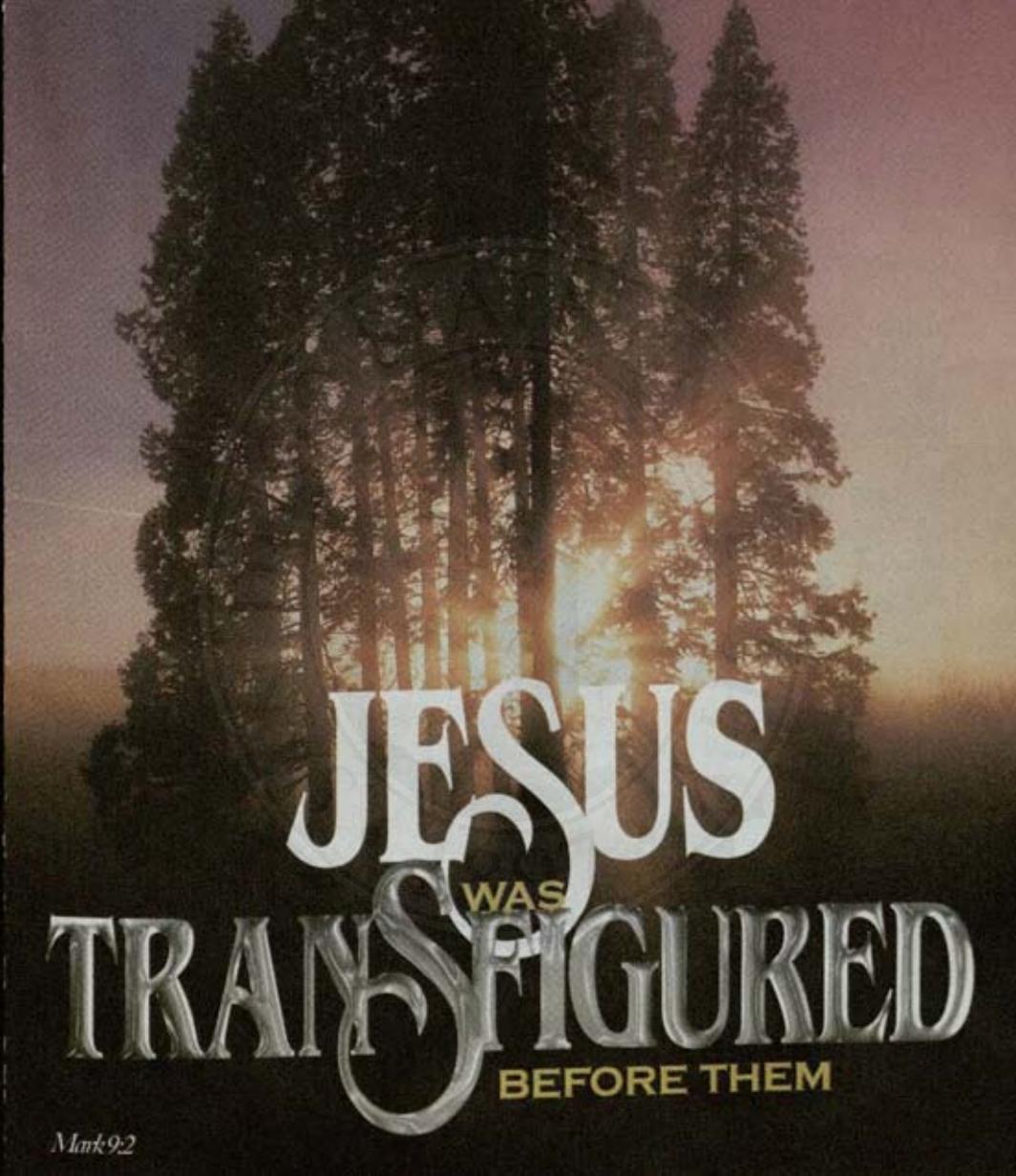
**This is to say that St. Paul understood that in order to minister to people in Christ's name we must meet them where they are, not where we are.**

A sales trainer asked his audience if they liked strawberries. Yes, they all said, delicious. Then he suggested that they go fishing and use strawberries as bait.

"But fish don't like strawberries," said one of the trainees. "But you do," replied the trainer. "But I want to catch fish," said the trainee. "What do fish like, then?" asked the trainer. "Worms," the trainee replied. "Do you like worms?" asked the trainer. "No," replied the trainee. "Then," said the trainer, "don't sell what you like, **sell what they like.**" (2)

How often do we, as the church, go fishing with strawberries? The president of the Men's Fellowship who wanted unchurched young men in that community to come play dominoes instead of watch football was fishing with strawberries. How often we do that in church! We have the kind of worship services that appeal to us, the kind of ministries that appeal to us, the kind of fellowship activities that appeal to us. We rarely stop to ask, what are the needs and the preferences of the people Christ has called us to reach?

St. Paul changed the world as we know it. With the help of Peter and the other Apostles he changed the tiny Christian community from a small sect to a worldwide influence. How? He was driven by a passion—to win the world for Christ. He was willing to do whatever it took to achieve his goals—at least whatever was consistent with his calling as an emissary of Christ. And he was willing to focus on the world's needs and the world's preferences and not on his own. And isn't that a formula that the church needs today? Isn't it time we stopped fishing with strawberries? Isn't it time for us to take Christ to people, not on our terms, but on theirs? Isn't it time that we become all things to all people that we might win some to Christ?



**JESUS**  
**WAS**  
**TRANSFIGURED**  
**BEFORE THEM**

*Mark 9:2*

# MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE

March 5, 2000

10:30 AM



## PREPARATION OF OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

*"Let the people be in silent meditation and prayer upon entering the sanctuary."*

## WE PRAISE GOD

PRELUDE  
CHORAL INTROIT

Organist  
Chancel Choir

*"We Have Come Into His House"*

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

...

§HYMN OF PRAISE

*"Blessed Assurance"*

#341

†CALL TO WORSHIP

*Leader: Come, walk in the way of the Lord with songs of gladness and joy.*

*People: Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, both now and for evermore.*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION *(In Unison)*

O God, who through Jesus Christ has called and consecrated us as citizens of your new world: We confess our failure to fulfill our calling. You call us toward a world of justice and peace, service and compassion, integrity and faithfulness, joy and hope. Yet, we remain captive to injustice and violence, self-seeking and hatred, expediency and deceit, discouragement and despair. Forgive our wavering trust in and weak commitment to your victory in Jesus Christ. Through your grace, consecrate us anew for the fulfillment of your purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

DECLARATION OF PARDON

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH  
*"The Apostle's Creed"*

...

Page 14

*The Presbyterian Hymnal*

# WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD

ANTHEM

*"The Majesty and Glory of Your Name"*  
Fettke & Johnson

Chancel Choir

...

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

*Leader: Lift up your hearts.*

*People: We lift them up to the Lord.*

*Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

*People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.*

*Leader: Let us pray.*

PASTORAL PRAYER

CHORAL RESPONSE

*"Spirit of the Living God"* (#322)

Chancel Choir

*Jim Hood*

...

RITUAL OF FRIENDSHIP

*"Jesus Loves Me"* (#304)

Congregation

*(Passing The Peace - Say "The Peace of Christ Be With You")*

STEWARDSHIP/MISSION

*Doreen*

Edie Grice

GIVING OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY MUSIC *"I've Been Buked"* -arr. Hall Johnson

Chancel Choir

DOXOLOGY *"Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow"*

Congregation

OFFERTORY PRAYER

THREEFOLD AMEN

## GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE

Robert Matthews

I Corinthians 9:15-27

MUSICAL SELECTION *"I Know the Lord/Over My Head"* Medley

Chancel Choir

arr. Stevens / Dorothy Smith, Soloist

COMMUNION MEDITATION

Rev. George W. Smith

*"Whatever It Takes"*

## WE CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

HYMN OF APPROACH *"Let Us Break Bread Together"*

#513

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

SERVING THE BREAD *(Say - "This is the body of Christ broken for you.")*

SERVING THE CUP *(Say - "This is the blood of Christ shed for you.")*

THANKSGIVING AFTER THE SUPPER

INVITATIONAL HYMN *"I Want Jesus To Walk With Me"*

#363

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

*"God Be With You"*

Chancel Choir

§Congregation standing

†Congregation sitting

...Worshippers will be seated

**TO OUR GUESTS:** You are welcome to our worship service and all activities of the church. Please help us to know you by filling out a visitor's card from one of the Ushers. You are invited to meet with others in the Fellowship Hall for refreshments following the Worship Service. Please come again and invite your friends and neighbors to come with you.

**USHERS FOR TODAY** are Payton Cook, Joe Littlejohn, William Ponder, Rufus Purdie.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR,** We invite you to come to the front of the sanctuary during the Invitational Hymn. Elders Barbara Boucher and Lola Buie will be at the front of the sanctuary to greet you.

**PREPARING FOOD FOR THE HOMELESS TODAY** will be **THE PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN.** If you are asked to help prepare or purchase food, please do it with a smile! We love your time and talent. Thank you.

**HOSTING THE FELLOWSHIP HOUR TODAY** will be the **Social Committee.**



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**YOUTH CHOIR DIRECTOR/PIANIST:** ..... Ms. Delores Fisher  
**CHILDREN'S CHOIR** ..... Dr. Dorothy Smith  
**CHURCH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS:** ..... Dr. Robert Matthews  
**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COORDINATOR** ..... (Vacant)  
**ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT:** ..... Mrs. Zee Griffith  
**SECRETARY/BOOKKEEPER:** ..... Ms. Cathy Ramsey